

Report of the Assistant Chief Officer/Director of Prevention

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Inspection Report and Improvement Plan 2023/2024

Purpose of report

1. To update and advise Members on the HMICFRS Inspection Report 2023 and the subsequent Improvement Plan.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Authority notes the outcomes and findings highlighted in the HMICFRS inspection report 2023. In particular that:

- i) Of the 11 assessment areas, the Service has achieved four ratings of 'good' and seven ratings of 'adequate'.***
- ii) There were no areas rated as 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate'.***
- iii) The report identifies 11 Areas for Improvement.***
- iv) Work is ongoing to produce the next HMICFRS Improvement Plan.***
- v) The findings of the previous report from 2021 are considered closed.***

Introduction and Background

2. Between May and August 2023, HMICFRS carried out their third inspection of Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service. The inspection report was published in November 2023.
3. The report contains an assessment of the Service's effectiveness, efficiency and how well it looks after its people. HMICFRS have not given separate grades for these three pillars as they have previously, but rather measured the Service across 11 assessment areas which they hope will encourage Fire and Rescue Services to consider inspection findings as a whole.
4. Services are now measured against the 'characteristics of good performance' and are given graded judgements. HMICFRS have also expanded the previous four-tier graded system to include a fifth graded judgement of 'adequate'.
5. In the report, the Inspectorate states that they are pleased with the performance of Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service and the improvements made since the last inspection and they would encourage the Service to continue to make improvement in the areas they have highlighted.

6. The Service recognises the improvement from the previous inspection with all 11 assessment areas graded as 'adequate' or 'good'. The table below shows the comparison with the 2021 inspection:

Assessment Area	2021 Grade	2023 Grade
Understanding fires and other risks	Requires Improvement	Adequate
Preventing fires and other risks	Requires Improvement	Adequate
Protecting the public through fire regulation	Good	Good
Responding to fires and other emergencies	Requires Improvement	Adequate
Responding to major and multi-agency incidents	Good	Adequate
Making best use of resources	Requires Improvement	Adequate
Future affordability	Requires Improvement	Adequate
Promoting the right values and culture	Requires Improvement	Adequate
Getting the right people with the right skills	Requires Improvement	Good
Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity	Requires Improvement	Good
Managing performance and developing leaders	Requires Improvement	Good

7. A grading of 'good' is given where the Service has substantially demonstrated all the characteristics of good performance. A grading of 'adequate' is given where the Service has demonstrated some of the characteristics of good performance, but HMICFRS have identified areas where the Service should make improvements.
8. The inspection highlighted one area for 'promising practice', relating to our Multi-Agency Targeted Enforcement (MATE) partnership, stating that it is an "effective collaboration between Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service and a wide variety of different Enforcing Authorities".
9. If the Inspectorate consider that an aspect of the Service's practice, policy or performance falls short of the expected standard, they will report this as an Area for Improvement (AFI). HMICFRS have identified 11 AFI's in this year's inspection (see Appendix 1). This is half the number of AFI's compared to the previous report. At least four of the AFI's relate to national or wider issues and will be reflected in most English Fire and Rescue Services HMICFRS reports. The table below shows the 11 Assessment Areas and the main findings:

Assessment Area	Main Findings
Understanding fires and other risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Service is effective at identifying risk in the community. The Service has effective prevention, protection and response strategies that underpin the CRMP. The Service needs to review its processes for updating risk information.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Service uses the outcomes of operational activity effectively to build an understanding of risk. <p>Area for Improvement: The Service should make sure its Firefighters have good access to relevant and up-to-date risk information: <i>“Site-specific risk information wasn’t always completed within the time set by the service”.</i> <i>“The service needs to do more so that staff in prevention, protection, and response roles can access the information they need”.</i></p>
Preventing fires and other risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Service’s prevention strategy clearly links to the risks identified in its CRMP. • Targeting of prevention activity is improving. • The Service should improve staff competence in carrying out home fire safety visits. • Staff understand how to identify vulnerable people and act to safeguard them • The Service has arrangements in place to tackle fire-setting behaviour. • Improvements are still required in the evaluation of prevention work. <p>Area for Improvement: The Service should make sure staff carry out home fire safety visits competently: <i>“Some HFSV’s carried out by crews that were not appropriately risk assessed, completed within service timeframes, or suitably referred to the prevention team”.</i></p> <p>Area for Improvement: The Service should evaluate its prevention activity, so it understands what is most effective: <i>“We found limited evidence that the Service evaluates how effective its activity is or makes sure all its communities get appropriate access to prevention activity that meets their needs”.</i></p>
Protecting the public through fire regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Service’s protection strategy is clearly linked to its CRMP. • The Service directs its protection activity based on risk. • The Service carries out consistent, good quality audits. • The Service has an effective quality assurance process in place. • The Service is good at taking enforcement action when appropriate. • The protection function is well resourced. • The Service is adapting to new legislation. • The Service works well with other enforcement agencies. • The Service manages building consultations effectively. • The Service could do more to engage with local businesses.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Service has not taken enough action to reduce unwanted signals. <p>Area for Improvement: The Service should make sure it effectively addresses the burden of unwanted fire signals:</p> <p><i>“The Service hasn’t taken sufficient action to manage the burden of false alarms. We were informed that a revised policy is to be considered at the next Fire Authority meeting in October 2023”.</i></p>
<p>Responding to fires and other emergencies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Service aligns its resources to the risks identified in its CRMP. • The Service has introduced new response measures and has plans to improve its response times. • The Service has good wholetime availability, but on-call availability could be improved. • Staff have a good understanding of how to command incidents safely. • Fire control staff have good involvement in training, exercising and debriefs. • The Service should make sure that risk information is accurate and up to date. • The evaluation of operational performance is still ineffective. • The Service has introduced an effective plan to implement National Operational Guidance. • The Service is effective at keeping the public informed. <p>Area for Improvement: The service should make sure it has an effective system to learn from operational incidents</p> <p><i>“The Service doesn’t always act on learning it has, or should have, identified from incidents - this was an identified area for improvement in our last inspection and, as there has been insufficient progress, it will remain”.</i></p>
<p>Responding to major and multi-agency incidents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Service is prepared for major and multi-agency incidents. • The Service’s ability to respond to major and multi-agency incidents could be improved. • The Service works well with other fire and rescue services. • Incident commanders have a good understanding of JESIP. • Cross border exercises lack corporate oversight. • The Service is an active and valued member of the West Mercia Local Resilience Forum. • The Service shares and contributes to national learning. • The Service has improved staff training and exercising on marauding terrorist attacks. <p>Area for Improvement: The Service should make sure it has an effective method to share fire survival guidance information with multiple callers and that it has a dedicated communication link in place.</p>

	<p><i>“We found a good level of understanding, among operational firefighting staff, of procedures for fighting a fire in a tall building. But there was limited knowledge from all staff as to fire survival guidance (FSG) and evacuation procedures when changing from a stay put to a simultaneous evacuation”.</i></p> <p>Area for Improvement: The Service should make sure it has an overarching cross-border exercise strategy. The strategy should assure the service that exercise objectives are in line with community risk management plan risks and that learning is recorded, shared and actioned:</p> <p><i>“The service should make sure it has an overarching cross-border exercise strategy”.</i></p>
<p>Making best use of resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Service has improved how it allocates resources to meets its objectives. • The Service has made improvements to staff productivity and is delivering new ways of working. • The Service explores collaboration opportunities but still needs to monitor, review and evaluate the benefits. • The Service has effective continuity arrangements in place. • The Service shows sound financial management. <p>Area for Improvement: The Service should make sure it effectively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and outcomes of any collaboration activity:</p> <p><i>“There has been insufficient progress on the area of improvement (AFI) from the last inspection - therefore, this AFI will remain”.</i></p>
<p>Future affordability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Service understands its future financial challenges, but needs to develop its savings plan. • The Service has plans for using reserves. • The new fleet and estates plans are clearly linked to its CRMP. • The Service invests in technology to support change and improve efficiency. • External funding and income generation is limited. <p>Area for Improvement: The Service needs to make sure it has adequate plans in place to close its identified budget gaps:</p> <p><i>“The service told us that it would develop a savings plan alongside its next CRMP. However, at the time of inspection, savings options were not established, evaluated, or prioritised”.</i></p>
<p>Promoting the right values and culture</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values are accepted and maintained throughout the Service. • Staff have access to appropriate services to support mental and physical health.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Service has appropriate health and safety provision in place. • The Service has clear processes to manage staff absence. <p>Area for Improvement: The Service should monitor secondary contracts to make sure staff don't work excessive hours:</p> <p><i>"We found that there has been only limited progress on the monitoring of staff who have secondary employment or dual contracts to make sure they comply with the secondary employment policy and don't work excessive hours".</i></p>
Getting the right people with the right skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Service has improved its workforce planning. • Workforce skills and capabilities are managed well. • The Service supports staff with learning and development.
Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Service and senior leaders seek feedback from staff. • Most staff are confident with the Service's approach to dealing with bullying, harassment and discrimination. • The Service acts positively to improve diversity in recruitment. • The Service promotes equality, diversity and inclusion.
Managing performance and developing leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Service effectively manages individuals' performance. • The Service needs to do more to assure the workforce that promotion and progression processes are fair • The Service has diversified its leadership, but it can do more. • The Service should improve plans to develop leadership and high-potential staff at all levels. <p>Area for Improvement: The Service should make sure it has processes in place to manage and develop talent within the organisation:</p> <p><i>"But, of those that completed our survey, only 60 percent (184 out of 307) felt that promotion processes are fair".</i></p>

10. Seven of the Areas for Improvement highlighted are continuations of previous AFIs which the Service is actively working toward addressing through the existing Improvement Plan and will continue to do so as part of the next Improvement Plan hence we can now close the reporting on the previous 2021 HMICFRS report.

HMICFRS Improvement Plan

11. The 11 Areas for Improvement (AFIs) in the report will be factored into the next HMICFRS Improvement Plan, alongside any outstanding actions from the previous Improvement Plan.
12. The Strategic Leadership Board (SLB) will be required to recommend the strategic direction for each AFI and designate leads for the AFIs and the actions that will make up the next Improvement Plan.
13. The draft Improvement Plan will be produced for Members' approval at the next Fire Authority meeting in February 2024.
14. The delivery of the Improvement Plan will be coordinated by members of the Performance and Information (P&I) team, who meet regularly with senior managers responsible for each Area for Improvement to prepare updates on actions proposed and completed. The P&I team also ensure that actions carried out are fully evidenced and available for evaluation and audit.

Conclusion/Summary

15. Members are recommended to note the outcomes and findings of the HMICFRS inspection report 2023.
16. Further updates relating to the production of the next Improvement Plan will continue to be provided to the Fire Authority.

Corporate Considerations

<p>Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)</p>	<p>The HMICFRS Inspection Report highlights areas for improvement relating to effectiveness, efficiency and people. Resource implications will be considered as part of the Improvement Plan.</p>
<p>Strategic Policy Links & Core Code of Ethics (Identify how proposals link with current priorities & policy framework and align to the Core Code of Ethics)</p>	<p>Areas for Improvement with links to strategic policies will be considered as part of the Improvement Plan.</p>
<p>Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).</p>	<p>Any risks associated with proposals will be assessed through the development of the next Improvement Plan.</p>
<p>Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)</p>	<p>The publication of the inspection report involved the full participation of Senior Managers in relevant Service departments. The report is publicly available through HMICFRS and will be featured on the Service website.</p>
<p>Equalities (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)</p>	<p>An EIA is not required for this report. EIAs will be completed as appropriate when preparing proposals through the Improvement Plan.</p>
<p>Data Protection Impact Assessment (where personal data is processed a DPIA must be completed to ensure compliant handling)</p>	<p>Impact assessments will be completed as required for specific actions that are proposed in the next Improvement Plan.</p>

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – HMICFRS Inspection Report 2023