

Proposed fire and rescue services inspection programme and framework 2018/19

For consultation

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Foreword

In July 2017, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary's (HMIC) remit was extended to include inspections of fire and rescue services in England. It is now called Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS).

This is the first inspection programme and framework for fire and rescue service inspections. We will assess and report on the efficiency and effectiveness of the 45 fire and rescue services in England. This includes how well fire and rescue services prevent, protect against and respond to fires and other emergencies and how well they look after the people who work for the service. This consultation document seeks responses to seven questions about how the inspection of fire and rescue services should be carried out. We will use the consultation responses to develop a programme and framework, and methodology for our inspections.

We have given prominence to the following principal themes: how effective each fire and rescue service is at preventing and responding to incidents; whether the service provides value for money; whether the service understands where future risks lie; and the ability of the service to train staff, embrace diversity, and develop a positive working culture. As part of our inspection reports, we will provide graded judgments, which will help the public to see how well their fire and rescue service is performing.

The inspection programme will be developed with the fire and rescue service by recruiting experts from the sector to carry out the inspections, and by taking advice from senior service representatives who are members of the external reference group. The inspection programme will be designed to promote improvement in all aspects of the work undertaken by fire and rescue services.

This public consultation will be open from 19 December 2017 to 19 February 2018. I hope that you will offer your considered views, to help us design an inspection programme that leads to continued improvements across fire and rescue services.

(Sgd.) Thomas P Winsor

Sir Thomas Winsor WS
HM Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Consultation introduction

This document provides details of HMICFRS' proposed fire and rescue services inspection programme for 2018/19, and asks for your views on whether the right areas of fire and rescue services activity are covered. In particular, we are seeking your responses to the following questions:

1. What do you think of the proposed approach to FRS inspection that HMICFRS proposes to conduct in 2018/19? How could this be improved?
2. Do you agree that an integrated inspection of fire and rescue services' effectiveness and efficiency, and how they look after their people, is better than separate thematic inspections?
3. Are there any other areas of fire and rescue services' activity that should be included in the integrated inspections?
4. Does the draft inspection methodology (annex A) include the right questions to gather evidence for a rounded assessment of fire and rescue services? How could this be improved?
5. How else could HMICFRS adapt the way in which it acquires information to take full account of the circumstances of fire and rescue services and of risks to public safety?
6. What, if any, new or emerging problems for fire and rescue services should HMICFRS take into account in its inspections?
7. What else should HMICFRS consider doing to make its fire and rescue service assessments as fair as they can be?

These questions are repeated in the body of this document. At the end of the document there is an explanation of how you can let us have your views.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) independently assesses and reports on the effectiveness and efficiency of police forces and fire and rescue services – in the public interest.

We ask the questions which we believe the public wishes to have answered, and publish our findings, conclusions and recommendations in an accessible form, using our expertise to interpret the evidence. We provide authoritative information to allow the public to compare the performance of their police force or fire and rescue service against others, and to determine whether performance has improved or deteriorated over time. Our recommendations are designed to bring about improvements in the service provided to the public.

Introduction

This document provides details of HMICFRS' proposed inspection programme and framework for fire and rescue services for 2018/19.

Types of inspection HMICFRS will conduct in 2018/19

HMICFRS may conduct several different types of inspection each year. To provide context for the proposed fire and rescue services' inspection framework for 2018/19, each type of inspection is summarised here.

Fire and rescue services inspection programme

The fire and rescue services inspection programme enables HMICFRS to draw together evidence from inspections of all 45 fire and rescue services in England. This rounded assessment of all fire and rescue services will cover the effectiveness and efficiency of each service and how it looks after its people. This will include an assessment of:

- the operational service provided to the public (including prevention, protection, resilience, and response);
- the efficiency of the service (how well it provides value for money, allocates resources to match risk, and collaborates with the police and ambulance services); and
- the organisational effectiveness of the service (how well it promotes its values and culture, trains its staff and ensures they have the necessary skills, ensures fairness and diversity for the workforce and develops leadership and service capability).

The resulting assessments will include graded judgments of performance.

HMICFRS' assessments are designed to enable the public to see how each fire and rescue service's performance changes over time and in relation to the performance of other services.

The fire and rescue services inspections will not include an assessment of corporate governance or the accountability structures provided by the fire and rescue authority, police, fire and crime commissioner, locally elected mayors and, in London, the Mayor's Office.

Inspecting governance arrangements

The fire and rescue service inspections will focus on the service provided to the public rather than on the accountability structures that govern fire and rescue services. During inspections, HMICFRS inspectors will meet representatives from fire and rescue authorities, police, fire and crime commissioners, locally elected mayors and, in London, the Mayor's Office.

If during an inspection we identify evidence that the decisions and activities of those within the fire and rescue authority, police, fire and crime commissioner, locally elected mayors and, in London, the Mayor's Office inhibit the efficiency and effectiveness of the chief fire officer, we may carry out a separate corporate governance inspection.

Statutory requirements

This inspection programme and framework requires the approval of the Home Secretary before the inspectors act in accordance with it¹.

The Home Secretary may, at any time, require HMICFRS to carry out an inspection of a fire and rescue authority in England, all fire and rescue authorities in England, or all fire and rescue authorities in England of a particular type².

Such a requirement may limit the inspection to a particular matter³. HMICFRS may also carry out an inspection of a fire and rescue authority in England even though that inspection has not been set out in an inspection programme and has not been required by the Home Secretary⁴. Before doing so, the chief inspector must consult the Home Secretary⁵.

Consultation questions

1. What do you think of the proposed approach to FRS inspection that HMICFRS proposes to conduct in 2018/19? How could this be improved?
2. Do you agree that an integrated inspection of fire and rescue services' effectiveness and efficiency, and how they look after their people, is better than separate thematic inspections?

¹ Section 28A(2), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004

² Section 28A(3), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. Available at: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/21/contents

³ Section 28A(4), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004

⁴ Section 28A(5), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004

⁵ Section 28A(6), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004

An overview of HMICFRS' proposed inspection programme for fire and rescue services 2018/19

Fire and rescue inspection programme

In May 2016, the Home Secretary established a wide-ranging reform programme for the fire and rescue services in England. This included a proposal to establish a rigorous and independent inspection regime for fire and rescue authorities.

In July 2017, the Home Office confirmed that HMIC would take on the role of inspecting fire and rescue services in England, and of assessing and reporting on the effectiveness and efficiency of each service. To reflect these new responsibilities, HMIC's name changed to HMICFRS.

The Policing and Crime Act 2017, which amended the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, contains provisions to strengthen existing powers to inspect fire and rescue authorities⁶.

HMICFRS will inspect the fire and rescue services that carry out the principal functions of a fire and rescue authority: fire safety, firefighting, road traffic accidents and other emergencies⁷. We will inspect all 45 fire and rescue services in England, in three sets of 15 services, beginning in summer 2018. We will consult the fire and rescue sector on the criteria for judgment. Each inspection will result in a rounded assessment and graded judgments for each fire and rescue service. We will publish a report of our findings.

The principal questions which the fire and rescue services inspection programme is designed to answer are set out below, along with the corresponding inspection focus. The detailed draft FRS inspection methodology is provided at annex A. We ask for your views on the proposed methodology.

⁶ Section 11, Policing and Crime Act 2017

⁷ Sections 6-9, Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004

Principal question**Inspection focus**

How effective is the fire and rescue service at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?

How well the fire and rescue service understands its current and future risks, works to prevent fires and other risks, protects the public through the regulation of fire safety, responds to fires and other emergencies, and responds to national risks.

How efficient is the fire and rescue service at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?

How well the fire and rescue service uses its resources to manage risk, and secures an affordable way of providing its service, now and in the future.

How well does the fire and rescue service look after its people?

How well the fire and rescue service promotes its values and culture, trains its staff and ensures that they have the necessary skills, ensures fairness and diversity for its workforce, and develops leaders.

Our assessment of effectiveness will consider how well the fire and rescue service is performing its principal functions in relation to fire safety, fire-fighting and road traffic collisions. The inspection will give prominence to the principal themes of how effective each service is at preventing, protecting against and responding to incidents; whether the service provides value for money; and whether the service understands its current demands and where future risks lie.

Our assessment of efficiency will consider whether the way in which each fire and rescue service operates represents value for money, and how well it is matching resources to the risks faced by the public.

Our assessment of how each fire and rescue service looks after its people will consider leadership at all levels in the organisation, including training, diversity, values and culture.

This will be the first full assessment of all 45 fire and rescue services for some years. At the end of each set of inspections, HMICFRS intends to publish a report of its assessment of each fire and rescue service inspected in that set, as well as a summary of themes emerging from the inspections. HM Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services for England is required to report each year on the carrying out of inspections, including an assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of the fire and rescue authorities in England⁸.

⁸ Section 28B, Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004

National thematic inspections

National thematic inspections are in-depth examinations of specific fire and rescue service matters, which will usually be identified through HMICFRS' monitoring processes or as a result of a commission from the Home Secretary. These inspections will identify areas of strong and weak practice in specific fire and rescue services, but will result also in recommendations that are relevant to the fire and rescue service as a whole. The Home Office can commission thematic inspections on individual issues if needed. HMICFRS is not funded to carry out thematic inspections.

Consultation questions

3. Are there any other areas of fire and rescue services' activity that should be included in the integrated inspections?
4. Does the draft inspection methodology (annex A) include the right questions to gather evidence for a rounded assessment of fire and rescue services? How could this be improved?

HMICFRS' inspection framework

Inspection framework for fire and rescue services

We will gather information to inform our assessments using a range of methods that include: analysis of documents and data; reviews of operational incidents; surveys of the public, and of fire and rescue services staff; interviews; focus groups; and observations of fire and rescue practice.

Following the first round of full inspections, HMICFRS intends to move to a risk-based inspection programme, which will be developed and consulted on separately. This allows inspection activity and resources to take account of known risks to public safety and to reflect the assessed performance of each fire and rescue service.

Graded judgments

Fire and rescue services will be assessed and given graded judgments for the three principal questions in the inspection methodology (efficiency, effectiveness and people). We may give a single overall judgment for each service. We will test this during the pilot inspections and make a final decision as to our approach when the pilots have concluded. The categories of graded judgment are:

- outstanding;
- good;
- requires improvement; and
- inadequate.

Judgment is made against how efficient and effective fire and rescue services are, and how well they look after their people.

Good is based on policy, practice or performance that meets pre-defined grading criteria that are informed by any relevant national operational guidance or standards.

If the policy, practice or performance exceeds what is expected for good, then consideration will be given to a graded judgment of outstanding.

If there are shortcomings in the policy, practice or performance of the fire and rescue service, then consideration will be given to a graded judgment of requires improvement. If there are serious critical failings of policy, practice or performance of the fire and rescue service, then consideration will be given to a graded judgment of inadequate.

Fire and rescue service authorities' priorities

Fire and rescue authorities must have regard to the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England in carrying out their functions⁹. The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England¹⁰ states that each fire and rescue authority must produce an integrated risk management plan that identifies and assesses all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks that could affect its community.

HMICFRS inspectors will consider the content of the fire and rescue authority's integrated risk management plan and how this translates into the operational practice of the fire and rescue service. The plan will be used as a source of information about the assessment of risk and vulnerability in respect of each service, the factors which affect considerations of public safety, and how each fire and rescue service will use prevention, protection and response activities to mitigate the risk to communities.

Professional standards body

Part of the Home Office reform programme for fire and rescue services is the formation of a professional standards body. It is currently in development. HMICFRS will take account of all existing and new professional standards for fire and rescue services, including national operational guidance.

Consultation questions

5. How else could HMICFRS adapt the way in which it acquires information to take full account of the circumstances of fire and rescue services and of risks to public safety?
6. What, if any, new or emerging problems for fire and rescue services should HMICFRS take into account in its inspections?
7. What else should HMICFRS consider doing to make its fire and rescue service assessments as fair as they can be?

⁹ Section 21(7), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004

¹⁰ The Framework is prepared by the Home Secretary. It must set out priorities and objectives for fire and rescue authorities in connection with the discharge of their functions; it may contain guidance to fire and rescue authorities in connection with the discharge of any of their functions; and it may contain any other matter relating to fire and rescue authorities or their functions as the Home Secretary considers appropriate. (Section 21, Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004) Available at: www.gov.uk/government/collections/fire-and-rescue-national-framework-for-england

Methodology, monitoring, assurance and analysis

Advisory and reference groups

This inspection programme is being developed with fire and rescue services. It has been designed to promote improvements across fire and rescue services.

HMICFRS has established a fire and rescue service external reference group. Its members include those who have specific skills and experience in the areas that will be inspected such as representatives from fire and rescue services, the National Fire Chiefs Council, the Home Office, the Local Government Association and police, fire and crime commissioners. We are using their knowledge and advice to establish a sound methodology for inspections.

The HMICFRS Fire Technical Advisory Group considers how to develop appropriate methods of data collection and analysis to support the inspection methodology. The members of the Fire Technical Advisory Group include representatives of the National Fire Chiefs Council co-ordinating committees, the Home Office, representative bodies, fire and rescue services and others. It will also include representatives from the professional standards body, when it has been established.

HMICFRS' monitoring process

HM inspectors of fire and rescue services (HMIs) will regularly monitor all services in order to promote improvements. If an HMI identifies a cause of concern about practice in a particular fire and rescue service, it will be raised with the relevant chief fire officer/chief executive/commissioner and the fire authority/police fire and crime commissioner, so that they can take action.

Follow-up from previous inspections

HMICFRS conducts a number of follow-up activities throughout the year. They range from formal revisits to offering support to services in responding to our findings. Also, we track the progress that services have made against our recommendations.

Consultation questions

1. What do you think of the proposed approach to FRS inspection that HMICFRS proposes to conduct in 2018/19? How could this be improved?
2. Do you agree that an integrated inspection of fire and rescue services' effectiveness and efficiency, and how they look after their people, is better than separate thematic inspections?
3. Are there any other areas of fire and rescue services' activity that should be included in the integrated inspections?
4. Does the draft inspection methodology (annex A) include the right questions to gather evidence for a rounded assessment of fire and rescue services? How could this be improved?
5. How else could HMICFRS adapt the way in which it acquires information to take full account of the circumstances of fire and rescue services and of risks to public safety?
6. What, if any, new or emerging problems for fire and rescue services should HMICFRS take into account in its inspections?
7. What else should HMICFRS consider doing to make its fire and rescue service assessments as fair as they can be?

How to respond to this consultation

Please submit your answers to these questions, together with any other comments, by email to: HMICFRSfireinspectionprogramme@hmic.gsi.gov.uk, no later than 1700 on 19 February 2018.

If you prefer, you can post responses to the Chief Operating Officer, HMICFRS, 6th floor, Globe House, 89 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1PN.

If you have a complaint or comment about HMICFRS' approach to consultation, you can email this to: HMICFRSfireinspectionprogramme@hmic.gsi.gov.uk

How consultation responses will be reviewed

HM Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services will consider respondents' views and, if he determines it appropriate to do so, change the proposed inspection programme and framework before putting it to the Home Secretary for approval. In accordance with section 28A(2), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, HM Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services must obtain the approval of the Secretary of State for an inspection programme or inspection framework before the inspectors act in accordance with it.

The final document, which will be appropriately revised to reflect the results of the consultation, will be made available on HMICFRS' website at:
www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/about-us/what-we-do/inspection-programmes/

You should note that HMICFRS may publish consultation responses, or summaries of them, except where they have been provided in confidence. Please indicate in your response if you do not wish it to be published.