

Sent by email:

Chief Fire Officers
Chairs of Fire Authorities
Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners
Lead Fire Authority Members
Locally elected Mayors
Other FRS interested parties

8 January 2024

Dear colleague,

Fire and Rescue Service Update

I hope you enjoyed the festive season and I wish you all a very Happy New Year. I would like to take this opportunity to update you on several developments in relation to our fire and rescue inspection programme.

Chiefs and Chairs

Firstly, thank you to everyone that attended our Chiefs and Chairs event on 1 November 2023, it was good to see so many of you in person. You will recall the event included three table discussions focusing on the following topics:

- Values, culture, and staff misconduct.
- Promoting improvements at service and national levels.
- Future areas of inspection focus.

Discussion and feedback from tables has certainly given us a great deal to think about. We will consider this feedback when developing our future inspection plans.

Round 3 inspections

We have now published 12 Round 3 inspection reports, with three more due to be published this spring. HMCI Andy Cooke's 2023 State of Fire and Rescue report will also be published this spring and will cover our findings so far and wider impacts on fire and rescue services. Thank you to everyone who has already facilitated an inspection.

I would like to remind chief fire officers that the pre-publication check (PPC) process is the opportunity to identify areas of factual accuracy from the draft report with HMIs and our staff. I urge you to use this process and to raise concerns in writing within the PPC return, rather than verbally or via separate correspondence, and in a timely manner, so they can be addressed if necessary.

Our Values and Culture Spotlight report recommendations

In March 2023, we published our [Values and culture spotlight report](#), which contains 20 recommendations aimed at chief fire officers. I thank those of you who have worked hard with your services to accept and respond to our recommendations, which are intended to assist services in improving values, culture, fairness, and diversity.

We have been reviewing the progress made and HMCI Andy Cooke will report on this in his State of Fire and Rescue report. For some of the recommendations, we will also be considering the actions that chiefs have taken during our inspections.

Of the 20 recommendations, 18 deadlines have now passed. Where we previously have not required detail on progress made against each recommendation, I now ask that you please provide this detail, so that we can make a fuller assessment of progress. I also ask that you please keep your updates on just one spreadsheet in your service Huddle folder, to avoid confusion. There was some difference in the way information was recorded that meant some records had not been updated and led to letters asking for updates that were not required. Using a single system will help prevent misunderstanding in future.

Several services have asked about recommendations 9, 12 and 14. The delivery of these recommendations has been contingent on the Fire Standards Board delivering recommendations 8, 11 and 13, by revising their standards. I am pleased to say that the Fire Standards Board have amended three of their standards, and that they are now live on the Fire Standards Board website. These standards are:

- Leading the Service
- Leading and Developing People
- Safeguarding

The suite of live fire standards can be accessed [here](#). Therefore, chiefs and their services should now be able to deliver recommendations 9, 12 and 14.

Responsibilities of Fire and Rescue Authorities

I want to remind you that the Fire National Framework states that fire and rescue authorities must give due regard to reports and recommendations made by HMICFRS and – if recommendations are made – prepare, update, and regularly publish an action plan, detailing how the recommendations are being actioned. These plans will usually be

developed by the fire and rescue service, and I urge FRA chairs and their equivalents to make sure they are publishing action plans with respect to our spotlight report recommendations.

Misconduct thematic

Our thematic inspection of the handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services is continuing at pace. We have now completed seven in-depth service inspections with three more ongoing and due to be completed by the end of the month. We are combining this detailed evidence with the data provided by all English services in our autumn data return; the staff survey we conducted in all services in November via our research partners Crest Advisory; and the survey and interviews that Crest are conducting with people that have left fire and rescue services. We will be combining and triangulating all this evidence to identify our key findings and our recommendations to the sector and will publish our report in June.

The FRS Technical Advisory Group (TAG)

The FRS Technical Advisory Group (TAG) supports the design and development of inspections by advising on our use of analysis, research, and data. TAG members are invited quarterly to represent their service or organisation and provide constructive feedback. Attached is the group's terms of reference, with more details about who should be attending and their responsibilities. On 8 February 2024, HMICFRS will host an all-day in-person TAG meeting in Manchester. Please take this opportunity to add or change your service's TAG membership ahead of the meeting, by emailing the secretariat:

Daisy.Akehurst@hmicfrs.gov.uk

Positive Practice

A key pillar of our HMICFRS Strategy is to capitalise on our independent insight and learning and to share this with the sectors we inspect. At HMICFRS we believe this is a vitally important part of our work, to help the sectors improve by giving you the opportunity to learn from each other, alongside our work identifying areas where things are not going so well.

At the core of the programme are the practices identified as 'promising' or 'innovative' during our inspections and published in our reports. This terminology is common across all our types of inspection and has also been adopted by the NFCC.

Promising practice is defined as: those activities HMICFRS find to be working well in a force or service, where there are positive measurable outcomes which have been observed or monitored. Innovative practice is defined as: new ways of working in a force or service that may not have been formally evaluated, but that have the potential to produce more positive outcomes but have not been subject to any testing or monitoring.

The programme includes: positive practice events, stakeholder newsletters, and positive practice portals. We worked with the NFCC to develop a [positive practice portal](#) for fire and rescue services, which launched last year. We will continue to contribute and support the NFCC on its development. These practice examples are already available in our reports, however featuring them on the portal will ensure they are easy to access and search.

I hope that you will find this work beneficial to your service and would encourage you to access the NFCC's positive practice portal. Any suggestions you have for future topics of focus, particularly where either you and your service have something that is working well to share with others or feel you would benefit from learning from others, please let us know.

Thank you for your continued support of our inspection programme.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'RW', is written over a light grey dotted grid background.

Roy Wilsher OBE QFSM

His Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary

His Majesty's Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services