
Report to Fire and Rescue Services Scrutiny Committee

30 September 2022

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Tranche One and Two Inspection Report

Report by Chief Fire Officer

Summary

For over 160 years, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary has independently assessed and reported on the efficiency and effectiveness of police forces and policing, in the public interest.

In summer 2017, HMIC (now HMICFRS) took on inspections of England's fire & rescue services, assessing and reporting on their efficiency, effectiveness and leadership.

The inspection assessed how effectively and efficiently West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service prevents, protects the public against, and responds to fires and other emergencies. It also assesses how well the Service looks after the people who work for the Service and fed back concerns it had identified. This was the first time that HMICFRS has inspected fire and rescue services across England. Its focus is on the service provided to the public, and the way available resources were used.

Following a visit from a delegation on behalf of the Minister in September 2018, the Service was written to outlining concerns that the Council had been 'disproportionately impacted by cuts' and recommended a review of our resources - including financial - against our statutory requirements. There has since been an increase in funding from the County Council to support the improvement and development plans of the service.

An additional COVID related inspection was carried out in October 2020 and focused on how the Service was responding to the pandemic. This latest inspection considers for a second time the Service's effectiveness, efficiency and people.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service (HMICFRS) carried out a further full inspection of West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service (WSFRS) between September and November 2021. This was HMICFRS's second full inspection of fire and rescue services in England.

Focus for Scrutiny

The Committee is asked to consider the inspection report and confirm its future plans for scrutiny of the Fire and Rescue service.

The key lines of enquiry are:

- (1) To consider the closure of the Improvement Plan in relation to the Tranche One Inspection.

- (2) To consider the proposal for six monthly reviews through a report to the committee, and through consideration of the Annual Statement of Assurance against the Community Risk Management Plan.
- (3) To consider any lessons that have been learned in respect of the first inspection report.
- (4) To confirm the priorities for scrutiny and service outcomes it wishes to focus on and to identify those areas requiring greatest or earliest attention from the second inspection.
- (5) To consider how members may obtain assurance as to the effectiveness of measures taken or planned to address the areas of improvement and to identify any particular data or evidence it wishes to receive to assist its future consideration of these matters.

The Chairman will summarise the output of the debate for consideration by the Committee.

Proposal

1 Background and context

- 1.1 HMICFRS assesses services on their effectiveness, efficiency and how well they look after their people. These are then judged as outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate based on inspection findings and professional judgment across the year using questions focused on core areas of FRS work.
- 1.2 HMICFRS carried out its first full inspection of West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service (WSFRS) through the autumn of 2018.
- 1.3 On 20th June 2019, HMICFRS published its inspection report for WSFRS which included four causes of concern. This was the first time that HMICFRS has inspected fire and rescue services across England. Its focus was on the service WSFRS provides to the public, and the way it uses the resources available. The inspection assesses how effectively and efficiently WSFRS prevents, protects the public against and responds to fires and other emergencies. It also assessed how well it looks after the people who work for the Service.
- 1.4 The overall pillar ratings were
 - 1.4.1 Effectiveness as requires improvement,
 - 1.4.2 Efficiency as requires improvement
 - 1.4.3 and People as Inadequate.
- 1.5 There were four causes of concern highlighted through the inspection:
 - 1.5.1 Prevention activity doesn't always align with risks identified in the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). Home fire safety checks aren't being done in a timely manner and there is a large backlog of high-risk cases.

- 1.5.2 WSFRS doesn't have a clear strategy for using its risk-based inspection programme to identify the highest risk premises. The database it uses to manage premises information is unreliable and not always accurate. The Service can't carry out the number of audits of high-risk premises that it commits to as part of its programme.
- 1.5.3 WSFRS staff sometimes act in ways that go against its core values. This is leading to bullying in the workplace.
- 1.5.4 WSFRS doesn't engage with or seek feedback from staff to understand their needs. We found this to especially be the case with some under-represented groups. When staff raise issues and concerns, the Service doesn't respond quickly enough.
- 1.6 The completion & delivery against the plan was monitored through WSFRS project and programme governance process and assured through the HMICFRS Improvement Board.
- 1.7 To support this an Independent Advisory Panel was set up in December 2019 which was created to provide independent oversight, advice and assurance to assist the successful improvement journey for WSFRS and the work of the Authority's HMICFRS Improvement Board. The membership had representatives from National Fire Chiefs Council, Local Government Association and County Council Members and officers from the Fire & Rescue Service.
- 1.8 There was a dedicated Scrutiny Committee which was put in place for an inaugural meeting on 18th March 2020 but due to the pandemic this was postponed and met on 3rd June 2020.
- 1.9 A Value for Money audit assessment reported at West Sussex Regulation Accounts and Audit Committee in November 2020 which highlighted that there was a good golden thread and had made effective in roads to its improvement through planning and subsequent delivery of projects during COVID.
- 1.10 There was significant investment put forward by the County Council without which the level of improvements wouldn't have been achieved. The £5.1m investment has been secured over 3 years and this results in £2.1m base budget addition as well as £1m additional that was secured through the budget process in 20/21.
- 1.11 This has allowed a first phase of investment including provision of IT equipment and the Farynor system, provision of additional training across the Prevention and Protection functions, as well as the provision of people resource across the organisation.
- 1.12 In addition, a further £1m transitional funding was invested in 20/21 that has allowed the service to respond robustly to establish the improvements required as demonstrated by its ability to respond and adapt effectively to the pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a total base budget increase of £3.1m annually prior to the implementation of the current Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP).
- 1.13 The reactive plan was initially very ambitious, and this needed to be re-baselined to ensure that the levels of improvement required across all areas was measured and also a focus on the areas of concern for public safety as well as making progress on all areas.

- 1.14 The Improvement Plan was monitored through individual projects and oversight was managed through our Organisational Assurance & Governance Team. Any changes were monitored to the Plan through Change Controls to individual project and on a Head of Service level these are reviewed at Programme Steering Board and Service Executive Board.
- 1.15 The initial inspection report was subject to scrutiny at a special meeting of the Environment, Communities and Fire Select Committee on 10 July 2019 and the Improvement Plan was subject to further scrutiny by the Committee at two further meetings, 20 September 2019.
- 1.16 The Service reported to the scrutiny committee through a Priority Programme report considered at each meeting.
- 1.17 Projects were previously reported through Core Measure 31 which showed a consistent trend of improvement from 2020/21. In 20/21 this showed an average of 77% projects on track against a stretch target of 95%. In 21/22 this showed an increased achievement of 88%. This has always been extremely challenging without a pandemic, but this was necessary given the improvement required. It was a challenge but the progress and improvement was clear through the annual progress.
- 1.18 Throughout the life of the programme twenty-six projects were delivered. These were varied from IT implementation of new protection and prevention system Farynor through to purchase of equipment or vehicles, staffing restructures and policy and procedure improvements.

2 High level Benefits achieved

- 2.1 An increased understanding of organisational data sets and procedures has enhanced the work of the team in its efficiency, which was recognised in the recent HMICFRS report through a regrading of the judgement.
- 2.2 Recruitment of staff with required skills and resources needed to both improve and sustain improvement of the service.
- 2.3 Improved CRMP and supporting service plans to ensure that there is a golden thread from the community to the risk management plan through to individual team plans and individual staff objectives.
- 2.4 Efficiency in reduction of travel, perhaps as a bi-product of the pandemic, there has been an improvement in both staff engagement and the availability of technical resources for meetings.
- 2.5 Increased opportunities for staff engagement and feedback have been achieved.
- 2.6 Increased organisational self-awareness of areas of required improvement and success as these have all be pre-empted in the CRMP which is based on the risk we see as a county.
- 2.7 Improved CRMP engagement with the community which had 697 responses.
- 2.8 Closure of Independent Advisory Panel after one year, due to clear planning, progress against plan and supporting governance & scrutiny.

- 2.9 Following the inspection, a separate Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee has been established, which has considered the improvement plan at each meeting.

3 Feedback from Tranche 2 Inspection

- 3.1 HMICFRS carried out a full inspection of WSFRS between September and November 2021.
- 3.2 On 27th July 2022, HMICFRS published its inspection report for WSFRS.
- 3.3 The feedback from HMICFRS below demonstrated the improvement made and all future improvements are embedded within the CRMP and will be monitored through a WSFRS Continuous Improvement Assurance Board.
- 3.3.1 "West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service has improved since its 2018 inspection. It has used increased funding to expand its prevention and protection teams. We had previously been concerned about these teams but now we are satisfied with their performance."
- 3.3.2 "The service is improving how it responds to calls, with better command of incidents, and fire engines arriving within the expected timeframe. It also has good workforce planning processes and is better at having the right people with the right skills in place."
- 3.4 This will ensure the process of improvement is continuous as there are still areas of improvement which are all clearly highlighted in the CRMP which has a clear golden thread through the organisation and associated skilled workforce to future proof the further organisational efficiencies to be achieved:
- 3.4.1 "There are still areas where the service needs to improve, however – these include making sure firefighters carry out enough prevention activity, doing more to reduce unwanted fire signals, and continuing to make sure staff behaviour aligns with organisational values."
- 3.5 This improvement has all been factored in within the CRMP which is annually reported through the Statement of Assurance.

4 Lessons Learned

- 4.1 As with all improvement progress there were significant lessons learned and some of the key lessons learned were as below:
- 4.1.1 Improved governance and transparency has supported enhanced organisational improvements.
- 4.1.2 A clearer understanding of organisational roles and responsibilities was needed to enable a happy workforce, this must be continued through regular communication.
- 4.1.3 Improved planning ahead of project creation to ensure successful delivery and clear understanding of goals and objectives.
- 4.1.4 Change control has improved the organisational understanding of project status and timelines.

- 4.1.5 Utilisation of PowerBi has improved organisational understanding of the Performance & Assurance Framework
- 4.1.6 Benefits of working together in lieu of working in silos as this previously created duplication of work
- 4.1.7 Awareness raised of resource lag from recruitment to a functional staff member needs to be understood through planning
- 4.1.8 Culture change takes time, but progress can be made through incremental improvement, and this can be independently seen after a few short years.
- 4.1.9 System implementation needs time to embed to ensure maximisation of benefits for individuals and organisational outcomes.
- 4.1.10 Staff appreciation of celebration of successes is key to keep staff motivated as well as honesty around areas of lack of progress.

5 Proposal details

- 5.1 For the Committee to continue to undertake scrutiny into the area of concern arising from the inspection report through Statement of Assurance Annually. This would be supplemented with a CRMP Programme report at six monthly intervals to ensure that there is regular reporting through the organisation. This is recommended as the remaining Cause of Concern in people will take longer to implement the proposed cultural change and these updates will therefore have more information.

6 Other options considered (and reasons for not proposing)

- 6.1 For the committee not to review issues arising from the latest inspection report. This would not allow for rigorous scrutiny into the fire and rescue service.

7 Consultation, engagement and advice

- 7.1 Consultation will be undertaken as part of the consideration of the report to identify what further scrutiny members wish to undertake.

8 Finance

- 8.1 None.

9 Risk implications and mitigations

Risk	Mitigating Action (in place or planned)
A lack of effective scrutiny of the Fire and Rescue Service	The continuation of members considering the improvement journey will enable robust and focused scrutiny of the Fire and Rescue Service.

10 Policy alignment and compliance

- 10.1 There are no social value, crime and disorder, equality duty, human rights, public health, Climate Change or legal implications arising from this report.

Chief Fire Officer

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Appendices

Appendix A: HMICFRS Inspection Report (Tranche 2)

Background papers: None