



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

MEETING	Overview and Audit Committee
DATE OF MEETING	17 March 2021
OFFICER	David Norris, Head of Prevention, Response and Resilience
LEAD MEMBER	Councillor Lesley Clarke OBE
SUBJECT OF THE REPORT	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) round 2 inspections, and COVID-19 report.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<p>The HMICFRS lead for Fire and Rescue Services (FRS), HMI Zoe Billingham, wrote to all FRS on the 27 November 2020. In this letter HMICFRS signalled the intention both to publish the COVID-19 inspection reports, and to re-commence round 2 inspections early in 2021.</p> <p>HMICFRS published COVID-19 inspection reports into all fire and rescue services on 22 January 2021. The report consisted of a letter sent to the Chair of the Fire Authority and the Chief Fire Officer. HMICFRS judged that this Service 'responded well during the pandemic and provided additional support to its communities'.</p> <p>The BFRS COVID-19 report is at Annex 1.</p> <p>HMICFRS have configured the round 2 inspections of all 45 fire and rescue services, into three tranches; and this Service is in tranche 1. HMI Billingham wrote again on the 14 January to all fire and rescue services with a further update, including inspection format and engagement events.</p> <p>In preparation for round 2 inspections, a document request was received on the 18 January, along with a refreshed self-assessment template. HMICFRS will shortly open an independent reporting line and conduct a staff survey, as with the round 1 inspections.</p> <p>The decision to press ahead with the current inspection timetable was reviewed in mid-February, and our inspection is expected to take place around 24 May 2021. Preparations are well underway, although the final format of the inspections is yet to be confirmed.</p>

	<p>The inspection methodology has been reviewed within the COVID-19 restrictions, and will rely less on face-to-face interviews, focus groups and reality testing and more on virtual engagement. The questions set and judgment criteria remain largely unchanged from Round 1.</p> <p>Following completion of the first inspection round of all 45 fire and rescue services, HMICFRS published the report into Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service on 17 December 2019, as part of the final tranche of reports.</p> <p>An improvement plan has been developed addressing specifically the report recommendations and identified areas for improvement. At the meeting of the Authority on the 12 February 2020, it was agreed that progress against this plan will be reported to this committee.</p> <p>Our Service Liaison Lead, Paul Kay, returned to Merseyside fire and rescue service in November 2020 and we await notification of a newly appointed Service Liaison Lead.</p> <p>Through the efforts of all our staff we continue make progress against the items in the improvement plan.</p> <p>On 16 February, HMICFRS wrote to all fire and rescues services requesting support by providing short-term secondees. This service continues to provide enduring support to HMICFRS with the secondment of a Group Commander (Service Liaison Lead).</p> <p>CFO Thelwell is a member of the HMICFRS External Reference Group (ERG). Formed of representatives from Home Office, Local Government Association, Police Fire and Crime Commissioners, National Fire Chiefs Council and HMICFRS Portfolio team, the ERG is a mechanism through which HMICFRS test the effectiveness and impact of the inspection regime.</p> <p>During a recent engagement event HMICFRS shared revised inspection themes to include an adjusted question; <i>How well does the FRS promote equality, diversity and inclusion to ensure fair and open opportunities for all?</i> The second principal change includes a focus on the effectiveness of the risk-based inspection programme.</p>
ACTION	Noting.
RECOMMENDATIONS	That Members note the current position regarding HMICFRS inspection programme, and preparations for BFRS’s round 2 inspection.
RISK MANAGEMENT	There remain reputational corporate risks to the organisation should we have been judged as inadequate. The Service had already taken steps to

	mitigate this through having extensive internal and external audits of a number of areas of the Service.
FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS	FRSs are not funded for the burden of preparation for, resource implications of, HMICFRS inspections, nor is the Service charged. This round of inspections will be funded directly by the Home Office. The Police are top sliced from their government grants to fund their HMICFRS inspections. There has been no indication yet that this might be a future funding model for the inspection of FRSs.
LEGAL IMPLICATIONS	<p>The current Fire and Rescue Service National Framework issued under section 21 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, to which the Authority must have regard when carrying out its functions, states as follows at paragraph 7.5:</p> <p>‘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. If the fire and rescue authority does not propose to undertake any action as a result of a recommendation, reasons for this should be given’ [emphasis added].</p> <p>It continues: ‘When forming an action plan, the fire and rescue authority could seek advice and support from other organisations, for example, the National Fire Chiefs Council and the Local Government Association’.</p>
CONSISTENCY WITH THE PRINCIPLES OF THE DUTY TO COLLABORATE	Officers have developed our approach to inspection with our Thames Valley FRS partners.
HEALTH AND SAFETY	There are no Health, Safety or Wellbeing implications from this report.
EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY	There are no Equality and Diversity implications as part of the report.
USE OF RESOURCES	<p>Following this Service’s inspection, an improvement plan was presented to the Fire Authority and approved on 12 February 2020.</p> <p>We maintain a robust and enduring relationship with HMICFRS. Our ongoing approach to HMICFRS inspections is now being led by the Head of Prevention, Response and Resilience, as the designated Service Liaison Officer.</p> <p><u>Communication with stakeholders</u></p> <p>Engagement and briefings have regularly been carried out, and points of communication with Members and</p>

	<p>staff have been scheduled.</p> <p><u>The system of internal control</u></p> <p>Specific areas for service improvement have been identified through a number of workshops. These are being captured in relevant departmental plans and in the Operational Assurance Plan. These will be reported on in the usual way and ultimately to the Overview and Audit Committee.</p> <p><u>The medium-term financial strategy</u></p> <p>No direct implications for the strategy are identified at this time. There may be future implications depending on the long-term funding model for HMICFRS.</p> <p><u>The balance between spending and resources</u></p> <p>No new capability requirements have been identified as being required to prepare for and support an inspection. The Corporate Planning Manager oversees preparation of evidence with support from the Service’s Resilience and Business Continuity Manager. The Viper system has been designed to capture evidence on an ongoing basis. This allows managers to provide evidence as part of their usual reporting process. The Performance Monitoring Board provides further scrutiny of progress towards the delivery of the corporate plan.</p> <p>The ethos of the Service will be to continue to deliver the Service’s vision and strategic aims and gather the relevant evidence for the HMICFRS on a business as usual basis, rather than as an extra burden. While we develop an understanding of the inspection process and monitor the experience and effect on other services, we will revisit the resourcing needs. We identified that preparations for aspects of the new Public Safety Plan (PSP) due in 2020 needed to be closely aligned with preparations for the HMICFRS. This is now reflected in the Public Safety Plan 2020-2025.</p>
<p>PROVENANCE SECTION & BACKGROUND PAPERS</p>	<p>Background</p> <p>Background Chapter four of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 established the legal framework for the inspection of English Fire and Rescue Services. Wales and Scotland have their own mechanisms for assuring Services. The Home Office subsequently awarded a contract to Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and consequently they changed their name to Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services.</p> <p>Our preparation plans together with our response to HMICFRS’ consultation on the inspection methodology was presented to, and considered at, the 14 February</p>

	<p>2018 Fire Authority meeting (see pages 131 – 162): https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/140218_fire_authority_agenda.pdf/</p> <p>14 November 2018 O & A preparation update (see pages 185-192): https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/overview_and_audit_committee_agenda_and_reports_14118-min.pdf/</p> <p>13 February 2019 – Fire Authority preparation update (see pages 155-244): https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/130219_fire_authority_agenda.pdf/</p> <p>23 January 2020 - Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) Inspection Findings Report: https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/230120_item_7_hmicfrs_cover_report_23012020_appendix-min.pdf/</p> <p>12 February 2020 - HMICFRS Inspection Findings Report – Action Plan: https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/120220_item12_hmicfrs_inspection_findings.pdf/</p> <p>22 July 2020- Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) Improvement Plan Update https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/07/item-18-hmicfrs-bfrs-inspection-improvement-plan.pdf/</p> <p>11 November 2020 – Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) Improvement Plan Update https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/11/item-11-hmicfrs-improvement-plan.pdf/</p>
<p>APPENDICES</p>	<p>Annex 1 – BFRS COVID-19 inspection report January 2021</p> <p>Annex 2 – BFRS Inspection Improvement plan</p>
<p>TIME REQUIRED</p>	<p>15 minutes</p>
<p>REPORT ORIGINATOR AND CONTACT</p>	<p>David Norris – Head of Prevention, Response and Resilience</p> <p>01296 744627</p> <p>dnorris@bucksfire.gov.uk</p>



Promoting improvements
in policing and fire & rescue
services to make everyone safer

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Matt Parr CB
Her Majesty's Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services
Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary

Jason Thelwell
Chief Fire Officer
Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service

Councillor Lesley Clarke OBE
Chair
Buckinghamshire Fire Authority

22 January 2021

Dear Mr Thelwell and Cllr Clarke,

COVID-19 INSPECTION: BUCKINGHAMSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

In August 2020, we were commissioned by the Home Secretary to inspect how fire and rescue services in England are responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. This letter sets out our assessment of the effectiveness of your service's response to the pandemic.

2. The pandemic is a global event that has affected everyone and every organisation. Fire and rescue services have had to continue to provide a service to the public and, like every other public service, have had to do so within the restrictions imposed.
3. For this inspection, we were asked by the Home Secretary to consider what is working well and what is being learned; how the fire sector is responding to the COVID-19 crisis; how fire services are dealing with the problems they face; and what changes are likely as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. We recognise that the pandemic is not over and as such this inspection concerns the service's initial response.
4. I am grateful for the positive and constructive way your service engaged with our inspection. I am also very grateful to your service for the positive contribution you have made to your community during the pandemic. We inspected your service between 2 and 13 November 2020. This letter summarises our findings.
5. In relation to your service, the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum (LRF) jointly declared a major incident on 19 March 2020.
6. In summary, the service responded well during the pandemic and provided additional support to its community. It used wholetime and on-call firefighters to respond to emergencies.

Staff supported the service's partners, especially the local ambulance trust. This meant the people of Buckinghamshire were well supported through the pandemic.

7. Firefighters drove ambulances, assisted in the delivery of essential items, trained care home staff in infection control, and supported the other two Thames Valley fire and rescue services in the distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE) to frontline workers. The service was able to maintain its response, continue prevention activity and broadly maintained all protection activity. Resources were well managed, and the service's financial position was largely unaffected, especially as reserves weren't needed to cover extra costs. The service effectively managed its low level of staff absences, and ensured the Thames Valley primary and secondary control rooms were effective and 'COVID secure'.

8. The service communicated well with its staff throughout the pandemic and provided guidance and support on wellbeing. Extra wellbeing services were put in place for those at higher risk of COVID-19 including black, Asian and minority ethnic staff. The service also provided coronavirus testing to staff and their families who were showing symptoms of the virus. The service made sure all staff had the resources they needed to do their jobs effectively, including extra IT and new flexible working arrangements. It has continued to collaborate with its partners, and has supported the Thames Valley LRF effectively.

9. We recognise that the arrangements for managing the pandemic may carry on for some time, and that the service is now planning for the future. In order to be as efficient and effective as possible, Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service should determine how it will adopt the new and innovative ways of working introduced during the pandemic for the longer-term, to secure lasting improvements.

Preparing for the pandemic

10. In line with good governance, the service had a pandemic flu plan and business continuity plans in place which were in date. These plans were activated. They were detailed enough to enable the service to make an effective initial response, but understandably they didn't anticipate and mitigate all the risks presented by COVID-19. The service has reviewed its plans to reflect the changing situation and what it has learnt during the pandemic.

11. The plans now include further detail on what elements of the service should maintain response capability if loss of staff is greater than normal. These are the degradation arrangements. They cover prevention, protection, response and support functions, social distancing, making premises COVID secure, remote working, mutual aid and the supply of PPE. The service monitors what work has stopped, what has been scaled back, what it is doing differently and all the new ways of working that have been introduced.

Fulfilling statutory functions

12. The main functions of a fire and rescue service are firefighting, promoting fire safety through prevention and protection (making sure building owners comply with fire safety legislation), rescuing people in road traffic collisions, and responding to other emergencies.

13. The service has continued to provide its core statutory functions throughout the pandemic in line with advice from the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC). This means the service has continued to respond to calls from the public and attend emergencies. It has continued to undertake prevention work and carry out 'fire and wellness' visits using a risk-based approach in line with NFCC guidance. It has also continued its protection activity throughout the pandemic.

Response

14. The service told us that between 1 April and 30 June 2020 it attended fewer incidents than it did during the same period in 2019.

15. The overall availability of fire engines was better during the pandemic than it was during the same period in 2019. Between 1 April and 30 June 2020, the service's average overall fire engine availability was 56.8 percent compared with 44.3 percent during the same period in 2019. We were told that this was a result of lower sickness levels and on-call firefighters being available to respond to emergencies due to being furloughed from their primary employment.

16. The service told us that its average response time to fires improved during the pandemic compared with the same period in 2019. This was for several reasons including lower sickness levels, better fire engine availability and less road traffic during this period. This may not be reflected in [official data recently published by the Home Office](#), because services don't all collect and calculate their data the same way.

17. The service had good arrangements in place to make sure that its joint control room located in Berkshire had enough staff during the pandemic.

18. This included effective resilience arrangements, such as locking down both primary and secondary emergency control rooms to prevent cross-contamination. The facility also implemented enhanced hygiene measures, and all staff followed guidance on social distancing and cleaning of equipment and furniture.

Prevention

19. The NFCC issued guidance explaining how services should maintain a risk-based approach to continue prevention activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. The service adopted this guidance.

20. The service conducted fewer fire and wellness checks than it would normally undertake. It reviewed which individuals and groups it considered to be at an increased risk from fire as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, it maintained those at risk from arson and assessed

health and social care referrals as being at increased risk from fire. The service responded to each high-risk referral and instigated a triage system to identify risk levels by speaking to the resident on the telephone. This led to a face-to-face fire and wellness visit for those at highest risk, for which staff were provided with appropriate PPE.

21. The service continued to offer the option of a fire and wellness check by telephone instead of a face-to-face home fire safety check. It also continued to work jointly with housing associations in high-risk premises.

Protection

22. The NFCC issued guidance on how to continue protection activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes maintaining a risk-based approach, completing desktop audits and issuing enforcement notices electronically. The service adopted this guidance.

23. The service reviewed how it defines premises as high risk during the pandemic. As a result, it added care homes, places of education and worship, and hospitals that had changed their way of working due to the pandemic as being at an increased risk from fire. The service engaged with these premises, uploaded guidance and information on the service website and carried out mailshots.

24. The service conducted fewer fire safety audits than it would normally undertake. It decided to continue face-to-face fire safety audits and enforcement work because it was able to give staff suitable PPE. It introduced risk-based desktop appraisals instead of face-to-face audits to minimise face-to-face contact between members of staff and the public.

25. The service continued with its enforcement activity and issued enforcement notices and prohibition notices. It also continued responding to statutory building control consultations. The service concluded a prosecution as a result of which a large financial penalty was awarded.

26. It also introduced other measures to reduce social contact, such as using telephone and email to make the initial contact, using video conferencing, and using electronic documents to replace hard-copy letters. The service also used social media and its own website to inform the public of fire safety measures.

27. The service has continued to engage with those responsible for fire safety in high-risk premises with cladding similar to that at Grenfell Tower, in particular, premises where temporary evacuation procedures are in place.

28. A conference centre used for the repatriation of 150 British citizens was in the service area. The service worked with the building's responsible person to put in place suitable and reasonable fire safety measures. The service liaised with another FRS to understand the provisions required to provide appropriate fire safety measures.

Staff health and safety and wellbeing

29. Staff wellbeing was a clear priority for the service during the pandemic. It proactively identified wellbeing problems and responded to any concerns and further needs. Senior leaders actively promoted wellbeing services and encouraged staff to discuss any worries they had.

30. Most staff survey respondents told us that they could access services to support their mental wellbeing if needed. Support put in place for staff included occupational health, counselling, peer support, and access to external resources such as mindfulness presentations. The service has discussed with its staff how it should plan for the potential longer-term effects of COVID-19 on its workforce.

31. Staff most at risk of COVID-19 were identified effectively, including those from a black, Asian and minority ethnic background and those with underlying health problems. The service worked with staff to develop and implement processes to manage the risk, including individual risk assessments. The service made sure that its most vulnerable staff 'shielded', and it adopted flexible ways of working to enable working from home. It also provided COVID-19 testing for all staff members and families who had symptoms.

32. Wellbeing best practice was also shared with other services. The service worked with several fire and rescue services and delivered virtual workshops on positive action and inclusion, trans awareness and LGBTQ+ hate crime. All workshops were recorded and shared with the workforce.

33. The service made sure that firefighters were competent to do their work during the pandemic. This included keeping up to date with most of the firefighter fitness requirements. It also assessed the risks of new work to make sure its staff had the skills and equipment needed to work safely and effectively.

34. The service provided its workforce with suitable PPE on time. It participated in the national fire sector scheme to procure PPE, which allowed it to achieve value for money.

Staff absence

35. Absences have decreased compared with the same period in 2019. The number of days lost due to sickness absence between 1 April and 30 June 2020 decreased by 17.9 percent compared with the same period in 2019.

36. The service provided additional guidance and information to staff, which enabled it to better manage staff wellbeing and health and safety, and to make more effective decisions on how to allocate work. This included information about recording absences, self-isolation, testing, training for managers and returning to work. Data was routinely collected on the numbers of staff either absent, self-isolating or working from home.

Staff engagement

37. Most staff survey respondents told us that the service provided regular and relevant communication to all staff during the COVID-19 pandemic. This included regular virtual team meetings, written correspondence, and one-to-ones with a manager about wellbeing and health and safety. The chief fire officer posted weekly video messages that were shared with all staff. The service made use of telephone, email, social media, virtual meeting platforms and video blogs when communicating with on-call staff during the pandemic.

38. The service intends to maintain changes it has made to its ways of working in response to COVID-19, including the new technology it introduced to facilitate virtual meetings. The service will allow staff to work remotely, whilst maintaining the balance of face-to-face interaction. It will also continue to collaborate with its Thames Valley FRS partners to provide a targeted response to community needs.

Working with others, and making changes locally

39. To protect communities, fire and rescue staff including firefighters were encouraged to carry out extra roles beyond their core duties. This was to support other local blue light services and other public service providers that were experiencing high levels of demand, and to offer other support to its communities.

40. The service carried out the following new activities: driving ambulances, assisting vulnerable people, delivering PPE, packing/repacking food parcels for vulnerable people, and delivering training to care home staff.

41. A national 'tripartite agreement' was put in place to include the new activities that firefighters could carry out during the pandemic. The agreement was between the NFCC, National Employers, and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), and specifies what new roles firefighters could provide during the pandemic. Each service then consulted locally on the specific work it had been asked to support, to agree how to address any health and safety requirements including risk assessments. If public sector partners requested further support outside the tripartite agreement, the specifics would need to be agreed nationally before the work could begin.

42. The service consulted locally to implement the tripartite agreement with the FBU and the Fire Officers Association. Other unions were engaged, including UNISON, if their members were asked to do extra work, including those activities covered under the tripartite agreement. All of the new work done by the service under the tripartite agreement was agreed on time for it to start promptly and in line with the request from the partner agency.

43. There were extra requests for work by partner agencies that fell outside the tripartite agreement, including the distribution of PPE across the Thames Valley. Throughout the pandemic, service staff helped the Thames Valley LRF's logistics cell to co-ordinate and manage the distribution of emergency supplies to key services, including care homes and primary care services. On-call staff helped facilitate a COVID-19 testing site at the request of Buckinghamshire

Council. This work was agreed and undertaken on time and in line with the request from the partner agency.

44. All new work, including that done under the tripartite agreement, was risk-assessed and complied with the health and safety requirements. All activities to support other organisations during this period were monitored and reviewed. The service has identified which to continue, for example, helping medical staff to gain entry to private properties. The relationship between Buckinghamshire FRS and South Central Ambulance Service has been strengthened as a result of FRS staff driving ambulances. Staff will continue to maintain their ambulance driving competencies and there will be joint training in future.

Local resilience forum

45. To keep the public safe, fire and rescue services work with other organisations to assess the risk of an emergency, and to maintain plans for responding to one. To do so, the service should be an integrated and active member of its local resilience forum (LRF) – in this case, Thames Valley LRF.

46. The service was an active member of the LRF during the pandemic. The service told us that the LRF's arrangements enabled the service to fully engage in the multi-agency response.

47. As part of the LRF's response to COVID-19, the service chaired the community hub working group, the media advisory cell and the finance and legal group. The service provided the deputy chair for the tactical co-ordinating group and provided representation on the LRF executive board and strategic co-ordinating group. It was a member of the death management group and the testing cell. The service was able to allocate suitably qualified staff to participate in these groups without affecting its core duties.

Use of resources

48. The service's financial position hasn't yet been significantly affected by the pandemic.

49. The service has made robust and realistic calculations of the extra costs it has faced during the pandemic. Up to 30 June, its main extra costs were £43,000 on PPE, £29,000 on the upgrade in technology, £10,000 on cleaning materials, £66,000 on overtime and £1,000 on signage to reinforce critical messages on hygiene and social distancing. It fully understands the effect this will have on its previously agreed budget and anticipated savings.

50. As of 30 June 2020, the service has spent £149,000 of its £696,000 of extra government funding to support its response. It spent this money on PPE, cleaning materials, an upgrade in technology, overtime and signage. It has shown how it used this income efficiently, and that it mitigated against the financial risks that arose during this period.

51. The service didn't use any of its reserves to meet the extra costs that arose during this period. When used, overtime was managed appropriately. The service made sure that its staff who worked overtime had enough rest between shifts.

Ways of working

52. The service changed how it operates during the pandemic. For example, to maintain productivity it enabled staff to work at different locations within the service. It had the necessary IT to support remote working where appropriate. Where new IT was needed, it made sure that procurement processes achieved good value for money.

53. The service could quickly implement changes to how it operates. This allowed its staff to work flexibly and efficiently during the pandemic. The service plans to consider how to adapt its flexible working arrangements to make sure it has the right provisions in place to support a modern workforce.

54. The service has had positive feedback from staff on how they were engaged with during the pandemic. As a result, the service plans to adopt these changes in its usual procedures and consider how they can be developed further to help promote a sustainable change to its working culture.

55. The service made good use of the resources and guidance available from the NFCC to support its workforce planning and help with its work under the tripartite agreement.

Staffing

56. The service had enough resources available to respond to the level of demand during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to re-allocate resources where necessary to support the work of its partner organisations. Arrangements put in place to monitor staff performance across the service were effective. This meant the service could be sure its staff were making the best contribution that they reasonably could during this period. Extra capacity was identified and reassigned to support other areas of the service and other organisations. The service assisted South Central Ambulance Service by driving ambulances, and supported Buckinghamshire Council at a coronavirus testing facility. The service also provided staff to assist the logistics cell with administering and distributing PPE.

57. For most of the pandemic, the main role for wholetime firefighters was to provide the service's core responsibilities, while work under the tripartite agreement was done by other parts of the workforce. This approach was taken because the service felt this was the best way to make sure it had the resources it needed to meet its foreseeable risk. We expect the service to keep its processes under review to make sure it uses its wholetime workforce as productively as possible.

58. The on-call workforce took on extra responsibilities covering some of the roles agreed as part of the tripartite agreement, with the assistance of prevention staff.

Governance of the service's response

59. Each fire and rescue service is overseen by a fire and rescue authority (FRA). There are several different governance arrangements in place across England, and the size of the authority varies between services. Each authority ultimately has the same function: to set the service's priorities and budget and make sure that the budget is spent wisely.

60. Members of Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Authority were actively engaged in discussions with the chief fire officer and the service on the service's ability to discharge its statutory functions during the pandemic.

61. The authority maintained effective ways of working with the service during the pandemic. This made sure the service could fulfil its statutory duties as well as its extra work supporting the LRF and the tripartite arrangements. The service regularly updated fire and rescue authority members about how it was responding to the pandemic and the extra activities of its staff. This included work carried out as part of the tripartite arrangements.

62. During the pandemic, the FRA continued to give the service proportionate oversight and scrutiny, including of its decision-making process. It did this by regularly communicating with the chief fire officer and receiving the service's written briefings.

Looking to the future

63. During the pandemic, services were able to adapt quickly to new ways of working. This meant they could respond to emergencies and take on a greater role in the community by supporting other blue light services and partner agencies. It is now essential that services use their experiences during COVID-19 as a platform for lasting reform and modernisation.

64. Buckinghamshire FRS is an active member of the Thames Valley collaboration group, strengthening its relationships with its partners, local authorities and South Central Ambulance Service. This has enabled the emergency services to support the LRF more effectively, which in turn has provided better service to communities across the Thames Valley. Buckinghamshire FRS is looking at ways its workforce can support these organisations more consistently especially during periods of high demand.

65. It has developed the way it communicates with staff and explored different ways of working during the pandemic, which has helped different parts of the workforce to connect and work together. The service also transformed its use of technology and is considering how virtual platforms and remote working can help it become more effective and efficient.

66. Good practice and what worked was shared with other services in the Thames Valley collaboration group. The service moved into the new Blue Light Hub in Milton Keynes on 30 June 2020, despite the pandemic. Thames Valley Police, South Central Ambulance Service and NHS Blood and Transplant will join them in the new building later this year.

67. The hub's design promotes engagement between the three services. It includes flexible working spaces for all services, and informal breakout spaces to promote collaboration.

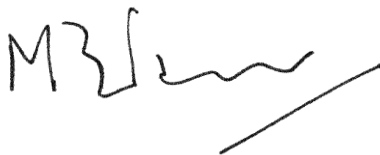
68. The service introduced a professor of operations and critical systems from the University of Manchester to the LRF to improve efficiencies and assist local authorities in creating effective volunteer schemes.

69. An apprentice recruitment process for operational activity during the pandemic was completed. This followed all government guidance on social distancing and hygiene. It used its own facilities at first, then moved to an external provider when their facilities reopened. The process was recorded and shared with others electronically.

Next steps

70. This letter will be published on our website. We propose to restart our second round of effectiveness and efficiency fire and rescue inspections in spring 2021, when we may follow up some of our findings.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Parr', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Matt Parr CB

Her Majesty's Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services
Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary



OVERVIEW AND AUDIT COMMITTEE - 17 March 2021

Annex 2

Report Reference	Inspection Pillar	HMICFRS inspection report item	Improvement Activity	R/A/G
Page 11	Prevention – Area for improvement	The service should evaluate its prevention work, so it understands the benefits better.	<p>An evaluation of the prevention activity commenced in July 2020. The evaluation uses a diagnostic methodology developed from academic research and with colleagues from Manchester University. The approach uses the Viable Systems Methodology, which has been adapted for the Services purposes and forms the basis of the evaluative approach.</p> <p>The evaluation has been separated into work-stream to enable a more focussed and pragmatic approach to the evaluation. The first phases include fire and wellness checks (linked to the item above, youth engagement and safeguarding.)</p>	
Page 11	Prevention - Area for improvement	The service should understand the reasons for its reducing number of prevention visits and consider how it can better target those who are most at risk to fire.	<p>An increased shift to referral led prevention visits has been implemented from April 2019 to utilise service resources more effectively. Administration teams that are responsible for screening and booking in Fire and wellness visits, have previously been under established, affecting the ability to book in visits. A recruitment campaign has been undertaken and will soon see the three administration teams back to full establishment.</p> <p>Specific roles have been identified & funding has been agreed by the Authority to establish a number of new Prevention posts, which will help to oversee and deliver Fire & Wellness visits, to address the volume of</p>	



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			<p>prevention visits in identified areas of increased risk, including the delivery of a program of high-rise interventions and engagements with specialised housing.</p> <p>Intervention post incident, is being reinvigorated through a revised procedure supported by processes which enable this activity to be recorded in PRMS.</p>	
Page 14	Protection - Area for improvement	The service should ensure it allocates enough resources to a prioritised and risk-based inspection programme.	<p>Several recruitment campaigns have been undertaken to fill posts that have become vacant following resignations and also to fill newly created apprentice fire safety roles, approved 2019/20 by the FA. Training is currently underway of these new staff members.</p> <p>This year, 2020/21, the Fire Authority have approved four further fire safety posts, which will be utilised to increase capacity of existing inspecting officers, through the creation of lead teams in specialist areas, such as: enforcement and prosecution; Specialised Housing; and, High Risk Residential Buildings (HRRB).</p>	
Page 14	Protection - Area for improvement	The service should review its response to false alarms to ensure operational resources are used effectively (termed 'unwanted fire signals').	An evaluation of the policy on Automatic Fire Alarms commenced in July 2020, as part of a collaborative project with Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire fire and rescue services. Due to COVID-19 pressures, the three-service approach has been paused however continues in this Service. The evaluation uses a diagnostic methodology developed from academic research and with colleagues from Manchester University. The	



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			<p>approach uses a methodology, which has been adapted for the Services purposes and forms the basis of the evaluative approach.</p>	
Page 14	Protection - Area for improvement	<p>The service should ensure it works with local businesses and large organisations to share information and expectations on compliance with fire safety regulations.</p>	<p>Capacity to deliver proactive engagement activity has been limited due to vacancies in an already small protection department. These posts have now been filled and training up to Level 4 Diploma accreditation is currently underway.</p> <p>The creation of additional posts enables the increased capacity to focus work on targeted engagement of lower risk premises that may not be included within a refreshed Risk Based Inspection Programme (RBIP).</p>	
Page 16	Response – Area for Improvement	<p>The service should ensure it has a sustainable system to provide its operational response model.</p>	<p>Following a review of the Resourcing Model, the Service has commenced work to further improve availability of appliances and disposition of staff. The introduction of new on-call contracts has led to a better employment proposition for staff, which in turn provides greater resilience and opportunity.</p> <p>Total staffing numbers remain low, and the review has identified a range of areas in which efficiency can be improved. These efficiencies are supported by the introduction of 20 additional firefighters to the establishment following a recent successful growth bids in 2020.</p>	



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Page 16	Response – Area for Improvement	The service should improve the availability of its on-call fire engines to respond to incidents.	<p>A new revised approach to On-Call awareness sessions has been created and delivered online (virtual) on three occasions now. This has seen an increase in new applications.</p> <p>A new On-Call Contract was introduced in 2018 which created four availability options. This ranged from immediate response through 20mins, 60mins and 3 hour response to mobilising.</p> <p>A new resource management system (FSR - Fire Service Rota) was introduced and the resilience availability options are being developed into the system. The strategic resourcing model identifies three On-call appliances with up-to 10 minute mobilisation availability.</p>	
Page 23	Efficiency – Recommendation	Ensure it has the capacity and capability to support its activity in its public safety plan;	Officers adopted a zero-based budget approach when developing the budget proposal for 2020/21. This approach has been developed alongside the new Public Safety Plan and feedback from our recent inspection report from HMICFRS. Although our report noted that the inspectorate “would like to see improvements in the year ahead, but without increased funding, it is difficult to see where progress can be made” the zero-based budget approach has identified some key opportunities within the current budgetary constraints:	



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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing the wholetime establishment by up to 20 firefighters in 2020/21, with the potential to increase by a further 10 in the following year (depending on the outcome of the comprehensive spending review) Increasing the Protection Team by 4 FTEs and introducing a Team Leader role and two further FTEs into the Prevention Team. Introducing a Head of Technology, Transformation and Programme Management Office (PMO) to manage the actions required following our inspection report. 	
Page 23	Efficiency – Recommendation	Consult with the people of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes on options to have the most effective and efficient response against the financial environment in which it operates.	<p>The 2020-2025 Public Safety Plan (PSP) was approved for public consultation at the Authority’s 18 September 2019 meeting. The consultation was open for an eight-week period from 23 September to 18 November 2019.</p> <p>Officers will proceed with the further development of the strategy proposals set out in the PSP having regard to the consultation feedback as they are progressed and to undertake further consultations with stakeholders potentially affected by any specific changes arising from their implementation.</p>	
Page 25	Efficiency – Area for Improvement	The service should use sound financial management to ensure all additional costs such as pension liability are	The zero-based budgeting approach adopted for 2020/21 reviewed all costs to ensure that the right amount of money is being spent in the right places.	



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		accounted for and that there is a contingency plan.	<p>The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2020/21 to 2024/25 shows two scenarios, one with the continuation of the pension grant funding and the other showing the impact if it were to cease after 2020/21.</p> <p>Following approval of the PSP a Financial Strategy has been developed, this was considered by the Executive Committee in November 2020 and approved by the Fire Authority in December 2020. The Strategy included the development of alternative scenarios and contingency plans and further addressed the two Efficiency recommendations shown above.</p>	
Page 31	People –Area for Improvement	The service should put in place an achievable succession plan, for the whole organisation.	Implementation of a pan-organisational succession plan which undertakes regular systematic and rigorous Strategic Workforce and Succession Planning processes, incorporating Public Safety requirements	
Page 33	People – Area for Improvement	The service should plan to be more ambitious in its efforts to attract a more diverse workforce which better reflects the community it serves.	Attendance at Career Fairs at Colleges, Schools, MK Stadium etc. Have a go days for Females, BAME groups. Review of the People Strategy portal to ensure the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) message is consistent. Workforce Reform project as part of the Thames Valley Collaboration agenda established. Re-established Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) group to work on initiatives to attract a more diverse workforce.	



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Page 34	People – Area for Improvement	The service should put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders.	<p>Our talent management programme, continues to ensure replenished development pools at each level, resulting in staff with the required skills to fulfil the roles when needed.</p> <p>A pilot scheme to identify and develop future senior leaders was successfully employed to recruit an interim replacement for a Head of Service position. This pilot is being validated later this year with a senior management assessment and development centre. This approach will continue to futureproof the Service and minimise the potential impact on its workforce, ensuring the operational commitment can be maintained.</p>	
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