



# Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

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**Meeting and date:** Overview and Audit Committee, 21 July 2021

**Report title:** Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) Improvement Plan Update

**Lead Member:** Councillor Lesley Clarke OBE

**Report sponsor:** Deputy Chief Fire Officer Mick Osborne

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**Action:** Noting

**Recommendations:** That the Committee note current progress against the HMICFRS - BFRS improvement plan.

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## **Executive summary:**

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.

An improvement plan (Appendix 1) is in place to specifically progress 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 the Overview and Audit committee.

On the 18 March 2020, HMICFRS confirmed suspension of all their inspections of police and fire and rescue services, because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following a commission by the Home Secretary in the Summer of 2020, HMICFRS announced a national review of fire and rescue service COVID-19 preparations. BFRS received the inspection team for a COVID-19 inspection during November 2020.

The results of our COVID-19 inspection were published on 22 January 2021, where HMICFRS concluded that BFRS “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.”

The second round of inspections of all 44 (since Hampshire and Isle of Wight merged in 2021) fire and rescue services has now recommenced and BFRS is being inspected again as part of the Tranche one schedule, with our inspection taking place between 24 May 2021 and 9 July 2021.

Through the efforts of all our staff we continue make progress against the items in the current improvement plan and look forward to considering the findings of our latest inspection, which are to be published in the Autumn of 2021.

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### **Financial implications:**

FRSs are not funded for the preparation for, resource implications of, HMICFRS inspections, nor is the Service charged. The inspections are funded directly by the Home Office. The Police are top sliced from their Government grants to fund the HMICFRS inspections of Police Forces. There has been no indication yet that this might be a future funding model for the inspection of FRSs.

### **Risk management:**

There remain reputational corporate risks to the organisation should we be 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. Notably, our operations have been subject to external independent assurance. Our Health, Safety and Wellbeing function has been independently audited by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and received a Gold Award.

### **Legal implications:**

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:

‘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.’

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’.

### **Privacy and security implications:**

No privacy or security implications have been identified that are directly associated with this report or its appendices. The respective strands of the improvement plan have undergone Data Protection Impact Screening and full impact assessments have been completed and reviewed where appropriate.

The report and its appendices are not protectively marked.

**Duty to collaborate:**

Each fire and rescue service is inspected individually.

Officers have developed our approach to inspection with other FRS partners, and with ‘peer’ support from Thames Valley and Gloucestershire Police Forces.

**Health and safety implications:**

There are no Health, Safety or Wellbeing implications arising from this report.

**Environmental implications:**

There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

**Equality, diversity, and inclusion implications:**

Progress against our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion objectives are included within the updated improvement plan.

**Consultation and communication:**

Specific areas for Service improvement have been identified through a number of workshops and working groups. These are being captured in relevant plans and will be reported on in the usual way, ultimately to the Overview and Audit Committee.

**Background papers:**

14 February 2018 Fire Authority meeting (see pages 131 – 162): Our preparation plans together with our response to HMICFRS’ consultation on the inspection methodology

[https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/140218\\_fire\\_authority\\_agenda.pdf/](https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/140218_fire_authority_agenda.pdf/)

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\\_141118-min.pdf/](https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/overview_and_audit_committee_agenda_and_reports_141118-min.pdf/)

13 February 2019 – Fire Authority preparation update (see pages 155-244):

[https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/130219\\_fire\\_authority\\_agenda.pdf/](https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/130219_fire_authority_agenda.pdf/)

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/](https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/230120_item_7_hmicfrs_cover_report_23012020_appendix-min.pdf/)

12 February 2020 - HMICFRS Inspection Findings Report – Action Plan:

[https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/120220\\_item12\\_hmicfrs\\_inspection\\_findings.pdf/](https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/120220_item12_hmicfrs_inspection_findings.pdf/)

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/>

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/>

Appendix	Title	Protective Marking
1	HMICFRS INSPECTION REPORT – IMPROVEMENT PLAN Updated 28 May 2021	Not protectively marked



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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 Service’s purposes and forms the basis of the evaluative approach.</p> <p>The evaluation has been separated by work-stream to enable a more focussed and pragmatic approach. The initial phase included Fire and Wellness visits, Road Safety, Youth Engagement and Safeguarding with the completion of the remaining phase of the evaluation being placed on hold to facilitate work on Covid.</p> <p>An evaluation of the behaviour change brought about by Fire &amp; Wellness visits has been completed and is being used to inform a targeted program of knowledge acquisition for operational staff.</p> <p>Service delivery area profiles have been developed and launched to all nine service delivery areas. These documents provide information on community risk and incident demands/trends.</p> <p>Benchmarking reports have been developed to assist in the comparison between Service areas and the national statistical data.</p> <p>Objectives are now being developed to address priority Prevention objectives bespoke to Service area requirements.</p>	A



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<p>Page 11</p>	<p>Prevention - Area for improvement</p>	<p>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>	<p>An increased shift to referral-led Prevention visits has been implemented from April 2019 to utilise Service resources more effectively.</p> <p>A successful recruitment campaign has been undertaken within the administration team which has seen the three administration teams back to full establishment; the administration teams are responsible for screening and booking Fire and Wellness visits, and were previously under-established, affecting the ability to book visits.</p> <p>Funding agreed by the Authority to establish a number of new Prevention posts is helping to oversee and deliver Fire &amp; Wellness visits in specific buildings. This additional capacity will address the volume of Prevention visits in identified areas of increased risk, including the delivery of a program of high-rise interventions and engagement with the occupants of specialised housing. These new posts have been filled with a CS Team Leader and two CS Technician roles alongside an onboarding program of relevant training.</p> <p>Planning meetings linked to the first phase of the Prevention evaluation are now integral to driving the Prevention agenda forward, addressing evaluation findings, scrutinising all staff workstreams and the capacity to deliver.</p> <p>Post-incident intervention is being reinvigorated through input on the revised procedure supported by adjustment to processes which enable this activity to be more effectively recorded in our Premises Risk Management System (PRMS).</p>	<p>G</p>
<p>Page 14</p>	<p>Protection - Area for improvement</p>	<p>The service should ensure it allocates enough resources to a prioritised and risk-</p>	<p>Following the Fire Authority’s approval of a significant Protection growth bid at the February 2020 Fire Authority meeting, we have now recruited into all the posts including a newly created apprentice fire safety role. There was one exception, which was recruiting into the High Risk Residential Building Manager</p>	



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		<p>based inspection programme.</p>	<p>(HRRB) role. This is due to the essential criteria for specific technical qualifications.</p> <p>Due to these additional challenges, we undertook a review of the department structure to ensure the required resources are available in the correct locations, based on the risk profile for each area. This resulted in the creation of lead teams and references in specialist areas, such as: enforcement and prosecution; specialised housing; and High-Risk Residential Buildings (HRRB).</p> <p>Three of the new posts have been filled with support staff, and those not currently fully qualified and competent have received significant investment and are nearing completion of their training and probationary periods.</p> <p>The fourth (manager) post has been redesignated through internal role movements as an operational Station Commander post. Fulfilling this post with a suitably qualified and experienced manager and increasing the out of hours Protection cover for undertaking emergency enforcement action and responding to operational incidents, where a Protection officer can add specialist advice and support.</p> <p>The HRRB team are focussing on the delivery of the Building Risk Review Programme (BRRP) and supporting the review and development of a new Risk Based Inspection Programme (RBIP) methodology.</p> <p>Due to the global pandemic, the development of the new RBIP methodology and its piloting has been delayed and should go ahead from 1 June 2021.</p> <p>A range of approaches will be developed to engage with those premises that aren't deemed as the highest risk. This will include business engagement, workshops/ seminars, and response crew thematic reviews.</p>	<p>G</p>
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<p>Page 14</p>	<p>Protection - Area for improvement</p>	<p>The service should review its response to false alarms to ensure operational resources are used effectively (termed 'unwanted fire signals').</p>	<p>An evaluation of the policy on Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs) 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 work in this Service continues. The evaluation uses a diagnostic methodology developed from academic research and with colleagues from Manchester University. The approach uses a methodology, which has been adapted for the Service's purposes and forms the basis of the evaluative approach.</p> <p>The evaluation is considering two linked areas, response to AFAs and Unwanted Fire Signals (UwFSs).</p> <p>Data analysis continues to identify the cost and value to all stakeholders, from BFRS attending all AFAs. On completion of this evaluation, an options paper will be taken to the Fire Authority for decision.</p> <p>The current UwFS Officer post and processes are undergoing evaluation to inform options going forward, as we recognise some early initial benefits and that the rate of reductions in UwFSs have levelled out over recent years.</p> <p>Response crews are to undergo Protection training, which will improve their knowledge of the built environment and expectations of basic fire safety measures and management. This will also enable them to undertake fire safety engagement and thematic activities at simple and lower risk premises. Although these lower-level activities will not be counted as audits for the purposes of reporting to the Home Office, they will assist in identifying non-compliance, improving knowledge and keeping people safe.</p>	<p>A</p>
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<p>Page 14</p>	<p>Protection - Area for improvement</p>	<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> <p>Utilising Home Office Grant funding has enabled us to engage a number of individuals on fixed term contracts to focus on business engagement.</p> <p>Activity has significantly increased in this area, in a time where physical engagement has been severely restricted. Website and Social Media activity, press releases, radio interviews, Milton Keynes Open University induction programme, Care Home virtual seminar (planned for 23 June 2021), including OFRS and RBFRS.</p> <p>Web site development is underway, to consider a number of planned activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-Assessment form to target lower risk premises.</li> <li>• An app/ web-based alert system, or other means of sharing alerts with people and businesses who have signed up to receive alerts from us, relevant to their interest or work sector.</li> <li>• A range of forms that the public could use to make referrals for community or business fire safety advice and support. This could include a tool for people in high-rise flats who wish to raise concerns about the way the flats are being run by the management company from a fire safety point of view but are not sure how to do so.</li> </ul>	<p>A</p>
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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A means of receiving information from Responsible Persons for High Rise residential premises, as detailed in the Grenfell Tower Phase 1 recommendations.</li> </ul>	
Page 16	Response – Area for Improvement	The service should ensure it has a sustainable system to provide its operational response model.	<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 new 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 successful growth bids in 2020.</p> <p>The Resource Management Team is currently being re-structured to provide more capacity within the team. This re-structure will result in future efficiencies in how the department resources fire appliances. The focus will be on Fire Service Rota (FSR) development and predicting and planning effectively for shortages.</p> <p>Integration between FSR and Vision is nearing completion. From June/July 2021 this project will enable on-call fire fighters to make themselves available for not only their closest appliance providing immediate cover, but also other appliances on a second and third-line availability basis.</p>	G
Page 16	Response – Area for Improvement	The service should improve the availability of its on-	A 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.	



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		call fire engines to respond to incidents.	<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>	A
Page 23	Efficiency – Recommendation	Ensure it has the capacity and capability to support its activity in its public safety plan;	<p>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.</p> <p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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)</li> <li>Increasing the Protection team by 4 FTEs and introducing a Team Leader role and two further FTEs into the Prevention team.</li> <li>Introducing a Head of Technology, Transformation and Portfolio Management Office (PMO) to manage the actions required following our inspection report.</li> </ul>	A



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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>The plan has since been approved and came into effect from April 1<sup>st</sup> 2020</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>	G
Page 25	Efficiency – Area for Improvement	The service should use sound financial management to ensure all additional costs such as pension liability are accounted for and that there is a contingency plan.	<p>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.</p> <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>	A
Page 31	People –Area for Improvement	The service should put in place an achievable succession plan, for the whole organisation.	Regular systematic and rigorous strategic workforce and succession planning processes are in place, which incorporate current Public Safety Plan requirements and horizon scanning of likely future external and internal challenges.	



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			<p>Outcomes from these processes are subsequently translated into timely interventions to ensure the Authority continues to meet workforce capacity requirements and build capability.</p> <p>In addition, it provides opportunity to refresh the workforce through the identification of people; internally and where required externally to fill identified key positions.</p>	G
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.	<p>The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) group is well established. They meet monthly to progress the 6-, 12- and 18-month objectives.</p> <p>The EDI objectives 2020 -2025 are being presented to the Fire Authority on 16 June 2021, having previously been approved at Performance Monitoring Board and Strategic Management Board. The objectives provide an update on progress to date, EDI headlines of workstreams and EDI workforce data.</p> <p>The tangible objectives have been reviewed and extended to 24 months from 18 months, to reflect the amount of work being carried out in regard to EDI. The EDI objectives are reflective of HMICFRS recommendations and the refreshed corporate plan.</p> <p>The Recruitment Oversight Board meets on a regular basis, where stakeholders from across the service discuss resourcing and recruitment to ensure a joined-up approach. The end to end process has been mapped out and further meetings are planned.</p>	A
Page 34	People – Area for Improvement	The service should put in place an open and fair process to	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.	G



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		<p>identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders.</p>	<p>All elements/modules of our promotional process have been reviewed, consulted on, and brought together in one Operational Promotional procedure to provide clarity and consistency to staff on the requirements and route for promotion.</p> <p>Following the successful pilot of a scheme used to identify and develop future leaders in the Service, we have embedded this into our recently refreshed appointment and promotion procedures and are progressing a new Leadership and Management Development Framework to support and assist with the development of newly recruited or promoted managers.</p> <p>All employees have an annual appraisal, where their commitment to their behaviours linked to the Authority’s values is an essential element. Quality assurance of appraisal returns is undertaken to identify themes, and to assist with training requirements.</p> <p>This approach continues to futureproof the Service and minimise the potential impact on its workforce, ensuring the operational commitment can be maintained.</p>	<p>G</p>
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