



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

Meeting and date: Executive Committee, 13 November 2024

Report title: His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) 2023-2025 Revisit Update

Lead Member: Councillor Simon Rouse, Chairman

Report sponsor: Chief Fire Officer, Louise Harrison

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Action: Noting

Recommendations:

That the HMICFRS update, and the Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service: Causes of concern progress letter 8 November 2024 (Appendix 1), be noted.

Executive summary:

In July 2017, HMICFRS extended its remit to include inspections of England's fire and rescue services. They assess and report on the efficiency, effectiveness and people of the 44 fire and rescue services in England.

HMICFRS published the BFRS Round 3/2023-2025 report on 19 October 2023. The report can be found here: [BFRS 2023-2025 - HMICFRS](#). This report sets out HMICFRS inspection findings for Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service following the inspection during May and June 2023. The latest report for the Service identifies three causes of concern, accompanied by 10 recommendations, and 26 areas for improvement. The report was noted at the Extraordinary Fire Authority meeting on 24 October 2023.

As per requirements set out in the report covering letter to the Chairman and Chief Fire Officer on 17 October 2023, a copy of the action plan detailing how the Service will address the recommendations must be submitted to HMICFRS within 28 days of the report. A copy of the action plan was sent to HMICFRS within 28 days of the report publication; on the 15 November 2023.

On 21 November 2023, HMICFRS informed the Service that it will now be entering the supportive Engage process. The Engage process provides additional scrutiny and support from the Inspectorate.

Revisit

HMICFRS revisited the Service, in May and September 2024, to review the progress made against the recommendations. Following a strategic briefing, they met with teams from Response, Prevention, Protection and EDI.

On the 21 October 2024, the Chief Fire Officer and the Chairman attended the Fire Performance Oversight Group (FPOG) to give an update on our progress.

The HMICFRS have now shared an update on their findings (Appendix 1):

Prevention:

- Substantial improvements have been made in identifying and prioritising those most at risk of fire and other emergencies. Referrals are now triaged and prioritised based on risk, ensuring that those in greatest need receive timely support.
- All recommendations related to Prevention have been successfully completed, and this cause of concern is now closed.

Protection:

- Good progress has been made in how BFRS prioritise risk within protection activities. Fire safety audits have increased and there is a clear plan to audit very high and high-risk premises.
- A new role has been introduced in the protection team to support training and policy development, enhancing the overall effectiveness.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI):

- BFRS have made good progress in promoting EDI. The introduction of a People and Culture Officer and a Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development will help coordinate these efforts across all departments.
- Ambitious plans to further promote EDI are well underway, and HMICFRS look forward to this important work continue.

The inspectors have noted the robust governance arrangements BFRS have in place to monitor the Service's progress, with regular strategic improvement board meetings chaired by the CFO. They have also acknowledged the Service's comprehensive action plan, which includes clear responsibilities, deadlines, and progress updates for each task.

HMICFRS will continue to monitor progress through regular contact and a virtual revisit in January 2025 to assess the impact of the changes implemented.

Financial implications:

The prioritisation of improvements to address the specific recommendations raised within the causes of concern may introduce additional financial implications, either through reprioritisation of other projects, or through new workstreams.

Consideration will be given to ensure associated costs, both direct and indirect, are fully understood and managed effectively.

Risk management:

There remain reputational corporate risks to the organisation. The Service continues to take steps to mitigate this through having extensive internal and external audits of a number of areas of the Service, in addition to the HMICFRS inspections. The internal audit plan for 24/25 can be found here: [Internal Audit plan](#)

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 report and its appendices are not protectively marked.

Duty to collaborate:

Each fire and rescue service is inspected individually. However, the latest report includes findings relating to the Service’s ability to collaborate effectively with partners. The report states: “We were pleased to see the service meets its statutory duty to collaborate. It continues to consider opportunities to collaborate with other emergency responders.”

Health and safety implications:

The HMICFRS report states:

- The service provides good well-being provisions to its workforce, but work-related stress is not being fully addressed.
- The service has a positive health and safety culture.

The areas for improvement relating to working hours and secondary contracts will feed into the health, safety and wellbeing group.

Environmental implications:

The HMICFRS report states:

“The service didn’t identify all the potential climate impacts and mitigation measures required in its 2020–2025 public safety plan. This is what it calls its integrated risk management plan. It has now recognised that it needs a different range of equipment to be ready to respond to this risk both now and in the future.”

Equality, diversity, and inclusion implications:

The Service has been judged as ‘requires improvement’ in the area relating to ensuring fairness and promoting diversity, along with a cause of concern and four recommendations relating to equality, diversity and inclusion. All the findings from the HMICFRS round three inspection report have been fully considered and prioritised to ensure continual improvement is established and maintained.

The Authority’s equality, diversity, and inclusion objectives 2020-2025 – year 3 progress was presented to the Fire Authority on 14 June 2023.

Consultation and communication:

Specific areas identified for Service improvement are being captured in relevant plans and will be reported on in line with the recommendations.

Background papers:

HMICFRS BFRS Home Page: [Buckinghamshire - His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/buckinghamshire-fire-and-rescue-service/)

16 February 2022 – Fire Authority: Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) Inspection Report 2021

<https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2022/02/fa-item-10-16022022.pdf/>

24 October 2023 – Extraordinary Fire Authority: His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) Inspection Report 2023

[Extraordinary Fire Authority Meeting – 24 October 2023 - Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service/](#)

6 December 2023 – Fire Authority: His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) 2023 Action Plan

[Fire Authority Meeting - 6 December 2023 - Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service](#)

8 February 2024 – Executive Committee: His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) 2023 Update

[Executive Committee – 8 February 2024 - Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service](#)

13 March 2024 – Overview and Audit Committee: His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) 2023 Update

<https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2024/02/overview-and-audit-committee-13-march-2024-item-9-hmicfrs-bfrs-2023-2025-update.pdf/>

09 May 2024 - State of Fire and Rescue: The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2023

[State of Fire and Rescue: The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2023 - His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services \(justiceinspectrates.gov.uk\)](#)

12 June 2024 - Fire Authority: His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) 2023-2025 Update

[\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority, 12/06/2024 11:00 \(bucksfire.gov.uk\)](#)

30 July 2024 – HMICFRS Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service: Causes of concern revisit letter

[Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service: Causes of concern revisit letter - His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services \(justiceinspectrates.gov.uk\)](#)

01 August 2024 - HMICFRS Standards of behaviour: The handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services

[Standards of behaviour: The handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services - His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services \(justiceinspectrates.gov.uk\)](#)

11 September 2024 – Extraordinary Fire Authority: HMICFRS Update

[\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority, 11/09/2024 11:00 \(bucksfire.gov.uk\)](#)

07 November 2024 - Overview and Audit Committee: His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) 2023 Update

[OVERVIEW AND AUDIT COMMITTEE - 7 NOVEMBER 2024 - Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service](#)

| Appendix | Title | Protective Marking |
|----------|--|--------------------|
| 1 | Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service: Causes of concern progress letter, 8 November 2024 | N/A |

Louise Harrison
Chief Fire Officer
Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service

8 November 2024

Dear Louise,

Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service: progress made against causes of concern

Between May and June 2023, we inspected Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service. During our inspection, we identified that the [causes of concern](#) relating to prevention and equality, diversity and inclusion issued after our inspection in 2021 hadn't been fully addressed. We also identified a new cause of concern about the service's protection activity. On 19 October 2023, we issued the causes of concern and made the following recommendations:

Prevention cause of concern

Some improvements in prevention have been made since our last inspection. The service has revised its prevention strategy, and this is giving its prevention and response teams better direction. But the service is still not adequately identifying and prioritising those most at risk from fire.

Recommendations

Within 28 days, the service should review its action plan to make sure that:

- it has an effective system to define the levels of risk in the community; and
- its systems and processes for dealing with referrals from individuals and partner agencies effectively manage and prioritise those referrals with the highest identified risk.

Protection cause of concern

The service hasn't done enough since our last inspection to address its [areas for improvement](#) and provide clear direction to make sure that its teams can prioritise work according to risk.

Recommendations

Within 28 days, the service should provide an action plan that:

- clearly defines its risk-based inspection programme, within a revised protection strategy, which is aligned to its next public safety plan;
- makes sure its increased number of staff complete a proportionate amount of activity to reduce risk and work to effective targets;
- assures the system to record fire safety activity is robust and well supported to enable prioritisation of highest risk;
- makes sure it has an effective quality assurance process so that staff carry out audits to an appropriate standard.

Equality, diversity and inclusion cause of concern

The service hasn't made enough progress since our last inspection to improve equality, diversity and inclusion. The service has done enough to complete one of our recommendations by reviewing its [equality impact assessment](#) process. But the other recommendations still require action to be taken or completed.

Recommendations

Within 28 days, the service should review its action plan, detailing how it will:

- give greater priority to how it increases awareness of equality, diversity and inclusion across the organisation;
- make sure that it has appropriate ways to engage with and seek feedback from all staff, including those from under-represented groups;
- make improvements to the way it collects equality data to better understand its workforce demographics and needs; and
- be more ambitious in its efforts to attract a more diverse workforce that better reflects the community it serves.

On 15 November 2023, you submitted an action plan setting out how you would address the causes of concern and our recommendations.

Between 20 and 24 May 2024, we carried out a revisit to review progress against the action plan. During the revisit, we interviewed staff who were responsible for developing this plan, including you as chief fire officer. We also interviewed managers and staff with responsibility for prevention, protection and equality, diversity and inclusion, together with colleagues from their teams. On 31 May 2024, we shared our initial findings with you.

We have continued to review your progress through continued engagement, a checkpoint visit on 23 September and your presentation at the Fire Performance Oversight Group meeting on 22 October. This letter provides an update on our findings.

Governance

We again found appropriate and robust governance arrangements in place to monitor progress of your action plan. You, as chief fire officer, chair the His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) strategic improvement board meetings, which have been held regularly since December 2023.

Action plan

The service has an action plan that covers all the causes of concern. The plan identifies senior responsible officers, deadlines and people assigned to each task. It includes updates on the progress of actions made against each cause of concern and the associated recommendations. The service continues to monitor its progress against the areas for improvement we identified in our last inspection.

Progress against the causes of concern

Prevention

The service has made good progress against the remaining recommendations associated with the cause of concern. It has improved the way it identifies and prioritises those most at risk of fire and other emergencies.

Referrals are quickly triaged, added to the system and prioritised for a visit by staff. All referrals are now prioritised on a highest-risk basis rather than on a first-come, first-served basis.

The service has started to train all firefighters and staff involved with processing referrals and is regularly assessing the quality of this work.

The key performance indicators help the service to effectively manage these changes and the impact they will have on its performance and on the public. All the recommendations have now been completed and the cause of concern is closed.

Protection

The service has made good progress in improving how its teams prioritise risk. It has used support from the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) and other fire and rescue services to help it review its ways of working.

It has introduced a risk-based inspection programme that identifies very high-risk and high-risk premises that should be prioritised for annual audit. The service told us in the year to September 2024, it had audited 95 percent of these premises.

The service has introduced a new role in the protection team to support how it develops training and policy and create a standardised approach. Although it has made good progress, we want to be assured that improvements are sustainable and understood and accepted by everyone in the service. We will carry out a virtual revisit to determine whether this new role and the continuation of quality assurance procedures have improved how the service manages its protection activity.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

The service has made good progress to improve the way it promotes equality, diversity and inclusion.

It now has a people and culture officer and a director of HR and organisational development. These two roles are relatively new but will help the service to focus on its work on equality, diversity and inclusion and make sure it is co-ordinated across the service's departments.

The service has ambitious plans to further promote equality, diversity and inclusion. We look forward to seeing this promising work continue.

Conclusion

We were pleased to see the significant steps the service has taken in response to the causes of concern we issued. The action taken to address the prevention cause of concern has made sure that the service is now prioritising those most at risk of fire for a home visit. This cause of concern is closed.

We will continue to monitor the service's progress against the remaining causes of concern in protection and fairness and diversity through regular contact and attendance at its improvement boards. And we will carry out a virtual revisit in January 2025 to examine the outcome of the changes the service has made. We will assess whether Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service has made satisfactory progress with its action plan and if the service it provides to the public has improved.

This letter will be published on our website.

Yours sincerely,



Roy Wilsher OBE QFSM

His Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary

His Majesty's Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services