

Avon Fire & Rescue Service response to HMICFRS Inspection

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services has today published a report on how effectively Avon Fire & Rescue Service (AF&RS) prevents, protects the public against and responds to fires and other emergencies. The inspection also assesses how well AF&RS looks after its people.

We wanted to take the time to respond to the report and to share with our communities how we are working hard to make them safer and our Service stronger both before and after the HMICFRS inspection in July:

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies

We welcome HMICFRS' assessment that we are 'good' at understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies. It's important to us as a fire and rescue service that we have this acknowledgment as it will rightly reassure the public that we identify and understand the risks and challenges we face within our Service area. For AF&RS there are four categories of risk that we manage – national, corporate, local and operational risks – and we have a range of ways we analyse the prevailing risk across these categories.

However, we accept that there is more that we can do in this area in terms of building and developing our detailed knowledge of the communities we serve. We have made a commitment in our forthcoming Service Plan 2019-2022 – which will be published for consultation in January and which combines our Corporate Plan and Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) – to use sophisticated risk modelling tools and other sources of information to help enrich our understanding of the specific risks faced by our communities. We will continue to work closely with our staff, professional partners and communities to develop and share this intelligence and strengthen our ability to prevent, protect, respond and increase resilience.

Preventing fires and other risks

Protecting our communities and preventing fires and other risks is at the heart of what we do and we have a dedicated risk reduction team and Technical Fire Safety officers who are devoted to carrying out this work across the Service area. Throughout the year we also work closely with our partners and other organisations to increase awareness and drive down risk, including with schools to deliver local education campaigns and promote our key community safety messages. In addition we have developed a vital network of relationships with partners and other support services to make sure that when we come into contact with someone who needs extra help – for example, during a home fire safety visit – we can make sure that they're signposted to the support required to help them continue living independent and fulfilled lives.

However, in the current challenging political and financial climate we have to look at ourselves as an organisation and target our activity to help those who need us most. We have to be smarter with the resources we have and operate as effectively and efficiently as possible, while ensuring value for money for local people. This includes maintaining our online presence via our website and ensuring that we continue to engage with our communities and make relevant



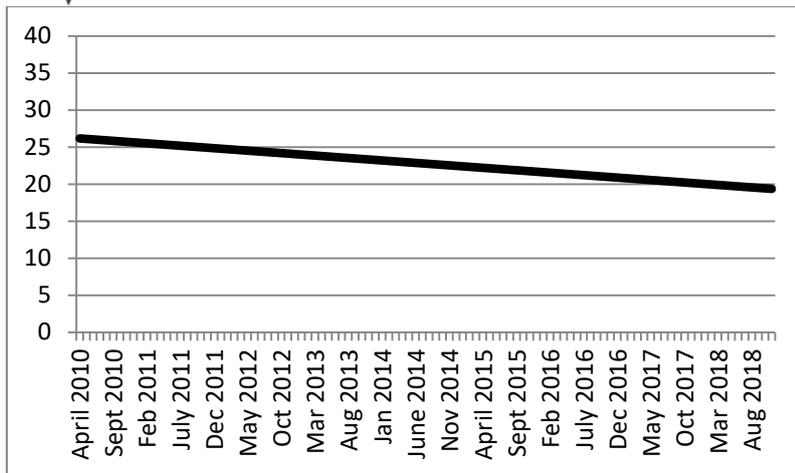
information available and as easy to access as possible. The work outlined in our forthcoming Service Plan around understanding the vulnerabilities within our communities will help to ensure that our efforts are focused on those people who are most at risk of harm and need our help.

Protecting the public through fire regulation

As we have previously published on our website, we work closely with local businesses and non-commercial organisations across our area throughout the year, providing them with fire safety advice and information, speaking with staff and working together to ensure they are compliant with relevant fire safety legislation. Our Technical Fire Safety (TFS) department works closely with those organisations which are subject to the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. This work has seen these businesses taking the appropriate steps to reduce the risk from fire and responsibly make sure their properties are safe for all who use them and, where necessary, taking the appropriate enforcement action under the Order.

Since 2010, the number of primary fires we have attended in properties subject to the provisions of Order has declined and this overall trend of risk reduction continues. We fully understand the importance of making the places we work in and visit as safe as possible and are totally committed to ensuring that this is the case. Additionally, we were very proactive in re-allocating our Technical Fire Safety officers in supporting our local authority partners and agencies with high-rise premises immediately following the Grenfell Tower fire and it is disappointing that the Inspectorate did not sufficiently take that into account.

We have acknowledged HMICFRS' cause of concern in relation to the specialist capacity within our TFS department through the implementation of a detailed action plan which will see a phased, sustainable increase in qualified TFS staff over the next 12 months. With no evidence to suggest that fires in non-domestic buildings is increasing, in fact according to our records (see Figure 1 below) the opposite is true, we fundamentally disagree that people have been put at risk due to number of people within the TFS department. Furthermore, the size of the team in 2011 compared with recent years shows no material impact on the number of audits or Building Regs. consultations compared to changes in officer numbers. All things considered, we therefore do not feel that the report has taken into account the holistic and diverse nature of the work that has been undertaken to drive down risk in the business community.



Between April 2010 and November 2016 we have seen a 38% reduction in primary fires in these premises.

Figure 1: Trend in relation to primary fires in premises subject to Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005

Finally, we acknowledge HMICFRS' concerns regarding the burden of unwanted fire signals and agree that that way in which we respond to automatic fire alarms needs to change. We recognise the disproportionate effect our current response to alarms has on our ability to focus on other vital activities such as community safety interventions and risk-critical firefighter training and have therefore developed detailed proposals to change the way in which plan to respond in the future. This will form a major part of our Service Plan consultation in the New Year and will hope you will take the time to have your say.

Responding to fires and other emergencies

National Operational Guidance (NOG) is the national best practice for developing operational policies, procedures and training for fire and rescue services across the country. Following its introduction we have been working closely with the central NOG team, as well as the south west regional fire services' team and other individual fire services (including Kent and the Welsh services) as we work towards the best implementation model for AF&RS. We had hoped to launch the implementation process at the start of October this year – however, this has been postponed for a number of reasons including delays in the central digital platform where NOG will sit and concerns raised which require some of the guidance documents to be reviewed. That said, we acknowledge HMICFRS' concerns and are developing a robust implementation plan which will see the managed roll out of NOG over the next two years.

We recognise HMICFRS' comments in relation to managing our assets and resources and the way we respond to emergencies and other incidents – our response standards. In 2006 we adopted a set of local response standards for fires and other emergencies; these were then amended and re-approved in 2012 and are included in our current IRMP. Following the recommendations of the Statutory Inspection into Avon Fire Authority published in July 2017, we have brought forward our IRMP planning cycle as part of our Improvement Programme and will publish a new three-year integrated Service Plan in April 2019. Part of this plan includes our proposals to better match our resources to risk and change the way we measure our

performance along with a more demanding method of measuring the time we take to respond to the most serious emergencies. We would once again encourage you to share your thoughts regarding this.

Responding to national risks

We welcome HMICFRS' conclusion that we're 'good' at planning to respond to national risks. We are one of the key agencies with statutory duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 to prepare for larger and more complex incidents and we work with other emergency services both locally, regionally and nationally to prepare for major incidents such as a terrorist attack, widespread flooding or pandemic flu. We work very closely with our partner emergency services to provide an effective multi-agency response and align to the national Joint Emergency Services' Interoperability Principles (JESIP).

Making best use of resources

We are currently in the process of combining our IRMP and Corporate Plan and will publish a new integrated Service Plan 2019-2022 on 1 April 2019. The Service Plan is our contract with our communities and articulates our collective vision of preventing, protecting and responding to the needs of the community. It outlines our commitments which sit beneath our two strategic priorities which will focus every element of our work for the next three years: **making our communities safer and making our Service stronger**.

In the demanding and ever-changing environment in which we operate, we know that as a fire and rescue service we will need to remain alert and flexible so we can continue to match our resources to risk in the most effective and efficient way. This means we need to look at all areas of the organisation and objectively evaluate whether they are meeting (and will continue to meet) the needs of our local communities. This will involve us looking at – amongst other things – our response standards, how we respond to automatic fire alarms, what vehicles we send when responding to incidents based on the circumstances and how we crew our response. All of our plans and proposals around making best use of our resources through matching our resources to risk will be outlined in our draft Service Plan and you can have your say as part of the consultation process in the New Year.

Making the fire and rescue service affordable now and in the future

Avon Fire & Rescue Service currently costs just 10p per day per person in our Service area and we will do everything we can to keep it that way. We were pleased that HMICFRS rated us as 'good' in this area despite the challenging financial pressures we have faced over the last eight years, during which we have achieved real-term revenue savings of £14.5m (26%) and maintained a balanced budget through sound financial planning.

Despite our ongoing commitment to saving money through collaboration, innovation and investing for the future to ensure return on investment, the potential for further reduced funding will mean that providing the support and services people need will become even more challenging. This is a position faced by all emergency services and we are committed to fighting for fairer funding for our Service.



Promoting the right values and culture

We know that our people are our greatest asset and are committed to investing in our staff to ensure that they are given fair opportunities for development and growth, as well as supporting their mental health, wellbeing and welfare. This starts with providing them with a clear vision for what it means to be part of AF&RS and this is determined by our values. Earlier this year we consulted with staff and agreed our new Service values will be: respectful, honest, courageous, ambitious, inclusive and transparent. We know we have to do more work in this area and have committed to speaking and listening to staff to explore what our values mean to them in greater detail.

Our values were central to our recent 'Yes You Can' recruitment campaigns and will continue to be at the heart of everything we do. How our staff embrace and embody our values largely depends on how confident, safe and supported they feel by the organisation as a whole. We know we need to do more to improve our sickness levels and work with staff to prevent them from becoming unwell in the first place, recognising warning signs early and seeking appropriate support. We work closely with Red Poppy Services which offer staff support through counselling, we have signed up to the MIND Blue Light Programme and we recently introduced a trauma-focussed peer support system (known as TRiM) for those staff who need it. We want our staff to be healthy and happy at work and will be investing further in a wider support system including the recruitment of a dedicated manager to co-ordinate all elements of staff welfare as part of our Health, Safety and Welfare team.

Getting the right people with the right skills

We welcome HMICFRS' rating of being 'good' at getting the right people with the right skills across the organisation but recognise that we need to improve our succession planning process for the Service. We have been working hard on a range of improvements to our governance procedures including those which guide the recruitment of our most senior managers. The transparency of these new procedures was demonstrated during the recent recruitment of our new substantive Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive. Our strategic leaders undergo a range of continuing personal development including participation in the national fire and rescue service Executive Leaders' Programme and the Windsor Leadership Trust's Experienced Leaders' Programme

Across the Service we are developing new apprenticeships, leadership and professional qualifications and personal development programmes for both our existing staff as well as offering them to new entrants. We are working hard to promote the fire and rescue service as a rewarding, fulfilling and welcoming career for people from all sections of our diverse communities and aim to be an employer of choice by demonstrating the importance we attach to investment in our staff.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity

Our first HMICFRS inspection report comes against the backdrop of last year's Statutory Inspection. As one of his first actions after taking up his interim position in August 2017, our



new Chief Fire Officer commissioned a full cultural review of the organisation as part of our improvement programme and the full results were received less than a week before our HMICFRS inspection in July. It therefore comes as no surprise that the HMICFRS inspection report reflects what we already know and have already committed to improving.

With over 70% of our staff taking part in the cultural survey, we are confident that the review has provided a comprehensive view of how our staff feel about working for AF&RS and provides a solid basis on which we can start to make genuine improvements. Through identifying and working through the issues – as tough as they are – we believe that we will make our Service stronger and our communities safer and we will not shy away from tackling the emerging challenges head on.

We have already strengthened our Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion and Equality (DICE) team through the recruitment of additional staff and, as acknowledged by HMICFRS, we have established a new Staff Engagement Network to improve two-way communication throughout the organisation. We anticipate that a full action plan for cultural change will be published in the New Year but recognise that cultural change does not just happen overnight. Instead, it develops from changes in the way we do things as an organisation, the importance we place on our values and our people visibly living those values throughout their working lives. We have already signalled some strong changes including a commitment to greater openness and transparency through a public commitment to the principles of the Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy and a much greater focus on the visibility of senior leaders across the whole workforce.

Alongside other fire and rescue services throughout the country, we are also striving to ensure that our workforce is more representative of the communities we serve. We acknowledge that the position of the UK fire and rescue service being “96% white and 95% male” is unacceptable but lasting change will inevitably take time as new staff are recruited into the service. In the last 12 months, we have recruited for two wholetime firefighter training schools – our first since 2009 – and of the 30 successful candidates, seven (23%) were from a BME background and six (20%) were female. We are encouraged by this success and we are now actively recruiting for a third wholetime school to start training in May 2019.

In September this year, our Training Management Group agreed that all staff will receive reinigorated DICE training. The structure and associated timeframe for delivering this training will be developed in collaboration with other teams across the Service ahead of its roll out in the New Year and we will continue to strive for an equal, inclusive and cohesive culture that celebrates diversity.

Manging performance and developing leaders

Our leaders – and the way we recognise and develop future leaders – are crucial to the sustainability and future of our organisation. We agree with HMICFRS’ findings and recognise that we need the best leaders within our organisation – those who can drive forward change, engage with staff and who are able to demonstrate personal resilience. As outlined in our forthcoming Service Plan 2019-2020 we will be launching a comprehensive programme of



AVON
FIRE & RESCUE

leadership and professional development opportunities which will help our staff to grow and excel. We are also committed to continually reviewing our promotion policy to make sure we are better able to recognise and promote talent in the Service – openly, transparently and fairly.

PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING