



## **Avon Fire & Rescue Service Chief Fire Officer responds to HMICFRS report**

Today (22 November 2023), His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) published its findings into Avon Fire & Rescue Service (AF&RS), following their Round 3 inspection.

Taking place in June and July 2023, the inspection assesses the Service's effectiveness, efficiency and how well it looks after its people, measuring the Service against 11 areas, with each one being given a graded judgement.

Following the inspection, HMICFRS will now carry out enhanced monitoring on the Service to assist in finding ways to improve identified causes of concern and support in carrying out a comprehensive analysis and development of an improvement plan.

AF&RS Chief Fire Officer (CFO), Simon Shilton said: "There can be no denying that His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services' inspection report into the Service makes for uncomfortable reading. That said, as a Service we welcome the challenge and support to ensure we are the best Service we can be, however, I'm sorry if local people feel let down.

"I accept these are the Inspectorate's findings, and I want to reassure our local communities we have already put plans in place to address some of the concerns raised. It is disappointing, despite the hard work undertaken by our staff to deliver the best possible service to our communities, it's clear the pace of change has not been sufficient against the challenging financial and political backdrop we've faced this past year.

"There is more to be done to tackle and improve on the areas highlighted going forward, particularly in relation to our provision of risk critical information and in creating a more inclusive culture. However, I feel strongly that the findings do not represent who we are as a Service and what I know the dedicated staff I work alongside daily, strive for the Service to be."

Since the publication of HMICFRS' initial findings, the Service has already addressed concerns regarding the reliability of its mobilising system. Extensive mitigation has been put in place to rectify the issues identified with the software used to mobilise our fire engines which is supplied by a third-party provider and used by about 80% of UK fire and rescue services.

The Service also continues to meet its response standards as set out in our Service Plan and the Inspectorate also acknowledged in its report how the Service has effective arrangements in place for dealing with multi-agency incidents.

Chair of Avon Fire Authority, Councillor Brenda Massey said: "On behalf of the Fire Authority, it is regrettable that these are the Inspectorate's findings into Avon Fire & Rescue Service, despite how much work staff have put into making continual improvements across the Service since the last inspection.



“It’s important our local communities know and have confidence the Service will respond to them in an emergency. However, the Inspectorate have highlighted areas for improvement and the Authority and I, will continue to work with the Chief Fire Officer and the Service to ensure pace of positive change; working together to ensure the necessary improvements and progress are made and reported on.”

The Chief Fire Officer has outlined plans to work closely with staff, partners and communities to develop and share intelligence and strengthen the Service’s ability to prevent, protect, respond and increase resilience in all areas of the Service’s work.

Cultural challenges being faced by AF&RS and the sector have also been addressed by the Service, for example: investing in leadership training, commissioning an independent external review into the handling of past staff complaints, grievances and discipline cases and publishing a new zero tolerance statement and dignity and respect toolkit.

CFO Shilton continued: “We recognise there is more work to do and, while we may not be able to fix the past, we are focused on improving current staff experiences and ensuring a supportive and inclusive organisation where our staff can thrive – and one where we maintain the public’s confidence in us as a Service.

“As an organisation, we are truly committed to continuous improvement and to be there for you, our local communities, as and when you need us most. We have made – and continue to make – significant changes: implementing initiatives, systems and support mechanisms to make our communities safer and make our Service stronger.”

As part of the monitoring process, the CFO will report back on Service improvements to the Fire Performance Oversight Group (FPOG), made up of representatives from HMICFRS, the Home Office, Local Government Association and the National Fire Chiefs Council.

The recommendations outlined in the HMICFRS inspection report have formed the basis of an action plan for the Service and progress on their implementation will be publicly shared via the Service’s website – [www.avonfire.gov.uk](http://www.avonfire.gov.uk).