

AVON FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING:	Extraordinary Avon Fire Authority
MEETING DATE:	Wednesday, 13 December 2023
REPORT OF:	Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive
SUBJECT:	HMICFRS Round 3 Inspection Report

1. SUMMARY

- His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) published its latest ('Round 3') assessment of Avon Fire & Rescue Service's (AF&RS) performance on 22 November 2023 and its report is provided at **Appendix 1**.
- Across the eleven diagnostics, HMICFRS graded AF&RS as 'adequate' in two, 'requires improvement' in five and 'inadequate' in four (see [Table 1](#)). It issued a total of 31 areas for improvement (AFIs) and four causes of concern (CsoC – with 20 associated recommendations; see [Table 3](#)).¹
- As a result of the Round 3 findings, AF&RS will now enter HMICFRS' enhanced monitoring (or 'engage') phase and benefit from additional support from the sector in order to resolve the concerns raised within our latest inspection report.
- HMICFRS' findings undoubtedly make for uncomfortable reading and are disappointing, concerning and frustrating in equal measure. However, we accept the Inspectorate's findings and are already working at pace to address their accelerated CsoC. Revised governance arrangements will address concerns by strengthening scrutiny and oversight of progress.
- The Fire Authority's Policy and Resources Committee (PRC) has previously received a report detailing the Service's actions in response to HMICFRS' accelerated causes of concern (ACsoC) published on 16 August 2023. These two ACsoC have now been assimilated into the Round 3 inspection report published on 22 November 2023 and form two of the four CsoC included within it. The latest version of the ACsoC action plan, updated as

¹ The Round 3 graded judgments are not directly comparable with previous rounds due to the introduction of a fifth judgment of 'adequate' to align the outcomes of fire inspections with those already in use in HMICFRS' police inspections. Additionally, pillar-level judgments against the principal areas of effectiveness, efficiency and people (see [Table 1](#) and [Table 2](#)) have been removed in Round 3.

of 22 November 2023, is provided at **Appendix 3** and demonstrates the good progress made to date which has been achieved by improved organisational focus and sharpened strategic oversight.

- The initial version of our Round 3 HMICFRS inspection action plan is being developed to address the recommendations associated with the four CsoC and the HMICFRS [Spotlight Report](#) into values and culture in fire and rescue services and will be published by 19 December 2023.




	Effectiveness	
	Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies	Inadequate
	Preventing fires and other risks	Inadequate
	Protecting the public through fire regulation	Adequate
	Responding to fires and other emergencies	Inadequate
	Responding to major and multi-agency incidents	Adequate
	Efficiency	
	Making best use of resources	Requires improvement
	Making the fire and rescue service affordable now and in the future	Requires improvement
	People	
	Promoting the right values and culture	Inadequate
	Getting the right people with the right skills	Requires improvement
	Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity	Requires improvement
	Managing performance and developing leaders	Requires improvement

Table 1: Summary of Avon Fire & Rescue Service’s Round 3 inspection results

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Fire Authority is asked to:

- a) note the content of this paper and HMICFRS’ Round 3 inspection report provided at **Appendix 1**; and
- b) note the work currently in progress to develop the Round 3 inspection action plan to address the formal recommendations from HMICFRS in compliance with the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England.

3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 HMICFRS carried out its third full (‘Round 3’) inspection of Avon Fire & Rescue Service between May and August 2023 which included an assessment of effectiveness, efficiency and how it looks after its people.

- 3.2 If HMICFRS identifies a serious, critical or systemic shortcoming in providing a statutory function, practice, policy or performance it will report that issue as a cause of concern (which will always be accompanied by one or more formal recommendations); such findings are normally included in HMICFRS' subsequent fire and rescue service report. However, where HMICFRS finds significant service failures or risks to public safety they report these concerns and recommendations earlier without waiting for the full report to be published – this is known as an 'accelerated cause of concern'.

4. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 There is no direct financial impact associated with HMICFRS inspection. However, some of the actions agreed as part of our response to HMICFRS' Round 3 findings will have a financial impact but are not directly relevant to this report.
- 4.2 It is clear that investment will be needed to implement some of the actions designed to address both the CsoC and AFIs included in HMICFRS' Round 3 inspection report and a financial reserve is being allocated for this specific purpose. In particular, we know that further IT investment is required in our site-specific risk information and mobilising systems and this requirement is being actively progressed through the Capital Steering and Prioritisation Group.

5. **KEY CONSIDERATIONS**

- 5.1 HMICFRS is currently undertaking its third round of fire and rescue service inspections in 2023 to 2025. The fire and rescue services' inspection programme enables HMICFRS to draw together evidence from inspections of all 44 fire and rescue services in England. This rounded assessment of all fire and rescue services covers the effectiveness and efficiency of each Service and how it looks after its people as summarised in [Table 2](#).

Principal question	Inspection focus
How effective is the fire and rescue service at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?	How well the fire and rescue service understands its current and future risks, works to prevent fires and other risks, protects the public through the regulation of fire safety, responds to fires and other emergencies, and responds to national risks.
How efficient is the fire and rescue service at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?	How well the fire and rescue service uses its resources to manage risk, and secures an affordable way of providing its service, now and in the future.
How well does the fire and rescue service look after its people ?	How well the fire and rescue service promotes its values and culture, trains its staff and ensures that they have the necessary skills, ensures fairness and diversity for its workforce, and develops leaders.

Table 2: Summary of inspection focus

- 5.2 A summary of the findings for AF&RS against the three inspection pillars during Round 3 is provided in [Table 3](#) below.

Pillar	Areas for improvement (AFIs)	Causes of concern		
		Accelerated Causes of Concern	Causes of Concern	Recommendations
Effectiveness	11	2	1	15
Efficiency	6	--	--	--
People	14	--	1	5
TOTAL:	31	2	2	20

* An 'accelerated cause of concern' relates to immediate issues relating to public safety and results in a [letter](#) from HMICFRS (and subsequent action planning) **before** the publication of the full inspection report.

Table 3: Summary of areas for improvement, causes of concern and recommendations for Avon Fire & Rescue Service

Governance arrangements

- 5.3 Since its publication in April 2022 our Round 2 inspection action plan has been regularly updated and progress monitored by the Service Leadership Team. This approach served us well during our work to resolve the three CsoC and 15 areas for improvement (AFIs) resulting from our Round 1 inspection, but HMICFRS has made it clear in our latest report that we have not reacted quickly enough to address the outcomes of our Round 2 inspection report and, as a result, some of the Round 2 AFIs have now become Round 3 CsoC. Indeed, the Inspectorate considered that this insufficient progress was “... *due to insufficient governance, oversight and assurance processes being in place.*”
- 5.4 Given that conclusion, we clearly need to tighten up on our oversight mechanisms to ensure we can monitor progress more closely and ensure that sufficient resources are allocated to projects which will allow us to react at pace to the Inspectorate’s findings. We have therefore reviewed the governance and scrutiny arrangements which we apply to HMICFRS’ findings as they form a key strategic pillar to our improvement plans going forward. These revised arrangements are outlined in Figure 1 below.

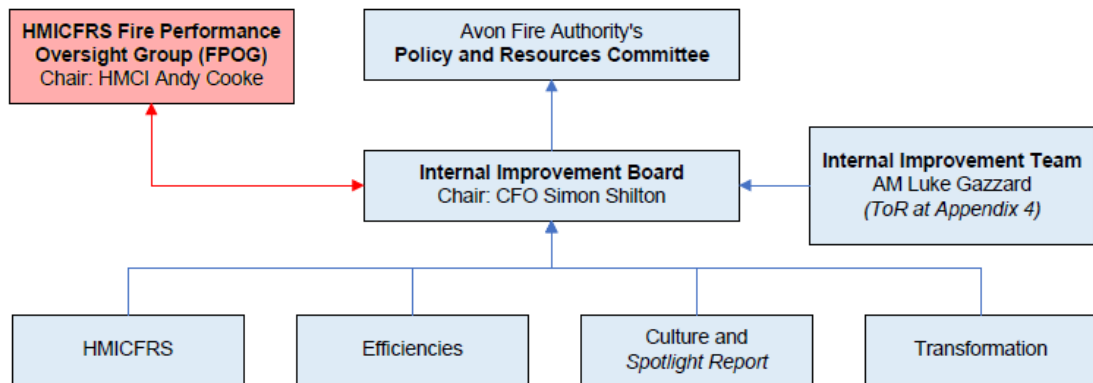


Figure 1: Revised governance and scrutiny arrangements

- 5.5 The Terms of Reference for the Internal Improvement Team are provided at **Appendix 4**.

Enhanced monitoring and support: 'Engage'

- 5.6 In 2022, HMICFRS formalised its performance monitoring approach, which is now closely aligned with that used for police forces. The process is intended to establish services that need further support to overcome difficult problems and make improvements.
- 5.7 HMICFRS' fire monitoring group reviews services of concern. After doing so, it decides whether a service needs to be moved from the 'scan'² to 'engage' phase. Placing a service into engage is a significant step and occurs, for example, if a service isn't addressing a cause of concern, or if it isn't succeeding in managing, mitigating or eradicating the cause of concern. Services moved to the engage phase are invited to attend HMICFRS' Fire Performance Oversight Group (FPOG) chaired by HM Chief Inspector Andy Cooke.
- 5.8 Alongside the National Fire Chiefs' Council (NFCC), the Home Office, the Local Government Association (LGA) and other organisations, HMICFRS works closely with those services in its engage phase to support them to make progress in problem areas. Although it is still in its early stages, this approach has already raised the profile and process of improvement in fire and rescue services.
- 5.9 As a result of the findings of its latest inspection, HMICFRS has decided to move AF&RS into 'engage'. We will therefore be working closely with the FPOG to resolve our Round 3 CsoC and to benefit from the additional support offered through the engage process.

² The default phase of monitoring, the scanning phase uses data and information from a range of sources to highlight poor or deteriorating performance and identify potential areas of concern. Regular monitoring is undertaken and a summary monitoring report produced which is discussed with HMLs and, if possible areas of concern are found, at the regular fire monitoring group meetings.

HMICFRS revisit

- 5.10 Given the publication of the two ACsoC relating to site-specific risk information (SSRI) and our mobilising system on 16 August 2023, HMICFRS revisited AF&RS in the w/c 4 December 2023 to assess progress against our action plan to address these two issues.
- 5.11 The revisit was undertaken by a team of four inspectors and included interviews, desktop reviews and operational reality testing with those responsible for delivering the actions within the plan developed to address the ACsoC and submitted on 19 September 2023. Good progress has been made – particularly against the technical solutions required to resolve the issues affecting the mobilising system – and we are now awaiting the formal feedback from HMICFRS starting with the Chief Fire Officer’s ‘hot debrief’ on Friday 15 December 2023.
- 5.12 Members will recall that AF&RS received six formal recommendations in its Round 1 inspection report published in December 2019, five of which were resolved by the time of the publication of our Round 2 report in December 2021.³ However, at that time there was no mechanism for HMICFRS to report the formal discharge of recommendations ahead of the publication of its next full inspection report. Since then, HMICFRS has developed a [monitoring portal](#) on its website on which progress against its recommendations is tracked. This portal is updated in March and September each year and therefore provides an opportunity for recommendations to be closed off before the next full round of inspections.
- 5.13 Whilst at the time of writing we still await the feedback from the December 2023 revisit; however, we are hopeful that the HMICFRS inspection team will recognise progress in the ACoC for mobilising and give due consideration to closing this concern as complete.
- 5.14 We also expect a further revisit to assess progress against our action plan for the two further Round 3 CsoC (relating to prevention and values/culture) in April/May 2024.

Round 3 inspection action plan

- 5.15 The action plan to address the recommendations associated with the two ACsoC was submitted on 19 September 2023 and presented to PRC on 29 September 2023. Progress against that plan was assessed during the recent HMICFRS revisit as detailed above and this separate action plan will be assimilated into our wider Round 3 action plan in due course.
- 5.16 The further two CsoC – one relating to prevention and one to values/culture – require an action plan to be developed within 28 days of the published report

³ [HMI Wendy Williams, December 2021 \(page 4\)](#): *“In our last inspection, we identified three causes of concern. We are very pleased with the progress the service has made since to address these. It produced a robust action plan for resolving each cause of concern and has detailed the progress made against each area for improvement. I am delighted that I can now discharge the three causes of concern we found in our 2018 inspection.”*

(ie by 19 December 2023) to address HMICFRS' formal recommendations associated with those CsoC. This links to section 7.5 of the current [National Framework](#) which states:

“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 ...”

- 5.17 Given the inevitable challenges presented by a 28-day deadline (particularly in the run up to the festive season) but the importance of complying with both the HMICFRS deadline and the requirements of the National Framework, we intend to develop the Round 3 action plan in two main stages:
- a) the initial version including the actions against the 14 recommendations (associated with the four CsoC) and the 20 (out of 35) recommendations directed to local Chief Fire Officers in HMICFRS' [Spotlight Report](#) into values and culture in fire and rescue services published on 31 March 2023; and
 - b) a subsequent version to be supplemented with the additional actions required to address the 31 Round 3 AFIs.
- 5.18 The HMICFRS Round 3 inspection action plan will be monitored in line with the revised governance arrangements detailed in section 5.4 above and continue to be scrutinised by Members in accordance with the PRC's [terms of reference](#) (PRC6(a)).

6. RISKS

- 6.1 The outcome of the HMICFRS inspection process is relevant (but not limited) to the following corporate risks: CR01 – Performance targets; CR02 – Prevention and protection; CR03 – Response and rescue; CR04 – People capacity, capability and resilience; CR06 – Control and mobilising; CR08 – Financial capacity; CR11 – Financial systems; CR16 – Health, safety and wellbeing; and CR18 – Business continuity management.

7. LEGAL/POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 HMICFRS' fire and rescue services' inspection programme is prepared under Section 28A of the [Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#).
- 7.2 The outcomes of HMICFRS inspections are directly relevant to the two strategic priorities detailed within the Service Plan 2023-2026: making our communities **safer** and making our Service **stronger**.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- PRC report: 29.09.23 ([paper 11](#))
- HMICFRS (December 2022) [HMICFRS assessment framework commencing January 2023: Fire and rescue services](#)

- Home Office (2018) [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England](#) (Section 7: Inspection, intervention and accountability)

9. APPENDICES

1. HMICFRS (November 2023) [Fire and rescue service: effectiveness and efficiency 2023/24 – an inspection of Avon Fire & Rescue Service](#).
2. Avon Fire & Rescue Service (November 2023) AF&RS press release – response to HMICFRS Round 3 inspection report.
3. Avon Fire & Rescue Service: HMICFRS accelerated causes of concern (August 2022) – action plan V1.3 (updated as of 22 November 2023).
4. Internal Improvement Team: Terms of Reference (V1.0 – 23 Nov 23)

10. REPORT CONTACT

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