



TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Item No 7

MEETING: FIRE AUTHORITY 20 NOVEMBER 2023

SUBJECT: FORTHCOMING HMICFRS INSPECTIONS OF TWFRS

**JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER/CHIEF EXECUTIVE (THE CLERK
TO THE AUTHORITY)**

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the forthcoming inspections of Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service (TWFRS), by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS).
- 1.2 Ten of the 44 Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) in England have been selected to be inspected as part of a thematic inspection. Services have been selected to enable HMICFRS to gather evidence from a range of services, large and small, rural and urban. They also cover the different governance models that operate throughout England and have been selected to avoid overlap with scheduled round 3 full inspections.
- 1.3 Round 3 of the full inspection programme, which commenced in 2023, has been paused for HMICFRS to conduct the thematic inspections, and will resume in Spring 2024.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 On 19 July 2023, HMICFRS wrote to all Chief Fire Officers (CFOs) to advise that HMICFRS will carry out a thematic inspection of the handling of misconduct cases in FRS in England, namely to examine the extent to which services have taken steps to implement the recommendations made in their spotlight report 'Values and Culture in the Fire and Rescue Service', published on 30 March 2023.



- 2.2 The terms of reference for the inspection were published on 19 July and state that HMICFRS will be examining the following as part of the inspection, with findings reported to the Home Secretary:
- the extent to which services are identifying and investigating misconduct;
 - the effectiveness of misconduct processes and how consistently they are applied;
 - how confident fire and rescue service staff are in raising concerns and in misconduct processes; and
 - the role of fire and rescue authorities and other organisations in handling misconduct.
- 2.3 TWFRS were notified on 26 July 2023 that our service was one of the ten FRS selected to be inspected.
- 2.4 The ten FRS undertaking a thematic inspection are: Northamptonshire FRS, Humberside FRS, Lincolnshire FRS, Staffordshire FRS, Tyne and Wear FRS, Dorset and Wiltshire FRS, West Midlands FRS, Cornwall FRS, Greater Manchester FRS and Kent FRS.
- 2.5 All thematic inspections will be concluded by late January 2024 and HMICFRS have confirmed that there will be no graded judgements and/or reports published for individual services inspected.
- 2.6 Themes and issues identified as part of the ten inspections will be combined into a final national thematic report into misconduct handling in all 44 FRS and will be published, along with recommendations, by HMICFRS in June 2024.

3 THEMATIC INSPECTION METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 The thematic inspection into misconduct case handling will commence in TWFRS on 4 December 2023 and last for three weeks, concluding on 22 December 2023.
- 3.2 HMICFRS will carry out a range of activities to as part of the inspection, to include:



- data collection and document submissions
- desktop review of a sample of complaint, grievance, discipline, and whistleblowing files and other Service documents
- a staff survey (which will be extended out to ex-FRS staff)
- interviews with key individuals
- focus groups
- reality testing exercises.

3.3 The inspection activity as described will be conducted via a combination of onsite and remote activity and engagement. The interview period for the inspection will be carried out over two weeks, commencing 11 December 2023.

3.4 The areas of focus for the inspection will cover the following:

- **Background checks** – how effective are background checks in the FRSs and are there opportunities to strengthen them further
- **Awareness and communication** – how well does the FRS promote its values and culture/Core Code of Ethics/staff confidence in raising concerns
- **Management** – how effectively does the FRS manage grievances, disciplinaries/whistleblowing/public complaints
- **Understanding** – how well does the FRS understand grievances and disciplinaries by its workforce
- **Investigation** – how effectively does the FRS investigate grievances and disciplinaries
- **Outcomes** – how does the service ensure fair and proportionate outcomes
- **Appeals** – how effective are appeals for grievances and disciplinaries.

3.5 The inspection will also include interviews with the Chief Fire Officer, HR Strategic Manager and Head of HR, Head of Learning and Development, Head of Corporate Communications, HR advisors and 'staff companions' / trade unions who have supported any grievance and disciplinary cases.



3.6 Members should be advised that there will also be a remote interview scheduled with a member of the Authority's Appeals Committee and this will be arranged imminently once the inspection timetable is finalised with our Service Liaison Lead (SLL) from HMICFRS.

3.7 All inspections will conclude with a hot debrief for each individual service.

4 PREPARATIONS FOR THEMATIC INSPECTION

4.1 The Service's preparations for the 2023 thematic inspection are now fully underway.

4.2 Prior to our inspection date, the Service has been asked to provide relevant policies and strategies for review by inspectors, in addition to a selection of complaint, grievance, discipline and whistleblowing files. The first of these document requests was completed and submitted to HMICFRS on 19 October 2023. The final document return is due to be submitted by 10 November 2023 and the Service is currently working on collating that submission and ensuring it is completed within the set timescales.

4.3 There will also be a staff survey issued to all 44 FRS in early November 2023 to support the information gathering process for the thematic inspection.

4.4 The survey is being facilitated by an external research agency, Crest Advisory, on behalf of HMICFRS and is designed to *'hear from both current and former staff members of all 44 fire and rescue services in England who have had a personal experience of the misconduct process while in service'*

4.5 Crest Advisory will be conducting two online surveys: one aimed at current staff members and another aimed at former members of staff who have worked in a fire and rescue service in England within the last five years. There will also be the opportunity for ex-FRS staff to share their experiences via a remote interview with the Crest Advisory team, should they wish to. Current staff experiences will be picked up as part of the inspection fieldwork as outlined at Section 3 of this report.



4.6 Any further detail received by the Service on the inspection process will be provided to Members as appropriate.

5 ROUND 3 INSEPCIONS 2023-25

5.1 In January 2023, HMICFRS commenced the round 3 full inspection programme for all 44 FRS in England.

5.2 To date 16 FRS have been inspected as part round 3 inspection, with the programme due to conclude in Spring 2025. Of those 16 FRS that have already been inspected, 8 have had their reports published so far.

5.3 Review and analysis of the published reports has been undertaken by the Service to help identify key themes, areas of good practice and an understanding of the application of the evolving inspection methodology.

5.4 HMICFRS have amended the grading system for the round 3 inspections. This includes the introduction of a fifth, new 'adequate' pillar, and removal of the 3 graded overall judgements. Analysis of the 8 reports published so far shows significant use of the adequate grade, and indicates the criteria for achieving 'good' and 'outstanding' grades is more stringent, with fewer Areas for Improvement (AFIs) permitted to achieve those grades.

5.5 The round 3 inspection of TWFRS is scheduled for April 2024, with document requests, staff survey and self-assessments to be conducted in March 2024.

5.6 Inspectors will follow a 10 week timetable of fieldwork, as of 29 April 2024, which will include a mixture of onsite and remote activity as per the approach for the upcoming thematic inspection.

5.7 HMICFRS have advised the ten FRSs that are being inspected as part of this thematic inspection that any evidence and information gathered will be considered during full routine round 3 inspections.



6 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 HMICFRS inspection assesses how the Service is performing in the pillars of effectiveness, efficiency and people, and helps identify improvements which will support the Service in achieving the vision of '*Creating the Safest Community*'.
- 6.2 The Service already has an established continuous improvement approach that takes into account any feedback and findings from HMICFRS inspection activity, in addition to our own programme of self-assurance
- 6.3 Through implementation of our HMICFRS continuous improvement plan, consistent internal review of our performance, and ongoing evaluation of our approach and processes, this will ensure the Service manages inspection, and any associated risks, in the most effective and efficient way.

7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no financial implications in respect of this report.

8 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no equality and fairness implications in respect of this report.

9 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no health and safety implications in respect of this report.

10 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 The Authority is recommended to:
- a) Note the contents of this paper and the associated background reports.
 - b) Receive further progress reports relating to HMICFRS as appropriate.
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BACKGROUND PAPERS

The under mentioned Background Papers refer to the subject matter of the above report:

HMICFRS Report: [Values and culture in fire and rescue services](#)

HMICFRS Report: [Fire and Rescue Services Inspection Programme and Framework January 2023](#)

**Tyne and Wear Fire
and Rescue Authority**

