

TYNE & WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Item 4

MEETING: SEPTEMBER 2020

SUBJECT: HMICFRS THEMATIC INSPECTION OF TWFRS

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

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the forthcoming thematic inspection of Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service (TWFRS), by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS).
- 1.2 In March 2020, HMICFRS notified the Service of the temporary suspension of inspection activities to allow fire and rescue services to respond appropriately to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 1.3 In late July, HMI Sir Thomas Winsor wrote to all Chief Fire Officers in England, to advise of HMICFRS' intention to approach the Home Secretary requesting permission to resume inspection activities in the form of a thematic inspection on how FRS have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 1.4 The Home Secretary commissioned this work, allowing HMICFRS to inspect all 45 fire and rescue services in England to determine:
 - (a) how the fire sector is responding to the COVID-19 outbreak;
 - (b) what is working well and what is being learned;
 - (c) how the sector is dealing with the problems it faces; and
 - (d) what changes are likely or appropriate for the fire and rescue sector as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Members will be aware that in July 2017, the remit of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) was extended to include inspections of fire and rescue services in England, becoming HMICFRS.
- 2.2 In 2018/19, HMICFRS inspected all FRS in England, reporting on three key pillars: effectiveness, efficiency and people. Following a comprehensive inspection, HMICFRS provided the following judgments for TWFRS:

- Effectiveness – GOOD
- Efficiency – GOOD
- People – GOOD.

3 THEMATIC INSPECTION 2020 METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 HMICFRS will carry out a range of activities to assess how TWFRS responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes data collection and document submissions, an HMICFRS staff survey, submission of an FRS Survey (a form of self-assessment) and interviews with key members of staff by inspecting officers. Representative bodies will also be invited to contribute, in the form of a survey.
- 3.2 During inspection, HMICFRS will seek to engage with a wider range of staff than they are able to interview, by means of an independent staff survey. The survey is anonymous, and asks a wide range of questions, from what staff are most proud of, to how they feel about the Service. It encourages staff to complete this survey, to ensure the highest possible response rate and encourage continuous improvement.
- 3.3 The interview period of the inspection of TWFRS will be carried out over two weeks, commencing 28 September 2020. This will include interviews with the Chief Fire Officer, Assistant Chief Fire Officers, and a representative from the Local Resilience Forum (LRF). These interviews will be conducted by our Service Liaison Lead (SLL), assisted by an Inspecting Officer and HMICFRS Associate. The Chair of the Fire Authority will be interviewed by HMI Matt Parr, and the SLL.
- 3.4 On 17th August 2020, HMICFRS hosted a national Chief and Chairs event, to provide further details on the thematic inspection. This was followed by an HMICFRS Service Liaison Officer event on 27 August, which provided additional operational and tactical details on the inspection.
- 3.5 Following conclusion of all 45 thematic inspections, HMICFRS will report their findings in the form of a letter to each Chief Fire Officer. There will be no graded judgements associated with this inspection (as there are with full inspection). The letter will also be available to the public and media, published on the HMICFRS website.
- 3.6 Publication of these letters is expected in December 2020 / early 2021. In addition to individual letters, HMICFRS will also produce a summary report of national findings, in addition to the Chief HMI for Fire, Sir Thomas Winsor's 'State of Fire report 2020' (expected December 2020).
- 3.7 HMICFRS' programme of full FRS inspections, assessing the three pillars of Effectiveness, Efficiency and People, is due to be resumed in Spring 2021. TWFRS currently remains in Tranche 1 of inspections, which is likely to be Spring / Summer 2021. The Service is awaiting confirmation of full inspection dates, and will notify Members in due course.

4 PREPARATIONS FOR INSPECTION

- 4.1 The Service's preparations for the 2020 thematic inspection are now fully underway. Despite the business interruptions caused by COVID-19, the Service has held monthly workshops with the Senior Management Group (SMG) to review progress against the areas for improvement identified in the last HMICFRS inspection, and prepare for the forthcoming thematic inspection. The Service has maintained regular contact with HMICFRS to ensure a continued positive relationship, and has increased contact with our Service Liaison Lead (SLL) in recent weeks.
- 4.2 The Service has initiated a communications plan to support staff engagement and understanding of the inspection process. Updates on progress and findings of the inspection for Members have been included in this plan.
- 4.3 The data and documents requested by HMICFRS are being collated for submission within the required timescales, and the Service is currently preparing a strategic summary of our COVID story – describing what we did, when, and why, and the positive impact this made to our community.

5 TWFRS POSITION

- 5.1 The Service is in a confident position relating to how we responded to the challenge of the pandemic. Key messages, prepared to inform all interactions with Inspectorate, and internal communications, have been developed to help assert our position:
 - 5.1.1. TWFRS has played a key role in driving the response and recovery to COVID-19 in the region and country. The Service played a driving role in the Local Resilience Forum response, and significantly contributed to national response and recovery, via the National Fire Chief's Council.
 - 5.1.2. TWFRS has proved to be resilient and adaptable, at times of significant challenge. We have continued to offer a first class, operational response throughout COVID, at all levels, managing the situation to ensure minimal impact on operational cover and succession planning.
 - 5.1.3. TWFRS has positioned the health, safety and welfare of staff as of paramount importance and has have taken many steps to put this first throughout the pandemic to ensure staff are appropriately protected and supported.
 - 5.1.4. TWFRS has played a key role in supporting the community of Tyne and Wear, and partners, to help vulnerable people. The Logistics Cell, initially established to provide support with PPE delivery to medical facilities, has been expanded and maintained, continuing to provide support in the community where it is needed most.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 Risk Management has been at the heart of all activities to ensure our workforce and communities remain safe through the COVID-19 pandemic. The thematic inspection will review our approach to this risk management, and business continuity planning, and provide feedback on our performance including any areas of notable practice, and any areas for improvement.

7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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

8 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no implications associated with 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) Endorse the contents of this report
- b) Receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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