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His Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary
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Services

Sent by email:

Chief Fire Officers
Chairs of Fire Authorities
Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners
Lead Fire Authority Members
Locally elected Mayors
Other FRS interested parties

14 March 2024

Dear Colleague,

Fire and rescue service update

I would like to update you on the most recent fire and rescue service and Inspectorate developments.

Wayne Brown

I want to start the update by remembering the tragic passing of our late friend and colleague, Wayne Brown of West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service. Wayne dedicated over three decades of his life to working in London Fire Brigade and West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service.

I'm sure I speak on behalf of all you when I say that Wayne's death is greatly felt across the firefighting community, and our thoughts are with his family and friends during this difficult time. His death also serves as a sad reminder of the challenges and pressures faced by those of us who must live in the public eye whilst trying to keep our communities safe.

On this point I would like to remind you to be attentive to your own and your colleagues' wellbeing, and to make use of the support and services that are available to you if you feel that things are becoming too much.

Round 3 inspections and State of Fire and Rescue report

We have continued our third full round of fire and rescue inspections. We have published 15 reports and completed more inspections to date. We thank all services that we have inspected so far for their engagement and cooperation.

HMCI Andy Cooke's 2023 State of Fire and Rescue report will be published later this spring. The report will address the challenges faced by the sector and the headline findings from our inspections so far.

Changes to the cause of concern process

HMICFRS are making changes to how we manage our cause of concern process.

Currently in our inspections, when we identify a serious, critical or systemic shortcoming in a force or service's practice, policy or performance, we report it as a cause of concern. A cause of concern will always be accompanied by one or more recommendations. When we identify a cause of concern during our inspections, we normally provide details in the published force or service report.

When we discover significant service failures or risks to public safety, we report our concerns and recommendations earlier. This is called an accelerated cause of concern. An action plan detailing how the recommendation(s) are being actioned is normally required within 28 working days of a cause of concern and recommendation letter being issued or a service report being published.

From 1 April 2024 this will change. In order to ensure action plans are provided in a more timely manner, a plan will now be required within 28 working days of the cause of concern and recommendation letter or service report being made available for factual accuracy/pre-publication checking. The submission of an action plan will not change the findings of the inspection, or any grade associated with it. Action plans and any comments should be sent to hmicfrsfireteam@hmicfrs.gov.uk

If the fire and rescue authority does not propose to undertake any action as a result of a recommendation, reasons for this should be given as soon as possible.

Like you, we would like to keep the public fully informed and updated on your response to our report. We are still examining options to make all action plans easily accessible via our website. In the meantime, it would be helpful if, when responding, you could also provide us with a link to where your response is published, again, via the email address - hmicfrsfireteam@hmicfrs.gov.uk

2025-27 FRS inspection design consultation

We have been considering how to improve our inspection methodology for our next round of inspections. We would like to engage your experiences, views and feedback as part of the design programme for our next round of fire and rescue service inspections. This will help to make sure that the next inspection cycle continues to achieve positive outcomes for services and public safety.

We will be meeting with key stakeholders in April, to engage their ideas and expertise, including consideration of potential changes to our existing 'characteristics of good'. We anticipate that consultation will take place in the summer, and I encourage you all to participate and provide feedback.

Values and culture spotlight recommendations

As you are aware, in March 2023 we published our [Values and culture spotlight report](#), which contains 20 recommendations aimed at chief fire officers. The final two of these recommendations were due by 1 March 2024:

- Recommendation 12: By 1 March 2024, chief fire officers should provide assurances to HMICFRS that they have implemented the standard on staff disclosure, complaint and grievance handling.
- Recommendation 14: By 1 March 2024, chief fire officers should provide assurances to HMICFRS that they have implemented the standard on misconduct allegations and outcomes handling.

In my January sector update letter, I thanked those of you who have worked hard with your services to accept and respond to our recommendations. I asked that you (chief fire officers) provide detail on progress made against each recommendation, so that we can make a fuller assessment of progress. I also asked that you please keep your updates on just one spreadsheet in your service Huddle folder, to avoid confusion.

I mentioned that HMCI Andy Cooke would report on progress made in his State of Fire and Rescue report. It is now likely that a progress update will instead be included in my misconduct thematic report.

To enable an accurate assessment of progress, I am setting a cut-off deadline. Therefore, **please can all services provide a final update for all 20 of the recommendations aimed at chief fire officers by 17.00 on Tuesday 19 March 2024**. This request has also been communicated to services already by the respective HMICFRS service liaison leads.

We are considering how we might be able to use our future inspection activities to explore how you have implemented these recommendations and the outcomes achieved as a result of these changes.

Misconduct thematic

The evidence gathering phase of our thematic inspection of the handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services has concluded. We completed ten in-depth service inspections and collected data and surveyed staff from all 44 services in England. We also interviewed ex-fire service staff. I am grateful to all services, but particularly the ten we conducted in-depth inspections of, for their openness and candour. We are combining the evidence from these different sources to identify our findings and the recommendations we will make to the sector. We intend to publish my report in June.

Responsibilities of fire and rescue authorities

In my January sector update letter, I reminded you that the [Fire and rescue national framework for England](#) states that fire and rescue authorities (FRAs) 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.

Some FRAs appear to be unaware of their responsibilities in relation to the national framework, I therefore remind you again of your responsibilities in this respect.

Positive practice masterclass

In my January sector update letter, I set out our work on positive practice. I am pleased to share that HMICFRS are holding our first positive practice masterclass event for fire and rescue services on Monday 29 April 2024. The event is being organised in partnership with Greater Manchester Fire & Rescue Service, who have kindly agreed to host the day.

The agenda will centre around leadership and improvement, we will share the positive practices that we have identified in the current round of inspections, as well as opportunities for the attendees to learn from each other. An agenda with further information will be shared with attendees in due course.

The event invite is open to chief fire officers, plus an additional member of their senior leadership team. We look forward to their participation in the event.

Inspection officer and service liaison lead recruitment

In the next month we will be advertising for seconded inspection staff. These roles form the backbone of our inspection work, and it is vital we fill these roles with your brightest and best staff. Please could you help identify suitable candidates and encourage them to apply. Our seconded inspection staff are one of our success stories. The majority have returned to service after gaining a promotion and the experience gained in HMICFRS greatly benefits their development and the service they return to.

It would greatly assist both our inspection planning and your own service liaison lead (SLL) engagement if services can find a way of honouring the 2-year secondment term without impeding staff promotion prospects.

Please look out for our further communications on opportunities within HMICFRS for your staff, you can also guide them to: [Civil Service job search - Civil Service Jobs - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/civil-service-job-search) where they can create job alerts for HMICFRS vacancies.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'RW', is written over a light grey dotted grid background.

Roy Wilsher OBE QFSM

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