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Roy Wilsher OBE QFSM
His Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary
His Majesty's Inspector of Fire & Rescue
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

10 July 2024

Dear Colleague,

Fire and Rescue Service Update

I would like to update you on the developments within our inspection programme since the end of March.

Round 3 inspections

We have continued our third round of fire and rescue inspections. At the time of writing, we have published 16 reports, with a further 8 reports due to be published by Autumn 2024.

It has been observed that in your efforts to be helpful, some services are sending us an excessive amount of documentation for the document review stage of inspections. This makes it time consuming and difficult for our inspection teams to establish the appropriate body of evidence on which to base our fieldwork and may mask the relevant information you want to provide. Therefore, I kindly request services to be mindful of only sending us the actual documents that we request for the reviews, within the timescales provided. I understand that certain documents might be titled differently but please check with your SLL if there is any confusion before submitting the documents.

Also, some services struggle to adhere to our various inspection deadlines. We appreciate that our inspection requests may not always come at a convenient time for services, and would like to assure you that our inspection teams will always try to minimise the impact on you and your staff. However, I just wanted to remind you that these delays affect our inspection processes, creating pressures and bottlenecks at certain stages of our inspection cycle, which, in turn, can lead to pressure on both the inspected service and our inspection teams. To minimise these impacts, services are requested to inform us at the earliest opportunity if they are unable to meet our deadlines, with the reasons why, or to discuss any delays with their HMI as soon as possible.

As always, I would like to thank all services for your support and assistance.

State of Fire report

HMCI Andy Cooke's annual assessment of fire and rescue services, the 2023 [State of Fire and Rescue report](#) was published in May.

The report's key messages were:

- Our inspection regime has helped to drive improvements across the sector.
- The Government must press ahead with reform.
- Values, culture, and the management of misconduct has seen some improvement in some services but still needs to urgently improve.
- FRS leaders need to be even more strategic in their approach to make sustainable improvements, and be ready to address the emerging challenges and risks that their services face.
- HMICFRS needs additional powers to continue to drive improvements in the sector.

We will continue to work with and support all services and partners, to help them deliver these changes and developments for the benefit of the sector and our communities.

2025-27 FRS Inspection Design consultation

We had positive meetings with key stakeholders in April 2024, seeking their views and feedback as part of the design programme for our next round of fire and rescue service inspections. I also attended the NFCC Chiefs Council meeting in early July to outline our proposals, answer questions and welcome chiefs' ideas and suggestions. We are grateful for the insights and suggestions provided, which will help shape our early thinking for the next inspection cycle as we continue to yield positive outcomes for services and public safety.

We are currently considering any potential changes to our existing 'characteristics of good'. We anticipate that formal consultation will take place in August 2024, and I encourage you all to participate and provide feedback.

Handling of Misconduct in Fire & Rescue Services - Thematic report

As you are aware, the previous Home Secretary commissioned HMICFRS to conduct a thematic inspection of the handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services. This included:

- examining the extent to which services were identifying and investigating misconduct;
- the effectiveness of misconduct processes and how consistently they were applied; how confident fire and rescue service staff were in raising concerns and in misconduct processes; and

- the role of fire and rescue authorities and other organisations in handling misconduct.

Our inspection took place between October 2023 and January 2024. We undertook detailed inspections of ten FRSs that were selected to be a representative sample of FRSs across England in terms of size, location, governance structures and performance.

We:

- reviewed their relevant policies and processes;
- examined a sample of their grievance, discipline, whistleblowing and public complaints case files;
- interviewed and held focus groups with staff in a variety of roles and at all levels of seniority;
- analysed data provided by all 44 FRSs in England about their grievance and discipline cases;
- carried out staff surveys in all 44 FRSs in England;
- asked staff about their experiences and opinions about the handling of misconduct;
- interviewed former FRS staff to understand their experiences, conducted interviews with senior FRS leaders, human resources experts, and union and staff association leaders; and
- held focus groups to explore the issues affecting women and staff from minority ethnic backgrounds.

The publication of the report has been delayed due to the General Election and will now be published later this summer.

Values & Culture Spotlight Recommendations

In March 2023 we published our Values and culture spotlight report, which contained 20 recommendations aimed at chief fire officers. The implementation dates for all 20 recommendations have now passed.

Encouragingly, most services have told us they have completed most of the recommendations. However, many services are still implementing some recommendations, and a minority of services have not provided us with updates on several recommendations. Your responses have been analysed, and a summary of the findings will be published as an annex in the Misconduct Thematic report.

I would like to remind colleagues that we made these recommendations to support the sector to tackle key issues that were holding back positive values, cultures, and behaviours in services across the country. As such, it is important for all services to implement all these recommendations.

Therefore, I am requesting that all colleagues continue to implement the outstanding recommendations and ensure they are embedded for the future.

We will continue to monitor your progress on these recommendations alongside the recommendations that we will issue in the misconduct thematic report, and in our future inspections.

Inspection officer (IO) and service liaison lead (SLL) recruitment

Following the advertisement in my last sector update, I would like to thank you all for the quality and quantity of secondment applicants that we received from your services for our latest IO and SLL recruitment drive. We have completed the interviews and the results of the recruitment process should be concluded in the following weeks.

I would like to remind you that it greatly assists both our inspection planning and delivery, and your own SLL engagement if services support their staff to honour the 2-year secondment term without impacting their promotion opportunities. I'm also aware that many of you feel that the secondments also bring excellent experience, value and in many cases improvements to your services when secondees return to service.

I will be writing to all of you again separately providing a more detailed update about our recruitment drive.

I thank you again for recognising the value that secondees bring in our joint efforts to improve the sector.

Yours sincerely,

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

Roy Wilsher OBE QFSM

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