

PFCC and FRS Inspection response record

Version:

FRS	Staffordshire
Police and Crime Commissioner	Ben Adams
Chief Fire Officer	Rob Barber
Title of inspection	State of Fire and Rescue – The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2021
Inspectorate	 <p>Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services</p>
Summary of inspection	<p>This year's report includes the progress made by the sector since the inspectorate's first round of fire and rescue service inspections in 2018. Considerable efforts have been made by local and national organisations to improve the sector, but there is still much more to be done. All safety-critical, essential public services benefit from the scrutiny of inspection and reporting. Our inspections are valuable for both the public and the fire and rescue sector: we have seen evidence of how services have improved and staff have told us that they have seen worthwhile changes for the better.</p> <p>In August 2020, the Home Secretary commissioned us to inspect how all 45 fire and rescue authorities in England responded to the pandemic. We completed those inspections in November 2020. This means that, since 2018, every service has been inspected at least twice. There is now a benchmark against which the inspectorate can monitor progress.</p> <p>Our national recommendations are still relevant. This is why I will not be setting any new recommendations this year, as the sector must continue to act on the ones I have already made, and at a more urgent pace. My frustrations grow, on behalf of the public, at the lack of progress being made to reform this vital public service.</p>
Grade	N/A
Recommendations	<p>No new recommendations: Our national recommendations need to be brought in faster.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the Home Office should precisely determine the role of fire and rescue services, to remove any ambiguity; – the sector should remove unjustifiable variation, including in how they define risk; – the sector should review and reform how effectively pay and conditions are determined; – the Home Office should invest chief fire officers with operational independence, whether through primary legislation or in some other manner; – there should be a code of ethics; and – the Home Office should ensure that the sector has sufficient capacity and capability to bring about change.
Areas for improvement	

Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner's Acknowledgement

Staffordshire Commissioner, Ben Adams, is truly proud of the way the FRS has stepped up to deliver services during the pandemic as part of the communities it serves. From delivery of vaccines to hard to reach communities; delivery of food parcels to the vulnerable to maintaining the programme of high rise safety audits and delivery of an impressive sprinkler safety programme. The pandemic has given the FRS new ways of reaching vulnerable people in the community and targeting home safety advice. With regard to prevention and home safety visits, Staffordshire continue to use a rating system to identify those most at risk and provide both telephone and face to face advice to support residents and businesses in Staffordshire.

Over the past two years the Staffordshire Commissioner has worked with Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service to ensure the prioritisation of protection work. Therefore, it is pleasing that HMICFRS have recognised the efforts that services are making to ensure protection and risk planning are prioritised.

Here in Staffordshire, the FRS are working hard to increase the number of competent protection staff, who have the right knowledge and skills to carry out audits at premises at highest risk. This is making a difference, but it takes time to train and develop confident and competent fire safety inspectors, and a concerted effort to retain them. I appreciate that our leaders need to keep a relentless focus on protection, and develop, train and accredit their staff to maintain this progress and for the public to feel the safety benefits

To support response efforts, Staffordshire FRS recognise their on-call model still needs attention to make sure it works now and in the future. This is currently a focus of a 9point action plan to improve availability and make most effective use of Staffordshire FRS resources.

The Staffordshire Commissioner is keen to concur with the HMICFRS acknowledgement that inconsistent funding and governance arrangements persist. Many services are still operating with a lack of financial certainty, which is caused by differences in their governance models. The announcement of a 3year view of funding arrangements is a step in the right direction and we look forward to additional clarity in the coming months which will assist in Staffordshire's ability to be efficient and effective.

Good intentions to promote equality, diversity and inclusion aren't always successful and the Commissioner here in Staffordshire is challenging what works and what doesn't in order to reach our target demographic, for recruitment and retention of a truly representative workforce.

In acknowledging this report Ben Adams adds, "I am keen to emphasise that, as PFCC, I support the reform of the Fire Service and can demonstrate the efficiencies and effectiveness borne out of a collaborative relationship with Police and Fire. However, ongoing reform does require full support of the named bodies, (the Home Office, the NFCC, the Local Government Association and National Employers) to fully implement the outstanding HMICFRS national recommendations. I would like to add my disappointment, on behalf of the public, at the lack of progress being made to reform this vital sector."