

Resources and Fire and Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee

9 March 2021

Covid19 Inspection of Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service

Recommendation(s)

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the summary findings of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Covid19 specific inspection of Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service (WFRS).

1.0 Key Issues

- 1.1 Within Warwickshire a joined up and partnership approach has been taken to responding to the pandemic. WFRS has worked together with WCC colleagues and partner agencies such as Public Health England, the NHS and Warwickshire Police to respond to the needs of the communities of Warwickshire during the pandemic.
- 1.2 The pandemic is a global event that has affected everyone and every organisation. Fire and rescue services have had to continue to provide a service to the public and, like every other public service, have had to do so within the restrictions imposed.
- 1.3 In August 2020, HMICFRS were commissioned by the Home Secretary to inspect how fire and rescue services in England are responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 1.4 For this inspection, HMICFRS were asked by the Home Secretary to consider what is working well and what is being learned; how the fire sector is responding to the COVID-19 crisis; how fire services are dealing with the problems they face; and what changes are likely as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. HMICFRS recognise that the pandemic is not over and as such the inspection looked at Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Services (WFRS) initial response.
- 1.5 HMICFRS inspected WFRS between 28 September and 9 October 2020.
- 1.6 This HMICFRS Covid19 specific inspection did not provide WFRS with a grading. The feedback provided was a narrative on areas of strength and areas for future focus.

2.0 Options and Proposal

2.1 In summary, HMICFRS stated that they:

“Were impressed with how Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service maintained its statutory functions and made good use of its staff to carry out additional duties to support the community during the pandemic. It primarily used its wholetime firefighters to respond to emergencies. The service used the increased availability of its on-call workforce beyond their normal operational commitment to help support those most vulnerable in the community”

2.2 HMICFRS also recognised that WFRS effectively responded to the pandemic in the following ways:

- WMFS offered a range of additional support to help its communities during the pandemic. For example, staff made telephone calls to vulnerable people to check on their welfare. They delivered food parcels and prescriptions, and transported people from hospital to their homes.
- WFRS managed their resources well and supported staff working from home. The service was able to maintain the resilience of its control room by putting in place measures to protect the health and safety of those staff.
- WFRS supported its staff well during the pandemic, making sure their health, safety and wellbeing were protected.
- WFRS identified a potential issue of whether on-call firefighters would qualify for furloughed payments for their primary employment given their on-call contract and related payments. The service raised the issue promptly with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), which worked with the Department for Work and Pensions and Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs to clarify the position that on-call firefighters were able to still do their role. This advice helped other fire and rescue services.
- WFRS is now considering how to use its wholetime and on-call workforce more effectively to build resilience and take on more community-focused activity.

2.3 The following areas for future focus were put forward by HMICFRS:

- WFRS should determine how it will adopt, for the longer term, the new and innovative ways of working introduced during the pandemic, to secure lasting improvements.
- WFRS should continue to develop its approach to those staff at higher risk from COVID-19, to make sure that they get the right wellbeing and support provisions in place.

- WFRS should make sure it has processes in place to work and negotiate effectively with all appropriate staff associations about subjects relevant to their members.
- WFRS should also make sure wholtime firefighters are fully productive, while minimising the risk of them contracting or spreading the virus

2.4 All inspections will highlight areas for development and growth. Warwickshire County Council, including WFRS, is a learning organisation that welcomes feedback and opportunities to improve. Activity is already taking place to develop in the areas of future focus identified through the HMICFRS Covid19 inspection.

2.5 The full HMICFRS Covid19 inspection narrative about WFRS can be found on the HMICFRS website link below or in the attached document to this report:

[Link to WFRS HMICFRS Covid 19 Inspection 22.1.21](#)

3.0 Financial Implications

3.1 None

4.0 Timescales associated with the decision and next steps

4.1 Not applicable

Background papers

None

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

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