

Cabinet

17 February 2022

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Inspection of Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service (WFRS)

Recommendation(s)

1. That Cabinet considers and comments upon the HMICFRS Inspection Report for Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service.
2. That Cabinet considers and endorses the HMICFRS Action Plan for Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service attached at Appendix 2.

1. Key Issues

- 1.1 HMICFRS carried out a full inspection of WFRS In February – March 2021.
- 1.2 This inspection was virtual and took place online over a period of 8 weeks during the Covid19 pandemic.
- 1.3 The report detailing the inspection findings was publicly released on the 12th January 2022 (Appendix 1)
- 1.4 HMICFRS grade every Fire and Rescue Service against three pillars: Efficiency, Effectiveness and People. There are four gradings that are used: Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement and Inadequate. WFRS has been graded as requiring improvement in all areas.
- 1.5 There are then 11 subsets on which a Fire and Rescue Service is graded and WFRS was graded in all but one area as Requires Improvement. In relation to preventing fires and other risks WFRS was graded as Inadequate.
- 1.6 HMICFRS has issued WFRS, within this inspection report, with three Causes of Concern: one in Protection, one in Prevention and one in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).
- 1.7 A Cause of Concern is defined as a serious, critical, or systemic shortcoming in a Fire and Rescue Service's practice, policy or performance.
- 1.8 An action plan to deliver improvement in these three areas had to be submitted by 31st August 2021. At that point in time, although the WFRS had received detail in relation to the three causes of concern, it hadn't received the full inspection report.

- 1.9 The Leader of the Council agreed the HMICFRS Action Plan in August, and the action plan was submitted to HMICFRS by the required deadline of 31st August 2021.
- 1.10 The detailed inspection report, received subsequently, identifies 41 Areas for Improvement. This has led to a review of the action plan which was originally submitted and the action plan being enhanced by further, more specific actions. The updated Action Plan is contained at Appendix 2.
- 1.11 WFRS will be expected to show improvements in the areas identified by HMICFRS whilst maintaining standards and levels of performance in other areas.
- 1.12 An assessment of the resources required to deliver improvements was undertaken with support and input from colleagues across the Council to determine the level of resources required. £1,550,000 over two years would be required for improvement and this allocation was agreed as part of the Council's budget decision on 8th February 2021.
- 1.13 A further visit by HMICFRS to WFRS is expected in February 2022.

2. Supporting Information

- 2.1 Following an HMICFRS inspection between March and May 2021, Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service have been notified of three Causes of Concern. These are as follows.
- A. The service hasn't done enough since the last inspection to develop a prevention activity that prioritises those most at risk of fire. Recommendation(s): the service should:
- Develop a clear prevention strategy that prioritises the people most at risk and make sure that work to reduce risk is proportionate.
 - Put in place an effective system for joint reviews after significant or fatal incidents. Reviews should be at an appropriate strategic level in the service and with partner agencies.
 - Review its systems and processes for dealing with referrals from partner agencies to make sure they are managed in accordance with risk.
- B. The service hasn't done enough since the last inspection to identify its highest risk premises to inform its risk-based inspection programme. Recommendation(s): the service should:
- Develop a protection strategy with a resourced and prioritised risk-based inspection programme.
 - Review its risk-based inspection programme to make sure it identifies its highest risk premises.
 - Put in place a clear plan with timescales for improving its management of risk information.

C. The service isn't taking a proportionate approach to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in the workplace. Recommendation(s): the service should make sure that:

- Its actions to promote EDI don't compromise the integrity of other policies, including health and safety and performance management.
- Senior leaders respond appropriately and quickly to EDI feedback or concerns from its staff.
- Its approach to positive action is appropriate and proportionate and is understood by staff; and
- It understands the diversity of its workforce and has the right provisions in place to support their individual needs.

2.2 In order to address these concerns and respond to the detailed inspection report, WFRS have produced the revised Action Plan shown in Appendix 2.

2.3 HMICFRS will regularly inspect WFRS around the Causes of Concern over the next two years prior to our next full inspection to assess improvement being delivered against the Causes of Concern. The first visit from the inspectorate is likely to be in the February 2022.

3. Improvement Action

3.1 Since receiving the Causes of Concern and the detailed inspection report WFRS has focused on delivering improvement. The following improvement has been delivered:

Overarching actions of the Service

3.2 A number of actions have been taken to lay the foundations for improvement. These include the following:

- A review and restructure of the Service has been undertaken with a view to strengthening the support and focus on the key areas of Prevention, Protection and Response. The revised structure was put in place on the 1st September 2021.
- Work was started to refresh the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) risk analysis using newly available approaches. As well as ensuring our understanding of risk is as current as possible the new approaches are also designed to increase the level of detailed analysis available to support Strategy reviews.
- The importance and value of staff views and inclusion in the improvement process has been recognised with staff briefings and consultation on the proposed action plan underway.

3.3 The key role of monitoring, assurance and peer support has also been recognised with the following arrangements having been put in place:

- The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) has been approached and has now offered peer support to ensure improvements take account of national best practice and all the options available to us.
- The related service improvement plan will be given oversight and scrutiny through the IRMP assurance panel, which ensures our plans and commitments made to the community within the IRMP are suitably met. The Vice Chair of the NFCC will also sit on this panel to give objective views on the implementation of the Service's improvement plan that relates to the causes of concern.
- The County Council internal audit team have been commissioned to objectively assure the service improvement plan against the causes of concern and related recommendations to ensure the right actions are being taken.

Preventing fires and other risks

3.4 A review of our prevention work is underway. Key policy and processes will also be reviewed part of this work with particular focus on those relating to the reviewing of significant incidents with partners and how we deal with referrals from partner agencies. The foundation work highlighted above, and in particular the IRMP refresh of the risk analysis, will be core to developing our revised approach and ensuring it takes account of national best practice and the needs of the community.

3.5 In addition the Service has:

- Clarified with staff the priority risks we look for when reviewing requests for safe and well checks against national guidance.
- Introduced a process to report all significant and fatal incidents to the Fire leadership team to enable them to ensure that appropriate actions are being taken by the service and with partners.
- Improved centrally held record keeping and management to support significant and fatal incident reviews.
- Renewed efforts to reduce the prioritised list of safe and well checks and increased related monitoring arrangements.

Protecting the public through Fire regulation

3.6 The Service is developing its protection strategy and in addition the following specific actions have been taken .

- Data relating to premises has been updated, the result being an increase in the number of building we hold detailed records for.
- A revised prioritisation process has been implemented and places the 35,000 premises identified into a numbered list from 1 – 35,000. Number one is the highest risk given national and local risk indicators and number 35,000 the lowest.

- Work is underway to create a refreshed project to replace current IT data systems that will assist in the storage and management of the prioritised risk-based inspection programme and data. A project manager has been appointed to progress this work.
- Options for temporarily increasing the numbers of competent fire protection specialists are being developed and adverts have been placed for operational staff with relevant competencies to join the protection team on a temporary basis. This approach is designed to enable the service to maintain and build on the number of audits made whilst supporting newer members of the protection team in building the skills and experience required.
- Training is continuing to be rolled out for operational crews and staff to increase the capacity of the Service in fire regulation, whilst the review of the related strategy is finalised.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity

- 3.7 After talking to staff and consulting with HMICFRS it is understood that the majority of evidence which led to this Cause of Concern was put forward by staff who were concerned or affected by the Service's past actions relating to recruitment and how we communicated around EDI.
- 3.8 During a recent recruitment campaign we took the following actions to ensure similar issues did not arise and at the same time have started to build engagement with staff around these issues:
- Established a middle management forum focused on positive action and positive discrimination. The related understanding gained through this was then cascaded out to all staff.
 - Communicated and discussed with our staff, our recruitment physical test standards, and how these relate to positive action with particular focus on why we have recently changed the standards and their alignment with national guidance
 - Reviewed via the recruitment team the over lapping policies and made checks against their intended ways of working to ensure there was the right synergy
 - Covered these issues in our staff briefing and consultation process will be refreshing the approach of our Staff Inclusion Network to support the right conversations and feedback taking place.
 - Provided staff with the opportunity to find out more information on the work the Service is doing each month as part of our Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion strategy.
 - Expanded the awareness of and opportunities for development and promotion including producing a new promotion policy which has been developed with staff (and is currently subject to the consultation) and introducing a Future Leaders apprenticeship degree programme which started in September 2021 to support talent management in the organisation.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 The total cost to resource the improvement plan is circa £3.7m
- 4.2 This figure of £3.7m can be reduced down to £1.55m through the efficient and efficient prioritisation of existing resources across WCC.
- 4.3 There is a current MTFS allocation for this improvement of £1.55m over two years.
- 4.4 The £1.55m is an unavoidable service pressure in the MTFS
- 4.5 This is a time limited investment to deliver improvement.
- 4.6 Being able to deliver the required improvements within the MTFS allocations relies upon the wider support of WCC at no cost to WFRS in relation to the work required that has been identified within the improvement plan.
- 4.7 It is essential that the improvement delivered through the investment can be seen and measured. The improvements and outcomes that will be delivered are as follows:
 - a) A Listening, Communication and Engagement Strategy based on a newly developed EDI narrative. The Service has a Strategic Plan that shows how we will reach the maturity level we want to achieve
 - b) A greater understanding of their communities and the differences that exist. It proactively seeks to engage and support communities and each other and understands the strength of diversity.
 - c) A workforce that feels they belong and work in an environment that supports their physical, mental, and cultural needs.
 - d) A clear prevention strategy that prioritises the people most at risk and makes sure that work to reduce risk is proportionate.
 - e) A Serious Case Review Policy that promotes learning and safeguards our communities
 - f) A robust referral pathway that is supported by an IT system that manages referrals based on risk.
 - g) A Protection strategy document that enables our ambition and direction to be translated into coherent actions. It will align with the IRMP, Service Plan, drive the Fire Protection business plan, and be resourced appropriately.
 - h) A complete, assured data-set of up-to-date premises within Warwickshire covered by the RRF50 2005.
 - i) A clearly defined RBIP process that ensures high-risk premises are identified, prioritised and inspected within an appropriate time-specific period. Information supplied by the RBIP provides further data to inform the IRMP and yearly action plan better.

5. Environmental Implications

5.1 None.

6. Timescales associated with the decision and next steps

6.1 The updated Action Plan will be used to progress improvements across WFRS. Progress will be reported back to the IRMP Assurance Panel, Corporate Board and Cabinet on an ongoing basis and the Resources and FRS Overview and Scrutiny Committee will have a monitoring and scrutiny role.

Appendices

Appendix 1. HMICFRS Inspection Report of WFRS

Appendix 2. WFRS HMICFRS Action Plan

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication: Chair and Party Spokes of the Resources and FRS Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Local Member(s):

Other members: