



Promoting improvements
in policing and fire & rescue
services to make everyone safer

6th Floor, Globe House,
89 Eccleston Square, London
SW1V 1PN
Email: wendy.williams1@hmicfrs.gov.uk

Wendy Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary
Her Majesty's Inspector of Fire & Rescue
Services

Chief Fire Officer Mick Crennell
Police & Fire Headquarters
PO Box 37
Valley Road
Portishead
Bristol BS20 8JJ

20 December 2018

Dear Mick,

AVON FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE REVISIT

We inspected Avon Fire and Rescue Service the week of 16 July 2018. During the inspection we identified a cause of concern. We shared the following cause of concern with you and made the following recommendation:

Cause of concern

Avon fire and rescue service isn't doing enough to keep the public safe through regulation of fire safety. Its risk-based inspection programme is entirely reactive, as its inspection department doesn't have enough staff.

Recommendation

By March 2019, the service should make sure it has allocated enough resources to a risk-based inspection programme. This allocation must be informed by local risk and enable the service to fulfil its statutory obligations relating to technical fire safety

2. You kindly submitted an action plan setting out how you would address the areas of concern and the recommendation.
3. We carried out the revisit between the 16 and 18 October 2018 to review progress against the action plan. We explored the following areas of the action plan:
 - (a) what progress has been made against the short-term actions of your plan; and
 - (b) whether the right levels of leadership and oversight were in place.
4. During the revisit we interviewed staff who were involved in the action plan including the Chief Fire Officer and the Assistant Chief Fire Officer. We also spoke to technical fire safety practitioners and we reviewed performance information. We concluded the revisit by feeding back our findings to the Chief Fire Officer.
5. HMICFRS has provided feedback against each area below.

Governance

6. We saw that there are governance arrangements in place to monitor the progress of the action plan. The ACFO meets regularly with the protection management team and is updated on progress on both the action plan and the current recruitment campaign for additional staff.

Action plan

- (a) Short term – by the end of 2018 ensure that the protection function is fully staffed back to 12 officers, with additional two green book staff to cover building regulations, thus freeing up other staff to return to audits and prosecution work.
 - (b) Medium/long term – by the end of 2019 to increase the establishment within the protection function to 24 staff.
7. We were told that additional capacity has been allocated to the protection team by using existing fire safety trained staff from within the organisation. We were also told that there may be more staff available, and that this was currently being explored. However, we found that the additional staff were not always able to carry out protection work and contribute to improving the regulation of fire safety.
 8. Although some additional temporary capacity had been arranged, the number of staff working in the protection team had reduced since our visit in July. There are now five vacancies because of staffing changes. The service is recruiting for two additional fire safety inspectors but had not yet made plans to fill the new vacancies.
 9. We were pleased to see that some progress has been made to address the back-log of building regulation consultations. The service now carries out a risk assessment on consultations and gives those that relate to more complex building design a higher priority. Since July, an additional 110 building regulation consultation have been completed. However, there is still a back-log of consultations that require attention and the service is not in some cases meeting the 28-day consultation time frame.

Link to the integrated risk management plan

10. We were pleased to see that the service has made progress to establish a greater understanding of risks by commissioning a baseline review of risk within the service area. The service has also carried out an enhanced baseline report that provides more in-depth analysis in relation to the operational demands the service needs to meet. The service has procured software that will allow it to model options on the location of resources in relation to risk and this will further support the new integrated risk management plan.

Outcome

11. The revisit team was pleased to see that the service had taken steps to address the cause of concern and that some additional temporary capacity has been provided to the protection team. However, the staffing situation has not improved since our visit in July. We identified that the current overall staffing position has now reduced. This will limit the ability of the service to make the required improvements.
12. We understand that the service will use the new IRMP to identify and rebalance resources across the service. This will be in place from April 2019. The success of the action plan is reliant on the outcomes of the IRMP and the service's ability to allocate the right resources to the protection function. While the action plan is comprehensive and linked to wider strategic plans, we cannot yet determine how effective the plan will be to address the capacity issues and ensure the risk-based inspection programme work improves.
13. We will return to Avon Fire and Rescue Service in July 2019 to make sure the contents of the action plan have been addressed and the service provided to the public of Avon has improved.

Yours sincerely,



Wendy Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary

Her Majesty's Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services