

Matt Parr CB

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

Neil Odin
Chief Fire Officer
Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service and Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service

Councillor Christopher Carter
Chair
Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority

Councillor Dave Stewart
Leader
Isle of Wight Council

22 January 2021

Dear Mr Odin, Cllr Carter and Cllr Stewart,

COVID-19 INSPECTION: HAMPSHIRE AND ISLE OF WIGHT FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES

In August 2020, we were commissioned by the Home Secretary to inspect how fire and rescue services in England are responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. This letter sets out our assessment of the effectiveness of your service's response to the pandemic.

2. Reflecting the forthcoming combination between Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) and Isle of Wight FRS in April 2021 and the considerable joint working already in place, we have inspected both services as one. So, reference to 'the service' in this letter means both services unless otherwise specified.
3. 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.
4. For this inspection, we 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. We recognise that the pandemic is not over and as such this inspection concerns the service's initial response.

5. I am grateful for the positive and constructive way your service engaged with our inspection. I am also very grateful to your service for the positive contribution you have made to your community during the pandemic. We inspected your service between 20 October and 3 November 2020. This letter summarises our findings.
6. In relation to your service, the local resilience forum (LRF) (strategic co-ordinating group), chaired by the chief fire officer, declared a major incident on 18 March 2020.
7. In summary, we are impressed by how the service adapted and responded to the pandemic effectively to fulfil its statutory functions, protect the public and support staff wellbeing.
8. The service had in place up-to-date plans that were sufficient to give an initial response to the pandemic. The service reviewed these plans as it understood more about the risks it faced. It continued to carry out safe and well visits and do fire safety audits (although it did fewer of both face to face). It was proactive in offering support to others. All groups of staff did additional work, especially to support the local ambulance service. The work varied based on local demand across the two service areas and meant that the people of Hampshire and Isle of Wight were better supported through the pandemic.
9. Firefighters in both services drove ambulances. Hampshire FRS staff also built a temporary mortuary and did body recovery work. They gave fire safety advice to the responsible persons for the new Nightingale hospitals and for a temporary mortuary. They delivered shopping to vulnerable people. Isle of Wight FRS staff also delivered prescriptions to vulnerable people in the community.
10. Resources were well managed. The service responded quickly to protect staff and support their wellbeing. Staff told us the service communicated well with them and used technology to help reach the widest staff audiences. The service made extra efforts to understand individual needs of staff (particularly those who are at higher risk from COVID-19) and put in place tailored support.
11. The service also made sure all staff had the resources they needed to do their jobs effectively. This included giving personal protective equipment (PPE) to all who needed it, and extra IT (particularly for staff on the Isle of Wight, so they could access Hampshire systems and information ahead of the planned combination in April 2021). The service has used learning from the first phase of the pandemic to inform its future decision making. It has also shared its learning nationally, and with other local and regional organisations.
12. We recognise that the arrangements for managing the pandemic may carry on for some time, and that the service is now planning for the future. In order to be as efficient and effective as possible, Hampshire and Isle of Wight FRSs should focus on the following areas:
 - (a) It 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.
 - (b) It should make sure all wholetime firefighters are fully productive, while continuing to minimise the risk of them contracting or spreading the virus.

(c) It should evaluate how effective its extra activities have been. It should then consider how its activities can give local communities the most benefit in future.

Preparing for the pandemic

13. In line with good governance, the service had a pandemic flu plan and business continuity plans in place which were in date. These plans were activated and had recently been tested. They were detailed enough to enable the service to make an effective initial response, but didn't anticipate and mitigate all the risks presented by COVID-19. The service has reviewed its plans to reflect the changing situation and what it has learned during the first wave.

14. The revised pandemic flu plan now includes additional COVID-19 specific detail and government advice on control measures such as test and trace, lockdown, social distancing, and making premises COVID secure. It also includes the service's revised working arrangements.

Fulfilling statutory functions

15. The main functions of a fire and rescue service are firefighting, promoting fire safety through prevention and protection (making sure building owners comply with fire safety legislation), rescuing people in road traffic collisions, and responding to emergencies.

16. The service has continued to undertake its core statutory functions throughout the pandemic in line with advice from the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC). This means the service has continued to respond to calls from the public in a timely manner, and to effectively respond to fires and other emergencies. In addition to this, it gave support to neighbouring services and sent specialist resources to support nationally co-ordinated incidents.

17. The service set up an emergency staffing team early. It did this to make sure it always had enough staff to cover all risk-critical work. The service put two Hampshire fire engines on to the Isle of Wight for its crews to use, in order to improve resilience. It continued its safe and well visits, and its community safety campaign work. The service also continued its well-established work with the ambulance service in co-responding to medical emergencies. It did fire safety audits of high-risk premises, although it did fewer of them. And it continued its fire safety enforcement and other work. To increase resilience on the island, Isle of Wight Council gave legal powers to the fire safety officers of Hampshire FRS. This meant the officers could carry out enforcement action on the island on the council's behalf.

Response

18. The service told us that between 1 April and 30 June 2020 it attended fewer incidents than it did during the same period in 2019.

19. The overall availability of fire engines in Hampshire FRS was better during the pandemic than it was during the same period the previous year. Between 1 April and 30 June 2020, the service's average overall fire engine availability was 85.9 percent compared with 80.3 percent during the same period in 2019. The overall availability of fire engines in Isle of Wight FRS was

better during the pandemic than it was during the same period the previous year. Between 1 April and 30 June 2020, the service's average overall fire engine availability was 87.8 percent compared with 72.3 percent during the same period in 2019. We were told availability improved because more on-call firefighters were available to respond to emergencies because they had been furloughed or were working from home in their primary employment. We were also told that all Isle of Wight fire engines were available throughout the entire day, something that hasn't happened before.

20. The service revised its degradation plan to include the number of people and amount of equipment it should send to different types of emergencies if there were fewer people or less equipment available. It also explained where fire engines should be relocated. This plan was well communicated internally and with neighbouring services.

21. The service didn't change its crewing models or shift patterns during this period.

22. The service told us that its average response time to fires was the same in Hampshire compared with the same period in 2019, but that it improved on the Isle of Wight during the pandemic. This was due to several reasons including better fire engine availability, having fewer incidents to respond to, and less road traffic during this period. This may not be reflected in [official statistics recently published by the Home Office](#), because services don't all collect and calculate their data the same way.

23. The service had good arrangements in place to make sure that its control room had enough staff during the pandemic. These included effective resilience arrangements, such as locking down the control room early, creating a second bio-secure control room to use while the other one was cleaned, implementing extra cleaning regimes, and early adoption of face masks in the workplace. These arrangements limited the spread of the virus, and sickness levels were low. The service trained extra staff to do non-999 control room work. It also had good support available from other services through a well-established control room partnership. However, it didn't need to redirect calls to its own fallback control room or to another service.

Prevention

24. The NFCC issued guidance explaining how services should maintain a risk-based approach to continuing prevention activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. The service adopted this guidance.

25. The service conducted fewer face-to-face safe and well visits than it would normally undertake. However, it reviewed which individuals and groups it considered to be at an increased risk from fire as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It did this by having firefighters make telephone calls to do home risk assessments using existing checklists. They referred people who were assessed as having a critical vulnerability to community safety officers. These officers visited them to give face-to-face safe and well visits. People who didn't get an immediate visit received fire safety advice over the telephone and were offered a visit later. Firefighters made these visits once COVID-19 restrictions had eased. As a result, the service gave fire safety advice to more

people during the pandemic than before. Safeguarding referrals continued in both approaches. Also, firefighters did a safe and well check when they attended an incident at a property.

26. The service decided to continue offering face-to-face safe and well visits on a risk-assessed basis and gave staff suitable PPE to do so.

27. The service continued to promote fire safety. It aligned its campaigns to changing circumstances. For example, there were more disposable barbecue fires in the New Forest as lockdown restrictions started to ease. It gave safety programmes for young people online. It also set up two new Fire Cadets schemes. The service has paused group activities for elderly people, due to them being at higher risk from the virus.

Protection

28. The NFCC has issued guidance on how to continue protection activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes maintaining a risk-based approach, completing desktop audits and issuing enforcement notices electronically. Activity included carrying out audits on those premises that are at the greatest risk from fire. The service adopted this guidance.

29. The service reviewed how it defines premises as high risk during the pandemic. As a result, it added supermarkets that hold large amounts of stock as being at an increased risk from fire. It also added hospitals and care homes as being at an increased risk from fire due to their increased capacity. Initially, some business premises were closed and therefore couldn't be inspected. However, the service still completed audits when possible. When restrictions lifted, these businesses reopened and, in some cases, operated differently. For example, they had fewer staff, stored additional stock, and increased or carried out different activities.

30. The service conducted fewer face-to-face fire safety audits than it would normally undertake. When necessary, it continued face-to-face fire safety audits and enforcement activity on a risk-assessed basis and gave staff suitable PPE.

31. The service continued to issue alteration notices, enforcement notices and prohibition notices. It also continued to respond to statutory building control consultations. It introduced risk-based desktop appraisals. It completed so-called short audits, which it used to determine whether a full audit was needed at that time. It did this as an alternative to face-to-face audits to minimise face-to-face contact between members of staff and the public. It made initial contact by telephone to assess COVID-related risks at premises prior to any visits. And it communicated extra fire safety information for businesses through its website and social media.

32. The service has continued to engage with those responsible for fire safety in high-risk premises with cladding similar to that at Grenfell Tower, and with other cladding types.

33. Nightingale hospitals were established both in Hampshire and on the Isle of Wight. Thankfully, they didn't need to be used. Mobile COVID-19 testing sites were also set up. The service worked with the responsible persons to identify the most appropriate sites from several

locations, and to put in place suitable and reasonable fire safety measures. A temporary mortuary was built, and buildings were repurposed for use as care homes and homes for homeless people. The service gave fire safety advice for all these premises. It also revisited the buildings when they were changed back to their usual use.

Staff health and safety and wellbeing

34. Staff wellbeing was a clear priority for the service during the pandemic. It identified wellbeing problems and responded to any concerns and further needs. Senior leaders actively promoted wellbeing services and encouraged staff to discuss any worries they had.

35. Most staff survey respondents told us that they could access services to support their mental wellbeing if needed. The service carried out its own wellbeing survey with staff to understand their needs. Support put in place for staff included one-to-one calls with line managers, occupational health, counselling, mental health first aiders (including some training for them on relevant topics such as alcohol consumption), trauma risk management services, support to balance caring arrangements and work, a bereavement guide, access to COVID-19 testing, and access to wider wellbeing, financial and legal advice (through an external employee assistance programme). The service also offered webinars on topics such as exercise, healthy eating, and mindfulness.

36. The service circulated NFCC guidance for on-call staff. This included advice on loss of earnings and managing financial hardship. The service helpfully directed staff to this guidance through regular virtual staff briefings and a dedicated SharePoint site.

37. Staff most at risk from COVID-19 were identified effectively, including those from a black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) background and those with underlying health problems. The service worked with staff to develop and implement processes to manage the risk. The service responded to changing Government advice regarding higher-risk groups. It implemented individual risk assessments and offered tailored support. Staff found these measures helpful. The service's inclusion and diversity network groups contributed to the content of the mental health and wellbeing guidance that was issued. Most staff survey respondents told us they were treated with dignity and respect.

38. Wellbeing best practice was also shared with other services. The service has discussed with its staff how it should plan for the potential longer-term effects of COVID-19 on its workforce.

39. The service made sure that firefighters continued to train and were competent to do their work during the pandemic and met national training frequencies. This included keeping up to date with most of the firefighter fitness requirements. However, it took a risk-assessed decision to freeze all qualifications-based training for six months, on the basis that the frequencies set by the service for itself are in excess of the national guidance. It also placed a greater reliance on online training during this period. Incident command training and assessment took place online, with on-call firefighters' drill nights initially being online too. Wholetime firefighters completed station-based

training in watch bubbles. Face-to-face training resumed when the service had a greater understanding of how to manage the risks.

40. The service assessed the risks of new and existing work to make sure its staff had the skills and equipment needed to work safely and effectively. It commissioned an internal audit report covering the period. The report found that a sound system of governance, risk management and control was in place for COVID-related health and safety risk assessments. Staff survey respondents reported feeling confident that the service took their health and wellbeing concerns seriously.

41. The service provided its workforce with suitable PPE on time and made sure that it achieved value for money. It participated in the national fire sector scheme to procure PPE, as well as the councils' schemes.

Staff absence

42. Absences have decreased compared with the same period in 2019. The number of shifts lost due to sickness absence between 1 April and 30 June 2020 decreased by 20.3 percent compared with the same period in 2019.

43. The service updated the absence policy so that it could better manage staff wellbeing and health and safety and make more effective decisions on how to allocate work. This included giving information about recording absences, self-isolation, shielding, testing, pay and conditions for COVID-related absences, bereavement, mandatory return to work interviews, and training for managers. Additionally, the service published a frequently asked questions (FAQ) guide about COVID-19 that was regularly updated with the necessary information. Data was routinely collected on the numbers of staff absent through: sickness, caring for dependents, self-isolating and/or having positive test results.

Staff engagement

44. Most staff survey respondents told us that the service provided regular and relevant communication to all staff during the COVID-19 pandemic. This included conducting a wellbeing survey to understand staff needs, capture views on the service's COVID-19 response and communications approach, and understand the support that staff have received from their line managers. The service also carried out regular virtual team meetings and virtual corporate briefings (which were both live and recorded). The service also provided COVID-19 branded correspondence, a COVID-19 inbox with responses turned into FAQs, one-to-one calls with a manager, an online information portal, and use of social media, posters and toolkits for staff about wellbeing and health and safety. The service used communications analytics to engage staff at the most effective times and in the most efficient ways. And it revised its style of communications in light of this information.

45. The service made use of telephone, email, social media, messaging services, virtual meetings and virtual training when communicating with on-call staff during COVID-19. Hampshire

FRS accelerated its buying of extra software licenses and ensuring access to SharePoint (and access to various information) for Isle of Wight FRS staff.

46. Because of changes to the service's ways of working in response to COVID-19, it intends to continue implementing its wellbeing strategy and to address the findings of the wellbeing survey it conducted. It will also maintain the following developments:

- (a) greater use of remote working and flexible use of staff;
- (b) use of communication analytics to engage with staff at the most effective times and in the most efficient ways;
- (c) the change in style of communication using virtual video presentation with live questions and answers, to be more engaging and interactive;
- (d) virtual communication, meetings, training, development and assessment; and
- (e) the centralised approach to managing and prioritising external requests for resources (including continuing the central staffing team).

47. In addition, it will implement a long-term health monitoring process for firefighters who have long-term health impacts as a result of COVID-19.

Working with others, and making changes locally

48. To protect communities, fire and rescue staff were encouraged to carry out extra roles beyond their core duties. This was to support other local blue light services and other public service providers that were experiencing high levels of demand, and to offer other support to its communities.

49. The service was trained and available to carry out the following new activities: moving bodies, driving ambulances, helping vulnerable people, fitting face masks, delivering PPE, ambulance transport, driving training and/or instruction for non-service volunteers to drive ambulances, transport to and from Nightingale hospitals, and delivering infection prevention and control training packages for care homes. Due to differing levels of demand, Hampshire and Isle of Wight fire and rescue services did a mixture of these activities. Staff from both services drove ambulances (as part of their co-responding work and patient care) and did body recovery work. Hampshire FRS also carried out face fittings of PPE masks for clinical care staff and delivered meals in the local community. Isle of Wight FRS staff also delivered prescriptions.

50. A national 'tripartite agreement' was put in place to include the new activities that firefighters could carry out during the pandemic. The agreement was between the NFCC, National Employers, and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), and specified what new roles firefighters could agree to engage in during the pandemic. Each service then undertook local consultations on the specific work it had been asked to support, to agree how any health and safety requirements including risk assessments would be addressed. If public sector partners requested further support

from services with additional roles outside the tripartite agreement, the specifics would need to be agreed nationally before the work could begin.

51. The service set up an additional weekly joint trade union meeting with all representative bodies specifically in relation to COVID-19, and consulted locally with the FBU and the Fire Officers Association to implement the tripartite agreement. Other unions were engaged, including UNISON, GMB, Prospect, and the Fire and Rescue Service Association. Consistent messaging was agreed where possible (for example, about the wearing of face masks in the workplace).

52. All of the new work done by the service under the tripartite agreement was agreed on time for it to start promptly and in line with the request from the partner agency.

53. There were extra requests for work by partner agencies that fell outside the tripartite agreement. Hampshire FRS staff built a temporary mortuary (the Grayson site). The service also trained staff to give administration support there, but ultimately this wasn't needed. They also hosted, ran and delivered PPE from a COVID-19 strategic co-ordination centre. This work was agreed and undertaken on time and in line with the request from the partner agency.

54. All new work, including that done under the tripartite agreement, was risk-assessed and complied with the health and safety requirements.

55. All activities to support other organisations during this period were monitored and reviewed. The service has identified which to continue. For example, the emergency central staffing team will manage resources. There will be greater use of support staff to give resilience for control. The service will use technology to deliver remote fire safety audits. And it will continue its well-established work involving co-responding to medical emergencies alongside the ambulance service.

Local resilience forum

56. To keep the public safe, fire and rescue services work with other organisations to assess the risk of an emergency, and to maintain plans for responding to one. To do so, the service should be an integrated and active member of its LRF – for both services, the Hampshire and the Isle of Wight LRF.

57. The service was an active member of the LRF during the pandemic. The service told us that the LRF's arrangements enabled the service to be fully engaged in the multi-agency response and to raise its profile.

58. As part of the LRF's response to COVID-19, the chief fire officer chaired the LRF strategic co-ordinating group for the pandemic and had officers undertaking the roles of chair of Isle of Wight Tactical Coordinating Group (TCG) and deputy chair Hampshire TCG, along with representing the service in the various groups and forums. A strategic co-ordination centre was set up, involving partners, and was hosted at the service headquarters in Eastleigh. The service was a member of

all working groups that were set up. The service was able to allocate suitably qualified staff to participate in the above groups without affecting its core duties.

Use of resources

59. The service's financial position hasn't yet been significantly affected by COVID-19. It has made realistic calculations of the extra costs it has faced during the pandemic. Its main extra costs were additional staffing; procurement of additional PPE, cleaning and decontamination supplies; ICT; and changes and adaptations to premises to enable social distancing. It fully understands the effect this will have on its previously agreed budget and anticipated savings. It has made some consequential savings during this period from reduced fuel, travel and training costs. It has used these savings to partially mitigate the financial risks and income losses it has identified.

60. At the time of our inspection, the service had received £1.6m of extra government funding to support its response. By 30 June 2020, it had spent approximately £644,000 of this money on the above areas of additional cost, and a further £192,000 on covering income lost due to COVID-19 during this period. It has shown how it used the grant funding efficiently, and that it mitigated against the financial risks that arose during this period.

61. The service didn't use any of its reserves to meet the extra costs that arose during this period. And it doesn't anticipate needing to do so in this financial year. This didn't affect its ability to maintain the smooth running of its service during this period. When used, overtime was managed appropriately through the central staffing team. The service made sure that its staff who worked overtime had enough rest between shifts.

Ways of working

62. The service changed the way in which it operates during the pandemic. For example, it locked down the control room early to protect staff who worked there. It required many other staff to work from home. Initially, on-call firefighters did their training online from home instead of attending in person. Incident command assessments and other training also took place virtually. The service held virtual staff briefings for staff who worked remotely; these were also broadcast directly to fire stations. The service did telephone risk assessments to determine which safe and well visits and fire safety audits it should carry out face to face. The service also introduced desktop appraisals for fire safety audits, and virtual activities for young people.

63. The service already had the necessary IT to support remote working where appropriate. Where new IT was needed, it made sure that procurement processes achieved good value for money. The service had already made remote working possible, so it was just a case of extending this practice. It also quickly distributed an existing stock of hardware/equipment to staff, to aid their homeworking. Hampshire FRS accelerated access to software for Isle of Wight FRS staff so that they could join corporate and team briefings, and access relevant information. It did this ahead of the services' planned combination, which is due to take place in April 2021.

64. The service could quickly implement changes to how it operates. This allowed its staff to work remotely and efficiently during the pandemic. The service is reviewing how to adapt its new working arrangements to make sure it has the right provisions in place to support a modern workforce.

65. Contracts for on-call firefighters were already sufficiently flexible. Firefighters can make themselves available to do casual wholetime shifts. They can also take up fixed-term wholetime appointments to offer additional fire cover to the public.

66. The senior leaders have had positive feedback from staff on how they were engaged with during the pandemic. As a result, the service plans to adopt these changes into its usual procedures and consider how they can be developed further to help promote a sustainable change to its working culture.

67. The service has made good use of the resources and guidance available from the NFCC to support its workforce planning, and help with its work under the tripartite agreement.

Staffing

68. The service had enough resources available to respond to the level of demand during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to reallocate resources where necessary to support the work of its partner organisations.

69. Arrangements put in place to monitor staff performance across the service were effective. This meant the service could be sure its staff were making the best contribution that they reasonably could during this period. Extra capacity was identified and reassigned to support other areas of the service and other organisations.

70. As well as performing their statutory functions, wholetime firefighters volunteered for extra activities, including those under the tripartite agreement. This approach was taken because the service felt this was the best way to ensure it had the resources it needed to meet its foreseeable risk. The on-call workforce also took on extra responsibilities to cover some of the roles that were agreed as part of the tripartite agreement. They also covered the shifts of wholetime staff who were absent due to sickness or because they were doing other work.

71. Non-operational staff gave support in the control room. They were also part of the various LRF working groups, played an important role in the central staffing team, and were trained to do administration for the temporary mortuary.

Governance of the service's response

72. Each fire and rescue service is overseen by a fire and rescue authority. There are several different governance arrangements in place across England, and the size of the authority varies between services. Each authority ultimately has the same function: to set the service's priorities and budget and make sure that the budget is spent wisely.

73. Members of Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority and the Isle of Wight Council were in discussions with the chief fire officer and the service on the service's ability to discharge its statutory functions during the pandemic.

74. During the pandemic, Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority and Isle of Wight Council maintained some oversight of the service. The two authorities were kept informed of decisions the service made. They reduced their oversight because they recognised the critical nature of this incident, and the need for the chief fire officer to be able to quickly adapt the service's response to effectively support its staff and communities. The authorities stayed in regular communication with the chief fire officer and received the service's written briefings. The work of the shadow joint fire and rescue authority continued to prepare for the combination of the two services in April 2021.

75. Members of the two authorities and the service maintained a constructive relationship. They put arrangements in place to give members relevant and regular information about how the service responded to the pandemic. They made use of technology and held meetings virtually.

Looking to the future

76. During the pandemic, services were able to adapt quickly to new ways of working. This meant they could respond to emergencies and take on a greater role in the community by supporting other blue light services and partner agencies. It is now essential that services use their experiences during COVID-19 as a platform for lasting reform and modernisation.

77. The service has further extended its collaboration with the police and the ambulance service. It is looking at ways in which its workforce can support these organisations more permanently, especially during periods of high demand. The use of virtual technology improved communication and ways of working during the pandemic; so did the early access that Hampshire FRS gave to staff on the Isle of Wight. The service is considering how virtual platforms and remote working can help it become more effective and efficient. It has extended the use of an online learning app to capture learning related to COVID-19 and has kept a 'lesson learned' log. It wishes to continue or develop several new ways of working to give longer lasting change. These include:

- (a) doing telephone risk assessments to supplement safe and well visits, particularly in harder to reach areas;
- (b) setting up additional referral pathways for people who are most vulnerable from fire;
- (c) providing digital activities for children and young people, as well as schools' engagement and seasonal educational video messages;
- (d) using digital platforms to share learning or good practice;
- (e) having fire safety inspection staff attend commercial building fires as specialist advisers;
- (f) keeping a centralised approach to managing and/or prioritising external partner requests for people and/or equipment;

- (g) fully developing the desktop fire safety assessment process;
- (h) maintaining increased testing of contingency plans with partners in the control room consortium;
- (i) maintaining training and use of support staff to give extra resilience in response to major incidents;
- (j) using on-call firefighters for more activities;
- (k) continuing and developing further virtual communication, meetings, training, development and assessment;
- (l) continuing remote working;
- (m) developing a supplier business continuity plan to mitigate supply chain disruptions; and
- (n) further exploring and developing degradation planning, including the relocation of two Hampshire fire engines to the Isle of Wight.

78. Good practice and what worked was shared with other services and/or through the NFCC and with other local partners. This includes work in relation to the service's degradation planning approach, clinical governance advice (ways of working and PPE guidance), safe and well and co-responding risk assessments, use of support staff in control, use of back-up radio networks for the senior team, and health, wellbeing, personal resilience, home working and bereavement support and guidance for staff. The service shared the FRS community safety, safe and well and co-responding risk assessment work with the NFCC to help in developing national guidance. The FRS also devised the 'PPE on – Bluetooth off' arrangement. This involves emergency workers turning off the Bluetooth contact tracing on their mobile phones when they put on their PPE and are knowingly going to be in regular contact with sufferers of COVID-19, to prevent them from being alerted unnecessarily. This is now national practice across all blue light services.

79. The service also continues to learn from others. For example, it has been assessing how services in the north of England have coped with local lockdowns, and with the impact of test and trace arrangements.

Next steps

80. This letter will be published on our website. We propose restarting our second round of effectiveness and efficiency fire and rescue inspections in spring 2021, when we will follow up on our findings.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MP' followed by a stylized flourish and a diagonal line.

Matt Parr CB
Her Majesty's Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services
Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary