

By email

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

24 June 2021

Dear Neil,

**HAMPSHIRE AND ISLE OF WIGHT FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE PROGRESS AGAINST
CAUSE OF CONCERN**

We have considered the documentary evidence you provided in relation to the progress being made on the cause of concern we gave to both Hampshire and Isle of Wight fire and rescue services in our first round of inspections (before the services combined on 1 April 2021). This letter summarises our findings.

Background

2. We first inspected Hampshire and Isle of Wight fire and rescue services in 2018. For both services, we identified as a cause of concern that they didn't do enough to be an inclusive employer. We found signs of low morale in the workforce, and staff had little confidence that they would be treated fairly or that senior leaders had their best interests at heart. The recommendations we gave each service were broadly similar. They were that, by 30 June 2019, the service should:

- (a) put in place [Isle of Wight]/embed [Hampshire] a programme to ensure that inclusion, fairness, equalities and professional development are priorities for the service;
- (b) ensure that recruitment activities are open and accessible to all;
- (c) treat employees according to their needs so they feel valued;
- (d) ensure that each person's potential can be developed so that the best can reach the top [Isle of Wight]/so they can perform to their very best [Hampshire];
- (e) ensure that the chief officer team leads the programme, actively promoting the values of the organisation; and
- (f) ensure that everyone knows how they contribute to the values.

3. In 2019, a single action plan was submitted by the fire and rescue services to HMICFRS for how these recommendations would be completed. There was regular monitoring of progress against the action plan by the services, Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority and Isle of Wight Council. In July 2020, the plan was formally reported to and closed by Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority and Isle of Wight Council. It was then forwarded to HMICFRS in December 2020, along with supporting documents that set out how these causes of concern are being addressed. While the two services didn't formally combine until April 2021, they had been collaborating for many years: they had long shared a senior team, and their strategies and policies were being increasingly aligned in preparation for the combination. (We will hereafter refer to 'the service', meaning both fire and rescue services before the combination and the single service afterwards.)

4. We have reviewed the documents submitted, alongside other recent inspection evidence from our COVID-19 inspection in October 2020. This evidence review was carried out during January and February 2021. It was conducted remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

Progress against the action plan

5. The service created an action plan in 2019 to address our cause of concern, and periodically reported on progress to Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority and Isle of Wight Council. The service is of the view that significant improvements have been made, and that the plan is now closed, although it is continuing to make further improvements.

6. Our initial assessment is that the review of the action plan, the outcome of the COVID-19 inspection, and the introduction of new policies and procedures all indicate that good progress is being made by the service against the cause of concern. Points of note include:

(a) The service has approved a 'people and organisational development framework', with 'our people' being one of five priority areas in the latest five-year safety plan.

(b) The new leadership framework includes mandatory training in equality, diversity and inclusion for all employees.

(c) The service's new values framework was created with staff and promoted by the chief fire officer and executive leadership team, and is now in place. It is central to the new safety plan and is part of the new performance review process, which was introduced in April 2020. A working group is in place to ensure these values are understood by everyone. The service has included them in recruitment, promotion and other processes.

(d) Our COVID-19 inspection covered many of the issues raised in the cause of concern. It demonstrated good progress.

(e) Our staff survey and representative bodies survey – completed as part of our COVID-19 inspection – reported positive improvements in the way staff feel, how they are treated, and their confidence to challenge without fear of negative consequences. There was also good awareness

of the new values, and recognition of the increased visibility of, and improved communications from, the chief fire officer and wider leadership.

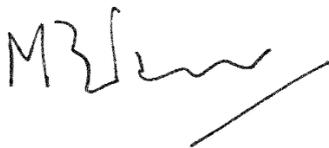
(f) However, due to the nature of our COVID-19 inspection, we haven't yet had the opportunity to meet with your workforce to consider the impact of your work.

Conclusion

7. We are encouraged by the work that is in progress to improve the values and culture of the service, and to become a more inclusive employer. We welcome the new frameworks, policies and associated improvements made to date, and recognise the fresh beginning a new service offers. It is pleasing to see that the results of the recent surveys recognise the improvements made. However, while there has been good progress, it will take time for these improvements and the transition to the new service to become established.

8. We will therefore inspect this cause of concern as part of your round 2 scheduled inspection in 2022. We will continue to monitor progress through updates from the service and data returns. When we next inspect the service, we will further assess progress against these recommendations with a view to closing them.

Yours sincerely,

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

Matt Parr

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary

Her Majesty's Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services