

Jonathon Pryce
Chief Fire Officer
Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service

14 December 2021

Dear Jon,

HEREFORD & WORCESTER FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS – CAUSE OF CONCERN

We inspected Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service in April and May 2021. During the inspection we identified an area of concern. We gave you the following cause of concern and recommendation:

Prevention activity is not a sufficiently high priority for the service and it is not adequately identifying those most at risk from fire.

By 31 August 2021, the service should have plans in place for:

- an effective system to define the levels of risk in the community;
- the development and delivery of a prevention strategy that prioritises the people most at risk of fire and ensures that work to reduce risk is proportionate; and
- the review of systems and processes for dealing with referrals from partner agencies. This is to make sure they are managed effectively, and the backlog of safe and well visits is reduced and resourced in accordance with risk.

2. You kindly submitted an action plan to us on 25 August 2021 setting out how you would address the area of concern and the recommendations.

3. We received further updates on the action plan on 23 September and 18 October 2021 to review your progress. We explained that while we didn't expect to see all the remedial work completed, we were looking for evidence of progress. Thank you for providing the further updates.

Governance

4. The service has shown a strong commitment to the action plan. You have put in place appropriate governance structures to oversee the plan's completion. This includes the Prevention Improvement Panel (PIP); which is attended by stakeholders from a cross section of the organisation. Members of the panel are tasked with developing and implementing the action plan. This group is led by the assistant director of prevention and reports to the deputy chief fire officer.

5. Progress against the action plan is monitored by the service's senior management board at fortnightly meetings. The service updated fire authority members at the audit and standards committee on 30 September 2021. The service intends to provide further quarterly updates on progress against the action plan at future meetings of the fire authority. The service has added the cause of concern to its strategic risk register so that actions to address the cause of concern are regularly reviewed.

Action plan

6. The service has developed an action plan covering the cause of concern identified in our letter to the service of 29 June 2021. The action plan has three main objectives aligned to our recommendations, which are further broken down into a series of tasks with anticipated completion dates and action owners.

7. We note, however, that some of the early dates on the action plan haven't been achieved. This includes the review of data sources and asking for quotes for geographic modelling software. The service should make sure that the sequence of actions is logical and achievable.

8. We are pleased to see the service is considering how to adopt approved standards from the National Fire Chiefs Council and the Fire Standards Board while developing its action plan.

Outcomes to date

9. The service has in place appropriate governance structures and some resources to carry out the commitments in the action plan. Some of the actions have already been completed.

10. On 17 October 2021 the service had cleared the outstanding backlog of prevention visits and is using prevention technicians on fixed-term contracts to support this work. The service will also fully review resources.

11. We would like to see continued progress against the action plan outcomes. The service needs to make sure that it supports the implementation of these outcomes and communicates them effectively across the service and to the public.

12. We will continue to monitor progress against the action plan to determine if the service provided to the public of Herefordshire and Worcestershire has improved. This may include a revisit to the service in spring 2022.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Wendy Williams". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Wendy Williams

HM Inspector of Constabulary

HM Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services