

**Matt Parr CB**

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

Andy Roe  
Commissioner  
London Fire Brigade

Baroness Fiona Twycross  
Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience

24 February 2023

Dear Andy,

## London Fire Brigade revisit

Between November 2021 and January 2022, we inspected London Fire Brigade. During that inspection, we identified two causes of concern that we shared with you. You submitted an action plan setting out how you would address the areas of concern and the recommendations.

In January 2023, we carried out a revisit to review progress against the following recommendations for the [cause of concern](#) related to prevention:

The brigade doesn't adequately prioritise [home fire safety visits \(HFSVs\)](#) on the basis of risk. It doesn't have a system in place that allows for the consistent assessment of risk levels among those people it has already identified as being at greatest risk from fire.

By 31 May 2022, the brigade should develop an action plan to:

- develop a prevention strategy that clearly details how it will implement its prevention activity;
- develop an effective system that assesses levels of risk among those people it has already identified as being at greatest risk from fire;
- make sure it prioritises HFSVs for those people it has identified as being at greatest risk from fire; and
- develop a plan that addresses the HFSV backlog in a way that is both timely and prioritised on the basis of risk.

During our revisit we reviewed documents and data. We interviewed staff responsible for implementing the action plan, including you as commissioner. We also interviewed prevention staff and firefighters based at stations. On 3 February 2023, we gave you our initial findings. This letter provides an update on our findings.

## **Governance**

We were pleased to find a HFSV governance board in place. A HFSV task force group regularly reports to this board to update on progress of the action plan. Strategic leaders and the deputy mayor for fire and resilience oversee prevention work through quarterly business meetings. We consider these arrangements to be sufficient.

## **Action plan**

There is a clear action plan that details actions and those responsible for them, as well as progress against each cause of concern recommendation. Progress is regularly reported, including regular updates from the brigade's service liaison officer to HMICFRS.

## **Progress against the cause of concern**

### **Develop a prevention strategy that clearly details how [the brigade] will implement its prevention activity**

We found the brigade had made good progress in developing its prevention strategy. You provided us with a draft strategy and delivery plan for 2023–26 that clearly defines the scope of the brigade's prevention work in areas such as arson and road and water safety. You also include the brigade's approach towards prioritising HFSVs according to individual risk.

You told us the first detailed draft strategy would be completed by June/July 2023 after it passes through governance processes. We look forward to seeing it in full once it is completed.

### **Develop an effective system that assesses levels of risk among those people it has already identified as being at greatest risk from fire**

We found significant progress had been made on a new system to assess risk and determine which people should be prioritised for a HFSV.

Clear criteria has been developed to identify the risk of individuals as very-high, high, medium or low risk, which reflects characteristics of the National Fire Chiefs Council's person-centred fire risk assessment.

We were pleased to find good use of data to inform the brigade's work on assessing individual risk. This included the use of data on fatal fires and accidental dwelling fires to identify common risk characteristics.

The HFSV risk assessment process has been piloted by the south west prevention team and evaluated, and we were encouraged to see learning acted upon. This includes the development of a process to automate risk calculation.

During the pilot, staff found the triage of HFSV referrals using the process took longer to complete. The brigade needs to ensure that it has sufficient capacity across its prevention teams to assess HFSV referrals in a timely manner.

You told us all four prevention teams would further test the risk assessment process in February 2023 prior to its implementation across the brigade in March 2023.

We were encouraged that the brigade was incorporating changes to the HFSV process into the specification for the IT system bringing together all risk information in one place, which is due to be introduced in 2025. Most staff we spoke to had confidence in the interim IT measures put in place.

We found the changes to HFSV processes were supported by a clear and comprehensive communication plan. This includes how the new HFSV system will be explained to staff, partner organisations (such as local councils) and the public.

The brigade has set a target that by July 2023, 90 percent of staff will know and understand the approach to HFSVs. Most staff we spoke to had a good awareness of the changes.

### **Make sure [the brigade] prioritises HFSVs for those people it has identified as being at greatest risk from fire**

We were pleased the brigade had developed plans to take out-of-hours HFSV referrals through [fire control](#). You told us control operators would be trained to complete HFSV risk assessments and ensure the response is based on the level of risk.

We were also pleased to see the brigade had developed clear HFSV response timescales prioritised by the level of risk:

- very-high risk: HFSV response within four hours;
- high risk: HFSV response within seven days; and
- medium risk: HFSV response within one month.

We were encouraged that most station and control staff we spoke to felt they had capacity to meet these timeframes.

You told us that people categorised as low risk didn't receive a visit but were directed to the home fire safety assessment on the brigade's website. People without internet access receive a telephone assessment within three months.

You acknowledged during our revisit that the brigade needed to assure itself that people were completing the online home fire safety assessment. You told us that different options were being looked at to address this issue.

We found the brigade had developed a clear set of performance indicators to support its approach to HFSVs, including measuring how often stations meet the new HFSV response times.

During our revisit, you acknowledged that further work was needed to develop a quality assurance process to support the new HFSV system. You told us that this wouldn't be in place for the HFSV system that will be introduced in March 2023. Until this is developed, quality assurance will continue at station level, although some staff told us that this approach lacked consistency.

We found HFSVs were being recorded on paper. The brigade has acknowledged that this is inefficient and needs to be improved.

HFSV training has yet to be provided to operational crews. Most firefighters we spoke to couldn't recall having HFSV training. You told us that the crews wouldn't receive it until the end of 2023 due to the training design process. The brigade should take action to assure itself that crews have the required skills to carry out HFSVs to a good standard.

### **Develop a plan that addresses the HFSV backlog in a way that is both timely and prioritised on the basis of risk**

The brigade has undertaken significant work to address the backlog of outstanding HFSVs identified in our initial inspection. We were pleased to find that the backlog resulting from the pandemic was clear. We found only two HFSVs classed as overdue for allocation to a station for completion.

During our revisit, we sampled HFSV files across all four area prevention teams that were waiting to be allocated to a station for completion. Most reasons recorded for HFSVs not being allocated were justified.

We also sampled HFSV files allocated to stations but showing as not completed. We were disappointed to find some HFSVs were significantly overdue. These files have been passed to brigade leaders to be addressed. Some senior leaders we spoke to acknowledged that sometimes visits were completed, but this wasn't always recorded. We were told that the new risk-based HFSV response times and performance monitoring would prevent visits becoming significantly overdue. We look forward to seeing how effective this will be.

## Conclusion

The inspection team was pleased to see that the brigade had worked hard to make improvements to address the cause of concern and our recommendations.

We were encouraged to find the brigade had made good progress in developing a prevention strategy. It has made significant progress in developing a system to assess individual risk and prioritise HFSV response.

We recognise the hard work the brigade has done to clear the backlog of HFSVs that we identified during our initial inspection.

However, the brigade needs assure itself that people identified as low risk complete its online home fire safety assessment and that staff have the skills they need to complete HFSVs to a good standard. We also found inefficient paper records of HFSVs. The significantly overdue HFSVs allocated to stations but not recorded as completed need to be addressed.

At the time of our revisit, the system to assess individual risk and prioritise HFSVs had yet to be implemented across the brigade. The prevention strategy is due to be in place in June/July 2023. So while we are pleased with the progress made, the cause of concern will remain in place until changes to the implementation of HFSVs are fully operational across the brigade.

We will revisit in July/August 2023, when we look forward to seeing how the brigade has improved the service to the public. Following this visit, I hope to be in a position to discharge this cause of concern.

This letter will be published on our website.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Parr', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**Matt Parr CB**

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