



Foreword

This is my first report to the Secretary of State under section 28B of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. It contains my assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of fire and rescue services in England, based on the inspections we carried out between June 2018 and August 2019.

Fire and rescue services haven't been formally inspected for more than a decade. The National Audit Office published a report on fire and rescue services in 2015, but its focus was solely on their financial sustainability. So this is a landmark report: our first assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of the fire and rescue sector that draws upon detailed inspections of all 45 services in England.

I will publish an annual report on the state of the fire and rescue sector from now on. I report separately every summer on the effectiveness and efficiency of police forces in England and Wales.

This report's structure and purpose

Part 1 contains my assessment of the state of fire and rescue services in England. In making my assessment, I have drawn on the inspections we have carried out since June 2018, as well as the findings and reports of other organisations, and other information and analysis available to me. This part also contains four recommendations which I have made to the sector.

Part 2 gives an overview of the gradings and the findings from our first round of inspections, which we carried out between June 2018 and August 2019.

Part 3 sets out the full list of our fire and rescue reports and other inspection publications for the period covered by this report.

The results of our individual inspections enable an assessment of the performance of individual services. I hope that institutions that are responsible for holding fire and rescue services to account, as well as the public, will draw on the overall conclusions in this report just as much as they draw on the specific conclusions we have reached for each service.



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Inspection is a continuous process of design, monitoring and reporting.

Our approach to inspecting fire and rescue services

The expansion of our remit to inspect fire and rescue services was a proud moment for the inspectorate and a reflection of the quality of our inspections to date. I congratulate our staff, who have designed and implemented a robust inspection methodology with which we have completed 45 high-quality fire and rescue inspections. I have also been greatly encouraged by the constructive way in which chief fire officers and their teams, as well as fire and rescue authorities, have broadly welcomed the scrutiny we are bringing to their operations.

I would like, too, to recognise the support we have received from the fire and rescue sector in general. At the beginning, we made three commitments. The first is to work closely with the sector to develop our ways of working. We have received advice and challenge throughout, which have strengthened our approach, and we continue to seek this input as we refine our processes. The second is to design a methodology that can promote improvement. We identify good practice as well as areas where services need to improve. The third is to inspect on a no-surprises basis. Services will know when



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we will inspect them, as well as the judgment criteria against which they will be assessed. Our approach was also subject to public consultation before we started inspecting services.

Inspection is a continuous process of design, monitoring and reporting. Now that we have carried out one full inspection of every service, we will monitor what improvements are taking place and how services are responding to our recommendations and areas of concern. From 2020, we will inspect every service for a second time.

Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs)

Rather than appoint a single inspector with responsibility for independently assessing the performance of fire and rescue services, this work has been shared among the organisation's existing HMIs: Zoë Billingham, Phil Gormley, Matt Parr, Dru Sharpling and Wendy Williams. I am grateful to them all for how they have responded to this increase in their workloads, especially HMI Billingham as the senior lead for fire and rescue inspections.

Contributions to my assessment

When compiling this assessment, I wrote to chief fire officers and other interested parties across the fire and rescue sector, inviting them to contribute their views on the state of fire and rescue in England. I would like to place on record my warmest thanks to all those who responded for their very thoughtful and insightful contributions. They have been of great help in producing this report.

Finally, I would like to thank our staff, who have put so much hard work into planning, organising and carrying out this first set of inspections. They have taken on this entirely new area of work with the utmost dedication and professionalism. We have benefitted from many joining us on secondment from the fire and rescue sector, bringing considerable expertise and experience. I am very grateful to everyone at HMICFRS for all they do.

Sir Thomas P Winsor

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services