

# **State of Fire and Rescue – The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2020**

**Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire  
and Rescue Services**

**Presented to Parliament pursuant to section 28B of the  
Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004**

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# Foreword

This is my second annual report to the Secretary of State under section 28B of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. It contains my assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of fire and rescue services in England since my last report, published in January 2020. I report separately every year on the efficiency and effectiveness of police forces in England and Wales.

## Coming to terms with COVID-19

The pandemic has affected everyone's way of life and how public and private services carry out their work. None of us could have imagined the many ways it has changed what we do and how we do it. Indeed, we are still learning about the longer-term effects of this pandemic on our communities.

Inspections of fire and rescue services are important, but they are usually not urgent. In March 2020, the HMICFRS Board made a series of decisions that included how best to provide support to fire and rescue services.

All inspections create administrative work for fire and rescue services. We always do everything we reasonably can to minimise this, but it can't be eliminated. Because of the extraordinary demands on services created by the pandemic, we decided to

suspend indefinitely all inspection work needing appreciable input.

## **Supporting services by redeploying staff**

Effective inspections require teams with operational experience, so our workforce always includes experienced fire and rescue staff. They usually join us on temporary secondment from their home services.

To support services during the pandemic, we offered to agree any requests for seconded staff to return temporarily. As we anticipated, many requests followed. Most of our seconded fire staff returned to their home services, where their skills and experience were in particularly high demand. What staff were asked to do differed between services, but some did high-risk pandemic work including moving the deceased and helping deliver personal protective equipment (PPE) to healthcare staff. We also agreed requests from the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC).

We took an identical approach with our police secondees, allowing them to return to their home forces and the National Police Coordination Centre.

We made a similar decision to support the temporary redeployment of civil servants who work at HMICFRS. Many were redeployed to other parts of the Civil Service to support vital work managing the emergency response.

In total, almost a quarter of our staff were redeployed at some stage during the pandemic. I am immensely proud of the contribution made by each of them. In these extremely difficult and unusual circumstances, our staff have continued to work hard, support each other and display our values in everything they do.

## **Completing our first virtual inspections**

Like every other organisation, we have had to adapt our work to meet mandatory restrictions and reduce transmission of the virus. We closed our three offices in March 2020. Since then, our staff have mainly worked at home. For the first time in our long history, we completed our first virtual inspections.

In these testing and difficult circumstances, I thank all our staff for their positive response to this change. We need to learn from our experiences to improve what we do, and so we are evaluating the benefits and consequences of this new approach.

## **Senior staffing changes**

Responsibility for inspecting fire and rescue services and police forces is shared among Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs). Over the past year, two have left HMICFRS: Dru Sharpling and Phil Gormley. I thank both for their invaluable efforts while at the inspectorate and wish them both well in their new endeavours. Ms Sharpling will continue in her role as a panel

member of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. Mr Gormley becomes the new chief executive of East Anglia Children's Hospices, a charity that I know is very close to his heart.

HMI Sharpling will not be replaced. I am grateful to HMI Matt Parr for agreeing to take responsibility for her three fire and rescue services.

HMI Gormley's successor is Andrew Cooke, formerly chief constable of Merseyside. I extend to him the warmest welcome as he assumes his responsibilities for fire and rescue services and police forces in the Northern Region, as well as his national duties.

In the eight months between HMI Gormley's departure and HMI Cooke's arrival, responsibility for northern fire and rescue services and police forces was shared between HMIs Zoë Billingham, Matt Parr and Wendy Williams. I am very grateful to them all for agreeing to increase their workloads in that prolonged period.

Since my last report, our chief operating officer has also changed. In June 2020, Simon Peachey left the Civil Service to join the private sector. I thank him for his contribution. His successor, Mark Byers, joined us in November 2020.

## **The report's structure and purpose**

Suspending our inspections has affected our work and limits what I can say in this assessment.

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 this year. These include the Home Secretary's commissions to assess how fire and rescue services are responding to the pandemic, and how the London Fire Brigade is responding to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry's Phase 1 recommendations. They also include our work to consider how services are responding to the causes of concern we gave in Round 1 of our fire and rescue service inspections.

I have also used the findings and reports of other organisations, and other information and analysis available to me.

Part 2 is an overview of the findings from the inspection activity we completed during 2020.

Part 3 sets out the full list of our fire and rescue publications in the period covered by this report.

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

## **Our approach to inspecting fire and rescue services**

In February 2020, following a public consultation, the Home Secretary approved our fire and rescue inspection programme for the second round of our service inspections. The programme was designed to replicate Round 1 of our inspections as much as possible. We did this to assess the improvements services are making, covering effectiveness, efficiency and people.

With support from our expert reference and technical advisory groups, we made some improvements to our inspection methodology. In particular, we made improvements to how we look at risk, protection, and equality and diversity. We have just restarted this inspection, inspecting and grading every service during the next 18 months.

I continue to be grateful for the support, challenge and advice provided to us from the fire sector. When we took on responsibility for fire inspection in 2017, we made a promise to work with the sector to design and develop our approach, something we continue to do.

I also put on record my thanks to several people. Thanks to Roy Wilsher, who shortly steps down as chair of the NFCC. Roy has been a great support to the inspectorate and provided us with excellent insight, advice and challenge throughout the design and implementation of our inspection work. As the Council's

first chair, he can look back with great pride at his achievements in building the NFCC and ensuring its place at the centre of the sector. I wish him well and look forward to working with his successor, Mark Hardingham.

I also thank HMI Zoë Billingham for her continued leadership of our fire and rescue inspection activity and her engagement with the fire sector.

Finally, I thank our staff, who continue to work hard in testing circumstances to promote improvements in fire and rescue services. We have had a large turnover of staff over the past year as secondments have come to an end and new ones begin. Each and every member of staff works with the utmost dedication and professionalism. I remain very grateful to everyone at HMICFRS for all they do.

**Sir Thomas P Winsor**

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services

# Part 1: Overview

This year's report begins with my assessment of the state of the fire and rescue sector in England in the past year, a year dominated by the pandemic.

## **National reform remains necessary and needs to accelerate**

In my last assessment, I concluded that the fire and rescue sector had many areas of strength and good practice, but significant reform was needed. It still is.

I made several national recommendations. Later in this assessment, I discuss the progress that has been made to implement these recommendations. Services have risen to the challenge of the pandemic and continue to make important changes. But I hoped more progress would have been made to remedy the national problems. I recognise the significant effect the pandemic has had on the sector and this work.

## **There remains a case for reform**

Since my last report, the sector continues to respond to a broad range of emergencies with commendable skill and professionalism. Services remain committed to protecting local communities, and staff are willing to work with others to achieve this.

But it is a sector that needs local and national reform, with barriers impeding the efficiency and effectiveness of services. We have just inspected how every service is responding to the pandemic. While there is much services can be proud of, these barriers remain.

There is also considerable financial disparity between services. Some are well funded while others struggle to afford the number of staff they need. We found flaws in how services ensure that the people responsible comply with fire safety regulations.

## **Some progress is being made**

This is not a sector that is standing still. It has been over three and a half years since the terrible tragedy at Grenfell Tower, and the sector is still learning and taking steps to ensure that nothing like this can ever happen again.

I am sure our first reports made difficult reading for some, so it is encouraging to see services are responding constructively to our findings.

At the time of writing, the Home Office is finalising a further reform programme, which has the potential to improve services. This is necessary. I look forward to seeing the detail and I hope progress is swift.

The Home Office is also considering changes to fire governance in England through its review of police and crime commissioners.

Work continues to implement the Government's existing reform programme. Measures in the Fire Safety Bill and draft Building Safety Bill should improve services' protection work, although more work is needed to determine how they will be implemented. The Government has given services significant long-term additional funding. This includes investing in a programme to assess or audit every high-rise residential building in England by December 2021, and the NFCC's work to manage all high-rise residential buildings with aluminium composite material cladding to ensure fire safety. The NFCC is leading central programmes of work covering areas including leadership, people, digital, data and risk. This work should radically improve what the sector does and how it works.

The reaction to my first assessment was broadly positive, with many responding constructively to my conclusions. Independent, expert and objective inspection in the public interest, under statutory authority and according to non-political criteria, is essential for public confidence in the efficiency and effectiveness of the fire and rescue sector.

Safety-critical, essential public services benefit from the scrutiny of inspection and reporting. Elected representatives who carry the ultimate responsibility for public safety have a great need for this scrutiny. Evidence-based, thorough analysis and assessment of performance, arrived at in fair

processes, is the right of every public service. It is part of the right to be treated fairly and to have rational, proportionate and procedurally sound decisions made. These are our standards and our commitment.

## **Our national recommendations need to get done faster**

So far, we have made six national recommendations. These cover major structural aspects:

- the Home Office should precisely determine the role of fire and rescue services, to remove any ambiguity;
- the sector should remove unjustifiable variation, including in how they define risk;
- the sector should review and reform how effectively pay and conditions are determined;
- the Home Office should invest chief fire officers with operational independence, whether through primary legislation or in some other manner;
- there should be a code of ethics; and
- the Home Office should ensure that the sector has sufficient capacity and capability to bring about change.

In July 2020, I convened a meeting with named bodies (the Home Office, the NFCC, the Local Government Association and National Employers) to consider progress, aware that the pandemic had affected this work. While encouraging progress has been made

in relation to some of these recommendations, in others, work is still in its infancy, or hasn't begun.

I proposed new dates for these recommendations. In some cases, I have aligned these dates with the work that I know is underway. In others, I have considered work that will affect completion, such as the Home Office's police and crime commissioner review and forthcoming fire reform programme.

I received comprehensive responses from each named body. These responses have allowed me to establish new completion dates for some of the recommendations. While Home Office ministers recognise the importance and persuasiveness of our recommendations, an implementation plan remains outstanding. I hope an announcement is imminent. I know the Home Office and the wider fire sector have discussed what should be done.

The new dates are:

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Original date</b>	<b>Proposed new date</b>
1: As soon as is practicable the Home Office, National Fire Chiefs Council and Local Government Association, in consultation with the Fire Standards Board and Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, should	Dec 2020	Dec 2021

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Original date</b>	<b>Proposed new date</b>
<p>establish a programme of work that will result in consistency in the four priority areas (1. identifying and determining risk as part of the IRMP process; 2. identifying and measuring emergency response standards and approaches; 3. defining what are high-risk premises for the purposes of fire protection; and 4. setting an expectation for how frequently high-risk premises, and parts of those premises, should be audited for compliance with fire safety legislation).</p> <p>There should be completion or significant progress in the four priority areas specified above, towards a common set of definitions and standards for fire and rescue services to adopt and apply as soon as reasonably practicable, for each of the four priority areas.</p>		

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Original date</b>	<b>Proposed new date</b>
2: As part of the next Spending Review, the Home Office in consultation with the Fire and Rescue Sector should address the deficit in the fire sector's national capacity and capability to support change.	Next spending review	Complete
3: The Home Office, in consultation with the fire and rescue sector, should review and with precision determine the roles of: (a) fire and rescue services; and (b) those who work in them.	Jun 2020	Awaiting fire reform implementation plan from Home Office
4: The Home Office, the Local Government Association, the National Fire Chiefs Council and trade unions should consider whether the current pay negotiation machinery requires fundamental reform. If so, this should include the need for an independent pay review body and the future of the 'Grey Book'.	Jun 2020	Jun 2021

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Original date</b>	<b>Proposed new date</b>
<p>5: The Home Office should consider the case for legislating to give chief fire officers operational independence. In the meantime, it should issue clear guidance, possibly through an amendment to the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, on the demarcation between those responsible for governance and operational decision making by the chief fire officer.</p>	<p>Sep 2020</p>	<p>Awaiting fire reform implementation plan from Home Office</p>
<p>6: The National Fire Chiefs Council, with the Local Government Association, should produce a code of ethics for fire and rescue services. The code should be adopted by every service in England and considered as part of each employee's progression and annual performance appraisal.</p>	<p>Dec 2020</p>	<p>Mar 2021</p>

Each of these recommendations remains live and relevant. Local reform is underway, but the sector needs clear national direction and to start again in

many areas. In some cases, services continue to work with different and inconsistent governance arrangements. They operate in varying ways, some with insufficient money and people, and face different barriers preventing reform. The sector needs fundamental reform.

Services need clarity on what they are required to do. I know this is being considered by the Home Office. But there needs to be greater clarity on activities such as co-responding (supporting the ambulance service), responding to floods, responding to terrorist attacks and wider public safety. This clarity cannot come soon enough. When fire and rescue staff have the appropriate training and skills, there should be no question that they support life-saving activities.

The National Joint Council (NJC) (the mechanism for agreeing pay and workforce terms and conditions) is failing firefighters and the public, and is in urgent need of reform.

Consideration also needs to be given as to whether it is right that these arrangements cover the whole of the UK. Fire is a devolved matter. I am unconvinced that a UK-wide body can provide the flexibility needed to protect the best interests of staff and services across the UK. For example, while the Home Office is considering the role of fire services in England, the Scottish Government has already tried – unsuccessfully – to agree with the NJC an enlargement of what firefighters do. This was to include providing more

support to their communities, including the most vulnerable.

The 'Grey Book' (the document that lists firefighters' terms and conditions) has not been updated since 2009. Terms and conditions are rigid, leaving little room for services to adapt quickly and provide firefighters with necessary flexibility. They also inhibit firefighters from providing additional support to their communities in ways they think necessary. Role maps were originally created to list general areas of competence. They are now being used as an exclusive list of what firefighters and control room staff can do.

The basic pay structure, in which firefighters can only move between 'trainee' and 'competent' in most roles, leaves no room to recognise performance. It offers limited opportunities to link pay to progression.

The rationale of NJC decisions on roles, especially those about pay, are opaque and should be open for all to see and understand. In these ways and others, the Grey Book, and the way it is interpreted and applied, is a barrier to change and improvement. A national approach is needed to find a model that provides appropriate terms and conditions. It must also allow for local variation and flexibility.

I know there are some who believe that the current arrangements are effective. But these views are in the minority and, at the very least, these arrangements need to be properly reviewed.

No progress has yet been made by the Home Office towards giving chief fire officers operational independence. Decisions on using resources to meet commitments in integrated risk management plans – as well as during emergencies such as a pandemic – should be for each chief fire officer to make. This would make them fully accountable for the effectiveness of their services' performance against the priorities set by fire and rescue authorities.

The activities associated with each firefighter role are listed in the role maps. Their prescriptive nature isn't helpful. Chief fire officers face resistance to varying degrees when asking their firefighters to undertake other tasks. During the pandemic, chiefs couldn't require firefighters to do something to protect their communities if it wasn't listed in the role maps. This necessitated the tripartite agreement, which I discuss later. This was a source of frustration for the many public-spirited firefighters who wanted to provide support to the communities they serve at a time of great need.

Leaders of emergency services shouldn't face these restrictions on how they use their staff. I recognise that the governance landscape in fire and rescue may change, not least following the forthcoming conclusions of the Home Office's police and crime commissioner review. But this needs to be resolved now rather than wait for several years after any governance changes have – or haven't – been made.

These matters of pay and responsibility need to be resolved.

## **Some national activity is underway**

I have decided not to make any more national recommendations at this point. I believe it is more important for the sector to act sufficiently on the recommendations I have already made, which are about fundamental reform. We expect a further programme of reform to be announced by the Home Office shortly.

I recognise that some work is underway. I acknowledge the work of the NFCC, Local Government Association, National Employers, Government and others to reform the fire sector. But I remain impatient on behalf of the public, who could be better served.

During our first round of inspections, we were concerned by the quality of integrated risk management plans. The quality differed hugely and some lacked sufficient clarity. For example, the average time taken for a fire engine to attend an emergency can be measured differently from service to service, and there is no commonly accepted standard to measure risk.

The sector is responding to these concerns through the NFCC's community risk programme. I look forward to seeing the results of this work.

The Fire Standards Board is publishing a benchmarking framework that services should follow when compiling

their integrated risk management plans. However, while this work will enable services to take a similar approach and provide more clarity and assurance to the public, at the time of writing it hasn't yet been completed.

As our recommendations from Round 1 confirm, it is essential that services have a common understanding of the risks and threats they must mitigate in their areas. They also need a common approach to matching that risk to clear response standards.

In our first inspections, our work in relation to how services treat their staff led to the lowest grades. In response, the NFCC is undertaking a range of work on areas such as recruitment, leadership, equality, diversity and inclusion, flexible working, succession planning, wellbeing, absence management and career progression. As this work develops, the main challenge will be ensuring that services accept its importance and put recommendations into practice. It is also important that progress is monitored to establish what works and where more attention is needed.

In my last assessment, I recommended a national code of ethics to improve the culture in services. I welcome the work to produce this code. Once finalised, service leaders must ensure that it is followed. It needs to be central to every decision, action and policy.

The sector's response to the pandemic has been affected by structural problems already addressed by our national recommendations. National reform needs to be accelerated. But I also recognise the positive

response most services have had to their first inspections. They are making improvements. I have seen how services have acted on the areas for improvement we established in Round 1, and how this meant that they were better able to cope with the pandemic.

The future challenge for the sector will be ensuring that services adopt best practice and apply our recommendations and findings in ways that are sensitive to and match local priorities.

## **Services rose to the challenge of COVID-19**

We have just finished inspecting every service to consider how they responded to the first phase of the pandemic. The main findings are below, with more detail in Part 2. We have published a national report ([\*Responding to the Pandemic\*](#)) with our findings, as well as a short report on what each service did.

Like most other organisations, while a pandemic was on everyone's risk register, none anticipated what actually happened in 2020.

We saw services rise to the challenge, adapting to respond to emergency calls and providing additional support to their communities. In general, the continuity measures put in place worked. Staff absence levels were generally low during the first phase of the pandemic.

## Variation was seen across the country

During our first round of inspections, we found considerable variation across services. This is still the case. Every service had planned for a flu pandemic differently. Some had bespoke plans that anticipated many problems. Others only had generic absence policies, some of which weren't activated because planned-for absence levels had not materialised at the time we inspected.

All the services implemented new ways of working, harnessing technology not previously used by services to enable more remote working. In most services, the pandemic was an opportunity to make more use of digital technology. This should help services address some of the challenges they face in recruiting and retaining a more diverse workforce. For example, more flexible working would allow people to manage caring responsibilities while getting their work done.

We saw services develop and strengthen local, regional and national working relationships. Services played a leading role in Local Resilience Forums and, without exception, were recognised and thanked for the work they did. A number of services led activity.

In line with the NFCC's advice, services were encouraged to reduce what they did in person, and to do more virtual prevention and protection work. They focused on people and premises at the highest risk. Implementation varied across services.

Some services adapted well to this change: they continued to carry out statutory duties, but in new ways. They also continued to support vulnerable people and enforce fire regulations. Others didn't adapt as well. A small number of services stopped either prevention or protection activity altogether to redeploy staff.

Services took decisions early in the pandemic with the best intentions, not knowing what the future held. While some services continued to review their approaches in line with changes in advice, others didn't. Indeed, in a few services it wasn't until months after the initial lockdown was lifted that they adapted their approaches to be consistent with the new restrictions.

The wider economic consequences of the pandemic will affect services' financial positions. Government grants have so far covered additional expenditure, but income is likely to fall in the future. For example, businesses closing will reduce business rates and therefore the funding available to services. This may have a disproportionate adverse effect on some services more than others. The Government will need to pay close attention to ensure that services continue to have the funding they need to meet their anticipated risk.

## Services provided a range of support to their communities

Throughout the pandemic, fire staff worked exceptionally hard to help their communities in different ways.

There was a willingness to help and a can-do attitude from staff. Over a third of the 6,075 respondents to our COVID-19 staff survey, who had the opportunity to volunteer to carry out additional roles, did so. But unfortunately, how this willingness translated into action varied considerably. Every staff group – whether wholetime firefighters, on-call firefighters, prevention and protection teams or non-operational staff – did valuable extra work. I pay particular tribute to all fire staff who did this.

For firefighters, the tripartite agreement – signed by the NFCC, National Employers and the Fire Brigades Union – helped achieve this in part. This national agreement allowed firefighters to undertake additional roles outside their normal responsibilities.

In December 2020, a further agreement was reached, but this time without the NFCC. The agreement was solely between National Employers and the Fire Brigades Union under the NJC. This strengthened the Fire Brigades Union's hold on the sector, and made it more difficult for the NFCC to ensure that operational factors were fully considered in relation to additional pandemic activities.

The agreement was time-limited. Several extensions were agreed, but the agreement ended in January 2021 after negotiations between National Employers and the Fire Brigades Union to extend it broke down due to disagreement over health and safety arrangements. No national agreement was ever reached for fire

staff to support the national vaccination programme. This caused difficulties for fire and rescue services, especially given that the Fire Brigades Union asked its members not to volunteer for new work – including the vaccination programme – until it could be agreed nationally. This demonstrates how delicate and impractical arrangements were during the pandemic. It is encouraging to see that, despite no national agreement, over half the services have since agreed locally to support the vaccination programme, including fire staff administering the vaccine. During a time of great national need, the support these services are providing the National Health Service (NHS) should be applauded.

The tripartite agreement was a pragmatic way to get additional work agreed during the pandemic, considering the significant impediments that the current industrial relations apparatus suffers from. In some services, it got more work done. But in others, it became a hindrance. I question why, in a public health emergency, a contract of this kind was even necessary. The sector had capacity to help, and strong systems in place to protect staff and enable them to take action. This should have been enough.

This agreement became too prescriptive. It laid down tight rules about what firefighters should and shouldn't do. It provided little flexibility. As services faced different demands, additional agreements were insisted upon, each taking considerable time

to negotiate. By December 2020, 15 agreements had been published. Firefighters were able to deliver food to the most vulnerable people, but they couldn't do wellbeing checks on them unless a further agreement was signed.

An agreement was reached for firefighters to drive ambulances under blue lights (with sirens), but the agreement didn't initially cover driving without blue lights. Much to the frustration of some firefighters, the need for further local consultation slowed down the pace of support firefighters were to provide. A request to support the national test and trace scheme wasn't agreed for several months. This was a source of annoyance for everyone involved. It often took a number of weeks between requesting additional work and it starting.

If the necessary health and safety and local arrangements are in place, chief fire officers should be free to decide how they use their workforces. During the pandemic, the approach taken by the Fire Brigades Union (which represents mainly operational staff) differed from other unions, including those representing operational staff such as the Fire Officers Association and the Fire and Rescue Services Association. They took a much more enabling approach, so their members could undertake additional responsibilities. UNISON (which represents non-operational staff, normally working on things such as looking after corporate affairs, and prevention and protection) agreed

a much broader scope to collaborate. Their members did extra work such as delivering food and PPE to vulnerable people and carrying out wellbeing checks.

Some wholetime firefighters did take on extra responsibilities. However, many wanted to do more. Services limited many wholetime firefighters to fire stations to ensure that they were available for emergencies and to reduce the chances of contracting the virus. Demand for emergency response was down and firefighters couldn't do much normal prevention, protection and community engagement work.

While these firefighters could have done more, they were either prevented from doing so by their services or weren't given the right technology.

We recognise that, in the early days of the pandemic, concerns about firefighters going down with COVID-19 meant that ensuring firefighters could still respond to emergencies was the highest priority for services. But as more was known about the virus and restrictions changed, firefighters could have been used more efficiently.

In about half the services, on-call firefighters and other staff carried out additional activities. A large number of on-call firefighters were furloughed from their main employment and so they were available to help.

Although bound by the tripartite agreement, services were able to use them more flexibly than wholetime firefighters. This meant that fire and rescue services could use them, and other fire and rescue staff, quickly

to begin work without waiting for negotiations under the tripartite agreement to be completed. It allowed wholetime firefighters to stay in their fire stations, ready to respond to emergency calls.

There is much to be learned from the added value services provided during the pandemic. National leaders, including National Employers and those responsible for governance of services, should take a careful look at whether in reality services deployed staff with the right skill sets for what they had to do. In some services, deployment decisions were influenced by other factors, including the Fire Brigades Union holding them back.

## **Fire and building safety is changing a lot**

I welcome the greater focus by the Government and the sector to improve fire and building safety.

In every profession, some events have a profound effect and fundamentally change practices and procedures. In policing, these events include the Hillsborough Stadium disaster in 1989 and the Macpherson report a decade later following the murder of Stephen Lawrence. Last year, HMI Wendy Williams published a report identifying the lessons the Home Office must learn from the Windrush scandal.

The fire sector has had similar profound moments. One of the greatest was the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017

in which 72 people died. Firefighters responded on the night with determination, dedication, courage and commitment. Staff in control responded with equal professionalism in the most difficult of circumstances.

Since the first phase of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, we have published our first set of inspection reports and Dame Judith Hackitt has published her review into fire and building safety. It said fundamental reform is needed.

## Implementing the Grenfell recommendations

Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry investigated the cause of the fire, how it spread and the response of the London Fire Brigade and other emergency services. The inquiry reported in October 2019 and made a series of recommendations.

These included:

- ensuring that services have information and plans for fires in high-rise buildings;
- improving understanding of how different construction materials for high-rise buildings behave in fires;
- ensuring effective communications between emergency control rooms and incident commanders;
- analysing how control rooms handle emergency calls and tell people how to maximise their chances of surviving fires;
- assessing the competence of command and control;

- improving the fire safety of similar buildings; and
- improving how emergency services work together.

Three and a half years after the Grenfell Tower fire, there are still too many high-rise buildings that have similar cladding. Nearly 300 buildings have been made safer by replacing cladding, and the Government has provided over £1 billion for renovations. But this work has been going too slowly. Residents need to be safe in their homes.

In August 2020, we were commissioned by the Home Secretary to assess how the London Fire Brigade was dealing with the inquiry's recommendations. While the inquiry made 46 recommendations, our focus was on the 29 relevant to the London Fire Brigade. We published our findings in February 2021. More detailed findings are included in Part 2 of this assessment.

We recognise the progress the London Fire Brigade is making to implement the recommendations, especially over the past year. However, there is significant work still to do. By the end of 2020, only four recommendations had been implemented.

It was clear that implementing these considerable changes is a priority for the brigade's leadership. Staff we interviewed demonstrated the same determination to improve.

The inquiry wasn't about the London Fire Brigade alone. We were pleased to see work underway with

London's other emergency services, as well as the national fire sector, to ensure that the failings established by the inquiry are not repeated.

Phase 2 of the inquiry is underway and examines the causes of the fire. This includes how Grenfell Tower came to be in a condition that allowed the fire to spread in the way it did. While there is much more evidence to be heard, I have been surprised by some given so far. I await the inquiry's findings on whether the building and fire regulatory systems worked as they should.

Turning back to our inspection, we recognise the amount of work underway. The 29 recommendations we examined are being implemented. For example, the brigade is now collecting better risk information on premises. This information should enable a more effective response. This will be further improved when legislative changes requiring owners and managers of high-rise buildings to provide further building information become law.

The London Fire Brigade has designed new working practices covering firefighting in high-rise buildings, evacuations, and how fire survival calls from residents should be handled. These will be implemented in the coming months. Staff training is underway although, at the time of our inspection, practical exercises needed to be arranged so staff can get to grips with the new procedures and become proficient in their use. This will take some time to achieve, as will improving the training of all incident commanders.

Specialist staff have been trained to understand the risks posed by certain materials used in high-rise building construction. When responding to the fire at Grenfell Tower, firefighters didn't know exactly what they were dealing with. This is why they didn't expect the fire to behave as it did. If dangerous construction materials are not used, catastrophes like this would be far less likely. In any case, it is helpful that the brigade is now better prepared.

Finally, there is to be a new system to manage large numbers of fire safety guidance calls. During the fire, the brigade struggled to deal with the high number of calls it received from trapped residents. These new arrangements should ensure that the brigade is able to answer them and provide appropriate – and current – fire safety advice as necessary. This will save lives.

There is still much work to do. The brigade needs better project management arrangements for this work, including more consistent ways of monitoring progress, managing risks, understanding and ensuring that things work well together, and checking that they do. The brigade is getting on with this.

Londoners can be assured that their fire service is learning the lessons from the appalling tragedy at Grenfell Tower. Improvements are being made, but the brigade still has much more to do. I hope the other more systemic failings that the inquiry is now assessing can also be rapidly identified and put right.

## The new building safety regulator

Dame Judith Hackitt recommended fundamental changes to the building regulation system. The Building Safety Bill is now before Parliament. Its main purpose is to create a new regulator.

The new regulator will be part of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and responsible for ensuring the fire safety of high-rise and other designated high-risk premises, from beginning to end. We have started discussions with the HSE to understand their work, consider how we can incorporate this in our inspection regime for fire services, and agree how we will work together.

Regulation confused is safety denied. For the new regulator to succeed, it is vital that everyone knows what they have to do, and how they will be accountable for it. And the relationship between regulator and regulated needs to be sound and fully effective.

In Round 1 of our inspections, we said that a number of services didn't have enough appropriately trained protection specialists. The Government has provided additional funding to recruit and train extra staff.

But it takes time for staff to be appropriately trained, and at present there is only a small pool of qualified people. However, the number of protection staff has increased by 5 percent to 758 since 2018/19. Services, the private sector and the new regulator all need them, so a co-ordinated approach is required to

increase their numbers. Otherwise, there will not be enough professionals available and public safety will suffer.

The sector has underinvested in protection for many years. The number of suitably qualified staff with the necessary experience and expertise in enforcement and prosecution has reduced by almost 10 percent over the past decade.

There is no common approach about what constitutes a high-risk building. Some services appear too reluctant to enforce and prosecute when appropriate. We welcome the publication of a professional standards framework, which explains how services should enable staff to develop careers in protection and get essential qualifications and experience.

Too often, different departments in services don't work well enough together to share information. In our second round of inspections, we will consider this further. We will also assess how services are managing their high-risk premises and how they adapt their response plans to the risk information they have. This was a significant finding from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, and a point on which fire services need to improve.

Compared with the corresponding period in 2019, fire safety audits, enforcement activity and prosecutions have fallen in the quarter since pandemic restrictions were put in place in March 2020. But we are encouraged that most services have introduced

risk-based desktop inspections, and intend to re-introduce on-site inspections with appropriate pandemic measures as soon as possible. Most services continued to undertake the most essential face-to-face activities while maintaining staff and public safety. During our next round of inspections, we will pay close attention to how services are managing the backlog caused by the pandemic. We will pay even closer attention to those who didn't follow NFCC guidance on how to adapt protection work during the pandemic.

## **Diversity and equality in the sector must be improved**

Events over the past year have highlighted the injustices experienced by black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people, and the sometimes catastrophic consequences.

There continues to be a woeful lack of gender and race diversity in fire and rescue services. Minority groups still feel excluded from entering the sector or progressing due to cultural barriers. Figures from March 2020 show that only 17.3 percent of the 44,595 staff in fire and rescue services were female. Only 5.1 percent of staff were from a minority ethnic group, and the percentage of black firefighters is even lower, although there has been some slight recent improvement.

There is also a lack of employees from a BAME background at middle or senior levels. This is not

helped by a culture where fire and rescue services tend to promote from within at all levels. This leaves very little opportunity to improve diversity. Not a single service is anywhere near having a workforce representative of its community. This must be tackled. I hope the work now underway by services and the sector successfully addresses this.

In our first round of inspections, we established that there were serious cultural problems in a few services. BAME firefighters described how they cannot be themselves in the workplace. They have suffered discrimination, are reluctant to access the leadership or career development programmes on offer, and suffer negative bias, unconscious or otherwise. This is entirely unacceptable; everyone deserves to be treated fairly. Action needs to be focused on both understanding and addressing these problems. Women experience similar barriers and discrimination.

Recent evidence from Public Health England (PHE) found that, due to various social and economic factors, there is an association between belonging to some ethnic groups and a higher likelihood of testing positive and dying with COVID-19. Our COVID-19 inspections found that two-thirds of staff who may be more vulnerable to the virus, including BAME staff, were identified effectively. However, more needs to be done in other services to ensure that they are aware of PHE guidance and have the necessary provisions available to support BAME staff to improve their health

and wellbeing. To achieve this, it is important to have strategies and arrangements in place to create a healthy and supportive workplace with zero tolerance of discrimination. This should encourage minority ethnic staff to raise any concerns they have.

For any changes to be sustainable, there needs to be a culture where all staff feel safe to talk about race, and are confident to address injustices and challenge negative behaviour. Too often, discussions about race, inclusion and inequality are left to those most affected by it. Services need to better educate all their staff on the importance of diversity and inclusion, and to take a zero-tolerance approach to bullying, harassment and discrimination. This needs to be more than an e-learning course.

We will consider how inclusive watches are.

Watches are common across services and a long-standing tradition. They are considered families by some, but they can exclude others. New members feel compelled to change to be accepted.

Diversity and equality are important at all levels of the service. The sector should focus on improving diversity and equality in leadership roles.

Without improved representation throughout the workforce, cultural and equality barriers will still exist, and the service won't gain from the benefits of diversity.

According to the staff survey carried out during our first round of inspections, 33.2 percent of 196 BAME respondents reported feeling bullied and

harassed in the past 12 months (against 22.5 percent of white respondents). Also, 33.2 percent of BAME respondents reported feeling discriminated against at work in the past 12 months. Again, this was significantly higher than the percentage of white respondents (20.4 percent).

All public sector organisations have a legal obligation to deal effectively with bullying, harassment and discrimination: as far as possible to prevent it, and to tackle it properly when it happens. This includes fostering good relations between those who have protected characteristics (as defined in the Equality Act 2010) and those who don't. Fire and rescue services are no different. Services should be sure that they discharge this duty in everything they do. This includes by effectively carrying out equality impact assessments.

Diversity is always of great value. The highest standards are achieved when people from all parts of the community can be recruited and retained. Shallow pools never provide the available depths and breadths of skill, expertise and industry, and that harms the public interest. It is up to strong national and local leadership to ensure that the best people, from wherever they can be found, come into, stay in and develop their careers inside the fire and rescue service.

Values and cultures, working practices, acceptance and development of people are all enhanced when everyone is asked to, and does, contribute their best, irrespective of anything but their own qualities.

That means the culture in the fire and rescue sector needs to change considerably. This needs action at the national level, and commitment and practical effective steps locally. I am pleased that the NFCC has published its inclusion strategy and introduced an online platform to disseminate information and best practice. I urge services to use this resource at once, and to take up the invaluable support and expertise provided to the sector by groups such as the Asian Fire and Rescue Association and Women in the Fire Service UK.

In matters of inequality and fair treatment of people, fire services should learn from others. For example, NHS Employers has equality and diversity action plans. Through these plans, it considers the latest developments both within and outside the NHS to improve how staff are treated and developed, and how well it deals with the people who use its services.

Our next inspections will assess services' approach to race and inequality. When we inspect, fire staff should be open with us about how they are treated. We have a confidential reporting line for staff to report problems if they don't want to be identified. Lack of diversity and equality is a conspicuous failure of fairness that shames the sector.

We will assess what services are doing to improve their lack of diversity and equality. We will find out how they are tackling and eliminating discrimination at every level, and how they are educating their workforces to develop cultures that welcome difference and get the

best out of people. We will also consider how services are engaging with their diverse communities and responding to their needs. Fire and rescue services need to ensure that their workforces are as diverse and talented as possible. Without embracing the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion, they will not be able to provide an effective and efficient service for everyone.

## **The importance of on-call firefighters**

In my last assessment, while recognising the tremendous dedication of on-call firefighters, I said the model needs attention to make sure that it is more sustainable and works well.

Over a third of all firefighters are on-call. The pandemic brought into higher focus the very great value of on-call firefighters in communities.

The pandemic has changed working lives, with more people working from home and fewer commuting. Services now have an opportunity to recruit from this pool. I hope the Government and the fire sector can capitalise on this opportunity.

The on-call workforce demonstrated its value even more than usual during the pandemic. Staff carried out a range of tasks from covering wholetime absences to taking on additional responsibilities.

Before the pandemic, the availability of on-call staff was a problem for many services. Often, they had too few

staff available during the working week; some fire engines crewed by on-call firefighters were unavailable for long periods. This changed during the pandemic. Services told us that many on-call firefighters were furloughed from work or were working from home. As a result, most services recorded higher availability than normal. Of the 44 services that provided comparable data, all had either increased or maintained their average availability from 1 April to 30 June 2020 compared with the same period in 2019. Overall, availability increased by 8.4 percent during this period.

Improvements are needed to address the long-term problems in recruiting and retaining on-call firefighters.

Data from March 2020 shows that there were 12,498 on-call firefighters in England. This was the second year the number of on-call firefighters didn't fall. Instead, they increased by 2.3 percent from the previous year. The sector needs this number to rise.

Services have been trying to improve the ways in which they recruit staff. They have carried out local recruitment campaigns and used social media. Their successes have varied. In some areas, recruitment rates have improved. The NFCC continues to develop its national recruitment campaign for on-call firefighters. The campaign highlights the opportunities open to people from all walks of life. The national website for on-call recruitment is a useful resource. It tells people where they may be needed, and provides

real-life stories giving insights into the role and what they may expect from it. But a more powerful campaign – perhaps similar to the call for volunteers to support the 2012 Olympic Games – may be needed. Incentives to employers, such as tax breaks, could encourage them to provide the flexibility on-call firefighters sometimes need.

Once services recruit on-call firefighters, it is essential that they create and maintain the conditions that make people want to stay. The recently introduced on-call apprenticeship should help retain on-call firefighters by providing people with the chance to develop their skills and gain or improve their qualifications.

## **The funding model needs review**

In my last assessment, I dealt with the financial disparity between services. This remains a problem.

The way central government allocates funding to the sector needs to be reviewed. We found in Round 1 that some services didn't have enough money to employ the number of staff they needed.

During the pandemic, most services received Government grants to cover short-term additional costs. But services are worried about the longer-term financial effects. If the economic downturn continues, more businesses may close, which could reduce the amount raised through business rates. In turn, this would reduce the funding available to services because business rates are one of the services' three principal

sources of funding. To mitigate this, some services have held back grant money, putting it into their reserves in anticipation that it will be needed to cover possible reductions in income. It's too early to predict with any certainty whether income will fall, and whether this unspent grant money will cover any shortfall.

With nothing better than year-to-year financial settlements (common in the public sector), services have no medium- or long-term financial certainty. This makes financial and organisational planning (both local and national) very difficult. Services have multi-year plans, but no certainty on whether they will have enough funding to see the plans through. Uncertain public finances because of the pandemic mean that this problem will not be solved soon.

In my last assessment, I questioned whether the 45-service model is financially sustainable. Forty-five are too many. I remain of the view that there are financial and operational benefits to changing the model. In particular, there are benefits from services being coterminous (working within the same geographic boundaries) with police forces and Local Resilience Forums. A few services need to work with more than one police force and more than one Local Resilience Forum. This duplicates work, can cause confusion, and is not effective or efficient.

## Round 2

We have inspected every service once. During this process, we improved our inspection techniques and expanded our knowledge.

Round 2 was to have started in March 2020.

The pandemic meant it had to be suspended; we returned seconded staff to their fire and rescue services for the duration of the emergency. While we will adapt our policies and practices to the circumstances of the pandemic, we restarted Round 2 in February 2021. We plan to inspect and report on every service by the end of 2022.

We intend to continue to inspect services' effectiveness and efficiency, and how well they treat their people. We always work on improving what we do, and so Round 2 inspections will include:

- a greater focus on race and diversity, and how services are overcoming undue inequalities;
- productivity of services;
- an assessment of how services are identifying and planning against their risks; and
- more case file reviews in relation to protection and buildings safety.

# Conclusion

During the pandemic, the expertise and dedication of fire and rescue services have been invaluable sources of security. But the sector's response has been hindered by significant structural issues that need to be overcome.

Because of the pandemic, services have changed how they operate, reducing their contact with the public and business owners, and doing more work online. The pandemic has demonstrated how important it is that services understand the risks in their areas. For example, they need to understand who requires the most help, which premises are at greatest risk of fire, and the resources they need to respond effectively.

In my last assessment, I said local and national reform were needed to improve effectiveness and efficiency. I have not changed my mind. Improvements are being made, especially at a local level. But more change is needed at a faster pace. The Home Office's intentions for reform are encouraging. However, I continue to see working practices and cultures that have no place in a modern public service. Strong leadership is needed to implement reforms and make improvements, to overcome resistance and shape the future of the service. We owe it to the public to make sure that this happens.

# Part 2: Our inspections

## Our inspections

### Changes to our planned inspection programme

In March 2020, when the Government announced restrictions to tackle the worsening pandemic, we suspended all inspection work that would have needed appreciable input from fire and rescue services.

We did this to allow services to focus intensively on responding to the challenges caused by the pandemic. It wasn't until September 2020 that our inspection work resumed. We restarted our Round 2 inspection programme in February 2021. We have adapted to the situation and incorporated flexibility in our approach to ensure that inspection activity doesn't interfere with services' important work for the communities they serve.

### Our work before the pandemic restrictions

In February 2020, we had just begun the second round of fire inspections. We had planned to inspect and provide graded judgments on every service in England in relation to their effectiveness, efficiency and how they look after their people.

Our aim was to replicate how we had inspected services in Round 1. This would have allowed us to consider each service's progress and how it was responding to our findings.

In February 2020, following a public consultation, the Home Secretary approved the inspection programme to enable us to do this. By then, the 15 services that were first in line for inspection had already submitted the material we had asked for to prepare for their inspection.

## Our revisits

We also started a series of revisits to services in respect of which we had logged a cause of concern relating to effectiveness in the first inspection in 2019. To date, we have completed nine revisits to seven services to consider progress.

In the period covered by this assessment, we completed three revisits: to the London Fire Brigade and Northamptonshire and West Sussex fire and rescue services. You can find information about these revisits later in this section. We have published on our website letters summarising our findings for each revisit. We had to postpone two further revisits to Essex and Gloucestershire fire and rescue services because of the pandemic. We will consider progress made by these services in Round 2.

## Our new commissions

In August 2020, we received two commissions from the Home Secretary under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. The first required us to consider how each fire and rescue service was responding to the pandemic. The second required us to assess the London Fire Brigade's progress in implementing the recommendations in the Grenfell Tower Inquiry's Phase 1 report.

A summary of our findings is included in this section. The specific reports are published on our website.

## Understanding our judgments

Fire and rescue services aren't in competition with each other. Inevitably, some people may want to compare judgments and use our Round 1 gradings to form a league table. But other factors (such as each service's operating context) should be considered. We explain this context in our reports.

For our published reports in Round 1, we gave a grade – outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate – against all the three main questions (covering effectiveness, efficiency and people) and the 11 questions beneath them.

In all our inspections covered by this assessment, we provided a narrative explaining how the service performed rather than a graded judgment. We did this because we had no benchmark to measure against.

We will go back to issuing graded judgments when Round 2 restarts.

## **Our COVID-19 inspections**

In August 2020, the Home Secretary commissioned us to inspect the English fire and rescue sector's response to COVID-19. Our commission, under section 28A(3) of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, was 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 completed this inspection entirely virtually, with all activity taking place remotely. This was the first time in the inspectorate's history that we had carried out an inspection in this way.

We inspected every service in England, requesting documents and data, running a staff survey and interviewing a number of the service's leaders.

Our inspections took place in autumn 2020 and focused on the first wave of the pandemic between April and June 2020.

We also conducted a series of national interviews to build our understanding of the whole sector's response.

These interviews were with the chair and committee leads of the NFCC; trade unions; representatives from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; the Local Government Association; National Employers; and ambulance trusts.

## Our findings

### **Every service maintained its ability to respond to fires and other emergencies**

Every service was able to respond to calls from the public, incidents and emergencies when needed. Most prioritised responding to emergencies over other activities such as prevention and protection. They also put in place measures to reduce the risk of exposure to the virus, ensuring that firefighters and control room staff remained available.

At the beginning of the pandemic, staff absences were thankfully low. There are several reasons for this, including steps taken by services to limit the spread of the virus in fire stations and reduce fire staff's contact with the public. Also, on-call firefighter availability was high. This was because many staff were furloughed from their primary employment or were working from home. Before the pandemic, on-call availability was often low in the working day for many services because people's working lives took them away from home.

The overall number of incidents attended by services fell by 5 percent from 1 April to 30 June 2020 compared

with the same period in 2019. Fire engine availability data shows that 44 services had an overall increase in average availability from 1 April to 30 June 2020 compared with the same period in 2019; the other service had no change. Overall, availability increased by 8.2 percent during this period. Dataset 1 sets out this data in detail.

**Dataset 1: Average percentage point change in overall availability between 1 April–30 June 2019 and 1 April–30 June 2020 by fire and rescue service**

Isles of Scilly had the same availability in 2020 compared with the previous year. All other services had more fire engines available. The largest difference was in Cambridgeshire, which had 17 percent more availability compared with the same period in 2019.

**Every service provided a range of additional support to its community that went above and beyond its statutory duties**

The role of fire and rescue services is listed in legislation, predominantly the [Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#). It comprises:

- fire safety;
- firefighting;
- rescuing people in road traffic collisions;
- responding to emergencies;
- enforcing building safety regulations in the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005; and

- responding to certain incidents such as chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear emergencies.

To support their communities during the pandemic, fire and rescue services did more than their 'business as usual' activities. Additional pandemic work included ambulance driving, and delivering food to vulnerable people and PPE to healthcare professionals.

Most of the activities carried out were listed in the tripartite agreement, but some services provided other support to their communities under local agreement. What each service did varied and depended on what was required locally by other public authorities or organisations such as local NHS trusts and local authorities, and which part of the workforce was willing to carry it out. Some services didn't receive any requests from other local public authorities or organisations for additional support.

While additional activity varied between services, it was provided by different staff groups, including wholetime (full-time) and on-call firefighters, as well as non-operational staff. Table 1 contains a list of all the extra activities that took place under the tripartite agreement up until 17 September 2020.

A small number of services were asked to lend their support but couldn't provide enough wholetime firefighters to do the work because the Fire Brigades Union objected. For example, the union had concerns about risk assessments, which are ultimately the

responsibility of each fire and rescue service. Other staff, including on-call firefighters and non-operational staff, were sometimes deployed instead of wholetime firefighters.

We were particularly impressed with how some county council-run services worked with council departments and colleagues to increase their knowledge of, and presence and work in, the community. This showed how fire and rescue services can benefit from being part of a larger organisation, particularly being able to share information technology (IT) and IT infrastructure, and to exchange information in the current climate.

**Table 1: Additional pandemic activities carried out by fire and rescue services provided under the tripartite agreement between 1 April 2020 and 17 September 2020**

<b>Additional pandemic activity listed under the tripartite agreement</b>	<b>Number of services out of 44</b>
Delivering essential items to vulnerable people	33
Delivering personal protective equipment (PPE) and other medical supplies to NHS and care facilities	32
Providing face-fitting masks to be used by NHS and clinical care staff working with COVID-19 patients	22

<b>Additional pandemic activity listed under the tripartite agreement</b>	<b>Number of services out of 44</b>
Packing/repacking food supplies for vulnerable people	21
Ambulance driving	19
Moving bodies of the deceased	16
Delivering infection, prevention and control training packages for care homes, including hand hygiene products and PPE guidance and procedures, and supporting the testing of care home staff	10
Driving ambulances not on blue lights (and without a siren), excluding COVID-19 patients, to outpatient appointments or to receive urgent care	8
Taking samples for COVID-19 antigen testing	5
Training non-service personnel to drive ambulances (not on blue lights)	5

Additional pandemic activity listed under the tripartite agreement	Number of services out of 44
Transferring patients, including those recovering and recuperating from but no longer infected with COVID-19, to and from Nightingale hospitals under emergency response (on blue lights) or through non-emergency patient transfer (not on blue lights)	3
Transferring known or suspected COVID-19 patients to and from Nightingale hospitals under emergency response (on blue lights with a siren) or through non-emergency patient transfer (not on blue lights)	2

## The fire and rescue sector's outdated arrangements hindered the way services responded

Since we began inspecting fire and rescue services in 2018, we have made six national recommendations. Two were made at the end of our [second tranche](#) of inspections in summer 2019; there were four more in [State of Fire and Rescue 2019](#) in January 2020. These recommendations cover important structural problems relating to how the fire and rescue sector operates, including:

- better standardisation of practice;

- clarity on the role of services and their staff;
- considering whether the arrangements governing staff terms and conditions remain appropriate; and
- providing greater operational independence for chief fire officers.

All these structural problems affected the ways services operated during the pandemic and reveal the sector's current limitations. This is despite the dedication and determination of services and their staff to provide the best possible service to the public.

The call we made in [\*State of Fire and Rescue 2019\*](#) for lasting national reform remains. Reform is necessary and essential, particularly in three areas, as follows.

First, the role of services should be clarified. The need for this became especially apparent when firefighters could, in many cases, carry out additional work to support organisations such as local NHS Trusts and local authorities only after the national tripartite agreement on specific activities had come into operation.

Second, chief fire officers should have operational independence. The ability of chief fire officers to allocate resources rapidly, safely and effectively when required should be an integral part of their role. During the pandemic, Local Resilience Forums asked their fire and rescue services to assist. In some instances, services couldn't commit resources there

and then, sometimes requiring a national agreement to proceed.

Third, arrangements governing staff terms and conditions should be reformed. Throughout the pandemic, the fire and rescue sector's motto has been 'ready, willing and able'.

However, the outdated arrangements for negotiating terms and conditions of service meant that some services were unable to attain that objective as fully as they wished.

### **Tripartite agreement: varied from service to service**

The employment arrangements in the fire and rescue sector are long-standing and, in our view, outdated. The NJC oversees conditions of service for firefighters (included in the 'Grey Book'). Despite repeated calls for reform, this hasn't been reviewed for years. While it provides standard terms and conditions for firefighters, it has also established a rigid set of national arrangements. Some services have been able to put in place arrangements to adapt what they do in local circumstances. Others haven't and consider the Grey Book a barrier.

In [\*State of Fire and Rescue 2019\*](#), we called for these arrangements to be reviewed to consider whether they are still fit for purpose and whether they establish, maintain or intensify intended or unintended barriers. We also recommended that consideration should be given to whether the NJC – the pay negotiation

machinery – needs reform. This recommendation remains open.

As explained earlier in Part 1, to overcome the rigidity of these arrangements, the national tripartite agreement was put in place to temporarily expand what operational staff could do during the pandemic. The agreement was between the NFCC, National Employers and the Fire Brigades Union. If additional roles were requested, they would need national agreement and further local consultation before work could start.

In March 2020, the first of 15 national tripartite agreements was agreed to increase the scope of work that operational staff could do. Each service then had to consult locally on the specific work it had been asked to do, and to agree how to address any health and safety requirements, including risk assessments.

In December 2020, the arrangements under the tripartite agreement ended and a new agreement was reached without the NFCC; the new contract was between National Employers and the Fire Brigades Union alone. Unfortunately, no further extensions could be made due to a disagreement between National Employers and the Fire Brigades Union on health and safety measures. The arrangement therefore expired on 13 January 2021. As a result, no national agreement was ever reached for how fire services could support the national vaccination programme.

At the time of publication, the NFCC has produced and disseminated to services risk assessments that list

necessary control measures services need to put in place for their staff when carrying out extra pandemic activities. National Employers support the risk assessments, and the onus is now on operational staff to volunteer to step forward for their communities. This can be done under local agreements specifying the work operational staff in each individual service will be doing.

The tripartite agreement played a role in enabling services to use their staff in different ways, such as driving ambulances and delivering food to vulnerable people. Its objective was pragmatic and rooted in all parties' desire to help the public. But, in some cases, it had a limiting or even negative effect, including creating delays to activity already underway.

There were national and local problems implementing the tripartite agreement, which became too prescriptive. For example, services were only able to deliver items to the most vulnerable people once that specific activity had been listed in a national tripartite agreement. If it had focused on broad principles, the agreement would have given individual services the flexibility to make decisions on how to deploy staff.

Because of the restrictive nature of the tripartite agreement, several services used other staff, such as non-operational employees, whose work was not covered by the tripartite agreement to do this additional work. Deploying non-operational staff was often quicker and easier than using wholetime

firefighters, even though they may not have had the same skills. We also found that services were able to deploy their on-call staff more flexibly by offering them additional hours and secondment contracts.

## **The pandemic demonstrated what on-call firefighters and non-operational staff offer fire and rescue services and the public**

Most services have on-call firefighters. They are generally employed on a part-time basis in locations where the local risk doesn't require full-time fire cover. They are firefighters who may have other jobs, but who respond to emergencies when called. Fire and rescue services used them extensively during the first wave of the pandemic to respond to emergencies, as well as to provide additional support to their communities.

The majority of on-call firefighters were available to support their fire and rescue services as needed; this was because many were furloughed from their primary employment or working from home. Consequently, most services with on-call staff had more fire engines available to respond to emergencies than before the pandemic.

On-call firefighters were willing to work flexibly to do a range of work, including delivering food to vulnerable people, supporting local ambulance trusts and covering staff absences.

Services took steps to mitigate any financial hardship the on-call firefighters might have faced if their

main employment was affected by the pandemic. This included offering them paid employment or short-term contracts.

Non-operational staff (including those who work in non-uniformed roles, such as prevention) also volunteered to help. Services told us of their willingness and ability to assist.

### **The way services maintained statutory prevention and protection functions varied, and some did less than expected**

Services have had to balance the need to act responsibly during a public health emergency – working out how to reduce the risk of exposure to the virus – with meeting their statutory obligation to promote fire safety and enforce fire safety legislation.

The NFCC provided advice on how services could maintain a risk-based approach to prevention and protection activity. However, not every service followed the NFCC guidance. During the early stages of the pandemic, four services exceeded the requirements of the guidance while eight stopped most protection activity.

In the first round of our inspections, between 2018 and 2019, we raised concerns that too many services didn't see their protection function as a high-enough priority, and had underinvested in it for many years. It is a matter of concern that some services have chosen to deprioritise it during the pandemic.

## **The wellbeing measures offered to staff during COVID-19 were generally good, but varied**

We saw that services placed importance on staff wellbeing. Some stepped up their wellbeing provision and tailored it to the outbreak, directing staff to additional help when necessary. However, more could have been done in a third of services to make sure that staff who may have been at greater risk, such as those from a BAME background, were identified and appropriate measures put in place to provide them with relevant support.

We were pleased to find evidence of these special arrangements in 29 services. Guidance from [PHE](#) says some people may not be prepared to disclose their individual circumstances. It is incumbent on services to talk to all their staff to identify risks and provide appropriate support.

## **The pandemic was a catalyst for change and transformation**

In our first inspections (between 2018 and 2019), we found that a small number of services had done little to modernise their ways of working. The pandemic changed that dramatically for the better.

Some services implemented improvement programmes within days of the first lockdown being announced, rolling out new IT and supporting infrastructure. Existing improvement programmes were brought forward and implemented in weeks rather than months.

And existing barriers preventing the exchange of information between fire services and other public organisations and local authorities were removed.

This mostly benefited non-operational staff whose working lives have been significantly changed with the introduction of digital and flexible working in many services. However, this rarely translated into improvements in the working practices or productivity of operational staff, including firefighters. Services should take their experience of digital and workplace reform and use it to make firefighters' time as productive as possible. This could include providing prevention advice remotely to vulnerable people.

When the pandemic began, services implemented changes, such as redeploying staff, reducing community activity and changing working practices, in anticipation of much higher sickness levels. Thankfully, these sickness levels had failed to materialise at the time of inspection. However, some services were slow to undo their changes, whether by returning redeployed staff or restarting activity that had been stopped.

# The London Fire Brigade and the recommendations of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry

On 14 June 2017, a fire at Grenfell Tower, a high-rise residential building in North Kensington, London, cost 72 lives.

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry was established to examine the circumstances leading up to, and surrounding, the fire. The inquiry was in two phases. Phase 1 focused on what happened on the night. The Phase 1 report, which includes findings and recommendations, was published on 30 October 2019. Phase 2 will establish what caused the disaster, and will assess the effectiveness of building and fire safety systems. This phase of the inquiry is underway.

In December 2019, as part of our first inspections of all fire and rescue services in England, we published our report on the performance of the London Fire Brigade. Our findings were consistent with the conclusions of the Phase 1 report.

We found that, while the London Fire Brigade had learned lessons from the Grenfell Tower fire, it had been slow to put in place the changes needed. We identified a cause of concern as to how well trained and skilled the London Fire Brigade staff were. We found that the London Fire Brigade had a significant

backlog of training for staff in risk-critical skills such as incident command.

On 4 August 2020, the Home Secretary commissioned us to review the governance and progress of the London Fire Brigade's action plan to implement the recommendations in the Phase 1 Report.

Because of Government restrictions relating to the pandemic, we carried out our inspection virtually during late 2020. We published our findings in February 2021.

## Our findings

At the time of our inspection in late 2020, the brigade had implemented four of the Inquiry's 29 recommendations for which they were responsible. It expects to have implemented 17 more by March 2021. This includes 12 that have been delayed by three months or more. While progress is being made, there remains a significant amount still to do.

### Governance

**Better co-ordination is being put in place, but assurance arrangements must improve fast**

Work is underway to implement the inquiry's recommendations. The brigade is improving how it manages and co-ordinates this work. But the public needs to know that, if there were an incident as potentially catastrophic as the Grenfell Tower fire, the brigade's response would be much better.

A year passed between publication of the inquiry's recommendations and our inspection. Arrangements are now in place to track what is being done to implement the recommendations, but more is needed to identify the links between different projects. The brigade needs to accelerate its improvement work so that it can invest its energy in making a difference to the way it serves the public.

Implementing the inquiry's recommendations is a priority for the commissioner and the brigade's leadership. However, the brigade needs to improve how it manages its different work plans to bring greatest benefit to public safety. The way the brigade monitors progress and manages risk is inconsistent. There is significant overlap between different areas of work. A large amount of activity is planned for the first half of 2021, but it isn't clear how the brigade will achieve this in the light of the complexity of some of this work and the number of people it will need.

The brigade has recently taken steps to improve assurance, including by establishing an independent audit committee, but it needs to do more. In particular, assurance processes need to be better so that leaders can be confident that the brigade's improvement programme is being efficiently and effectively carried out.

The brigade recognises that it needs to improve and is now starting to accelerate its work to improve. Its new transformation board and director of transformation are

focusing on co-ordinating plans and risks. They use dashboards to give a clear understanding of progress against deadlines. More staff are being appointed. They include new programme managers to support the improvement process, and consultants to help develop an approach to different areas of work and to improve leaders' skills in managing change in the organisation.

### More high-rise residential buildings are being inspected, and more often

Inspecting more high-rise residential buildings is a priority for the brigade's fire safety officers. They are inspecting more, and more often. The brigade is on target to inspect or review the safety of all high-rise residential buildings in London by the end of 2021. This is in line with the Building Risk Review, a Government-funded scheme for England. We welcome this improvement.

The brigade has also identified the need to improve its competency in fire safety. Retaining staff with the right skills and experience has been difficult, so it is focusing on developing staff's specialist skills. The brigade has also started to train firefighters to complete fire safety visits to lower-risk buildings.

## Evacuation and operational risk

Changed policies are starting to be introduced and staff are being trained

The brigade has acted quickly in some areas to strengthen its response to fires in high-rise residential buildings. It sends more commanders, more fire engines and better-targeted specialist resources, such as vehicles with extended height ladders, to incidents than it did before the Grenfell Tower fire.

The brigade also provided fire escape hoods, called 'smoke hoods', to all fire stations at the end of 2018. These hoods can be worn by members of the public when they evacuate smoke-filled areas.

Updated policies on high-rise firefighting and fire survival guidance, and a new policy on evacuation and rescue, are planned to be in place by April 2021. The new and updated policies are detailed and take account of what the brigade learned from the Grenfell Tower fire. A comprehensive training programme on the new policies for incident commanders and firefighters has begun. All are receiving e-learning on the new policies, with a knowledge test at the end. At the time of our inspection, most staff had completed this training.

## More practical training in the new working practices is needed

All staff we spoke to said they need more practical training on the new and updated working practices. Exercises are being planned at stations with scenarios involving high-rise residential buildings. For 18 months from April 2021, the brigade will carry out practical exercises at high-rise buildings. But at the time of our inspection, the planning and scheduling for these exercises hadn't yet started and suitable venues still needed to be found.

Incident commanders consistently told us that they would use their discretion to put some training into practice immediately if appropriate, even though the policies don't come into effect until the end of March 2021. We were given several recent examples of this being done. Although we welcome this, the brigade needs to assure itself that the lessons learned from the fire will be consistently applied by incident commanders.

## Staff better understand the risk of building materials

Information and training have improved staff understanding of the risks and signs of fire in external high-rise walls. Nearly all incident commanders and firefighters we spoke to feel better prepared to deal with such incidents than before the Grenfell Tower fire.

There is greater emphasis on carrying out risk assessments at high-rise residential buildings. And the

brigade's new quality assurance process for these assessments is robust. Better information is being made available about the operational risks that firefighters are likely to face when responding to incidents.

We welcome the greater focus given to assessing risks at high-rise residential buildings, and providing better information for firefighters and commanders attending incidents. The brigade has shown that it has a strong grasp on this activity and effective assurance arrangements in place to support it.

## **Control room**

**Good progress is being made but supervisors need more training**

The brigade is making good progress with the improvements needed in its control room. It is working to make fire control more central to its operational response. Staff are included more in policy design and training. Regular refresher training is in place for staff.

The updated fire survival guidance (FSG) policy, which control room staff helped to develop, is planned to take effect at the end of March 2021. FSG training has taken place and more is planned on the updated FSG guidance and new IT systems. Plans are in place for control room staff to be involved in the high-rise building exercises proposed to start in April 2021. Control room managers have a critical role in fire survival, and

training for their role in co-ordinating an FSG response is still being developed.

### Better technology is being introduced to help rescue people trapped by fire

The brigade has made improvements to its command and control system to help handle multiple calls from the public when they're trapped by fire. It has also developed an FSG application that is in its final stages of testing. These innovative and positive changes are designed to improve the information available to incident commanders from the control room so that they can prioritise rescue action.

A national radio talk group has been set up so that a control room can immediately let other fire and rescue services know when they're dealing with a major incident. Other control rooms can then provide support with handling FSG calls if needed. This should mean that members of the public reporting fires and other emergencies speak to control operators who have better awareness of the incident.

The brigade is in the process of replacing its command unit vehicles and buying a new IT operating system to be used on the replacements. The new system is designed to be more reliable than the previous version, and training in its use is being provided. The brigade is also making changes to the way the new vehicles are staffed and where they operate from. It has increased staffing levels and more station-based staff are being trained to operate the new vehicles. There will be closer

working and training between control room and command unit staff in future. This includes taking part in exercises.

## **Incident command**

### **Incident command training and competence assessment remain risks**

Incident command training and assessing competence remain risks for the brigade. The improvements will take time to introduce. Some plans have already been delayed because there aren't enough staff with the right skills.

Many of the inquiry's recommendations relating to incident command need incident commanders to be trained in revised or new working practices. The brigade has made the competence of its incident commanders a priority and has allocated more staff to work with its training provider to design new courses. It has started developing new training courses for Levels 1 and 2 incident commanders. (Incident command levels range from 1 to 4: commanders trained to the higher levels usually take charge of complex incidents that involve more resources.) But the limited number of staff able to design these courses is causing delays.

Meanwhile, the brigade has funded more courses from external training providers. This has ensured that Levels 3 and 4 incident commanders have had the right training. The brigade has started to introduce assessments for incident commanders similar to those

in place in other fire and rescue services. Only a limited number of brigade staff have the skills to carry out assessments; this shortage is delaying the assessments.

### Communication at incidents is getting better, but new equipment will take time to arrive

The inquiry recommended improvements to the way the incident commander and control room co-ordinate firefighters involved in rescues in buildings. The new and revised policies include processes to track rescue action being carried out by crews entering the building with breathing apparatus. The incident commanders and firefighters we spoke to have a good level of knowledge and understanding of these new procedures.

There is a comprehensive project to improve communications between the incident commander, command units and control room. This includes buying better radios to use at an incident, and devices to boost radio signals. It also aims to improve the communication to and from firefighters wearing helmets and breathing apparatus. This project is being carried out in stages and, at the time of our inspection, isn't scheduled to be fully in place until May 2022.

## Working with emergency services

Joint working with other emergency services is improving, but more training is needed

Recommendations in this area need other London emergency services or national organisations to work together with the brigade. The brigade is acting to address the recommendations and, when appropriate, to amend or create guidance for its staff.

The brigade has started to improve how it works with other emergency services when responding to a major incident. In the early stages of an incident, information is now exchanged with other services more consistently; this results in a better, more comprehensive response.

The brigade has acted to make sure that the lessons learned from the Phase 1 report are applied across all London's emergency service control rooms (for example, in the Metropolitan Police Service's and London Ambulance Service's control rooms). But still more work needs to be done to incorporate the recommendations into guidance, both nationally and in London. Training needs to be improved for the brigade's incident commanders and fire control staff. Technology intended to improve the sharing of incident information between London's emergency services is due to be installed by autumn 2021.

## Our revisits

In Round 1, we gave services areas for improvement and, in some cases, causes of concern.

If we identify an aspect of a service's practice, policy or performance that falls short of the expected standard, we will report this as an area for improvement. If we identify a serious, critical or systemic shortcoming in a service's practice, policy or performance, we will report it as a cause of concern.

A cause of concern will always be accompanied by one or more recommendations. The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England requires the fire and rescue authority receiving a recommendation to prepare, update and regularly publish an action plan detailing how it will act on the recommendation(s).

If we identify a cause of concern relating to effectiveness, we always follow it up with a revisit. This is to assess whether the service is acting to address the problem to reduce risks to public safety.

We have now conducted revisits to eight services to assess progress against their cause(s) of concern. With the exception of the London Fire Brigade, whose cause of concern related to people, these revisits covered effectiveness. Letters detailing our findings are published on our website and sent to the services involved.

<b>Service</b>	<b>Original inspection fieldwork</b>	<b>First revisit</b>	<b>Follow-up revisit (if needed)</b>
Avon	July 2018	October 2018	August 2019
Cornwall	July 2018	October 2018	N/A
Essex	July 2019	November 2019	Outstanding – to be included in Round 2
Gloucestershire	June 2019	November 2019	Outstanding – to be included in Round 2
London	July 2019	October to December 2020	Summer 2021
Northamptonshire	November 2018	June 2019	March 2020
Surrey	July 2018	October 2018	September 2019
West Sussex	November 2018	February 2019	January 2020

Causes of concern were also given to services in relation to their efficiency (Buckinghamshire and Surrey) and how they look after their people (Devon & Somerset, Essex, Gloucestershire, Greater Manchester, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Lincolnshire and West Sussex). In Round 2, we will assess what progress has been and is being made.

During the period covered by this assessment, we published three letters: one providing our findings from our first revisit to the London Fire Brigade, and two with the findings of our second revisits to Northamptonshire and West Sussex fire and rescue services.

## The London Fire Brigade

As part of our inspection of the progress being made by the brigade to implement the recommendations in the Grenfell Tower Inquiry's Phase 1 report, we also considered progress to address the cause of concern we had in our Round 1 inspection; this concerned staff training and skills.

Specifically, the brigade had a significant backlog of training for staff on risk-critical skills such as emergency fire engine driving and incident command. Some emergency vehicle drivers hadn't had refresher training for up to 20 years (despite national guidance recommending this to be provided every three to five years). New incident commanders didn't get the training they needed until after they had taken up an incident command role and had begun to command

real incidents. In some cases, this wasn't until up to a year later. We also found examples of firefighters acting as incident commanders who had received no training or assessment. The brigade also hadn't been providing regular incident command training and re-assessment so that staff had up-to-date knowledge, skills and understanding, and could continue to command at a competent and safe standard.

We found action was being taken to address this problem, although further work is needed. The brigade has made training in emergency driving a priority and has increased the amount of training available. At the time of our revisit, data provided by the brigade showed that the percentage of staff up to date in their training and assessment for emergency fire engine driving had increased from 68 percent (1,384 of 2,023) in November 2019 to 96 percent (1,642 of 1,711) in December 2020.

The brigade is also focusing on ensuring the competence of its incident commanders. The brigade now has an ambitious training strategy, but it will take several years to put in place and some parts aren't yet fully funded. Incident commanders still aren't being trained quickly enough.

We are encouraged by the brigade's efforts since our last inspection to make risk-critical training a priority. However, despite improvements, incident command training and assessing competence remain risks. The planned improvements will take time to introduce.

And some plans have already been delayed because there aren't enough staff with the right skills. We will continue to monitor progress through updates from the brigade and data returns. We will revisit the brigade in summer 2021 to consider what further progress has been achieved.

## Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service

We gave the service two causes of concern in Round 1 in relation to operational response and staff training.

We have now completed two revisits to consider the progress being made in relation to these connected problems. We published our findings after both revisits; the findings from our second revisit were published in March 2020.

Following our second revisit, we were pleased to see the positive progress the service had made to address both these problems. The service has treated making the necessary improvements as a priority.

The tangible improvements we saw have mitigated the risks to public safety that we identified in our original inspection. The measures that the service has introduced to improve fire engine availability are proving effective, with greater availability than when we first inspected.

At the time of our second revisit, in data provided by the service covering November 2019 to February 2020, the

service had the minimum number of fire engines needed between 95 percent and 99 percent of the time. This was a very substantial improvement since our first inspection. The service had caught up with giving its staff the safety-critical training they needed. We were encouraged by the systems being put in place by the service to monitor training.

To implement these actions, the service has produced detailed action plans with specified staff given responsibility for particular work. There are effective governance arrangements within the service and through the police, fire and crime commissioner to scrutinise progress. We also recognised what the service had done to produce better performance data and management information. Managers we interviewed at all levels showed a thorough understanding of this new information, which has helped decision making and made improvements a priority.

We propose to further consider what additional work is being implemented when we next inspect the service in Round 2.

## **West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service**

In Round 1, we gave the service four causes of concern in relation to prevention, protection, values and culture, and ensuring fairness and promoting diversity.

We have now completed two revisits to consider the progress being made in relation to their prevention and

protection causes of concern. We published our findings after both revisits: the findings from our second revisit were published in February 2020.

We found that the service had improved, driven by its senior leaders. While early progress had been slow, this was now improving. The service had cleared its backlogs in 'safe and well' visits and fire safety audits. Progress had also been made to increase staff numbers. Staff felt supported and welcomed the increased speed of the improvements.

The service has an action plan with senior responsible officers, deadlines and specific people responsible for actions to meet the requirements of each recommendation. The service has created an improvement board to oversee progress and monitor risk. The appointment of a skilled and dedicated programme manager has added benefit in prioritising and co-ordinating action.

In July 2019, West Sussex County Council approved £5.1m of extra funding to support improvements to address the causes of concern over the next three years. It also approved funding for a replacement IT system to overcome concerns we had found with the previous one. The council's governance and scrutiny arrangements were also changing to become more effective. At the time of our revisit in early 2020, some of these new arrangements had only recently been introduced, and others were due to start imminently.

The service was beset with problems when we first inspected. We were encouraged by the way it had improved, something we will consider further in Round 2.

# Part 3: Our reports

## Our reports

In July 2017, our remit was extended to include inspections of England's fire and rescue authorities. This is our second annual report on the fire and rescue inspections we have carried out.

The pandemic meant that we suspended all inspections for several months. This affected the number of reports we published this year. The reports we publish help us to fulfil our statutory duty to inspect the effectiveness and efficiency of fire and rescue authorities in England.

Every report has been published in full on our website and given to the fire and rescue service it relates to.

## Reports published

### January 2020 to February 2021

#### Inspections

Inspection of the London Fire Brigade's response to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry's Phase 1 recommendations

**Published:** 12 February 2021

Report summarising our findings from our inspection of the London Fire Brigade's progress against the Grenfell Tower Inquiry's Phase 1 recommendations. This fulfils a

commission from the Home Secretary under section 28A(3) of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004

**Lead HMI:** Matt Parr

### Fire and Rescue Service response to COVID-19

**Published:** 22 January 2021

Forty-four individual reports on how each fire and rescue service in England responded to the pandemic. This fulfils a commission from the Home Secretary under section 28A(3) of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004

### All HMIs

Responding to the pandemic: the fire and rescue service's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020

**Published:** 22 January 2021

Report summarising our findings from our COVID-19 inspections

**Lead HMI:** Zoë Billingham

### Revisit letters

When we identify a cause of concern, we require the service to produce an action plan to resolve the concern. We monitor progress against this plan. In relation to causes of concern relating to effectiveness, we usually carry out a revisit – and further revisits if necessary to assess progress against each plan. Following each revisit, the regional HMI

provides written feedback to the chief fire officer. Each letter is published in full on our website. In the period covered by this report, we sent and published revisit letters in respect of:

- The London Fire Brigade
- Northamptonshire FRS
- West Sussex FRS

### **Non-inspection publications**

#### **Memorandum of understanding between HMICFRS and Fire Standards Board**

**Published:** 14 October 2020

An agreement to ways of working between us and Fire Standards Board

**Lead HMI:** Sir Thomas Winsor

#### **Terms of reference: inspection of the London Fire Brigade's response to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry's Phase 1 recommendations**

**Published:** 13 October 2020

The Home Secretary commissioned us to inspect what progress the London Fire Brigade is making to respond to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry's Phase 1 recommendations. These are our terms of reference for that inspection

**Lead HMI:** Matt Parr

## HMICFRS fire and rescue service inspection programme 2020/21

**Published:** 12 February 2020

This document sets out our fire and rescue inspection programme covering the period beginning from 2020/21

**Lead HMI:** Sir Thomas Winsor

# Annexes

## Annex A: Fire and rescue service areas

- Avon
- Bedfordshire
- Royal Berkshire
- Buckinghamshire
- Cambridgeshire
- Cheshire
- Cleveland
- Cornwall
- Cumbria
- Durham and Darlington
- Derbyshire
- Devon and Somerset
- Dorset and Wiltshire
- East Sussex
- Essex
- Gloucestershire
- Greater Manchester
- Hampshire
- Hertfordshire
- Humberside

- Hereford and Worcester
- Isles of Scilly
- Isle of Wight
- Kent
- Lancashire
- Leicestershire
- Lincolnshire
- London
- Merseyside
- Northumberland
- Norfolk
- Northamptonshire
- Nottinghamshire
- North Yorkshire
- Oxfordshire
- Staffordshire
- Shropshire
- Suffolk
- Surrey
- South Yorkshire
- Tyne and Wear
- Warwickshire
- West Midlands
- West Sussex
- West Yorkshire

## Annex B: About us

### Our history

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary – as it then was – was established in 1856 to “inquire into the state and efficiency of the police”. Our role and influence have evolved over the past century and a half.

In 2017, we saw the biggest material change in our remit with our expansion to take on inspection of fire and rescue services in England. This was one element of the Government's fire reform programme announced in 2016 and uses legal powers created in the Policing and Crime Act 2017 that amended the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.

We are independent of Government, as well as fire and rescue services and police forces. Both our independence and inspection rights are vested in Her Majesty's Inspectors, who are Crown appointees (section 28(A1), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004).

### Our statutory responsibilities

We must inspect and report on the efficiency and effectiveness of fire and rescue authorities in England (section 28(A3), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004).

The Secretary of State may at any time direct us to carry out an inspection of one or all fire and rescue authorities in England (section 28A(3), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004).

We can carry out an inspection that hasn't been set out in our inspection programme. We must consult with the Secretary of State before we do so (section 28A(5) and (6), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004).

We don't have statutory obligations to inspect fire and rescue services outside England. However, we can do so if invited by the relevant authority.

### **Publishing reports**

We must publish the reports we prepare under section 28B of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (section 28B(1), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004).

We must not publish anything the inspectors believe would be against the interests of national security or might put anyone in danger (section 28B(2), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004).

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) of Fire & Rescue Services must each year submit to the Secretary of State a report on our inspections carried out in that period. A copy of this report must be laid before Parliament (section 28B(6), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004). The report must include HMCI's assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of fire and rescue authorities in England for the period the report covers (section 28B(5), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004). This is HMCI's second State of Fire and Rescue report. His first State of Fire and Rescue report was published in January 2020.

## **Producing our inspection programme and framework**

HMCI must prepare and publish an inspection programme (section 28A(1)(a), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004) and framework (section 28A(1)(b), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004).

HMCI must obtain the approval of the Secretary of State to an inspection programme or inspection framework before we can act in accordance with it (section 28A(2), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004).

## **Acting as a check on the removal of senior officers**

Fire and rescue authorities are responsible for the fire and rescue service in their areas. Authorities differ in size and governance arrangements. For authorities that are run by the police, fire and crime commissioner, arrangements for the dismissal of the chief fire officer are similar to those covering the dismissal of a chief constable.

If a police, fire and crime commissioner in England is proposing to dismiss their chief fire officer, they must invite HMCI to give his written views on the proposed removal. The police, fire and crime commissioner must consider his views before they make a decision (article 18, Fire and Rescue Authority (Police and Crime Commissioner) (Application of Local Policing Provisions, Inspection, Powers to Trade and Consequential Amendments) Order 2017). These written views should be given to the appropriate

police, fire and crime panel when considering the police, fire and crime commissioner's decision.

No police, fire and crime commissioner asked for written views during the period covered by this report.

## **Our powers**

Amendments made by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 to the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 created inspectors of fire and rescue services. They also created a duty to inspect and report on the effectiveness and efficiency of fire and rescue services in England and created new powers of inspection.

### **Access to information and premises**

Inspectors have powers to obtain any information or documents they reasonably need to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of a fire and rescue service (paragraph 6, Schedule A3, Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004). Inspectors also have powers to access premises used by fire and rescue services or those providing a service to a fire and rescue service.

They can seek access for the purpose of assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of the fire and rescue service. This includes obtaining documents and "other things" found on those premises (paragraphs 6 and 7, Schedule A3, Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004).

## **Power to delegate functions**

Inspectors have the power to delegate any of their inspection functions to another public authority (paragraph 2, Schedule A3, Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004).

## **Power to act jointly with another public body**

We can help another public authority exercise its functions, if HMCI considers it appropriate.

This includes facilitating a best value inspection under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999.

We can do these things on such terms, including payment terms, as HMCI thinks fit (paragraph 5, Schedule A3, Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004).

## **Who we are**

[Biographies for each of the Inspectors of Constabulary are on our website.](#)

## **Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services**

### **Sir Thomas Winsor**

In October 2012, Sir Thomas was appointed as Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary. He is the first holder of that office to come from a non-policing background.

## Her Majesty's Inspectors of Fire and Rescue Services

### Zoë Billingham

Zoë Billingham is Her Majesty's Inspector for the Eastern Region.

### Matt Parr

Matt Parr CB is Her Majesty's Inspector for the Southern Region.

### Wendy Williams

Wendy Williams is Her Majesty's Inspector for the Western Region.

### Andrew Cooke

Andrew Cooke will become Her Majesty's Inspector for the Northern region in April 2021.

## How we are accountable

The first Inspectors of Constabulary were appointed under the County and Borough Police Act 1856. This Act required them to inspect and report on the efficiency and effectiveness of most of the police forces in England and Wales. Substantially the same functions covering the inspection of fire and rescue authorities in England were created by the Policing and Crime Act 2017, which amended the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.

We currently have five Inspectors of Fire and Rescue Services. These inspectors also hold the separate appointment of Inspector of Constabulary. They are neither civil servants nor fire or police officers, and are appointed by the Crown for a fixed term of up to five years. That means we are independent of fire and rescue services, fire and rescue authorities (and their equivalents), police, Government, police, fire and crime commissioners (and their equivalents), other agencies and all outside parties.

However, independence doesn't mean a lack of accountability. We are accountable in these ways:

- our statutory duties, enforceable through judicial review or by action for breach of statutory duty;
- our obligation to submit an annual report to the Home Secretary under section 28B of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, which must be laid before Parliament;
- our obligation to seek approval to our inspection programme and framework from the Home Secretary;
- written Parliamentary questions;
- our obligation to give written and oral evidence to Committees of Parliament, including the Home Affairs Select Committee, the Public Accounts Committee and any other select committee that may call on us to give evidence;

- our obligation to carry out other duties the Home Secretary directs us to (section 28A(3), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004); and
- our obligation to comply with the rules of administrative law and the rules of good public administration, enforceable in the High Court by judicial review.

As a public body, we are also subject to the legal obligations imposed on public authorities, including:

- Official Secrets Acts 1911 and 1989;
- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974;
- Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (2016/679/EU);
- Human Rights Act 1998;
- Freedom of Information Act 2000; and
- Equality Act 2010.

### **How we work with other organisations**

We are mostly funded by the Home Office and are accountable to the Home Office for our spending, even though we are neither a subsidiary nor a part of the Home Office. For fire inspections, all our funding comes from the Home Office.

We have a concordat with the Home Office that explains the material parts of the relationship between our two organisations. The concordat sets out our respective roles, and the responsibilities of the main

people involved in running, sponsoring and overseeing our affairs. The concordat is published on our website.

We have also recently agreed a memorandum of understanding with the Fire Standards Board. This is also published on our website. The memorandum sets out our respective roles and responsibilities, and how we work with each other.

## Our regions

Our four geographic regions are the Northern, Eastern, Western, and Southern regions.

## Our purpose, values and objectives

Our purpose is to promote improvements in policing and fire and rescue services to make everyone safer.

Our values of respect, honesty, independence, integrity and fairness are at the heart of how we work. They act as a touchstone to help us make decisions – both as individuals and as an organisation.

Our objectives are to:

- demonstrate our values in everything we do;
- conduct informed, independent and evidence-based inspections;
- provide value for money;
- work with others to promote improvements in policing and fire and rescue services;

- report our inspection findings/analysis in a clear and compelling way; and
- ensure that our staff have the skills, knowledge and support to do their jobs.

## **Annex C: Our finances and our workforce**

### **Our finances**

As an inspectorate, we are mainly funded by the Home Office. All our funding for our fire inspection work comes from the Home Office.

We spent 85 percent of our funding on our workforce, with the rest spent on travel, subsistence, accommodation and other expenses.

#### **Expenditure breakdown 2019/20**

£21.9 million (85% of our funding) on staffing costs including associates

£2.1 million (8%) on travel and subsistence

£0.6 million (2%) on IT and telephony

£0.6 million (2%) on office expenditure and other costs

£0.5 million (2%) on surveys and inspection services

£0.1 million (1%) on accommodation

## Our workforce

Our workforce comprises HM Inspectors, civil servants, and secondees from fire and rescue services and police forces. We also have a register of associate inspectors and other specialist staff.

### **Staffing breakdown 2019/20**

Total workforce: 263

Permanent staff: 181

Police secondees: 42

Fire secondees: 20

Fixed-term appointments: 14

People from other government departments: 6

# Promoting improvements in policing and fire and rescue services to make everyone safer

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) independently assesses the effectiveness and efficiency of police forces and fire and rescue services – in the public interest.

In preparing our reports, we ask the questions that citizens would ask, and publish the answers in accessible form, using our expertise to interpret the evidence and make recommendations for improvement.

We provide authoritative information to allow the public to compare the performance of their police force or fire and rescue service against others. Our evidence is used to bring about improvements in the services they provide to the public.

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