

Wendy Williams CBE

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

Ben Brook
Chief Fire Officer
Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service

Councillor Andy Crump
Chair of Fire Authority

22 April 2022

Dear Ben,

WARWICKSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE REVISIT

We inspected Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service during March and April 2021. During the inspection, we identified three causes of concern. In June 2021, we issued these causes of concern and made the following three recommendations:

The service hasn't done enough since the last inspection to develop prevention activity that prioritises those most at risk of fire.

By 31 August 2021, the service should:

- develop a clear prevention strategy that prioritises the people most at risk and make sure that work to reduce risk is proportionate;
- put in place an effective system for joint reviews after significant or fatal incidents. Reviews should be at an appropriate strategic level for the service and organisations the service works with; and
- review its systems and processes for dealing with referrals from organisations the service works with to make sure they are managed in accordance with risk.

The service hasn't done enough since the last inspection to identify its highest-risk premises to inform its risk-based inspection programme.

By 31 August 2021, the service should:

- develop a protection strategy with a resourced and prioritised risk-based inspection programme;

- review its risk-based inspection programme to make sure it identifies its highest-risk premises; and
- put in place a clear plan with timescales for improving its management of risk information.

The service isn't taking a proportionate approach to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in the workplace.

By 31 August 2021, the service should make sure that:

- its actions to promote EDI don't compromise the integrity of other policies, including health and safety, and performance management;
- senior leaders respond appropriately and quickly to EDI feedback or concerns from its staff;
- its approach to positive action is appropriate and proportionate, and is understood by staff; and
- it understands the diversity of its workforce and has the right provisions in place to support their individual needs.

2. On 27 August 2021, you submitted an action plan setting out how you would address the causes of concern and our recommendations. We reviewed the action plan and in our letter of 12 January 2022 we acknowledged the progress the service was making.

3. Between 7 and 9 February 2022, we carried out a revisit to further review progress. During the revisit we interviewed staff who were involved in developing the action plan, including you as chief fire officer (CFO). We also interviewed managers and staff with responsibility for prevention, protection and EDI together with colleagues from their teams. On 14 February 2022, we concluded the revisit process by giving you our initial findings. This letter provides an update in that respect.

Governance

4. We saw that the service had continued to maintain the governance arrangements it had in place to monitor progress against its action plan, which were described in our letter to you of 12 January 2022. The service has shown a firm commitment to carry out the action plan.

5. The service should make sure that it uses its governance arrangements effectively to provide assurance to the authority and to the CFO so that the improvements being made are appropriate and carried out at the required pace.

6. We noted that the terms of reference for the integrated risk management plan (IRMP) assurance panel were focused on implementing the IRMP and didn't make reference to the action plan. The service should consider making explicit reference to the action plan so that it receives an appropriate level of scrutiny to bring about the required improvements.

Action plan

7. The service has developed an action plan covering the causes of concern identified in our letter to the service of 11 June 2021. We reviewed this plan and commented on progress in our letter of 12 January 2022. You provided us with an updated action plan for the revisit. We were able to see from this that the service was continuously monitoring progress against this plan.

8. The service has developed a draft prevention, protection and response strategy, which it intends to publish in April 2022. Senior leaders in the service showed a clear commitment to implement the strategy. But the service hasn't yet involved the workforce in discussions over how the strategy will be implemented throughout the organisation. While we understand that the service intends to do this, we didn't see a clear plan with timescales in place.

9. At the time of our revisit, the service was in the process of developing a plan designed to set out actions to implement the strategy. The service intends to create a 'one team' approach, to ensure that all staff are focused on reducing risk across its prevention, protection and response functions.

10. In order to reduce risk, the service told us that it intends to develop station and team plans. Each member of staff will have their objectives linked to these plans. We look forward to seeing how these plans translate into individual actions to bring about the required improvements.

Progress against causes of concern

Prevention

11. To develop the draft strategy for prevention, the service has reviewed its risk analysis to provide risk profiles for local areas. It has based this analysis on the definition of risk provided by the National Fire Chiefs Council. The strategy now provides clarity on those people who are most at risk from fire. This will help the service to target its resources better in order to prioritise the most vulnerable people for its prevention activity. The service intends to focus its prevention activity on those who are most at risk of fire.

Serious fire reviews

12. The service has made significant progress to address the concerns raised as regards the absence of joint reviews with organisations the service works with following a significant or fatal fire. In this respect, it has introduced a new policy and procedure. Since we wrote to the service about the causes of concern in June 2021, four significant or fatal fires have taken place. We were pleased to see that each incident had been reviewed in accordance with the new policy and with organisations the service works with where appropriate.

13. We also found that the service had put in place appropriate mechanisms for the integrated risk management board to monitor and close actions that were identified from the reviews. We were pleased to see that positive changes had been made following these reviews. For example, the service is now a partner on the multi-agency safeguarding board and the multi-agency suicide prevention steering group.

14. We are satisfied that the service has taken appropriate action to address this recommendation.

Partner organisation referrals

15. The service has made good progress to improve the way it deals with referrals for safe and well visits from other organisations it works with. It has put in place a mechanism for filtering referrals to prioritise those who are most at risk of fire. The service told us that those visits are completed within 48 hours where possible. While the prevention team is now effectively prioritising visits, it is doing this manually, which creates more work for it. We were assured that this process will be automated within a few weeks – this will help the service to track and monitor activity more efficiently.

16. At the time of our revisit, the service had significantly reduced the backlog of safe and well visits. Out of 372 referrals it had received since June last year from other organisations it works with, only 14 were waiting to have a date set for the visit. This is a significant improvement.

17. We reviewed those referrals that had been closed without a safe and well visit being carried out. We found that when the service had been unable to contact the person who would be receiving a visit, appropriate safeguards had been put in place. These included writing to that person with information about fire safety in the home and getting in touch with the referring organisation.

18. We are satisfied that the service has taken enough action to address this recommendation. We look forward to seeing the improvements in technology that will help its staff to work more efficiently and will provide a greater level of assurance for the service.

Protection

19. As previously mentioned, the service has developed a draft prevention, protection and response strategy, which it intends to publish in April 2022.

20. The service has used a revised methodology to review its risk-based inspection programme and has identified that it has approximately 33,000 regulated commercial premises. But it doesn't have a clear plan for how it will prioritise these for its inspection activity. At the time of our revisit, the service had audited 81 of its high-risk premises since April 2021. The service should review all of the regulated commercial premises it has identified to establish which ones are at highest risk. It needs to have in place a clear schedule that establishes how frequently these premises will be audited and how the audit schedule will be resourced.

21. The service doesn't currently have enough qualified and competent staff in protection to carry out all the audits it needs to do. This means that it still isn't auditing enough of its high-risk premises. The service has requested additional funding from the county council for more resources. The council has approved revenue funding of approximately £1m from April 2022, but this funding is limited to two years. While the funding is clearly welcome, it will take time to recruit and train staff, and see the benefits of this. The service will also need to have in place contingency plans for when the funding is no longer available. We noted that the service also intended to train its operational staff to conduct lower-risk audits, but this hasn't started yet.

22. While the service has plans in place to procure a new premises risk information system, progress with this project has been slow. The expected completion date for the project is September 2023. We noted that this project had already been delayed.

23. The current system requires numerous manual interventions and double-entering of information, which increases the likelihood of errors. This also creates more work for the team and reduces the amount of time it has to carry out audits.

24. The service has made some early progress to review its risk-based inspection programme. But still much work needs to be done before we can be assured that it has a robust, prioritised and resourced risk-based inspection programme in place.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

25. During our inspection last year, we identified significant problems with the service's culture. While swift action was needed, we recognise that fully resolving these problems takes time. The service has prioritised this issue and we are pleased to see some early, albeit limited, progress in this respect.

26. The service believes that its 'one team' approach will bring about positive change to its culture by training staff to carry out a variety of functions across prevention, protection and response.

27. The service has relaunched its staff engagement network. The objective of this network is to help to improve communication in the service and provide a mechanism for staff to provide feedback and challenge. It is also carrying out some work with its workforce to make improvements and develop values and behaviours.

28. Staff were positive about the leadership team. They told us that they were approachable and open to challenge. They said that the leadership team also listened and responded to staff more. But it is clear that there are still improvements that need to be made throughout the service to make sure that communication is effective at all levels. The service recognises that it has work to do to make sure staff fully understand and are involved in changes happening throughout the service.

29. When speaking to staff, it was clear that they still didn't understand some of the processes carried out by the service to attract potential recruits from diverse background and how personal equality data was used. The service still needs to address this. We noted that the service had developed a new policy to attract new recruits.

Conclusion

30. The revisit team was pleased to see the significant steps the service had taken in response to the causes of concern we issued. The increased levels of oversight and monitoring the service now has in place to track progress reflect its determination and commitment to make the required improvements.

31. The improvements that the service has made, particularly in respect of prevention, reflect the staff's hard work. The service has developed a new strategy for prevention, protection and

response, and it has put in place appropriate systems and processes to review significant fire incidents and manage referrals from organisations it works with. It has revised its methodology to identify high-risk premises. The service now needs to get the right resources in place with appropriate training to successfully implement its protection function.

32. The service has some plans in place to increase awareness of EDI throughout the organisation. Senior managers are clearly committed and motivated to developing a culture that is inclusive and has staff involved in its processes. We recognise that this will take some time to achieve.

33. Despite the good progress being made, there is still more work to be done. The service has a comprehensive action plan in place and governance arrangements to provide continued oversight. We acknowledge that the service has now put in place an effective system to review significant or fatal fires.

34. We aren't yet in a position to close any of these causes of concern. We will continue to monitor progress through updates from the service and data returns for prevention. We will carry out another revisit to the service in the autumn of this year in which we will be specifically reviewing progress in respect of protection. We will inspect progress against EDI in the workplace when we next inspect the service in Round 3.

35. This letter will be published on our website.

Yours sincerely,



Wendy Williams

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