



Home Office

Report by the Home Secretary on Fire and Rescue Authorities' compliance with the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England

Presented to Parliament pursuant to Section 25 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004

July 2018

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Compliance

Section 25 of the *Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004* requires the Secretary of State to report to Parliament every two years on:

- a) the extent to which fire and rescue authorities are acting in accordance with the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England (“the National Framework”); and
- b) any steps taken by him for the purpose of securing that fire and rescue authorities act in accordance with the National Framework.

The last section 25 report to Parliament by the Secretary of State was on 4 July 2016.

Each fire and rescue authority in England has complied with the requirement to publish an annual statement of assurance. These statements provide assurance on financial, governance and operational matters and show how they have had due regard to the expectations set out in their integrated risk management plan and the requirements included in the National Framework.

In accordance with the above requirement, the Secretary of State is satisfied that every fire and rescue authority in England has acted in accordance with the requirements of the National Framework, and no formal steps have been taken by the Secretary of State since the last assurance statement in 2016 to secure compliance.

Inspections and Review

There have been some specific issues of concern in two fire and rescue authorities since the last report to Parliament.

Avon: On 2 February 2017, the then Minister for Policing and Fire announced an independent inspection into a number of allegations made against Avon Fire and Rescue Authority. The inspection, which was the first of its kind, was established under Section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999. The inspection considered the authority’s compliance with its “best value duty” under Section 3 of the 1999 Act which requires the authority to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The report concluded that, in the lead Inspector’s opinion, the authority was failing to comply with its duty under section 3 of the 1999 Act and made a number of proposals for improvement in the areas of governance, leadership, culture and external scrutiny. However, it found that the Authority had met its obligations with reference to the National Framework.

Northamptonshire: The then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government announced an independent ‘best value’ inspection of Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) on 9 January 2018. The independent inspection report was published on 15 March 2018, giving evidence that the council had failed in its best value duty. The inspector found that failures at the council were not due to a lack of funding, but a result of poor management, a lack of budgetary control and a culture which discouraged challenge.

To supplement this inspection, Home Office asked the Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council to undertake a review to satisfy Ministers as to the operational viability of the Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service (which is currently part of NCC but

the previous Home Secretary has agreed the transfer of governance to the Northamptonshire Police and Crime Commissioner) and whether it was able to fulfil its core functions (as defined in sections 6 to 9 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004) and comply with the requirements of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England. The Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council concluded that while Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service is under considerable stress - financially and operationally - it is fulfilling its statutory obligations under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and complying with the National Framework.

A Revised National Framework

This report relates to the version of the National Framework which was made under section 21 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 published in July 2012¹. The next report to Parliament in 2020 will cover compliance with the revised National Framework which came into force on 1 June 2018². However, the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety (the “Hackitt Review”) and the Grenfell Tower Inquiry may make recommendations which need to be reflected in further revisions to the National Framework. Home Office has committed to review and update the National Framework as required to ensure any recommendations are captured.

Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services

Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services must submit to the Secretary of State and lay before Parliament an annual assessment on the efficiency and effectiveness of fire and rescue authorities for the period in which the report is prepared. That assessment will be made in addition to the Home Secretary’s section 25 report. Home Office will keep under review the need for this report in addition to that of the Inspectorate

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-and-rescue-national-framework-for-england>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-and-rescue-national-framework-for-england--2>

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