



Home Office

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

June 2023

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

June 2023



© Crown copyright 2023

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3.

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/official-documents.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at firereformconsultation@homeoffice.gov.uk

ISBN 978-1-5286-4299-6

E02938507 06/23

Printed on paper containing 40% recycled fibre content minimum

Printed in the UK by HH Associates Ltd. on behalf of the Controller of His Majesty's Stationery Office

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

2022

Report presented to Parliament pursuant to Section 25 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.

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 her 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 published in July 2020, covering the years 2017/18 and 2018/19. This report covers the years 2019/20 and 2020/21.

Each fire and rescue authority (FRA) in England has provided sufficient assurance that they are acting in accordance with the National Framework and material has been provided to demonstrate this. This includes assurance statements and, where appropriate, other documentation such as Integrated Risk Management Plans / Community Risk Management Plans, Governance Statements and other operational and financial information prepared by the authority for that period. Each FRA has also provided assurance to their community on financial, governance and operational matters, as well as providing COVID-19 response information.

The Home Office also carried out an examination of a sample of FRA assurance statements to confirm that authorities have complied with the framework and to consider their Integrated Risk Management Plans and financial plans.

It should be noted that this is the last statement where Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Services provide individual assurance statements. In 2021, the Hampshire and Isle of White FRAs merged to become a Combined Fire Authority, using the same Integrated Risk Management Plan.

Having assessed this information, 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 2020 to secure compliance.

Inspection of Fire and Rescue Services

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) completed the second round of inspections of all 44 fire and rescue services, with the final round 2 reports having been published on 20 January 2023. HMICFRS has now commenced the third round of inspections.

HMICFRS inspections of fire and rescue services are organised under three pillars: effectiveness; efficiency; and people.

- **Effectiveness** - the Inspectorate considers how well the fire and rescue service understands its current and future risks, works to prevent fires and other risks, protects the public through the regulation of fire safety, and responds to fires and other emergencies;
- **Efficiency** - covers how well the fire and rescue service uses its resources to manage risk, and secures an affordable way of providing its service; and
- **People** - the inspectorate assesses how the fire and rescue service promotes its values and culture, trains its staff and ensures that they have the necessary skills, ensures fairness and diversity for its workforce, and develops leaders.

Inspection reports shine a light on performance, spotlighting good practice and helping services identify what works well and where improvement is needed. They also provide the public with a clear, independent view of the quality of their local service on key issues such as protection and prevention, and the extent to which services are identifying and addressing local risk.

The second round of fire inspection reports saw 15 services out of 44 graded good or better across all three pillars for effectiveness, efficiency and people.

The Inspectorate also provides assurance to the Secretary of State through its annual State of Fire and Rescue report. During this reporting period, HMICFRS' Chief Inspector has submitted three reports to the Secretary of State under section 28B of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (January 2020, December 2021 and January 2023). These reports were also laid in Parliament. The reports draw on findings from inspections in all fire and rescue services in England, to provide an overall assessment of the state of the fire and rescue sector.

In 2022, HMICFRS introduced a new 'Engage' phase to their fire monitoring regime, overseen by the Fire Performance Oversight Group. This is a process of escalation if HMICFRS consider a service is not making sufficient progress in managing and mitigating causes of concern which present a risk to public safety or which are not progressing at a reasonable rate. This mechanism is a powerful way of scrutinising FRSs and helping support them take the necessary remedial action and signposting available support. The Home Office will keep under review the need for a statutory requirement to provide assurance reports in addition to those reports now produced by HMICFRS.

Grenfell Tower

On 30 October 2019, the Inquiry Chair Sir Martin Moore-Bick, published his Phase 1 report covering the events on the night of the fire, including the role of the emergency services. Sir Martin made a number of recommendations for both central government and fire and rescue services. The Home Office has published a tracker of progress against the Phase 1 recommendations; this can be found on gov.uk and as an

interactive version on the Fire England website¹. As of 1 December 2022, 31 of the 46 recommendations have been completed, with progress made in a number of areas.

Phase 2 of the Inquiry examined how the building was so seriously exposed to the risk of fire and came to be in the condition it was; the adequacy and role of fire safety legislation and building regulations; and the response by the authorities in the immediate aftermath of the fire (the first seven days). Hearings have now concluded, and we are awaiting the publication of the Phase 2 report and final recommendations. Once published, we will consider whether any revisions to the National Framework are required, in light of the Inquiry's Phase 2 report and recommendations.

COVID-19

In January 2021, HMICFRS published a report into how each individual fire and rescue service responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the emergence of new challenges. HMICFRS found that core services responded well to the outbreak. Services maintained their operational ability to respond to fires and other emergencies, which they prioritised over other activities. There were concerns with the speed with which agreements were reached for fire to play a fuller role in supporting communities with the need to negotiate cumbersome agreements with unions and employers. When freed from this and enabled to use operational discretion, fire staff were rapidly deployed providing vaccinations and community support. Though the earlier 'tripartite' agreements allowed services to deploy staff to support emergency service partners and communities, it also had a limiting effect in some areas, including creating delays to activity already underway, in local and national agreements, and restricting flexibility in deploying staff.

HMICFRS noted that positive aspects included low staff absences and the use of a national procurement hub used by three-quarters of services with over 400 suppliers to jointly procure PPE. The pandemic also acted as a catalyst for many services to transform, modernising some of their working practices.

Though the pandemic highlighted the desire of fire personnel to fully serve their communities, it also highlighted the ongoing need for reform, to ensure that they can respond rapidly to emerging threats and can continue to put the community first.

Fire Reform

As part of the ongoing need for reform highlighted by the Grenfell Tower tragedy, the Manchester Arena attack, COVID-19 response and HMICFRS inspections, the Government published the *Reforming our Fire and Rescue Service* white paper and consultation in May 2022. The consultation sought views across three key themes: People; Professionalism; and Governance. The consultation closed in July 2022 and the responses received are key to informing the next steps on reform. The official response will be published in due course.

¹ [Thematic update on progress against the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 recommendations - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/thematic-update-on-progress-against-the-grenfell-tower-inquiry-phase-1-recommendations)
[Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 Report recommendations – Progress on implementation | Fire England](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/grenfell-tower-inquiry-phase-1-report-recommendations-progress-on-implementation)

Values and Ethics in Fire and Rescue Services

Since the first State of Fire report in 2020, HMICFRS has been clear that the culture and ethics in fire and rescue services needs to improve and that, in some instances, is entirely unacceptable.

Following the publication of the London Fire Brigade's Independent Culture Review, there have been multiple reports of allegations of unacceptable behaviour in fire and rescue services. The National Framework includes a range of expectations in relation to services having comprehensive people strategies, including that they should cover behaviours, diversity and professionalism.

Some services have noted that they have people strategies in place that have been developed in collaboration with the workforce as per the requirement in the National Framework. Strategies are designed to account for the principles set out in the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) people strategy. Whilst it is positive that services have strategies in place for the areas set out in the National Framework, the Home Office is concerned that there needs to be a clear effort made to up the integrity across fire and rescue services.

The Home Office will continue to work with the NFCC and HMICFRS to ensure that these strategies are as robust and far-reaching as possible. The Home Office will continue to work closely with our partners, including fire and rescue services, the Inspectorate, and the National Fire Chiefs Council to ensure that these strategies are as robust and far-reaching as possible, and translate into meaningful change. This includes ensuring that we are seeing a positive impact from the new Government funded Code of Ethics. The Code was developed by the NFCC and other partners in the sector. The Code sets out five ethical principles which should be followed in all activities undertaken by fire and rescue services, including the principle of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

A Fire Standard has also been created by the Fire Standards Board to support the implementation of the Code of Ethics within services. The Home Office will also consider how values and ethics, as well as people strategies, will be assessed and reviewed within the National Framework in the future.

E02938507

978-1-5286-4299-6