

Fire and Rescue Scrutiny Committee – 2nd September 2022

Report Title: Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Update

Report Author – Jean Cole

1. Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS) was inspected by officers from Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) during September and October 2021.
2. HMICFRS announced their intention to begin to re-inspect all 44 fire and rescue services in England in three tranches. GFRS was inspected as part of the second tranche of fifteen fire and rescue services with final reports published on 27th July 2022.
3. The inspection focused on three main questions:
 - a. How effective is the fire and rescue service at keeping people safe and secure from the risk of fire and other risks?
 - b. How efficient is the fire and rescue service at keeping people safe and secure from the risk of fire and other risks?
 - c. How well does the fire and rescue service look after its people?
4. The inspection involved reviewing the Service’s policies and procedures, the submission of a Position Statement and Self-Assessment completed by the Chief Fire Officer, and a six week field-work phase, during which the inspectors interviewed employees from 4 whole-time stations and 6 on-call stations, held several focus groups with members of staff across the whole organisation and conducted interviews with middle and senior managers.
5. On the 7th January 2022, GFRS received prior notice that the Inspectorate would issue two Causes of Concern:

Cause of Concern 1:
“The Service hasn’t done enough since the last inspection to embed its values and associated behaviours, and promote a positive workplace culture.”

Cause of Concern 2:
“The Service hasn’t done enough since the last inspection to improve understanding of the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and remove barriers to establishing EDI in the service.”
6. In response to this notification, GFRS took a collaborative approach, working with Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) corporate leadership team, leaders from across the wider organisation, focus groups and representative bodies to develop a detailed Improvement Plan to address the issues raised in the two Causes of Concern. This

Improvement Plan was sent to the HMICFRS on 24th February 2022 and was signed off by the HMICFRS on 11th March 2022.

7. GCC recognised that to deliver transformational change of this scale additional funding and resourcing was paramount. With more than £2m of investment in GFRS over the past 2 years, GCC committed a further £2m of funding. This money is being used to increase capacity and capability culminating in 28 new posts that will be permanently added to the establishment. Clearly, funding alone will not deliver the changes we aspire to achieve. However, it will assist in creating the environment for improvement.
8. On the 25th May 2022, HMICFRS informed GFRS that it would be placed into an enhanced monitoring process, which provides additional scrutiny and support through the Fire Performance Oversight Group (FPOG).
9. On the 27th July 2022, the HMICFRS published the final report for GFRS.
10. Using graded judgements against the areas explored in the inspections, the HMICFRS identified four overall judgement categories:
 - Outstanding – where the service exceeds what is expected for good;
 - Good – the expected graded judgement for all fire & rescue services
 - Requires Improvement – where there are shortcomings, and
 - Inadequate – where there are serious critical failings of policy, practice or performance.

11. The overall summary for Gloucestershire FRS states

“The service has invested time and effort to address problems identified during our previous inspection but work hasn’t been focussed or co-ordinated, and staff haven’t been effectively involved. Some improvements have been made but overall the service has deteriorated since 2019.”

12. The individual grading’s against each of the three areas examined were:

a. Effectiveness – Requires Improvement

“We saw improvements in some areas since our 2019 inspection, but other areas have deteriorated. Overall the service hasn’t made enough progress. The service should make clearer links between, and explain better, how its risk assessments informs its risk management plans and objectives. It still hasn’t developed a process to make sure that its home fire safety checks can be easily prioritised to those at the highest risk. It is also still not evaluating all of its prevention activity, so it can’t see how well its actions work, and which are the most effective. Fire Safety audits are completed to a consistent standard. But the feedback that the Service gives to building owners needs improving. It also needs to do more to assess the quality of its protection work.”

b. Efficiency – Requires Improvement

“There has been limited progress since the last inspection. The service’s budget, and staffing plans aren’t clearly aligned to its IRMP, nor do they support its objectives. Its performance management arrangements need improvement. They should also show a clear link between the use of resources and achieving the services objectives.”

c. People – Inadequate

“Overall it is disappointing to see that the service has deteriorated in the way it looks after its people. Much more work is needed, quickly and with clear vision and leadership. There has been limited progress in improving the services culture. We found worrying pockets of unacceptable behaviour among staff and management. These are having a negative effect on the wider culture of the service.

A significant number of staff feel some leaders don’t model and maintain the service’s values. There is a lack of senior leader visibility. Staff told us that communication between them is seen as one-way and ineffective.

Progress to address bullying and harassment has been slow. We found that staff have little belief in grievance and bullying, harassment and discrimination procedures. Staff and management have limited confidence to challenge inappropriate behaviour.

Efforts to improve equality, diversity and inclusion lack a clear vision, and are not effectively co-ordinated. Equality impact assessments and actions don’t have effective governance or oversight.

Some promotion procedures have been updated, but the service needs to do more work to make sure that the procedures are fully inclusive, that they support the increasing workplace diversity and that they are seen fair by staff.

High workloads are effecting staff wellbeing. We found that there was no plan to address this.

There has been some progress on workforce planning. But the service needs to do more to develop a comprehensive plan that is linked to its IRMP.

Positively, the Service has made some improvements to its approach to staff appraisals. It has appointed an equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) manager, which is an encouraging step towards EDI in the service. The number of temporarily promoted staff has also decreased.”

13. In response to the areas identified for improvement, GFRS have taken a collaborative approach, working with Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) corporate leadership team, leaders from across the wider organisation, focus groups and representative bodies to develop a detailed Improvement Plan to address the issues raised which will be presented to full Cabinet on 21st September 2022.

14. Progress against the delivery of milestones contained within the Improvement Plan will be monitored independently by the recently re-established Community Safety

Improvement Board. This Board is chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive, includes the Cabinet Lead for Fire Community Safety & Libraries, members from GCC Corporate Leadership Team, HMICFRS, National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and the Local Government Association. Further governance and oversight will also be delivered by the Fire Scrutiny Committee.

15. To assist us on our journey of improvement we have enlisted the help of an external provider who specialise and have a wealth of experience in public sector cultural intelligence/change. We have also reached out to the NFCC and will be receiving additional support from the Principal Officer Team at West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service.
16. HMICFRS will revisit the Service in autumn 2022, to review progress against the Improvement Plan for the two Causes of Concern.