



Open Report on behalf of Mark Baxter, Chief Fire Officer

Report to:	Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date:	12 December 2023
Subject:	His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Inspection of Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue 2023

Summary:

This report provides a summary of the outcomes from the recent inspection of Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue (LFR) by His Majesty's Inspectorate for Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS). The final inspection report was published on the HMICFRS website on 29 November 2023 and is provided as an appendix to this report.

HMICFRS has recognised the positive direction of travel for LFR and has noted areas of promising practice.

Areas for further improvement have been identified, with clear recommendations for LFR to consider and address.

Actions Required:

Members of the Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee are invited to review the findings from the inspection report and agree the next steps in respect of the areas for improvement contained within the inspection report.

1. Background

His Majesty's Inspectorate for Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) continues in its inspection regime of Fire and Rescue Services in England.

This is the third round of inspections by HMICFRS that follows the inspection we received in 2018 and 2021. The inspection lasted for eight weeks within May and June 2023.

HMICFRS has updated the way it reports findings in terms of judgements, as follows:

- Moved away from three pillars of Effectiveness, Efficiency and People and now reports on all 11 areas separately.
- Introduced a judgement grade of 'Adequate'. The grades are now – Inadequate, Requires Improvement, Adequate, Good, Outstanding.
- Introduced two areas of judgment for shared sector learning on positive practice:
 - Promising Practice - *Activities that we have found to be working well in a service where there are positive measurable outcomes which have been observed or monitored.*
 - Innovative Practice - *New ways of working in a service that may not have been formally evaluated but that have the potential to produce more positive outcomes but have not been subject to any testing or monitoring.*

We welcome the findings of the recent inspection and fully accept the outcomes of the report. It is assuring to see the inspectorate has recognised the positive work and direction of travel of Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue and also acknowledge there is still more work to do in some areas, which the service is fully committed to.

The summary of our judgements for this inspection compared with previous inspections are:

Question	Direction of travel	This Inspection - 2023	2021
Effectiveness			Requires improvement
Understanding fires and other risks	↑	Adequate	Requires improvement
Preventing fires and other risks	↑	Adequate	Requires improvement
Protecting the public through fire regulation	=	Requires Improvement	Requires improvement
Responding to fires and other emergencies	=	Good	Good
Responding to major and multi-agency incidents	=	Good	Good
Efficiency			Requires improvement
Making best use of resources	↑	Adequate	Requires improvement
Future affordability	↓	Adequate	Good
People			Requires improvement
Promoting the right values and culture	↓	Requires Improvement	Good
Getting the right people with the right skills	↑	Good	Requires improvement
Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity	=	Requires Improvement	Requires improvement
Managing performance and developing leaders	=	Requires Improvement	Requires improvement

Areas of interest

HMI Lee Freeman summary – *‘Overall, the service has improved since our last inspection, but there is still more to do. We recognise the service is currently going through significant changes, which are affecting some areas of work. We will keep in close contact with the service to monitor the effect of these changes. We will also revisit the service to review its improvement plans.’*

The HMI inspectors have noted that there are two areas of promising practice within the report which are:

Corresponding - The service’s co-responding work is highly successful and has been an important part of the service for many years. Fire service staff have been trained to provide life support until the ambulance service arrives. They are proud to be involved with this work. The public is made safer through the early intervention the co-responders provide. Recently, funding for this work was at risk, but the service has found new funding. The service runs the co-responding model without making a profit or loss.

Assured level of risk model - The service’s ‘assured level of risk’ process is a dynamic working practice that allows resources to be adjusted based on risk. If a station area has an increase in incidents or risk, the service can move resources from on-call stations to help with prevention and protection work. It does this by increasing available working hours and training. This work is monitored and when the service feels the risk has been reduced, it moves this resource to other locations in need.

Both these areas will be posted on the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Positive Practice Portal that shares best practice for other services to view and learn from.

It should be noted that HMI has continued to recognise that the service provides a good operational response to fires and emergencies for single agency and multi-agency type incidents. This shows that the areas that the service has focused on in areas for improvement from the previous inspection has not been at the detriment of the operational response standard, which is a re-assuring message for the communities.

The inspectorate referenced in areas of the report the limitations of current IMT systems within the service that are making ways of working inefficient and sometimes ‘clunky’.

The report states – ‘The service IT provisions are hindering them from increasing productivity across the service, as they currently do not support an efficient way of working. The service is aware of this and are making improvements to IT, including upgrading infrastructure in conjunction with the county council priorities.’

‘This is impacting almost all areas of work and restricts the service from achieving as much as it would like. Many areas are still on paper based systems, which makes simple tasks, such as sharing of information, difficult or arduous from one department to another.’

Within Protection, it was recognised the improvements in terms of resourcing the Protection function and delivering against the Risk Based Inspection Program (RBIP). It was highlighted that out of the 293 care homes that are registered, 103 of them were not on the service's RBIP. They were on a separate list and being worked through independently of the RBIP.

The inspectorate had commented that there was a low level of prosecution action to what they would expect to see in ratio of inspections and enforcement notices. Their indication is that the enforcement protocols may not be as effective as necessary and would expect to see more prosecutions.

A staff survey was conducted by HMI as part of the inspection and the outcomes fed into the People section of the report. Although it was recognised the staff clearly understood the values and Core Code of Ethics, there were examples of staff not adhering to those values and behaviours during interviews. There was also the view that staff did not have sufficient confidence in the process in dealing with complaints and issues relating to bullying, harassment and discrimination despite having clear policies in place.

The report states that there is more work to do to increase the diversity of the service as there has been little progress, despite some focused recruitment, in reflecting the diversity of local communities.

A summary of statements within each area are:

Understanding fires and other risks

- The service has an effective community risk management plan.
- The service gathers, maintains, and shares a range of risk information but improvements could be made.
- The service uses the outcomes of operational activity effectively to build an understanding of risk.

Preventing fires and other risks

- The service's prevention strategy is clearly linked to the risks it has identified in its integrated risk management plan (IRMP).
- Prevention activity targeting is improving.
- Staff have the skills and competence to complete home fire safety visits.
- Staff are competent in dealing with safeguarding concerns.
- The service works well with other organisations to prevent fires and other risks.
- The service has arrangements in place to tackle fire-setting behaviour.
- The service evaluates its prevention work effectively.
- Performance management for stations prevention work could be improved.

Protecting the public through fire regulation

- The service protection strategy is linked to its IRMP.
- Activity is not always aligned to the highest risk.
- Quality assurance of protection work takes place.

- Quality of audits are not consistent.
- The service enforcement activity is not effective.
- The service is working towards being fully resourced.
- The service is adapting to new legislation.
- The service is working well with other enforcement agencies.
- The service responds well to building consultations and licencing requests.
- The service should improve its engagement with businesses to promote fire safety.
- The service has been effective in reducing unwanted fire signals.

Responding to fires and other emergencies

- The service aligns its resources to the risks identified in its IRMP.
- The service consistently meets its response standard.
- Availability is managed well by the service.
- Staff have a good understanding of how to command incidents safely.
- Control room staff are involved in training, exercising, debriefing and assurance activity.
- The management of risk information is improving.
- The service makes efforts to capture learning from incidents locally and nationally.
- The service is effective at keeping the public informed.

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents

- The service is prepared for major and multi-agency incidents.
- The service is well prepared to respond to major and multi-agency incidents.
- The service is well prepared to work with other fire services.
- The service is attempting to increase the number of cross-border exercises.
- Staff have a good understanding of JESIP (Joint Emergency Service Interoperability Principles).
- The service is an integral part of the Lincolnshire Resilience Forum.

Making best use of resources

- The service needs to show a clear rationale for the resources allocated between prevention, protection, and response activities.
- The service is working on improving productivity and implementing new ways of working.
- The service IT provisions are hindering them from increasing productivity across the service, as they currently do not support an efficient way of working.
- The service collaborates well with others.
- The service has worked with Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) to improve its financial management.

Making the fire and rescue service affordable now and in the future

- There are clear arrangements for accessing reserves within LCC.
- The service has improved the link between the fleet strategy and the IRMP.
- The service needs to improve its technology to support change and improve efficiency.

Promoting the right values and culture

- The service has well defined values, but work needs to be done to ensure all staff demonstrate them.
- The service provides good wellbeing support services for staff but need to improve accessibility and understanding.
- The service has a positive health and safety culture.
- Absence management processes are clear.

Getting the right people with the right skills

- The service has improved their workforce planning.
- Workforce skills and capabilities are managed well.
- The service has a positive learning and improvement culture.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity

Within this section the inspection team has confirmed that they have signed off two of the recommendations from the 2021 cause of concern relating to '*ensuring fairness and promoting diversity*'. They were:

- Give greater priority to how it increases awareness of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) across the organisation.
- Make sure that all staff receive appropriate EDI training.

There are three remaining recommendations that require further work and evidence that the inspectorate has outlined. It will re-inspect the service in March-April 2024 to look at these three specific areas to evaluate if these can be discharged. The Service has 28 days from release of the report to submit an action plan to HMI that details how it intends to:

- Improve how it works with its staff and provides feedback in relation to EDI issues.
- Improve the understanding and use of equality impact assessments in all aspects of its work and consider if its policies and procedures are inclusive and support those with protected characteristics.
- Make sure that there is a programme of positive action to support its recruitment and progression.

Other notes in this area:

- The service should do more to seek and act on staff feedback and challenge.
- Staff do not have confidence in the service's approach to dealing with bullying, harassment, and discrimination.
- The service is having limited success in addressing disproportionality in recruitment and retention.
- The service still needs to improve their implementation of equality, diversity, and inclusion.

Managing performance and developing leaders

- The service should ensure they are managing individual performance of all staff.
- The service should do more to ensure fairness in promotion and progression processes.
- The service should improve its plans to further diversify leadership in the future.
- The service should improve plans to develop leadership and high-potential staff at all levels.

Next steps

In terms of the existing cause of concern, the service will provide the HMI inspection team with an action plan within 28 days with details on how the service will address the existing three recommendations. It is acknowledged in the report that there has been work in all of these areas, but the inspectorate is requiring more evidence from staff that this work is embedded and understood.

The service is already actively engaged with LCC IMT to review current systems and processes to ensure they are as efficient as possible, recognising that there are areas that require bespoke systems that requires further investigations to resolve. There is an ongoing review of the IMT support in terms of roles and how these can be better aligned to provide the specialist support for areas of the service.

The IMT systems approach is being developed alongside the systems optimisation project to rationalise processes and create efficiencies. The Business Support team are linked in to reduce the processes that currently exist within the service and move away from paper based systems and reporting.

There are ongoing discussions with HR support to collectively improve how complaints and allegations can be supported more consistently and timely that reflects the values and behaviours that are expected from all staff. This is a 'high profile' area that is being reflected across all services.

There are a total of 14 areas for improvement that are within the main body of the report, with the three existing recommendations relating to the 2021 cause of concern, that will form part of the service's continual improvement agenda and business as usual which will be reported on through the performance management board and the service management board that is attended by the Executive Councillor. These areas are already aligned to how we deliver against our Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP). Progress will also be reported during regular Executive Councillor meetings with the Chief Fire Officer as part of a standing item.

The service has also just undertaken a further thematic inspection by HMI that has focused on bullying, harassment and misconduct. This is an inspection that the Home Office has commissioned HMI to complete on behalf of the fire sector. Lincolnshire is part of a group

of 10 services that reflect all governance models and a mixture of urban and rural services. The outcome of the full report will be published in June 2024 and will be anonymised so no services will be directly named in the report against any findings.

The demand that the Inspectorate is putting on services during the increased inspections and the monitoring through reports throughout the year is becoming significant. This has been fed back to the HMI's, but it appears that this demand will continue as business as usual for future inspection regimes. It is likely that this will be last of the full inspections of all areas of the service and a move to a programme similar to the PEEL (police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy) programme, which is a continuous monitoring regime that Police are accustomed to, seems more likely.

We do welcome the Inspectorate's findings and continuous inspection programme as it helps drive improvement and supports our commitment to deliver the best services to our communities. It is also recognised that to support the inspection programme to realise the full value requires resource commitment within the service.

2. Conclusion

LFR fully accepts the full findings of the latest inspection by HMICFRS. The inspection programme supports the continuous improvement program that LFR review and embed within its key planning documents. Scrutiny and oversight of areas that have been highlighted within this report will be delivered through LFR's internal management structure and the Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee.

HMI has been consistently positive about how LFR respond to operational incidents and therefore giving confidence to the communities of Lincolnshire that when our fire appliances are needed for emergency response, then they receive well trained, competent, and confident fire fighters and officers with access to good equipment and information to do the best job they can.

It is positive to see that HMICFRS has recognised the promising practice of our long standing corresponding scheme along with the benefits to communities and LFR staff.

It is positive to see that HMICFRS has recognised the promising practice of LFR resourcing to risk that ensure we have our resources placed to reflect where our risks are within the County and are agile enough to be moved as and when those risks change.

It is disappointing to hear that some staff have experiences of bullying and harassment within LFR. The continued commitment to ensure everyone should have the confidence to raise concerns and they will be addressed in a timely and supportive manner is a continuing area within the culture that is a key focus.

Although it has been recognised that staff understand the expected culture and behaviours which has been a positive journey over the last two years, it is disappointing that some staff have not demonstrated these at all times.

The HMICFRS inspection in 2023 has evidenced that there is progress and improvements in all areas, but also recognises that continued focus in some areas is required.

3. Consultation

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

N/A

4. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	HMICFRS Inspection report on Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue 2023

5. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

This report was written by Mark Baxter, Chief Fire Officer, who can be contacted on Mark.Baxter@Lincolnshire.gov.uk.