

## Divisions Affected -

# PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 November 2025

## Fire and Rescue Improvement Programme

### Report by Chief Fire Officer and Director of Community Safety

## RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to**

To note the report and approve the updated approach of monitoring improvements.

## Executive Summary

- The report provides an update on the progress Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service have made in terms of managing the Areas For Improvement (AFI) highlighted in the most recent HMICFRS report (July 2024).
- A previous paper (17<sup>th</sup> September 2024) set out the initial progress as well as the approach developed to ensure robust governance and performance reporting against the agreed action plan: this included development of a Fire Improvement Pipeline and Fire Improvement Board. The report also highlighted the 32 positive statements about the service made by the HMI inspection team.
- The HMI inspection report made 11 judgements and identified 26 “Areas For Improvement” (AFI). Our Fire Improvement Programme currently holds 41 defined elements that we are aiming to deliver in this financial year.

Critical Areas	All 6 Completed
Prioritised Areas	18 in Fire Improvement Pipeline (13 directly linked to HMI Areas for Improvement).
Deferred Priority	17 reas (7 directly linked to HMI Areas for improvement).

- Following risk-assessment by the service, the 6 most critical AFI's (including fire survival guidance, risk information, unwanted fire signals and quality assurance of building work) were identified as priorities and have subsequently been addressed.

6. 13 AFI's are currently in-progress alongside 5 other critical areas of change, taken either from internal review or from work required for adherence to other, national action plans. These areas are in the quarterly Fire Improvement Pipeline, with work being carried out by Heads of Service to ensure these are a focus of departmental activity.
7. 7 AFI areas are currently prioritised for completion later in the year (alongside a further 10 critical areas for change).
8. The Fire Improvement Pipeline was designed as "a dynamic document developed in response to national inquiry action plans, inspection reports, and the service's culture review, allowing the service to react to new recommendations while prioritising and managing capacity for delivery".
9. Alongside this a Fire Improvement Board was created, with the first meeting taking place on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2024. This board began scrutinising the prioritisation of work areas in the fire improvement pipeline, with a focus on AFI's as a service priority. This board aimed to report annually to the Place Scrutiny Committee, hence this current update. The Fire Improvement Board still represents all service areas, supported by the HMICFRS Service Liaison Lead and the executive leadership of the council. The board will still sit quarterly and report into the Place Scrutiny Committee on a regular basis ensuring Members have oversight of the improvements being made across the service area. The Cabinet Member for Public Health, Inequalities & Community Safety will be updated on progress of the improvement work through regular monthly briefings.
10. A recent review of both the Fire Improvement Pipeline and Fire Improvement Board has suggested improvements to the pipeline model designed to streamline the process and provide specific focus, quarterly, on the prioritised areas of change. Following this review the service aims to complete all necessary improvements before the next HMI inspection in two years and, with the HMI liaison sitting on the Fire Improvement Board, an update of progress to HMICFRS has led to an increased confidence level in this being achieved.

## **Key Issues**

11. Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Services were inspected in January 2024 and provided with gradings for 11 areas of the organisation. Gradings range from "outstanding" to "poor" and, if any area is issued with an "Area For Improvement" (AFI) they are automatically issued with an "adequate" grade.
12. In addition to highlighting the areas of improvement required, the January 2024 report contained positive statements across all the areas of inspection, highlighting the hard work of teams across the service to protect the community and make improvements. It recognised where we have closed out recommendations from the previous report and identifies some areas where this has not been the case. The report included 32 positive findings about the service

and 26 suggested areas for improvement. Some of these areas of improvement have already been resolved.

13. Following an initial period of progress with the Fire Improvement Pipeline an internal review highlighted the need to re-prioritise AFI's: this was prompted following discussions on capacity, the impact of the tragic Bicester Motion incident and the need to provide focussed, tangible, quarterly goals for teams to work towards.
14. Following this the Fire Improvement Process has now been standardised and streamlined, providing greater levels of internal scrutiny of progress and challenge, both ahead of the Fire Improvement Board and within it.
15. With the AFI's now re-prioritised and the work allocated quarterly, in order to address the most important improvements needed, progress is underway this quarter to completing 13 AFI's, along with 5 other critical areas of change which have been highlighted through national action plans. Each of these will ultimately each be signed-off through the Board.
16. Following significant work on these areas, 2 are awaiting sign-off at the next Fire Improvement Board. A further 4 areas are simply awaiting evaluation of their changes before sign-off will be requested, with work having begun on a further 5 areas that will carry-over into the next quarter. Currently 7 areas are paused due to capacity issues, which will be discussed at the next Fire Improvement Board.
17. The final 7 AFI's currently sit within a "holding area" for prioritisation later in the year, once capacity of teams allow for these to move into the pipeline.
18. Through the improved governance structure and reporting process, OFRS will ensure all necessary further improvements are planned and delivered through the fire improvement pipeline. Some of the areas of improvement will be addressed by the Fire Cover Model: this was recognised by the HMICFRS who stated they were looking forward to seeing the outcomes from this approach.

## **Corporate Policies and Priorities**

19. The Fire Improvement Programme and Pipeline are fundamental to Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service's (OFRS) ability to meet the Vision, Values, and Strategic Priorities of the County Council. By systematically addressing Areas For Improvement (AFIs) identified through inspection, these initiatives demonstrate a strong commitment to continual improvement, transparency, and delivering high-quality, responsive services for the community.
20. The re-prioritisation and streamlining of the Fire Improvement Process ensure that the most important changes are tackled first, with close scrutiny and oversight, supporting community safety and effective emergency response. The alignment with national action plans and routine equality impact assessments further reflect the Council's dedication to fairness, inclusion, and evidence-based planning—putting residents' wellbeing at the centre of decision-making.

## **Financial Implications**

21. The service manages the Fire Improvement Programme through its annual budgets and identifies additional pressures and saving through the Council Business and Budget Planning process.

Comments checked by:

Drew Hodgson – Strategic Finance Business Partner

## **Legal Implications**

22. The Fire Improvement Programme in itself does not give rise to any direct legal implications, but the inspection report recommendations do carry significant weight and are a critical part of the enforcement process of fire safety.

Comments checked by:

Jay Akbar – Head of Legal & Governance

## **Equality & Inclusion Implications**

23. The service will undertake equality impact assessments for all key pieces of improvement work that is required.

## **Sustainability Implications**

24. The service will review any sustainability implications against all key pieces of improvement work.

## **Risk Management**

25. The service regularly reviews the criticality of the areas of improvement highlighted by the HMI and re-prioritised the work required.
26. The service must make significant improvements in the next inspection to ensure it maintains the trust and confidence of the public. The main risk to the delivery against the recommendations is capacity and funding. The fire improvement pipeline looks to ensure there is balance between what we can deliver given the services resources and budgetary constraints.

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