

## **Divisions Affected - All**

### **PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**25 September 2024**

#### **Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service Improvement report**

**His Majesty Inspectorate of Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Services (HMI)  
Report for Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service**

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

### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. **The Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee is RECOMMENDED to:**
  - a) **Endorse the Fire Improvement Board as the appropriate method to track the improvement work within the Fire and Rescue service.**
  - b) **Agree that the Chief Fire Officer should report to this committee on an annual basis to present on the progress against the HMI recommendations and the fire improvement work.**

### **Executive Summary**

2. This report by the Chief Fire Officer and Director of Community Safety for the Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service outlines the findings and recommendations from the latest inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Services (HMI). The inspection, conducted in early 2024, resulted in 11 judgements and 26 areas of improvement, with varying levels of criticality.
3. Recommendations include the endorsement of the Fire Improvement Board to track improvement work within the service and an annual report to the committee on progress against HMICFRS recommendations. The report highlights that six recommendations have already been addressed, and eight are currently being worked on through existing service delivery plans. The remaining areas of improvement are incorporated into the fire improvement pipeline, which details the work required, expected benefits, lead officers, and timelines.
4. The governance of the improvement actions will be overseen by the Fire Improvement Board, supported by the HMI Service Liaison Lead and the executive leadership of the council. The board will meet quarterly and report to

the Place Oversight and Scrutiny Committee, ensuring members have oversight of the improvements being made.

5. The report also addresses financial, legal, staff, equality, inclusion, sustainability, and risk management implications. It emphasises the need for significant improvements in the next inspection to maintain public trust and confidence.

## Background

6. The Fire and Rescue service manages its continuous improvement work through its fire improvement pipeline which has been developed in response to national inquiry action plans<sup>12</sup>, 'state of fire'<sup>3</sup> and other national inspection reports, the service's culture review and the inspection of the service by HMI. This is a dynamic plan which allows the service to react to new recommendations while ensuring it is clear on its priorities and capacity for delivery.
7. The latest HMI inspection took place at the beginning of 2024. The report that was published in July made 11 judgements against the assessment areas and it contains 26 areas of improvement which carry different levels of criticality. The details of the report can be viewed on the HMI website here - [Oxfordshire - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services \(justiceinspectors.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/oxfordshire).
8. Since the inspection in January, 6 recommendations have been addressed including fire survival guidance, risk information, unwanted fire signals and quality assurance of building inspection work. The rest of the work has been risk assessed and a further eight recommendations are currently being addressed through existing service delivery plans. The remaining areas of improvement are all incorporated in the fire improvement pipeline. The pipeline spreadsheet details the work required including expected benefits, lead officers and teams as well as the timelines for the start and completion of the work. Details of work areas planned can be viewed at Appendix 2 - Fire improvement pipeline actions summary.
9. The governance to oversee the performance and completion of the actions will be through the introduction of a Fire Improvement Board. The board represents all service areas and will be supported by the HMI Service Liaison Lead and the executive leadership of the council. The board will sit for the first time in September and will scrutinise the prioritisation of all the work areas in the Fire Improvement Pipeline with particular attention on the recommendations from HMI.

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<sup>1</sup> [Phase 1 report | Grenfell Tower Inquiry & Phase 2 report | Grenfell Tower Inquiry](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Manchester Arena Inquiry Volume 2: Emergency Response - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/100000/manchester-arena-inquiry-volume-2-emergency-response)

<sup>3</sup> [State of Fire and Rescue: The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2023 - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services \(justiceinspectors.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/state-of-fire-and-rescue)

10. The Cabinet Member for Public Health, Inequalities & Community Safety will be updated on progress of the improvement work through regular monthly briefings.
11. The board will sit quarterly and report into the Place Oversight and Scrutiny Committee on a regular basis ensuring Members have oversight of the improvements being made across the service area. **As per the recommendations, the Chief Fire Officer has proposed an annual review of the fire improvements through the Place Oversight and Scrutiny Committee.**

## Key Issues

12. The HMICFRS has undertaken its third round of fire and rescue service inspections, with Oxfordshire inspected in December 2023 and January 2024. There has been a change to the grading criteria, with 11 areas of inspection that sit within the three pillars of effectiveness, efficiency and people. In addition to the grading of 'outstanding', 'good', 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate', a fifth assessment category of 'adequate' has been introduced and automatically applied if an area inspected is found to have any areas of improvement.
13. In addition to highlighting the areas of improvement required, the report contains 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 recognises where we have closed out recommendations from the previous report and identifies some areas where this has not been the case. The report includes 32 positive findings about the service and 26 suggested areas for improvement. Some of the areas of improvement have already been resolved. Appendix 1 shows a comparison of the judgements for the 11 areas across the 2024 report and the 2022 report. It also shows the number of recommended areas of improvements against each judgement.
14. The service has prioritised the work to address the most important improvements needed and through the improved governance and performance reporting, will ensure all necessary improvements are planned and delivered through the fire improvement pipeline.
15. Some of the areas of improvement will be addressed by the Community Safety Services (CSS) Review and the development of the new operating model. This was recognised by the HMICFRS who stated they were looking forward to seeing the outcomes from the review.
16. As per the recommendations, **the Place Oversight and Scrutiny Committee is asked to endorse the Fire Improvement Board as the appropriate method to track the improvement work within the Fire and Rescue service.**

## Financial Implications

17. The service will identify future additional budget pressures created by the improvement work through the 4-year business planning cycle as well as highlighting any pressures that we know will be created in 25/26.

Comments checked by:

Kathy Wilcox, Head of Corporate Finance, [kathy.wilcox@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:kathy.wilcox@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## Legal Implications

18. Independent inspection of fire and rescue authorities in England – and the fire and rescue service they oversee - is delivered by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services. The chief fire and rescue inspector and inspectors of fire and rescue authorities in England have powers of inspection given to them by the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, as amended by the Policing and Crime Act 2017.
19. Fire and rescue authorities must give due regard to reports and recommendations made by HMICRFS and – if recommendations are made – prepare, update and regularly publish an action plan detailing how the recommendations are being actioned.
20. This report shows how Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service will meet its legal obligations with regards to inspection as laid out in Section 7 of the [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England \(2018\)](#).

Comments checked by:

Anita Bradley, Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer  
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## Staff Implications

21. As stated in the body of the report, the resources required to implement the improvement work will be identified through the fire improvement pipeline. This is to ensure that the service clearly understands how and when work will be carried out within its existing resources and staffing or how it will secure additional resource to deliver this work.

## Equality & Inclusion Implications

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

## Sustainability Implications

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

## Risk Management

24. The service has reviewed the criticality of the areas of improvement highlighted by the HMI to prioritise the work required. This has included an assessment of the risks of not addressing improvement areas effectively and in a timely manner. This has been a fundamental consideration in the prioritisation of the work needed.
25. 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.

## Rob MacDougall, Chief Fire Officer and Director for Community Safety

Annex: **Annex 1** - 2024 Report and 2022 Comparison  
**Annex 2** - Fire improvement pipeline actions summary

Background papers: Nil

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September 2024

## Appendix 1: 2024 Report and 2022 comparison

Her Majesty's Inspection of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services have increased the number of judgement grading from 4 to 5, introducing an adequate grading in between good and requires improvement. The table below shows the service's judgement in the 2024 report and the 2022 report.

Area	2024 Report		2022 Report
<b>Effectiveness</b>		Areas for Improvement	
Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies (Page 9)	Adequate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transfer of risk information (improved)</li> </ul>	Good
Preventing fires and other risks (Page 12)	Adequate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate prevention activity</li> <li>Allocate enough resources</li> </ul>	Good
Protecting the public through fire regulation (Page 16)	Adequate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quality assurance (complete)</li> <li>Unwanted fire signals (complete)</li> </ul>	Good
Responding to fires and other emergencies (Page 21)	Adequate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Response Strategy</i></li> <li>Operational learning monitoring system</li> </ul>	Requires Improvement
Responding to major and multi-agency incidents (Page 25)	Adequate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fire survival guidance (complete)</li> </ul>	Good
<b>Efficiency</b>			
Making best use of resources (page 29)	Requires Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allocation of resources</li> <li>Performance Management process</li> <li>Productivity</li> <li>Evaluate collaboration activity (complete)</li> </ul>	Good
Making the FRS affordable now and in the future (Page 33)	Adequate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Productivity, innovation and technology</li> <li>Change Management skills</li> </ul>	Good
<b>People</b>			
Promoting the right values and culture (Page 37)	Requires Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Senior manager visibility and values</li> <li>Values – all staff</li> <li>People on dual contracts</li> </ul>	Good

Getting the right people with the right skills (Page 40)	Adequate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People appropriately trained</li> <li>• Temporary promotions</li> </ul>	Requires improvement
Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity (Page 43)	Requires Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication of change programmes</li> <li>• Address staff survey issues</li> <li>• Reducing unacceptable behaviour towards people</li> <li>• Equality impact assessments</li> </ul>	Good
Managing performance and developing leaders (Page 47)	Requires Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance Review process</li> <li>• High potential staff and aspiring leaders</li> <li>• Succession planning</li> </ul>	Requires improvement

## Appendix 2 – Fire improvement pipeline actions summary

WORK AREA	TASK	Benefit	OWNER	Target Start Date	Target Completion Date
Operational Learning	Implement operational learning system.	Provides the ability to track actions from operational learning and ensure they are implemented. System is already working effectively for health and safety learning across the County Council HMI AFI 7	Assistant Chief Fire Officer	01/03/2025	30/05/2025
Performance Management (People)	Develop a 121 and personal development approach to support all staff including fire crews, utilising the 12-3-2 framework with flexibility for change, ensuring staff and managers understand the reason for critical conversations	Supports staff in their development, improves behaviours, improves absence monitoring, ensures staff are aware of their key objectives. HMI AFI 24	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	01/09/2024	28/02/2025
Performance Management (People)	Positive behaviours workshops and improved understanding of everyone's responsibility to behave inclusively and in line with our values	Improves behaviour and staff understanding of expected behaviours and values. Creates a positive culture of inclusivity and gives staff the empowerment to challenge and report unacceptable behaviours HMI AFI 16 & 22	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	01/09/2024	31/12/2024



Performance Management (People)	Continued behaviour and critical conversation workshops and training programme building on culture and EDI conversations	embeds acceptable behaviour principals and standards for staff and empowers supervisory managers to hold critical conversations in taking next steps when unacceptable behaviour or absence triggers occur HMI AFI 16 & 22	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	01/04/2025	31/03/2026
Performance Management (People)	Ensuring staff have the correct skills to undertake their roles (not operational skills) including change management	Staff feel valued and able to carry out their role. We're able to deliver our objectives and meet outcomes and have effective change management / project management in place HMI AFI 18	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	01/11/2024	30/03/2024
Strategy	Reaffirm our purpose and create a service direction statement outlining our priorities. Communicate and engage staff with our purpose and service direction and how we will track and measure progress so everyone can see how what they do links to our purpose.	Everyone understands our direction and priorities - what we are focusing on and what we are not. Creates golden thread and link staff to our transformation activities as part of our service direction. Informs our communication and engagement strategy. Links what we need to do with how we need to do it and our values.	Chief Fire Officer	01/08/2024	31/10/2024
Structures and resources	Create forum for Dual Contract colleagues to understand specific issues	Understand and address the issues faced by colleagues who work both on a wholetime and on-call contract	Assistant Chief Fire Officer	Complete	

Structures and resources	Consider the policy and use of temporary positions with an aim to reduce the current numbers of staff in temporary positions	Improves staff morale and reduces anxieties around temporary positions both for the individual and the teams it directly impacts. Improves workload understanding and planning HMI AFI 19	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	01/01/2025	30/06/2025
Structures and resources	Review and improve succession planning processes, ensuring that workforce planning aids promotional processes, career pathways, and pre and post development and that processes are fair and transparent setting people up for success across all staff groups	clear career pathways and opportunities across all staff groups for opportunities helps staff to feel valued and ensures fairness in opportunity across staff groups. Clear succession planning aids the organisation to resource effectively, limit gaps in vacancy management and ensure we're effective in delivering our objectives HMI AFI 25 & 26	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	01/11/2024	31/12/2025
Structures and resources	Improve workforce planning and succession management	reduction in vacant roles or short notice moves to bridge vacancies creating capacity and workload impacts to affected teams and delivery of projects HMI AFI 19	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	01/01/2025	30/06/2025

Structures and resources	Ensure a clear rationale for resources allocated to prevention, protection and response. Linking workforce planning, budgets and risks.	improved staff understanding on how we have determined the number of resources and the roles required to complete the department objectives and meet demand. Organisation assurance in our resource planning. HMI AFI 9	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	01/05/2025	31/03/2026
Ways of working	Monitoring secondary contracts	Improving our ability to monitor secondary contracts will ensure staff are not working excessive hours and consider wellbeing and welfare of staff HMI AFI 17	Assistant Chief Fire Officer	01/01/2025	31/12/2025
Ways of working	Undertaking and understanding the use of EIAs to help shape policy, project, assessment and improvement or change decisions	assurance that our ways of working have been assessed against the protected characteristic groups ensuring best practice, safer and confident employees and being an employer of choice HMI AFI 23	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	01/01/2025	30/06/2025
Ways of working	Ensure accessible and visible performance metrics for managers to report against and staff to view. Ensuring metrics link to our purpose, service direction and objectives and provide visibility of the decisions taken so that	providing clarity to staff on their objectives and priorities will help with capacity issues and ensure staff feel valued as they have a purpose to fulfil HMI 10	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	01/04/2024	31/12/2024

	staff can see service direction progress and see how their role delivers against our service direction				
Ways of working	To ensure we have an embedded framework for reach and attraction for all career pathways and opportunities, for that attraction to start from early years contact, through to post education, utilising the opportunities we have through our reach into schools, communities. A framework delivered by operational staff and central corporate teams.	ensuring a workforce that represents our communities and attracts the right people with the right skills and expertise to ensure we continually work towards and are effective in delivering our service direction and purpose	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	01/06/2024	31/03/2025