

Divisions Affected – N/A

Performance Scrutiny Committee - 11 March 2021

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services Inspection Report on Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service Response to Covid-19 Pandemic 2020

**Report by Corporate Director
Commercial Development, Assets and Investment**

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Performance Scrutiny Committee is RECOMMENDED to accept the report and the recommended actions for Oxfordshire County Council Fire and Rescue Service.

Executive Summary

2. HMICFRS made the following recommendations. We recognise that the arrangements for managing the pandemic may carry on for some time, and that the service is now planning for the future. In order to be as efficient and effective as possible, Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service should focus on the following areas:
 - a) It should determine how it will adopt for the longer term, the new and innovative ways of working introduced during the pandemic, to secure lasting improvements.
 - b) It should evaluate how effective its extra activities have been. It should then consider how its activities can give local communities the most benefit in future.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service inspection of Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (HMICFRS) response to the Covid -19 pandemic

3. In August 2020 the HMICFRS were commissioned by the Home Secretary to inspect how fire and rescue services in England are responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. The inspection looked at the following areas.
 - What is working well and what is being learned
 - How the fire sector is responding to the COVID-19 crisis.
 - How fire services are dealing with the problems they face
 - What changes are likely as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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4. The inspection focused on the first three months of the pandemic, April to June 2020. The inspection took place over the first two weeks in October 2020 and was carried out virtually due to the restrictions on social contact.

Key issues

5. The following is the summary from the main report on the findings of the inspection.
6. The service responded well during the pandemic and provided additional support to its community. It used its wholetime and on-call firefighters to respond to emergencies, and the increased availability of its on-call firefighters allowed the service to use them to support its partners, especially the local ambulance trust. This meant the people of Oxfordshire were well supported through the pandemic.
7. Firefighters drove ambulances and helped deliver personal protective equipment (PPE) and laptops to schoolchildren. The service was able to continue prevention activity and broadly maintained all protection activity. Resources were well managed, and the service's financial position was largely unaffected. As part of Oxfordshire County Council, the service had access to extra government funding to support its response and to cover additional expenses it has incurred. The service effectively managed its (low) level of staff absences, and collaborated with the other fire and rescue services in the Thames Valley region in order to build resilience in its primary and secondary control rooms.
8. The service communicated well with its staff throughout the pandemic on issues relating to staff wellbeing. Guidance and support, including extra wellbeing services, were put in place for those at higher risk from COVID-19 including black, Asian and minority ethnic staff. The service also made sure all staff had the resources they needed to do their jobs effectively, including providing extra IT and putting in place new flexible working arrangements. The service has continued to collaborate with the other fire and rescue services in the Thames Valley region, and to effectively support the Thames Valley LRF.

Recommendations of the HMICFRS

9. We recognise that the arrangements for managing the pandemic may carry on for some time, and that the service is now planning for the future. In order to be as efficient and effective as possible, Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service should focus on the following areas:
 - It should determine how it will adopt for the longer term, the new and innovative ways of working introduced during the pandemic, to secure lasting improvements.

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- It should evaluate how effective its extra activities have been. It should then consider how its activities can give local communities the most benefit in future.

Service Actions to recommendations

10. At the end of April, Community Safety Service, linked in to the County Councils Restart, Recover and Renew programme, started to look at how it could continue to benefit from the new ways of working that had been introduced due to the pandemic. The service initiated three areas to be explored, these being;
 - Agile working
 - Communications
 - Communities
11. From this the service;
 - Improved staff understanding of how they could work more remotely and be support by technology that had been introduced.
 - How the service communicated to staff via the fortnightly “Keeping you Connected” sessions.
 - Introduced desktop audits for Fire Safety of buildings and triaging requests for Safe and Well visits, to provide a more efficient service for the public and reduced the risk of spread of Covid-19
12. The service has created a Fire and Rescue People and Wellbeing Strategy, this will link in to the County Councils People Strategy once it has been published, the aim of which is to ensure staff feel engaged and have a voice, regardless of role, and work together collaboratively to deliver quality services, including through the development and maintenance of a well-skilled, diverse workforce.
13. This work will continue over the coming year, in order that the service can realise greater benefits from the current pandemic.
14. The full report can be found on the following link
<https://www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/covid-19-inspection-oxfordshire-fire-and-rescue-service/>

Financial Implications

15. No Implications

Comments checked by: Rob Finlayson, Finance Business partner (Finance),
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Legal Implications

16. No Implications
Comments checked by: Jennifer Crouch, Principal Solicitor (Environment Team), for and on behalf of Anita Bradley, Director of Law & Governance and

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Risk Management

17. There is a risk associated with not actioning these recommendations, as the HMICFRS will look to see how the services has progressed these in their next inspection in Autumn 2021.

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