Divisions Affected -

CABINET
17 SEPTEMBER 2024

HIS MAJESTY'S INSPECTORATE OF CONSTABULARY AND FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES (HMI) REPORT FOR OXFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Report by the Chief Fire Officer and Director of Community Safety

RECOMMENDATION

1.   **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**

   a) note the report and approve the suggested approach of monitoring improvements.

Executive Summary

2.   The report provides an update on the Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue HMI report, focusing on areas required for improvement and the approach developed to ensure robust governance and performance reporting against the agreed action plan. This includes the development of the fire improvement pipeline and the Fire Improvement Board.

   The HMI inspection report published in July 2024 made 11 judgements and identified 26 areas of improvement, which have been risk-assessed by the service, with the most critical areas either addressed or in progress. The report also contains 32 positive statements about the service made by the inspection team.

   The fire improvement pipeline is 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. The Fire Improvement Board, starting on 19th September, will scrutinise the prioritisation of work areas in the fire improvement pipeline, with a focus on HMI recommendations, and will report annually, to the Place Scrutiny Committee.

   The service aims to complete necessary improvements before the next HMI inspection in two years and will ensure the HMI is informed of the progress through the Fire Improvement Board.

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, 'state of fire' 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.

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 report can be viewed on the HMI website here - [Oxfordshire - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)](justiceinspectorates.gov.uk).

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.

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. The board will 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.

Key Issues

3. The HMI 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.

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.

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. 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 HMI who stated they were looking forward to seeing the outcomes from the review.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

4. The HMI report states that the Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service is good at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks which aligns to the council's priority of **prioritising the health and wellbeing of residents**. Organisational improvements to address the recommendations from the inspection will ensure that Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service further supports this priority into the future.

Financial Implications

5. There are no direct financial implications arising from the report. Any budget pressures and opportunities arising from the improvement work will need to be considered through the council's 4-year business planning cycle. Any pressures or investments in 2025/26, that it is not possible to manage within existing funding or through the council's transformation programme, will need to be considered as part of the Budget & Business Planning process.

Comments checked by:

Kathy Wilcox, Head of Corporate Finance, kathy.wilcox@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. 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
Anita.bradley@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff Implications

9. 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

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

Sustainability Implications

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

Risk Management

12. 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.

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.

NAME

Rob MacDougall Chief Fire Officer and Director of Community Safety

Annex: Annex 1 – 2024 Report and 2022 Comparison

Contact Officer: Rob MacDougall
                                Chief Fire Officer and Director of Community Safety
                                07881 583208
                                Rob.macdougall@oxfordshire.gov.uk

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
Effectiveness		Areas for Improvement	
Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies (*Page 9)*	Adequate	• Transfer of risk information (improved)	Good
Preventing fires and other risks (*Page 12)*	Adequate	• Evaluate prevention activity • Allocate enough resources	Good
Protecting the public through fire regulation (*Page 16)*	Adequate	• Quality assurance (complete) • Unwanted fire signals (complete)	Good
Responding to fires and other emergencies (*Page 21)*	Adequate	• *Response Strategy* • Operational learning monitoring system	Requires Improvement
Responding to major and multi-agency incidents (*Page 25)*	Adequate	• Fire survival guidance (complete)	Good
Efficiency			
Making best use of resources (*page 29)*	Requires Improvement	• Allocation of resources • Performance Management process • Productivity • Evaluate collaboration activity (complete)	Good
Making the FRS affordable now and in the future (*Page 33)*	Adequate	• Productivity, innovation and technology • Change Management skills	Good
People			
Promoting the right values and culture (*Page 37)*	Requires Improvement	• Senior manager visibility and values • Values – all staff	Good

		• People on dual contracts	
Getting the right people with the right skills (*Page 40)*	Adequate	• People appropriately trained • Temporary promotions	Requires improvement
Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity (*Page 43)*	Requires Improvement	• Communication of change programmes • Address staff survey issues • Reducing unacceptable behaviour towards people • Equality impact assessments	Good
Managing performance and developing leaders (*Page 47)*	Requires Improvement	• Performance Review process • High potential staff and aspiring leaders • Succession planning	Requires improvement