

Fire and Rescue Service Inspections

Purpose of report

For discussion.

Summary

On 19 July the remit of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary was extended to include the inspection of fire and rescue services in England, and it became Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS). Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue, Zoe Billingham, who is acting as lead for the inspection programme will be attending FSMC to outline HMICFRS' inspection programme.

Recommendations

Fire Services Management Committee members are asked to:

1. Note the appointment of HMICFRS as the inspectorate for the fire and rescue service;
2. Comment on HMICFRS' inspection programme proposals; and
3. Note the Fire Peer Challenge Working Group will further shape its proposals for the future of the Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge in response to HMICFRS' programme.

Actions

Officers to action as appropriate.

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Fire and Rescue Service Inspections

Background

1. In May 2016 the then Home Secretary announced that the Home Office would be bringing forward proposals to establish a rigorous and independent inspection regime for fire and rescue services. Provisions were included in the Policing and Crime Act 2017 to create an inspectorate, with the Home Office's ambition being to have it fully operational by April 2018.
2. While the Policing and Crime Act was passing through Parliament, the Home Office asked Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) to scope proposals for how they would deliver this new function. These proposals were developed using an External Reference Group on which Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC) was represented, and presented to the Home Office in November 2016. HMIC attended FSMC's meeting that month to talk members through the planned approach to inspection that had been developed.
3. Although an announcement was expected in early 2017 as to which organisation would provide the inspectorate, it was delayed due to a number of factors, including the General Election. In July however the Home Office announced that HMIC had been appointed as the inspectorate, and as a result would become Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS).

HMICFRS and the inspection process

4. Following the announcement that they had been appointed as the inspectorate HMICFRS convened a meeting of the External Reference Group in August to provide an update to partners on how they intend to take forward the inspection process. Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue, Zoe Billingham, will attend FSMC to discuss HMICFRS's plans.
5. At the External Reference Group meeting last month HMICFRS confirmed that it is now recruiting staff for its fire function and developing methodology and plans for inspection. Its plans so far are in line with those discussed before the election with the Group.
6. In terms of the timetable for inspection HMICFRS explained that:
 - 6.1. Two pilot inspections are expected to take place between January and April 2018.
 - 6.2. All Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAS) in England will then be inspected in three tranches of 15 authorities (April-July 2018, August-December, January-May 2019).
 - 6.3. All 15 reports from each tranche will be published on the same day – the first tranche by November 2018.
 - 6.4. A final report and national summary is anticipated in September 2019 (at the end of years one and two).

- 6.5. Thereafter the HMICFRS will undertake risk-based inspections for two years (years three and four).
- 6.6. Good or outstanding services would not be inspected until year five.
7. HMICFRS also confirmed that the inspections will not look at governance but if an inspection produced evidence to suggest that governance was a serious issue, this would be included in the report. The Home Office might then commission a separate inspection of the FRA, which it could already do under existing arrangements.
8. The concept of thematic inspections will require further thought and planning, in particular in respect of funding and areas to focus on.
9. The External Reference Group will meet four times over the next year to support the development of inspection. In addition HMICFRS has invited all FRA chairs, police and crime commissioners and chief fire officers to an introductory event in London on 10 October 2017 to meet the inspectorate and hear about its early plans for inspecting the service, and help to develop the inspection methodology.
10. Members' views and comments are sought on the proposed approach from HMICFRS to inform further discussion with HMICFRS on the development of the inspection process and its operation.

Peer Support and Operational Assessment

11. As FSMC has previously discussed the introduction of an inspection regime has implications for the LGA's Operational Assessment (Op A) and Fire Peer Challenge offer. In order to lead the LGA's work in this area FSMC established a cross party working group, supported by LGA and National Fire Chief Council officers, to review and refresh the existing Op A and Fire Peer Challenge. Now that the inspectorate has been announced the working group will be able to develop a revised Op A and Fire Peer Challenge offer. The composition of the group has changed recently and includes the following members:
 - 11.1. Cllr Kay Hammond – Conservative
 - 11.2. Cllr David Acton – Labour
 - 11.3. Cllr Keith Aspden – Liberal Democrat
 - 11.4. TBC - Independent

Implications for Wales

12. There are no implications for Wales as the inspection provisions only currently apply in England.

Financial Implications

13. There are no immediate financial implications arising from the work set out in this report.

Next steps

14. Members are asked to:

14.1. Note the appointment of HMICFRS as the inspectorate for the fire and rescue service;

14.2. Comment on HMICFRS' inspection programme proposals; and

14.3. Note the Fire Peer Challenge Working Group will further shape its proposals for the future of the Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge in response to HMICFRS' programme.