

<b>Report title:</b> HMICFRS Inspection of the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service - Progress Report	
<b>Report to:</b> Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel	
<b>Report author:</b> Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority (PFCCFRA)	
<b>Date:</b> 8 December 2022	<b>For:</b> Noting
<b>Enquiries to:</b> Pippa Brent-Isherwood (Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer) <a href="mailto:pippa.brent-isherwood@essex.police.uk">pippa.brent-isherwood@essex.police.uk</a> 01245 291613	
<b>County Divisions affected:</b> All Essex	

## 1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to review how the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service (ECFRS) is addressing the issues raised in its latest inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and how the PFCC is monitoring and ensuring progress against this.

## 2. Recommendations

The Police, Fire and Crime Panel is invited to note the contents of the report, identifying any areas that require further clarification or comment.

## 3. Context / Summary

### Background

HMICFRS's second full inspection of the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service was undertaken in September / October 2021. The fieldwork took place over a six-week period through a blend of virtual and on-site interviews, desktop reviews and focus groups. This second inspection was brought forward by a year compared with the inspectorate's original timetable, thereby shortening the time available to the service to demonstrate improvements since the previous inspection in 2019. This meant, for example, that, although the service demonstrated improved identification and understanding of the risks it faces, this had not yet translated into tangible reductions in risk by the time inspectors returned. Whilst not published until July 2022, the timing of the fieldwork also means that the report reflects the position of the service over a

year ago, as the service, and indeed the country, were beginning to emerge from the coronavirus pandemic.

The inspection framework monitors each fire and rescue service's effectiveness, efficiency and how well it looks after its people. HMICFRS's categories of graded judgement are:

- Outstanding
- Good
- Requires improvement
- Inadequate

The full report is attached for the Panel's reference at Appendix 1. Although the inspectorate rated the service as "Requires Improvement" across all three areas of the assessment, it recognised that the service is good at understanding fire and other risks and acknowledged the improvements made in learning from operational activity both locally and nationally. Inspectors noted that the service has plenty of trained incident commanders and assesses them regularly and properly. This allows the service to manage the whole range of incidents it faces safely, assertively and effectively. However, a lack of staff training has limited the number of specialist staff and firefighters who are equipped to respond to certain major incidents, such as marauding terrorist attacks (MTAs). In addition, Fire Control staff are not consistently involved in the service's debriefing and exercising arrangements.

The report acknowledges the positive progress made in understanding what the service needs to do both in terms of preventing harm and protecting the public and describes the robust system the service uses to inform the public about ongoing incidents and to keep them safe during and after the response. The report notes how the service uses data and intelligence received from partner organisations to target Home Fire Safety Checks based on risk and vulnerability, and how it effectively targets and educates people who display fire-setting behaviour through a range of interventions. However, inspectors found an inconsistent level of understanding about vulnerability across the workforce.

Inspectors found that the service now has clear prevention and protection, enforcement, estate and fleet strategies, which clearly support delivery of its Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). They found that ECFRS has responded positively and proactively to the learning from the Grenfell Tower tragedy, including through the development of its Risk Based Inspection Programme (RBIP), and that the fire safety audits sampled were of a high standard. However, the cause of concern relating to fire protection work issued to the service following its initial inspection remains open due to shortfalls in the service's resources and skills to deliver its RBIP, the limited quality assurance of protection activity, low levels of enforcement activity, and lack of proactive engagement with businesses to promote fire safety.

Inspectors recognised that the service now has a much more detailed understanding of its financial position and that there is increased rigour amongst senior managers in the scrutiny of how resources are allocated

compared with what they found in 2019. They also found a strong emphasis on improving the environmental performance of the service's buildings and reducing its carbon footprint. However, the inspectorate remains concerned about the service's use of resources and how this aligns with risk across the domains of prevention, protection and response. Inspectors also commented that the service's use of reserves is not sustainable, and that its reserves strategy does not clearly set out how reserves will be utilised to promote new ways of working.

In relation to how well the service looks after its people, the report reflects the significant improvements made since 2019, particularly in promoting the right organisational values and culture (which was graded as "Inadequate" during the previous inspection). As such, the cause of concern issued to the service following the first inspection in relation to values and culture has been closed. The inspectorate found that the service has effective wellbeing policies, which are well understood by staff, and provides a significant range of support to support both the physical and mental health of its workforce. There is also an effective performance management system in place, which allows the service to develop and assess the individual performance of all staff effectively. However, the service still needs to do more to increase the diversity of its workforce and to address disproportionality in recruitment and retention in order to make the workforce representative of the community it serves, including by encouraging applicants from diverse backgrounds into middle and senior level positions.

Overall, the findings of the inspection reflect the priorities and areas for improvement set out in the Fire and Rescue Plan 2019 – 2024, including the need to increase the level of prevention and protection work done by staff on stations to reduce risks to the public, to invest more in the training of fire protection staff, and to continue to embed the positive values and culture it has introduced so that everybody in the service knows what is expected and required of them. As such, the inspection confirmed the PFCC's own assessment of where the service is doing well and the areas in which it needs to continue to progress.

### Progress to Date

As well as retaining the cause of concern relating to fire protection, HMICFRS identified 26 areas of improvement that the service is expected to demonstrate progress against ahead of the next inspection cycle. The number of areas of improvement identified within each pillar is shown below:

Pillar	Number of areas of improvement
Effectiveness	9
Efficiency	7
People	10

The service already had plans in place to enhance its work in these areas by the time the report was published, has made good progress since the inspection took place, and is clear about what it needs to do next. This improvement activity is incorporated within the service's Annual Plan, which in

turn is aligned with the Fire and Rescue Plan. Progress in delivering the Annual Plan is monitored through the service's Continuous Improvement Board and the PFCC's Performance and Resources Board on a quarterly basis. An initial report specifically on the service's progress in responding to the findings of the inspection report and its ongoing action plan was also reported to the PFCC's Strategic Board in September 2022. This report is summarised at Appendix 2. Highlights in respect of progress include:

- Values and ethics have been incorporated into key people processes (including recruitment) and Learning and Development content.
- Succession plans have been developed across the service and skills gaps are being reviewed.
- Monthly analysis is now undertaken into incidents where the service's response standards have not been met, to identify how response times might be improved.
- A dedicated Prevention and Protection Analyst took up post in June 2022 to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of targeted prevention activity.
- A training package is being procured to enable operational crews to inspect low and medium risk rated buildings as part of the Risk Based Inspection Programme (RBIP).
- A Prevention Board has been established to monitor and review progress against the Prevention Strategy and evaluate its effectiveness.
- A Business Engagement Lead has been employed.
- An app has been developed and implemented to assist in identifying organisations that are persistently responsible for false alarms due to apparatus (FADA) and facilitate the targeting of early engagement and education activity.
- A senior leadership development programme has been put in place.
- A specific programme of learning has been developed and delivered for Control operators.
- A new e-learning package on safeguarding and identifying vulnerable people has been launched for all staff and completion is being monitored. Reporting of safeguarding concerns has increased as this has been rolled out.
- A training package on Marauding Terrorist Attacks (MTAs) has been developed for support staff that is due to be rolled out in Quarter 4 of this financial year.
- The benefits (including financial) of collaboration projects are captured and monitored through a dashboard that is reported to each meeting of the Essex Emergency Services Collaboration Strategic Governance Board chaired by the PFCC. The programme is currently projected to deliver £12.9m of the £15.1m efficiency savings target, halfway into the 10-year programme. "Wave 2" of the programme is currently being developed.
- The restructured Procurement Team is now fully recruited to, and the service's first Procurement Strategy has been approved, allowing the service to adopt a centralised, category management approach to procurement.

On 26 October 2022, at the invitation of the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service, colleagues from the PFCC's office and Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service carried out an independent peer review of the service's progress in addressing the cause of concern identified by HMICFRS specifically around protection activity. This found that robust plans were in place and that there was a clear commitment to delivering the actions required to close the inspectorate's concern. Good progress had been made in terms of recruitment and training, however there are still insufficient resources to meet the Risk Based Inspection Programme, and more work still needs to be done to clarify the rationale for some of the performance targets. The review also scrutinised the very high proportion of "satisfactory" outcomes from audits, which may suggest that the targeting of audits is flawed and could be a product of their focus on the most high-risk buildings. The peer review also found a varying appetite for enforcement activity across the county and some inconsistencies in the application of quality assurance processes across the service.

11 actions arose from the peer review, relating to areas including:

- The management information available to the service, its alignment with HMICFRS's requirements and the service's ability to benchmark itself against other services nationally. Issues were also identified around the triangulation of evidence and the consistency of the narrative across the service in terms of the direction of travel against the Protection Strategy.
- Resource and succession planning for the department over the next six to 12 months, given anticipated retirements.
- The feasibility of delivering the Risk Based Inspection Programme.
- Partnership working with other organisations, such as Trading Standards and the Health and Safety Executive.
- The quality assurance strategy and process.
- The consistency of the approach to enforcement across the county, as well as relative to other fire and rescue services.

A new Assurance Strategy, incorporating a quality management policy, was already in development prior to the peer review, and is due to be presented to the PFCC's Strategic Board for approval later in December 2022. Seven inspecting staff are currently working towards Level 4 training and will be fully qualified by the end of December. Efforts are being made to recruit more Level 4 competent staff, but in the context of significant competition from the private sector. The NFCC is now assisting with recruitment nationally to help services maintain their resilience through anticipated retirements etc. In the meantime, further training is being procured and the service is recruiting a second Business Engagement Officer to support this activity. Various Power BI datasets and dashboards are being developed, and the RBIP is being re-written based on research from elsewhere (particularly Essex's "family group" of services) as well as the service's capacity to deliver audits. As part of this, the service is revisiting its rationale for targeting buildings to audit and is also clarifying the process to be undertaken where unsatisfactory audits are completed. All this work is due to be delivered by January 2023, when HMICFRS is due to re-visit the service.

The peer review was followed by a “deep dive” into delivery of the service’s Prevention Strategy on 22 November. This heard that the restructure of the central team designed to support delivery of the strategy better - which was being implemented as HMICFRS’s fieldwork was being completed - is now fully recruited to. Four additional Fire Bike team members were also recruited between March and October 2022.

Alongside other activities, the new Prevention Team developed a dedicated summer / water safety lesson and delivered this through multiple platforms and channels, including social media. A new risk modelling tool has been developed in partnership with the Essex Centre for Data Analytics for Accidental Dwelling Fires (ADFs), which is allowing ECFRS to understand trends over time and to target Home Fire Safety Checks, door knocking exercises and Safe, Well and Secure events more effectively. A recent evaluation of the impact of Home Fire Safety Checks confirmed that, as a higher number of safety checks are completed in an area, there is a reduction in the number of properties that suffer ADFs. 78% of participants said they had learned how to stay safe from fire in the home during their visit and just over half (52%) said they had already done something differently which would enable them to live more safely at home as a result. 97% said they would recommend the service to friends and family.

The new Prevention and Protection Analyst has also completed analysis of risks relating to water and drowning and shared this with partners at a specially themed meeting of Safer Essex in November 2022. This will now inform the development of a broader partnership approach to water safety across the county which, amongst other things, will identify water related incident hotspots and develop and implement innovative solutions to reduce incidents in those areas. The service is also collaborating with Essex County Council and Essex Police on the sharing of data to produce a vulnerability matrix to support the targeting of other educational programmes. A full training review has been completed for the team and a new training plan is in place for 2022/23.

Actions relating to the “people” pillar of the inspection framework are captured within the service’s People Strategy. Progress in delivering this is monitored through an internal governance board, on which the PFCC is represented, and reported on a regular basis to the PFCC’s Performance and Resources Board.

The risks associated with the potential non-delivery of the areas for improvement identified through the inspection process and the Fire and Rescue Plan are also captured in the service’s strategic risk register, which is subject to additional scrutiny and assurance via the independent Audit Committee.

### Next Steps

The service is due to receive a revisit from HMICFRS to follow up on the cause of concern relating to “protecting the public through fire regulation” and the progress made in this regard during the week commencing 16 January 2023. Ahead of this, work will continue to focus all competent resource on auditing high risk premises and to support Inspecting Officers to complete their Level 4

Diplomas, which will further increase capacity to complete audits.

Other immediate next steps, due for completion by the end of the financial year, include:

- Further work to develop bespoke station plans focusing on local risks and community needs. Station plans will have measurable targets for delivery and progress will be incorporated into station management performance dashboards.
- A peer review of the organisational risk management process.
- Reviews of the Prevention, Protection and Response Strategies to ensure clear links to organisational risks and the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) priorities. This work will be followed by reviews of the structures of the Prevention, Protection and Response Teams to ensure a clear rationale for the allocation of resources to activities.
- Further progression of collaborative projects to achieve their projected benefits including the roll-out of the Tri-Service Rural Community Officer pilot currently operating in the Dengie peninsula to the Uttlesford district.
- Production of a Capital / Treasury Management Strategy.
- Development of a strategic approach and process to understand the skills needed to carry out specific roles in certain locations to deliver the IRMP.
- Development of an approach around direct entry and accelerated development to support the service's leadership and wider resourcing arrangements.
- Review of the Dignity at Work Policy, which includes how the service will manage any instances of bullying, harassment and discrimination.
- Widening exercising around Marauding Terrorist Attacks (MTAs) across the workforce, including support staff, with effect from Quarter 4 of this financial year.
- Development of a business engagement plan linked to the Protection Strategy.

The service's third full HMICFRS inspection is expected in 2023/24.

#### **4. Appendices**

Appendix 1: Fire & Rescue Service 2021/22 – Effectiveness, efficiency and people: An inspection of Essex County Fire and Rescue Service

Appendix 2: HMICFRS Inspection: Findings and progress