



Northumberland

County Council

COMMITTEE: COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OSC

DATE: OCTOBER 7TH 2020

Title of Report: HMICFRS Improvement Action Plan (IAP) Update

Report of Chief Fire Officer Paul Hedley

Cabinet Member: Cllr John Riddle Fire Authority Chair

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report is to update Communities and Place OSC on the progress that has been made in addressing the 23 Areas for Improvement (AFI) across Effectiveness, Efficiency and People identified by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service (HMICFRS) in their inspection report into Northumberland FRS published 20th June 2019.

Recommendations

Communities and Place OSC is recommended to:

- Note the content of the report
- Provide comments on the progress being made
- Invite further reports as necessary to provide assurance on the progress of the Improvement Action Plan (IAP)

Link to Corporate Plan

The principle areas of relevance this report has to the priorities within the NCC Corporate Plan 2018-2021 are;

“We want to be efficiency, open and work for everyone” [HOW]

“We want you to feel safe, healthy and cared for” [LIVING]

Background

During the feedback from the HMICFRS inspection team at the Strategic Briefing of 15th October 2018, Her Majesty's Inspector Matt Parr stated that in his experience of inspecting Police Forces and Fire and Rescue Services, the challenges facing Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service were '*unique*' in terms of the combined challenges and impact of capacity, resources, geographical area, demographics and future efficiency profile.

Following the Strategic Briefing, Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) were independently assessed by a 10 person inspection team from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) from October 29th – November 2nd 2018. This was the first inspection of NFRS for approximately ten years and formed part of a wider HMICFRS inspection programme to assess and benchmark all 45 English Fire and Rescue Services.

The final report was published on June 20th 2019. The judgment gradings contained in both the PPC and Final reports for NFRS were;

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| ● Effectiveness | <i>Requires Improvement</i> |
| ● Efficiency | <i>Requires Improvement</i> |
| ● People / Leadership | <i>Requires Improvement</i> |

The high level Areas for Improvement (AFI) identified in the HMICFRS report are included as ***Appendix A***.

Northumberland FRS began developing an Improvement Action Plan (IAP) following the 'Hot Debrief' feedback received from HMICFRS on 11th November 2018 and a framework was in place in advance of the pre-publication draft report which was received on May 3rd 2019 as part of the report moderation process. The IAP was further refined by NFRS following publication of the final report and was then subjected to an external assurance review by service improvement consultants which resulted in some minor re-shaping of the IAP to improve governance and presentation.

The IAP presents the service's vision and the governance arrangements for achieving improvement. The plan aims to articulate and facilitate the development of a culture of striving for constant and sustainable improvement, with a focus on investing in people to achieve better performance.

The IAP is a key driver for the Service Leadership Team (SLT), as it works to agree, resource and deliver the priorities for the service. As the HMICFRS Areas for Improvement cut across multiple NFRS service delivery areas, actions to respond to the areas have been grouped into 12 distinct themes, each of which incorporates a number of individual actions. Each theme has an allocated lead person, who is responsible for overseeing delivery of all actions

within the theme. Each action has an allocated lead person, who may be different from the theme lead.

The 12 themes are:

- Leadership and Culture
- Community Risk and Strategic Planning
- Communications
- Organisational Management Arrangements
- Contingency Arrangements
- Finance
- Partnerships
- Prevention Delivery
- Protection Delivery
- Response Delivery
- L&D Delivery
- Fire Support Services Delivery

NFRS have developed two IAPs - one which is used as a project management tool for **internal** progression and delivery against the HMICFRS report, the other is an **outward facing** narrative version for public access and outlines the Area for Improvements using a - “What We Aim To Achieve” / “What We’ve Achieved So Far” model template. The public update is hosted on the NFRS websites pages and can be accessed here;

<https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/Fire-and-Rescue/NCC-Areas-for-Improvement-Action-Plan-Updated-March-2020.pdf>

To compliment the internal NFRS messaging, and so there is cross–service clarity on how NFRS is intending to address the issues raised by HMICFRS, we have created a staff “roadmap” which has been delivered and displayed at every NFRS site. The roadmap is attached as Appendix B.

Key issues

The service’s Improvement Action Plan (IAP) custodian is responsible for the development and maintenance of the plan, as well as fulfilling the role of holding theme and action leads to account for its delivery.

On a monthly basis, theme leads meet with their action leads to discuss progress and complete the monthly meeting record. The meeting record will document progress during the past month, plan progress for the following month and highlight emerging risks and issues and record an updated RAG rating for each action.

The completed monthly meeting record is then passed to the IAP custodian, who will use the documented information to update the IAP. In reality, and to ensure the process is followed, the IAP custodian may attend the individual theme meetings where required.

On a monthly basis, the IAP custodian will produce a headline report on progress, risks and issues for SLT. The IAP update will be a standing agenda item for SLT.

Once the process had been fully established in November 2019, delivery against the IAP was progressing well, with governance arrangements becoming well established. However, progress since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has slowed down significantly with the service's focus being diverted to maintaining critical functions, supporting NCCs COVID-19 response and supporting the most vulnerable in our communities. Delivery of the IAP has resumed in earnest at the end of July.

In response to the comments made by the HMICFRS in relation to lack of managerial and strategic capacity, the challenges to align our plans and ambitions to the significant efficiencies we have made since 2009/10 and the current levels of resource and capacity within specialist departments, to date NCC have invested approx. £300,000 into the provision of new posts within the service.

Improvement Action Plan Progress

Specific progress across the 12 main themes includes:

Theme 1 - Leadership and Culture

- Adoption of NCC vision and values, with 23 staff engagement workshops, involving over 150 members of staff, delivered to develop a NFRS specific narrative for each value with associated behavioural expectations.
- An internal Staff Communications and Engagement Plan has been drafted and was agreed at Service Leadership Team in March
- Currently working with NCC Communications Team to develop a NFRS specific presentation of the Vision and Values, whilst maintaining the NCC corporate identity.
- Currently planning how information from staff engagement workshops and the NCC Staff Survey report can be used to conduct a cultural review of the service.
- Strategic capacity within NFRS will be significantly improved with the appointment of a new DCFO
- Internal restructuring has allowed for the creation of a Band 12 post to support strategic planning and policy development and improve non-operational career progression within NFRS.

Theme 2 - Community Risk and Strategic Planning

- An independent review of community risk levels within Northumberland has been completed, with the final report delivered in February 2020. NFRS are leading the national FRS sector in the way they have approached the community risk

management review. This data will be considered when allocating resources between the prevention, protection and response strands of the service to achieve the NFRS mission of Making Northumberland Safer.

- Specific prevention, protection and response strategies have been produced which are now feeding into the development of a holistic overarching risk reduction strategy.
- Arrangements have been established via the service Performance Review Action Group (PRAG) to regularly scrutinise individual department plans to ensure they align with service priorities.

Theme 3 - Communications

- Supported by NCC we have now introduced a permanent dedicated Comms Officer for NFRS.
- A review of internal communications has been conducted, with a draft strategy presented to the NFRS SLT in February 2020.
- The COVID-19 response has necessitated a further review of how we deliver internal and external communications. Examples include engagement with businesses on fire safety issues via video and use of dial-ins and hangouts to engage with staff.
- Work is ongoing to maintain and where appropriate increase the use of social media for communicating with members of the public. NFRS currently uses both Facebook and Twitter to provide community safety messages.
- In response to the HMICFRS comments about lack of outward social media engagement with business, we have established a Fire Safety specific Linked In platform, increased our business social media output and have formalised our engagement and liaison with local business and NE business forums.

Theme 4 - Organisational Management Arrangements

- A proposed management restructure for NFRS is due to be presented to the NFRS SLT in August 2020. This restructure is necessary to accommodate the newly created Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Strategic Policy, Risk & Performance Officer roles.
- Restructures had been implemented in Fire Safety and Community Safety departments.
- Arrangements for achieving, maintaining and testing staff fitness levels have been reviewed. New arrangements are currently being implemented to ensure staff absences are minimised.
- Guidance has been provided for all staff via a service order regarding working additional hours, with robust monitoring arrangements established. Working arrangements will be further reviewed following lessons learnt during the COVID-19 response.

Theme 5 - Contingency Arrangements

- All NFRS Business Continuity Plans were reviewed between July 2019 and February 2020.

- Further review of all NFRS Business Continuity Plans is currently being undertaken to incorporate lessons learnt during the COVID-19 response.
- A programme of business continuity exercises is due to commence in February 2021.

Theme 6 - Finance

- Within the Efficiency section of the HMICFRS report, the main focus was on the outstanding efficiency targets that NFRS were still operating under and the concern of what attainment of that target would potentially mean for public safety and operational response. NCC have fully considered the NFRS efficiency profile in light of the HMICFRS comments and have removed the previous efficiency target of £960k and replaced it with a revised figure of £100k established for 2021/22.

Theme 7 - Partnerships

- A full review of all existing partnerships is currently underway to ascertain which partnerships provide value to the service and to ensure that any risks associated with partnership arrangements are minimised. We have a well established partnership register.
- NFRS led the regional fire and rescue services collaboration review of fire control. Recommendations have been accepted by regional chief fire officers to have a 3-stage approach to fully integrating all fire controls by 2028. Progress with this work has been delayed due to conflicting recommendations by consultants appointed by NCC.
- NFRS has been fully involved in a regional fire and rescue service partnership looking at increased collaboration in the field of fire safety. This has resulted in neighbouring services supporting NFRS with specialist staff during recent NFRS sickness absence.

Theme 8 - Prevention Delivery

- We have recruited two new Community Safety Delivery personnel to increase our programme delivery capacity.
- A comprehensive review of safeguarding arrangements within NFRS has been completed, with feedback on outcomes now provided to all persons who make a referral.
- We have redesigned our schools education programme and will be expanding our delivery into schools in 2021.
- A review of safe and wellbeing visits has commenced and a person centred approach to delivering this workstream has been agreed.
- We have improved our recording and governance arrangements for managing our Safe and Well visits to provide full assurance that our records are accurate and contemporaneous.

Theme 9 - Protection Delivery

- We have recruited two additional Fire Safety Inspecting officers to enable us to increase the number of safety audits we can deliver against our risk based inspection programme.
- A business engagement fire safety strategy has been developed in conjunction with the Better Business For All Forum and the North East Chamber of Commerce using a 'talking heads' approach.
- The risk based inspection programme has been reviewed and all high risk premises are on target to be inspected during 2020/21.
- The COVID-19 situation has necessitated the development of virtual fire safety audits of commercial premises.

Theme 10 - Response Delivery

- 10 wholtime trainees were recruited via the regional recruitment programme. They have all been trained by NFRS Learning & Development department and are now serving on fire stations throughout the county.
- Risk information is now being shared with neighbouring fire and rescue services, however an issue remains with risk information sharing with the Scottish Fire & Rescue Service, who do not utilise the Resilience Direct information sharing portal.
- The 8-minute response time for retained duty system staff has now been incorporated into recruitment procedures. This has contributed to an increase in fire appliance availability throughout the county.
- Cross border sharing of risk critical information protocols/agreements established.
- Reviewed and updated exercise planning and scheduling.
- Five strand emergency response review underway which includes the following areas:
 - Phased response expansion,
 - Predetermined attendance review,
 - RDS support officers business case,
 - Swiftwater rescue mobilisation review,
 - Technological and digital advances to improve FF safety.

Theme 11 - L&D Delivery

- A workforce development strategy has been developed and approved and this is currently being assessed against the requirements of the Skills for Justice Quality Mark for third party assurance.
- Risk critical training has been reviewed and a strategy developed and approved. This includes our approach to incident command training and assessment and firefighter recruit training. Risk critical training has continued during the COVID-19 response, with training being carried out virtually where appropriate.
- Development of an internal wholtime trainees course.
- Full review of incident command training at all levels, including acquisition and maintenance.

Theme 12 - Fire Support Services Delivery

- A new approach to performance management (statistical process control), developed in conjunction with Newcastle University is currently being piloted within the service.
- Progress continues with the adoption of the National Operational Guidance doctrine within the service.
- The operational assurance process of assessing performance both during and after incidents continues to evolve. Lessons learnt from these assessments are regularly shared throughout the service by means of Organisational Learning Bulletins.
- The technical refresh of the fire control mobilising system is almost complete. The only outstanding area to be updated is the mobile data terminals (MDTs) on fire appliances, which are scheduled to be rolled out during Autumn 2020.
- NFRS has successfully moved the fire station in Ponteland from the existing site to a new site within the Ponteland High School development.

Further Work Streams/Developments

- Complete the cultural review and priority action plan.
- Continue to look for initiative ways of recruiting RDS (On Call) personnel.
- Develop emergency response ways of working in order to maximise operational availability.
- Embed the performance management system within our Integrated Risk Management Plan.
- Finalise the prevention, protection and response strategies and integrate into the established data sets.
- Finalise the communication, engagement and people strategy.
- Finalise the strategic restructure and governance model, including principal officers group and service leadership team.
- Recruit and embed the new strategic posts, DCFO and Band 12.
- Meet the efficiency target for 2021/22.
- Finalise the cross border sharing of risk information protocols.
- Continue to work with the national sector to embed NOGP doctrine and structures.

Future HMI Arrangements

Initial plans for future HMICFRS inspections were communicated to all fire and rescue services in January 2020. At that time it was planned that NFRS would be in tranche 2 of the second round of inspections. This was planned to involve:

- Discovery week - 8th February 2021
- Inspection week - 1st March 2021.

Confirmation that these arrangements had changed was received on 5th August 2020. HMICFRS has been commissioned by the Home Secretary to conduct a COVID-19

response inspection, which is to commence immediately. NFRS will be assessed w/c 12th October with 7 one hour telephone interviews being conducted virtually with FRS and NCC HR and Finance personnel. A narrative assessment of NFRS will be provided by letter - there will be no graded judgment - with a full sector *State of Fire* report due to be published by the end of the year. The report will cover all fire and rescue services in England, rather than any individual reports for each service.

Further, HMICFRS is planning to restart its full inspection programme in early 2021, running through to Autumn 2022. There is currently no indication of where NFRS will be in the revised programme although it is anticipated that it will be August / September 2021 at the earliest.

In the meantime, NFRS continues to provide data returns to HMICFRS on a twice yearly basis.

Implications

Policy	It is not envisaged that delivery of this action plan will have any impact on NCC policy. Specific NFRS policy documents may require development or amendment to reflect any changes identified as necessary.
Finance and value for money	Delivery of this action plan to date has necessitated investment by NCC through the creation of additional posts, this has stabilised the structures in order to meet the HMICFRS inspection demands.
Legal	Delivery of this action plan will support the Fire Authority in delivering its responsibilities under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and other associated legislation, including the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 Act and health and safety legislation.
Procurement	Non anticipated at present.
Human Resources	HR implications associated with recruiting and employing additional members of staff.
Property	An outstanding action within the plan is to agree a solution to renewing/replacing Berwick Fire Station.
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached)	There are no identified negative equality impacts associated with this IAP, however the creation of a band 12 green book position has created additional opportunities for green book staff within the service.

Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	
Risk Assessment	The overarching risk associated with delivering this IAP is recorded in the NFRS strategic risk register.
Crime & Disorder	Delivery of this action plan will support the Fire Authority in delivering its responsibilities under the Crime & Disorder Act.
Customer Consideration	Delivery of this action plan will have a positive impact on customers as we strive to improve the levels of service we deliver across the workstreams of prevention, protection and response..
Carbon reduction	Not specifically considered in the original IAP, but has become a rising issue since the onset of COVID-19. New ways of working post Covid will have a positive impact on reducing the carbon footprint of the organisation>
Health and Wellbeing	Delivery of this action plan will support the Fire Authority in delivering its responsibilities under the health, safety and wellbeing legal and moral obligations.
Wards	

Background papers:

Northumberland Fire & Rescue Service Improvement Action Plan

HMICFRS Report on the Effectiveness, efficiency and people 2018/19 - An Inspection of Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service.

Report sign off.

Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:

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Appendix A

Areas for Improvement (AFI) highlighted in HMICFRS Report June 20th 2019.

EFFECTIVENESS

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies

- 1. The service should ensure its firefighters have good access to relevant and up-to-date risk information. This should include site-specific risk information.

Preventing fires and other risks

- 2. The service should assure itself it allocates the right resources to prevention activities and that prevention activities align to risk.
- 3. The service should evaluate and assure its prevention work, so it understands the benefits better.
- 4. The service should improve its use of communications to provide information about fire prevention and to promote community safety.

Protecting the public through fire regulation

- 5. The service should ensure it allocates enough resources to a prioritised and risk-based inspection programme.
- 6. The service should ensure its staff work with local businesses to share information and expectations on compliance with fire safety regulations.

Responding to fires and other emergencies

- 7. The service should ensure staff know how to command fire service assets at incidents effectively and safely.
- 8. During incidents the service should ensure it gives relevant information to the public to help keep them safe.
- 9. The service should ensure an effective system of debriefing to enable staff to learn from operational incidents to improve future response and command.

Responding to national risks

- 10. The service should ensure that supervisory managers know how to apply JESIP.
- 11. The service should ensure its firefighters have good access to relevant and up-to-date risk information. This should include cross-border risk information.

EFFICIENCY

Making best use of resources

- **12.** The service should ensure resources allocated to prevention, protection, response and support activities are linked to risks and priorities set out in its integrated risk management plan.
- **13.** The service needs to improve how it monitors the productivity of staff. It needs to ensure there is appropriate monitoring and management of working time.
- **14.** The service should ensure it has good continuity arrangements in place that take account of all foreseeable threats and risks. It needs to review and test plans regularly.

Making the fire and rescue service affordable now and in the future

- **15.** The service needs to agree ways of working within its reducing budget that enables it to meet future prevention, protection and response requirements.

PEOPLE

Promoting the right values and culture

- **16.** The service should make sure its values and behaviours are understood and demonstrated at all levels of the organisation.

Getting the right people with the right skills

- **17.** The service should make sure its workforce plan includes how it intends to reduce the number of staff in temporary positions.
- **18.** The service should assure itself that it trains all staff properly for their roles.
- **19.** The service should make sure there is a training plan for all staff and there is a consistent method of recording when staff have received training.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity

- **20.** The service should make sure issues identified through its staff survey are appropriately addressed and that actions taken are communicated to staff in a timely way.
- **21.** The service should assure itself that staff are confident using its feedback mechanisms.
- **22.** To identify and tackle barriers to equality of opportunity, and achieve a more representative workforce, the service should make sure diversity and inclusion are well understood and become embedded in the service.

Managing performance and developing leaders

- **23.** The service should put in place a system to actively manage staff careers, to diversify the pool of future and current leaders.

Appendix B



Northumberland Fire and Rescue IMPROVEMENT PLAN



In 2018, a formal inspection of fire service across Northumberland showed there were some key areas we needed to improve. This is our plan to make changes for the better and meet our improvement targets.

