



Northumberland County Council

County Council

Wednesday, 17 January 2024

Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service Inspection Report

Report of Councillor(s) Cllr Gordon Stewart, Cabinet Member for Looking After our Communities

Responsible Officer(s): Graeme Binning, Chief Fire Officer, and Helen Paterson, Chief Executive

1. **Link to Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan**

Delivery of Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service effectively and efficiently contributes to the delivery of all three corporate priorities.

2. **Purpose of report**

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) has undertaken a third full inspection of Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS). The inspection commenced on 29 May 2023, with initial feedback (hot debrief) provided on 9 August 2023. The final report was received by the Service on 27 November 2023 and published on HMICFRS website on 29 November 2023. This report provides an Executive Summary.

3. **Recommendations**

3.1 Council is recommended to note the outcome of the Inspection Report

4. **Forward plan date and reason for urgency if applicable**

This report does not require a key decision.

5. **Background**

5.1 At the time of publication, nine fire and rescue service reports had been published in round three so far. These include; Northumberland, Warwickshire, Cornwall, Merseyside, Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Buckinghamshire, Surrey and Bedfordshire.

5.2 Overall, Northumberland has made significant improvements since the previous inspection. Key highlights are as follows:

- No Causes of Concern.
- No Inadequate judgement (or grades).
- No Requires Improvement.
- 7 Adequate.
- 4 Good.
- 12 Areas for Improvement (52 percent reduction since the second round of inspections).

Direction of travel ➔												
HMICFRS Round 1 Performance 2018/19				HMICFRS Round 2 Performance 2021/22				HMICFRS Round 3 Performance 2023/25				
Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate	Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate	Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires Improvement	Inadequate
	Responding to major and multi-agency incidents	Understanding fires and other risks			Protecting the public through fire regulation	Understanding fires and other risks			Preventing fires and other risks	Understanding fires and other risks		
		Protecting the public through fire regulation			Responding to major and multi-agency incidents	Making best use of resources			Future affordability	Responding to fires and other emergencies		
		Making best use of resources				Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity			Promoting the right values and culture	Protecting the public through fire regulation		
		Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity				Managing performance and developing leaders			Getting the right people with the right skills	Responding to major and multi-agency incidents		
		Managing performance and developing leaders				Preventing fires and other risks				Making best use of resources		
		Preventing fires and other risks				Responding to fires and other emergencies				Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity		
		Responding to fires and other emergencies				Future affordability				Managing performance and developing leaders		
		Future affordability				Promoting the right values and culture						
		Promoting the right values and culture				Getting the right people with the right skills						
		Getting the right people with the right skills										

5.3 Of all nine services, Northumberland has demonstrated the most significant improvement by far, with many of the nine services seeing a deterioration in performance.

5.4 Of special note is the judgement that Northumberland is good at promoting the right values and culture. The report states:

“The service has well-defined values, which staff understood. We found staff at all levels of the service showing behaviours that reflect service values. Recent changes in both the fire and rescue leadership team and the county council leadership team, has meant a committed focus on values and culture throughout the organisation.” (page 33)

5.5 In addition, inspectors state:

“In response to our survey 94 percent of people (119 of 126) felt they are treated with respect by the people they work with.” (page 33)

5.6 HMICFRS is commissioned to undertake inspections of fire and rescue services in England across the three areas of effectiveness, efficiency and people. Supporting these three areas are 11 key questions or diagnostics, against which each service is judged. These questions have remained consistent across all three full inspections, while judgments have increased from four to five. **The inspectorate has emphasised that a reduction in grade, particularly from good to adequate**

does not necessarily mean there has been a reduction in performance, unless this is stated in the report.

5.7 During the first full inspection, Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service received 10 Requires Improvement judgments and 1 Good judgement against the 11 diagnostics. The Service also received 24 Areas for Improvement.

5.8 During the second full inspection, Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service received 9 Requires Improvement judgements and 2 Good judgements against the 11 diagnostics. The Service also received a Cause of Concern, and 25 Areas for Improvement.

6. Options open to the Council and reasons for the recommendations

6.1 Not applicable. The report is presented for information.

7. Implications

Policy	Areas for improvement identified in the report may require changes in policy.
Finance and value for money	There are no direct financial implications associated with this report. The Service was assessed as being Good at making the Service affordable now and in the future.
Legal	. Independent inspection of fire and rescue authorities in England is delivered by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS). 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
Procurement	Not applicable.
Human resources	Not Applicable
Property	Not applicable.
The Equalities Act: is a full impact assessment required and attached?	No - not required at this point No decisions are required and therefore no EIA has been produced.
Risk assessment	No risks identified.
Crime and disorder	Not applicable.

Customer considerations	HMICFRS undertakes independent inspections of Fire and Rescue Service on behalf of the public.
Carbon reduction	Not applicable.
Health and wellbeing	The Service was assessed as Good at preventing fires and risk.
Wards	(All Wards);

8. Background papers

[Fire & Rescue Service 2023-25 Effectiveness, efficiency and people \(An inspection of Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service\)](#)

9. Links to other key reports already published

Not applicable.

10. Author and Contact Details

Graeme Binning, Chief Fire Officer and Director of Public Protection, Email: graeme.binning@northumberland.gov.uk,

Deborah.Brown, Strategic Performance & Risk Officer, Fire and Rescue Services, Email: deborah.brown@northumberland.gov.uk