



**DORSET & WILTSHIRE
FIRE AND RESCUE
AUTHORITY**

Item 21/06

MEETING	Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority
DATE OF MEETING	11 February 2021
SUBJECT OF THE REPORT	Response to Covid-19, an inspection of Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service
STATUS OF REPORT	For open publication
PURPOSE OF REPORT	To consider and note
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<p>Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) was commissioned by the Home Secretary to undertake Covid-19 inspections of all fire and rescue services in England.</p> <p>The inspection process began in August 2020, with the Inspectorate requiring the submission of data, documentation, self-assessments and the completion of Service, staff and staff association surveys.</p> <p>Additionally, each fire and rescue service had a two-week period between September and November 2020 where virtual fieldwork was undertaken by the Inspectorate through a series of interviews with managers, the Chairs of the Local Resilience Forums and the Chair of the Authority.</p> <p>The Inspectorate found a positive and robust response by the Service to the pandemic with no significant areas of concern. Appendix A to this report provides the Inspectorate’s findings and opinion of the Service’s approach and response to the Covid-19 pandemic.</p>
RISK ASSESSMENT	Failure to learn from the findings of this inspection by HMICFRS may lead to the Service missing improvement opportunities.
COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT	None for the purpose of this report

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS	None for the purpose of this report
RECOMMENDATION	Members are asked to: 1. Note the content of the report.
BACKGROUND PAPERS	None for the purposes of this report
APPENDIX	Appendix A - Covid-19 HMICFRS Inspection of Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service. January 2021 Appendix B - Responding to the pandemic: The fire and rescue service's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 On 5 August 2020, Sir Thomas Winsor, in his capacity as Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Services, wrote to all Chief Fire Officers and Chairs of Fire & Rescue Authorities to announce the Home Secretary's commissioning of the Inspectorate to undertake Covid-19 inspections of all fire and rescue services in England.
- 1.2 The commission was issued under section 28A(3) of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 with the Inspectorate being specifically asked to consider:
 - what is working well and what is being learnt
 - how the fire sector is responding to the Covid-19 crisis
 - how fire services are dealing with the problems they face and
 - what changes are likely as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 1.3 Services were advised that the initial inspection work would cover the period from March to June 2020, with the inspectorate requiring specific data, documents, self-assessments and the completion of surveys.
- 1.4 Furthermore, the full inspection would be conducted entirely virtually, with fieldwork being carried out over a two-week window for all services, between September and November 2020.
- 1.5 Sir Thomas Winsor confirmed that following the completion of all Covid-19 inspections, all fire and rescue services were to receive a published letter, providing an overview of findings.

2. HMICFRS Covid-19 inspection

- 2.1 The HMICFRS inspection scope for services covered the:
 - activity to protect communities and limit the spread of Covid-19, including the arrangements within the national tripartite agreement between the Local Government Association (LGA), National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and the Fire Brigade Union (FBU)
 - safety and wellbeing of staff during Covid-19
 - maintenance of statutory functions during Covid-19
 - sharing and promoting best practice during Covid-19 and
 - capability to co-ordinate and broker requests for mutual aid during Covid-19.
- 2.2 With the process of inspection and evaluation undertaken through:
 - Service, staff and staff association surveys
 - data analysis
 - desktop reviews of service pandemic plans, business continuity and absence; management arrangements and

- a set of remote interviews of Officers and Chairs of Local Resilience Forum, as well as an interview led by HMI Wendy Williams with the Fire & Rescue Authority Chair.

2.3 To consider the wider national response, additional interviews would be undertaken by the Inspectorate through the National Fire Chiefs Council, ambulance trusts, Home Office, Local Government Association, National Employers, and staff associations.

3. Inspection findings

3.1 Appendix A provides the full details and findings from the Service's Covid-19 inspection by the HMICFRS.

3.2 The Inspectorate found that the Service rapidly established comprehensive arrangements to cope with the challenges and uncertainties associated with the national pandemic. The Inspectorate were pleased that core functions were maintained and that the Service was able to quickly adapt ways of working to keep the community safe whilst maintaining high standards of health, safety, and welfare for its staff.

3.3 It found that staff who could work remotely from home were able to do so without technical disruption. For those members of staff that needed to operate from fire stations and workplaces, infection protection control measures were robust and consistent with good health and safety practices. Staff felt well supported through good internal communication channels, their representative bodies and a strong overall focus on welfare services.

3.4 The Inspectorate were positive about how staff had volunteered to support wider community and partnership activities such as driving ambulances, face fitting masks for health care workers and supporting temporary mortuary facilities. It was also impressed by how the Service worked with its neighbouring fire and rescue services, and local, regional and national organisations through the two Local Resilience Forums during this incident.

3.5 In addition, an overall summary of findings report has been published by the inspectorate, intitled, Responding to the pandemic: The fire and rescue service's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. This can be found as Appendix B to this report

4. Summary and next steps

4.1 It is pleasing to receive such a positive letter from the Inspectorate regarding the Service's response to the national pandemic. It has undoubtedly been one of the most testing times for the Service, particularly during the summer months when we experienced one of the largest and most demanding fires in our history.

- 4.2 The Inspectorate have made two recommendations associated with securing lasting improvements from ways of working introduced to deal with the pandemic and also examining how we may further strengthen support provisions for members of staff at higher risk from Covid-19.
- 4.3 As Members are aware from recent seminars, the Service has a strong desire to build upon the learning and cost savings associated with responding to this pandemic, much of which has already been signalled through the draft Community Safety Plan.
- 4.4 Officers are assured that those members of staff at higher risk from Covid-19 are being well supported and that no additional control measures are required.
- 4.5 In terms of the future inspection programme, this is still being firmed up by the Inspectorate. Officers are continuing to strengthen the arrangements to maintain the high standing of the Service and its three 'Good' ratings. It is likely that the next round of inspection will commence in the spring, with the Service anticipated to be in the second wave of inspections. This will mean formal preparations beginning in the autumn of this year in readiness for a full inspection in 2022.

February 2021