

HMICFRS fire and rescue services inspection programme 2025–27

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Introduction

In our 2025–27 inspections, we will measure fire and rescue services (FRSs) against our characteristics of good performance. These characteristics describe the levels of performance FRSs need to achieve to be graded ‘good’. They help us to make consistent assessments across all FRSs, and also show FRSs what they are being graded against.

These characteristics are examples. They are not intended to set specific standards or to be a comprehensive list of how we expect FRSs to perform.

The characteristics take account of national standards, operational guidance and evidence from research, which we will keep under review. We aren’t limited to these and are entitled to establish our own measures of efficiency and effectiveness.

Effectiveness assessment

1. How well does the FRS understand and manage the risk of fire and other emergencies?

1.1 The FRS routinely uses a wide range of data to produce an accurate and clear risk profile and community risk management plan (CRMP). Resources are clearly allocated using evidence-based decision-making, informed by a comprehensive corporate risk register.

1.2 The CRMP identifies and clearly sets out current and future changes in risk, taking account of local community and national risk registers.

1.3 The CRMP clearly establishes how the FRS will manage risk to the public and monitor the delivery of its objectives for prevention, protection and response activity.

1.4 The FRS has appropriate governance arrangements in place which consider local risk and contribute to setting the priorities in the CRMP. The governance arrangements provide clear accountability to communities for the FRS's service.

2. How effective is the FRS at preventing fires and other risks?

2.1 The FRS has developed and implemented a realistic and risk-based prevention strategy which is informed by local risk and complies with statutory requirements. The FRS's prevention plan clearly sets out where the greatest risks lie within its area and has a clear rationale for the level of activity to prevent fires and other risks. The FRS uses findings from prevention, protection and response activity to adapt its prevention plan. FRS prevention activity meets community expectations, and its core functions are sustained regardless of other discretionary priorities for the FRS.

2.2 The FRS tailors its communications to provide information about fire prevention and to promote community safety. The FRS has a comprehensive understanding of the diverse needs of its communities and makes sure that its engagement and communication is designed to be appropriate and accessible to meet those diverse needs.

2.3 FRS staff are able to recognise the opportunity to prevent fires and other risks and take appropriate action. The FRS works with other FRSs, a wide range of partner organisations and diverse sections of the community to reduce the number of fires and other risks. The FRS evaluates the impact of its prevention activity and uses this to improve its own and partners' approaches.

2.4 Staff understand how to identify vulnerability and take action to safeguard vulnerable people as a result.

2.5 The FRS identifies and targets people who display signs of fire-setting behaviour for intervention activity, and routinely shares information with partner organisations to support the prosecution of arsonists.

3. How effective is the FRS at protecting the public through the regulation of fire safety?

3.1 The FRS has developed and implemented a fire safety enforcement strategy and risk-based intervention programme which is informed by local risk. The FRS's regulatory activities comply with statutory requirements to reduce the risk of fire and activity is aligned with other statutory bodies such as the building safety regulator. The FRS's enforcement plan prioritises the highest risks and includes a proportionate level of activity to reduce risk. The FRS carries out a programme of fire safety audits in line with its enforcement plan.

3.2 The FRS carries out systematic, consistent and robust fire safety audits. The FRS assures itself that fire safety audits are being carried out in a systematic, consistent and robust way.

3.3 The FRS uses its enforcement powers in a proportionate way. The FRS's regulatory activities keep people safe and secure from the risk of fire.

3.4 The FRS systematically and routinely shares relevant information on fire safety risk with staff who use it to carry out fire safety audits. FRS staff work and share information with enforcement partners and take appropriate enforcement action.

3.5 FRS staff work with local businesses and/or large organisations and share information and expectations on compliance with fire safety regulations. The FRS has a system to help all local businesses to have easy and timely access to clear guidance on how to comply with fire safety regulations.

4. How effective is the FRS at responding to fires and other emergencies?

4.1 The FRS has taken the action required in a timely manner to align its policies, processes and procedures with fire standards and national operational guidance, including joint and national learning.

4.2 The FRS has developed a response strategy that is based on a thorough assessment of risk to the community. The FRS has an appropriate range of resources (people and equipment) available to respond to personal, property and environmental risk in line with its risk management plan. The FRS understands and actively manages the resources and capabilities available for deployment. The FRS is able to handle calls in a timely manner to ensure public safety. The FRS is able to manage the fair deployment (and temporary redeployment) of resources to meet operational need.

4.3 The FRS routinely gathers relevant risk information about people, places and threats. It makes sure that the information it has gathered is accurate and up to date. It has easily accessible systems in place so staff involved in emergency incidents can access risk information in easily usable formats.

4.4 FRS staff are able to command fire service assets assertively, effectively and safely at incidents. FRS staff make sure the public are protected at incidents.

4.5 The FRS can mobilise sufficient resources to respond to local and cross-border incidents.

4.6 The FRS uses learning from emergencies (local and national) to improve its operational response and to challenge existing policies, processes and procedures.

5. How well prepared is the FRS to respond to major and multi-agency incidents?

5.1 The FRS understands national and cross-border risks, and has sufficiently assessed reasonably foreseeable local community risks that are likely to require a major or multi-agency response.

5.2 The FRS uses risk assessments to develop plans to respond to major and multi-agency incidents, and is supporting local communities to make them more resilient.

5.3 The FRS carries out a joint exercise programme to test arrangements for major and multi-agency incidents. The FRS uses the learning to improve its capabilities and inform local and national developments.

5.4 FRS staff can work with neighbouring FRSs and form part of a multi-agency response in line with [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles](#). The FRS actively participates in its local resilience forum and is well prepared for, or routinely contributes to, multi-agency debriefs.

5.5 The FRS's local arrangements comply with, and support, the requirements within the '[National Coordination and Advisory Framework \(NCAF\) England](#)'.

5.6 The FRS is aware of joint organisational and national operational learning. The FRS takes sufficient action to improve the services it provides in line with good practice.

Efficiency assessment

6. How well does the FRS use resources to manage risk, making sure it is efficient and affordable?

6.1 The FRS has appropriate governance and scrutiny arrangements in place to make sure its performance is meeting objectives and targets, improvement plans are providing the intended outcomes, audit requirements are in place and financial plans are affordable. Scrutiny activity is well planned and focused on areas of strategic importance.

6.2 Senior officers are constructively held to account for the corporate management and activity of the FRS through effective governance arrangements. A [scheme of delegation](#) clearly sets out responsibilities.

6.3 The FRS's budget and resource allocation is proportionate and supports the activity set out in its CRMP and its strategic priorities. The FRS has allocated enough resources to prevention, protection and response activity. There is a clear rationale for the levels of this activity linked to its CRMP. The FRS's workforce model allows it to carry out its core functions effectively and efficiently.

6.4 The FRS understands its likely financial challenges. The FRS's plans are built on sound assumptions, including scenario plans, and mitigate the main financial risks. The FRS has a plan for using reserves sustainably. The FRS has an affordable workforce model that provides the right skills and capabilities, and is linked to its CRMP and priorities. The FRS's financial plans help it to make sure it can provide a sustained service to the public, can continuously improve and will result in a balanced budget. The FRS has financial controls and financial risk control systems in place to reduce the risk of inappropriate use of public money.

6.5 The FRS's arrangements for managing its performance make sure the use of its resources is clearly linked to its CRMP and strategic priorities. The FRS has tools and systems in place to collect, interpret and analyse data to improve staff productivity, make sure resources are used efficiently and effectively, and provide value for money.

6.6 The FRS identifies savings and investment opportunities that improve service to the public and/or generate further savings. The FRS can demonstrate that it has consistently achieved savings, including from non-pay costs. It routinely reviews non-pay costs and regularly challenges itself to make sure that it is achieving value for money. The FRS comprehensively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and outcomes of any contract arrangements, collaboration and improvement projects, and can demonstrate the intended outcomes are achieved.

6.7 The FRS's strategies for its capital programme, estate and fleet are clearly linked to its CRMP. The FRS actively considers how changes in fleet and estate provision and status, and future innovation, may affect risk. The FRS exploits opportunities presented by changes in fleet and estate to improve efficiency and effectiveness. The FRS can demonstrate that it consistently carries out estate and fleet projects on time and on budget, managing risks appropriately.

6.8 The FRS actively considers how changes in technology and future innovation may affect risk, and it exploits opportunities presented by these to improve efficiency and effectiveness. The FRS can show it has a record of carrying out IT projects on time and on budget, managing risks appropriately.

6.9 The FRS has the capacity and capability it needs to improve performance, and has the skills needed to achieve sustainable change. The FRS manages change and transformation through effective projects and programmes. The FRS has a clear internal structure with appropriate governance arrangements to make sure progress against projects and programmes is monitored, scrutinised and challenged.

People assessment

7. How effective is the FRS at promoting, embedding and improving its values and culture, and ensuring the health and well-being of its workforce?

7.1 The FRS's governance arrangements provide oversight and assurance that its people strategies are effective at establishing a positive culture and standards of conduct that support the health and well-being of its workforce.

7.2 The FRS regularly assesses its culture by using and sharing learning to continuously improve. The FRS makes sure that its values and the [Code of Ethics](#) are established across the service, and acceptable standards of behaviour are understood and demonstrated by all. The FRS carries out effective background checks to help prevent unsuitable people from joining or remaining in the service.

7.3 Leaders at all levels are visible, approachable and open to alternative views. Leaders request, act on and learn from feedback from staff and all representative bodies and staff associations. Feedback processes are trusted, and staff have confidence that their views will be listened to and acted on.

7.4 Staff at all levels have the confidence to challenge unacceptable behaviour and raise concerns, and trust the systems that are in place for doing so. The FRS acts appropriately to address unacceptable behaviour, resolve grievances and discipline issues in a consistent and timely manner, adhere to national standards, and support the well-being of all involved.

7.5 The FRS has effective, trusted and well-understood policies and procedures to support and maintain the health, safety and well-being of its staff. Leaders at all levels prioritise and promote the physical and mental health of all staff, with a strong focus on prevention and early intervention.

8. How well trained, skilled and developed are FRS staff?

8.1 The FRS has a good understanding of the skills its workforce needs for its CRMP, now and in the future. The FRS has training and succession plans in place to identify and address gaps in its capabilities, taking account of organisational and wider learning, and regularly reviews these.

8.2 The FRS equips, develops and supports its staff with the operational and non-operational skills needed to carry out their roles effectively. The FRS has effective systems to develop, monitor and assure staff competence and capability.

8.3 The FRS has a culture of continuous improvement. It actively manages the career pathways of all staff, both operational and non-operational. It identifies and overcomes any barriers or disproportionality in the provision and accessibility of training and development.

9. How well does the FRS ensure fairness and diversity?

9.1 The FRS is taking effective action to attract and recruit talented people at all levels with various backgrounds, experiences and perspectives to better reflect the communities it serves, using fair, open, innovative and transparent recruitment processes. It has identified potential barriers to under-represented groups joining the service and is taking action to overcome these.

9.2 The FRS is making good efforts to progress and retain a diverse workforce so that it better reflects its communities at all levels of the organisation. The FRS understands and overcomes potential barriers preventing particular groups from progressing. It creates opportunities for people from these groups to develop and progress.

9.3 The FRS promotes equality, diversity and inclusion across all its staff groups, making sure all staff understand its importance. The FRS has prioritised equality through strategies, plans, training, facilities and practice, and works with all staff groups to resolve any issues.

10. How well does the FRS lead its people?

10.1 The FRS's senior leadership team effectively engages with staff at all levels and communicates its intention and strategic objectives for the service. Leaders at all levels make sure that staff understand and can demonstrate how they contribute to the delivery of the strategic objectives.

10.2 Leaders at all levels act as role models, promoting a positive culture through their behaviour. They actively encourage inclusive and ethical work environments. Leaders routinely challenge and act on inappropriate behaviour, and create safe environments where others feel confident to do so.

10.3 The FRS has open, fair and transparent processes to identify, develop and promote high-potential staff and aspiring leaders across all staff groups. FRS staff understand and trust these processes. The service has identified potential barriers preventing particular groups from accessing the talent schemes and is taking action to overcome these.

10.4 The FRS makes sure that leaders at all levels are equipped, developed and supported to meet leadership standards, and effectively supports both teams and individuals. All leaders are equipped and have the confidence to manage staff performance and well-being and to resolve poor performance and behaviour, and actively do so.

