

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY			
MEETING OF THE:	AUTHORITY BUDGET MEETING		
DATE:	25 FEBRUARY 2021	REPORT NO:	CFO/007/21
PRESENTING OFFICER	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	DEB APPLETON	REPORT AUTHOR:	DEB APPLETON
OFFICERS CONSULTED:			
TITLE OF REPORT:	HMICFRS COVID-19 INSPECTION OUTCOMES		

APPENDICES:	APPENDIX A:	MFRS COVID INSPECTION LETTER
	APPENDIX B:	NATONAL COVID INSPECTION REPORT

Purpose of Report

1. To inform Members of the outcomes of the COVID-19 inspection carried out by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) attached as Appendix A and B to this report. Please note, the reports are no longer under embargo.

Recommendation

2. That Members note the extremely positive outcomes of the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service COVID-19 inspection and the national outcomes.

Introduction and Background

3. Members will be aware that HMICFRS conducted a national inspection of Fire and Rescue Services' response to the pandemic in Autumn 2020. On 22nd January 2021 they published individual letters to Chief Fire Officers and Authority Chairs setting out their findings (Appendix A) and also published a national report on overall outcomes (Appendix B).
4. HMICFRS were asked by the Home Secretary to consider what is working well and what is being learned; 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. Their main focus was from April to June 2020, and that period is reflected in the individual fire and rescue authority letters, but the national report contains more recent information.
5. The MFRA inspection was held between 28th September and 9th October 2020 with the Chair, Principal Officers, several members of the Strategic Leadership Team, other key officers and the Deputy Chief Constable interviewed remotely.

Documents and data were also provided and a self-assessment questionnaire was completed. HMICFRS also opened their staff survey for the duration of the inspections.

6. Full details can be found in Appendix A, but in summary, the outcomes letter was highly positive. HMICFRS found that MFRS 'adapted and responded to the pandemic effectively', continuing to respond to calls from the public and attend emergencies whilst also taking on additional roles and responsibilities to support other blue light and public services that were experiencing high levels of demand.
7. Members may be aware that since the start of the pandemic, MFRS staff have worked alongside charities, local authorities and football clubs to deliver 4,102 prescriptions, 1,414 food parcels and 390 health and wellbeing parcels to the most vulnerable members of our community. In addition to the delivery of essential items, staff have also been carrying out 'face fit testing' of masks for North West Ambulance Service staff, critical care workers and those working within care home settings to ensure that they are able to keep safe whilst they are looking after others. Volunteers have helped to fit 451 masks during the pandemic.
8. MFRS staff have also volunteered to assist local authorities with mass testing and will soon begin helping with mass vaccinations. An appeal for volunteers across the Service to help with COVID-19 vaccinations saw more than 300 people put themselves forward, with the first cohort of MFRS staff being trained by St John Ambulance on 25th January.
9. In addition to this, HMICFRS noted that MFRS staff have also volunteered to help with morgue management were prepared to assist NWAS during the pandemic. The Service is currently in dialogue with the ambulance service to see how best staff can assist them during this unprecedented period of demand.
10. Staff continued their day-to-day operations, albeit through different means at times. Physical home fire safety checks were reduced to protect both staff and the community from risk of transmission, with only those deemed most at risk of fires in the home receiving an actual visit. Instead, more than 100,000 home safety and winter warmth leaflets were delivered to 25,000+ over 65s.
11. MFRS continued to engage with those responsible for fire safety in high risk premises, carrying out nearly 2,000 Fire Safety Audits in 2020 – half of which were carried out remotely as desktop assessments, in line with guidance from the National Fire Chiefs Council.
12. As well as recognising our local response, the inspection letter also highlights MFRS' national work, with the Service and Chief Fire Officer having a leading role in the co-ordination of the fire sector's response to the pandemic.
13. Inspectors also highlighted the way MFRS communicated with its staff throughout the pandemic, including on issues of staff wellbeing, adding that 'a

notable achievement is the extra contact and support it gave to its black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) workforce’.

14. As is to be expected, the letter does contain some recommendations for the Service but these appear to be standard comments in all reports:
 - It should determine how it will adopt, for the longer term, the new and innovative ways of working introduced during the pandemic, to secure lasting improvements.
 - It should update its plans, including business continuity and pandemic flu plans, using the lessons it has learned from the pandemic to date.
 - It should determine how it can improve its IT and systems so that staff can effectively work remotely.
15. Members will be reassured to know that all three areas were under way before the receipt of the letter and these will be added to the existing HMICFRS Action Plan and managed through the Service’s planning governance processes.
16. This complimentary report follows on from a successful full inspection in December 2018 and although the second round of full inspections was postponed in early 2020 due to the pandemic, arrangements are currently being made to carry out the round 2 inspections in 2021. Further details on when these will take place are awaited from HMICFRS.
17. The national report on the outcomes of the COVID 19 inspection presented some concerns about the overall response to COVID 19 separate from the good work referenced in individual Service letters. The HMICFRS press release for this report stated that:

“Dedicated fire and rescue staff stepped up to support the communities they serve during the COVID-19 pandemic, but working arrangements between fire and rescue service National Employers and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) prevented some firefighters from maximising the support they could provide to the public”.
18. Full details of the Inspectorate’s findings can be found in the report at Appendix B.

Equality and Diversity Implications

19. There are no equality and diversity implications arising from this report. The Inspectorate’s findings noted the way the Service supported BAME staff.

Staff Implications

20. There are no staff related implications arising from the report. The Inspectorate’s findings noted the relatively low number of staff absences, the occupational health and health and safety support available to staff and referred to the comprehensive communications during the period.

Legal Implications

21. There are no Legal implications arising from this report.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

22. There are no financial implications arising from this report. The Inspectorate's findings noted the Service's approach to procurement of PPE and efficient use of resources.

Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications

23. There are no health and safety implications arising from this report. The Inspectorate noted that the Service assessed the risks associated with new work and provided staff with suitable PPE on time.

Contribution to Our Mission: *Safer Stronger Communities – Safe Effective Firefighters*

24. The Inspectorate's role is to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the Service and how it treats its people. The positive outcomes of this inspection demonstrate to all our stakeholders that MFRS has maintained its high standards in all three areas during the pandemic.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

GLOSSARY OF TERMS
