

Greater Manchester Police, Fire & Crime Panel

Date: 21st March 2024

Subject: HMICFRS Inspection and Thematic Inspection Summary Report

Report of: DCFO Ben Norman

Report Author: GM David Wilson – HMICFRS Service Liaison Officer

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Round 3 inspection of Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS) as part of their independent assessment of the effectiveness & efficiency and their Thematic Inspection on The Handling of Misconduct in Fire and Rescue Services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members of the Panel are asked to note the contents of this report.

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Equalities Impact, Carbon, and Sustainability Assessment:

N/A

Risk Management

N/A

Legal Considerations

N/A

Financial Consequences - Capital

N/A

Financial Consequences - Revenue

N/A

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

- [HMICFRS Round 2 Inspection Report](#)
- [HMICFRS Round 3 Inspection Report](#)
- [Values and culture in fire and rescue services \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](http://justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)

TRACKING/PROCESS		
Does this report relate to a major strategic decision, as set out in the GMCA Constitution		No
EXEMPTION FROM CALL IN		
Are there any aspects in this report which means it should be considered to be exempt from call in by the relevant Scrutiny Committee on the grounds of urgency?		No
TfGMC	Overview & Scrutiny Committee	
N/A	N/A	

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. During the period from September 2023 and January 2024, GMFRS underwent two significant inspections conducted by HMICFRS:
 - Periodic Round 3 Inspections: These inspections covered all 44 fire and rescue services in England.
 - Thematic Inspection on The Handling of Misconduct: This specific inspection focused on the management of misconduct within fire and rescue services.
2. The subsequent report and feedback have provided an external assessment of the progress we have made since the last HMICFRS inspection in 2021, as well as the cultural improvements implemented since the appointment of CFO Dave Russel in September 2020.
3. Both the Round 3 inspection report and feedback from the thematic inspection have been overwhelmingly positive.
4. GMFRS has been graded as 'Good' against 10 of the 11 areas of assessment and as 'Adequate' in one area of assessment. Only 2 'Areas for Improvement' have been identified which is the lowest of any fire and rescue service in England (the average being over 16), one of which has already been addressed. GMFRS were also recognised by HMICFRS with 2 areas of 'Innovative Practice' and 4 areas of 'Promising Practice' – more than any other service in this round of inspections.
5. GMFRS has received one of the strongest, if not the strongest HMICFRS reports and is undoubtedly the most improved fire and rescue service. This underpins the recognition received when it was awarded the 'Emergency Service of the Year' at the 2023 FIRE Magazine annual Excellence in Fire and Emergency Awards.
6. A full review and scoping of our HMICFRS Round 3 report, is underway to identify further areas we can progress on our journey to becoming graded as 'Outstanding' in all areas.
7. The thematic inspection has provided informal feedback to GMFRS, which has suggested some areas for growth but overall has been very positive and which commends the case management, casefiles and focus on wellbeing of investigations. A national thematic inspection report based on the findings from all fire and rescue services is due to be published in June 2024.

8. GMFRS has been invited to host the first HMICFRS Positive Practice for fire and rescue services. This event will take place at our Bury Training and Safety Centre on 29th April. Invitations will be sent to all Chief Fire Officers plus 1 senior leader and CFO Dave Russel and Deputy Mayor Kate Green Have been invited to speak about the leadership and culture in GMFRS.

HMICFRS ROUND 3 INSPECTION

9. Since 2018 HMICFRS has been undertaking inspections of fire and rescue services in England. In Round 3 the HMICFRS are assessing the progress made since the last round of inspections, and have indicated that, in general, they would like to see more progress made against areas identified for improvement across the sector.
10. The terms of reference for the Round 3 inspection included:
 - The operational service provided to the public.
 - The efficiency of the service.
 - How well the service looks after its people.
11. HMICFRS collect and triangulate data to provide a grading against eleven assessment areas. Gradings are split into five categories these are:
 - Outstanding
 - Good
 - Adequate
 - Requires Improvement
 - Inadequate
12. The HMICFRS inspection consisted of a staff survey; a review of GMFRS's strategies, policies, and procedures; performance data reviews; several desktop exercises and reviews; interviews with heads of department; focus groups with staff from different departments and our diverse employees; reality testing on fire stations and in departments and finally; interviews with union leaders, the deputy mayor and chief fire officer.
13. A hot debrief was conducted in November, with brief feedback provided with the full HMICFRS Round 3 Inspection report published for the public on the 8th March 2024.
14. The eleven assessment areas and gradings for GMFRS for the Round 3 inspection were:

Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate
	Understanding fire and risk	Responding to major incidents		
	Preventing fire and risk			
	Public safety through fire regulation			
	Responding to fires and emergencies			
	Best use of resources			
	Future affordability			
	Promoting values and culture			
	Right people, right skills			
	Promoting fairness and diversity			
	Managing performance and developing leaders			

15. GMFRS was issued with 2 'Areas for Improvement' (AFIs) one related to the numbers of fire safety audits and one due to GMFRS's reliance on a paper-based system for recording fire survival guidance on the incident ground.

16. **AFI - 'The service should make sure that the resources it allocates throughout its protection department lead to increased numbers of fire safety audits.'**

GMFRS has increased the size of its Protection department and Fire Safety Inspectors over the last two years with further recruitment planned for this year. We now have more qualified Fire Safety Regulators than at any point in the last 5 years with 58 staff qualified to undertake Fire Safety Regulation compared to 37 at the time of the last HMICFRS inspection.

17. The pace and scale of recruitment means that many Regulators are currently developing their skills and confidence and undergoing additional training. The support being provided by more experienced Fire Safety Regulators also reduces auditing numbers. Consequently, the number of inspections being undertaken by

many Regulators has been below expectations but is expected to increase significantly over the next 12 months.

18.AFI - ‘The service should make sure it has an effective method to share fire survival guidance information with multiple callers and that it has a dedicated communication link in place.’ The Grenfell Tower Inquiry recommendations included the necessity for fire and rescue services to have electronic systems to record fire survival guidance information in the control room and display it simultaneously at the bridgehead and in any command units. At the time of the inspection, this recommendation was in development. This requirement was completed and went live in the service on 5th February 2024. As such, this ‘Area for Improvement’ is now closed.

19. GMFRS believes that this was the key driver in the Adequate grading in this area and that if we were inspected now, HMICFRS would grade GMFRS as ‘Good’.

20. GMFRS was recognised as having 4 ‘Promising Practices’, these are defined as: ‘Activities that we have found to be working well in a force or service where there are positive measurable outcomes which have been observed or monitored’. These are:

- Our Atlas programme for adult fire setters to rehabilitate and help them gain new skills.
- The establishment of a Programme Management Office, framework, toolkit and evaluation portal.
- Our provision of an effective ecological sustainability strategy with measurable outcomes.
- The service has put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders.

21. GMFRS was also recognised as having 2 ‘Innovative Practices’, these are defined as: ‘New ways of working in a force or service that may not have been formally evaluated but that have the potential to produce more positive outcomes but have not been subject to any testing or monitoring’. These are:

- Our state-of-the-art training and development suite for protection staff.
 - The establishment of our Culture First Board to oversee and scrutinise our approach to transforming organisational culture.

22. A full review and scoping of our HMICFRS Round 3 report, is underway to identify further areas we can progress on our journey to becoming graded as ‘Outstanding’ in all areas.

HMICFRS THEMATIC INSPECTION INTO THE HANDLING OF MISCONDUCT

23. Following several negative reports on the culture within individual Fire and Rescue Services and themes identified during His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) periodic inspections, the Minister of State for Crime, Police and Fire commissioned a report into the culture within fire services in England. On the 30th March 2023, HMICFRS published the 'Values and Culture in the Fire and Rescue report'.
24. Subsequently, 13th July 2023, the Home Secretary commissioned HMICFRS to undertake a thematic inspection of the handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services in England. The aim of this commission was to build on the findings of the spotlight report on culture and values in the fire service and other high-profile reports of unacceptable behaviour.
25. The terms of reference for the thematic inspection included:
- the extent to which services are identifying and investigating misconduct.
 - the effectiveness of misconduct processes and how consistently they are applied.
 - how confident fire and rescue service staff are in raising concerns and in misconduct processes.
 - the role of fire and rescue authorities and other organisations in handling misconduct.
26. GMFRS were one of ten were fire services selected to enable evidence to be gathered across a range of services: large and small, rural and urban. This selection also covered different governance models that operate throughout England and were selected to avoid overlap with scheduled, round 3, inspections.
27. To support the inspection, additional data was requested from all 44 fire and rescue services (FRSs) through HMICFRS's regular autumn data collection and a staff survey was sent to all services. HMICFRS also reached out to people who had recently left FRSs via social media, the FBU and contact groups with the aid of fire services across the country. Follow up interviews were conducted to improve the qualitative data informing the final report.

28. Following a week reviewing GMFRS strategies and policies as well as gathering data from a national survey, HMICFRS inspected GMFRS between 8th and 26th January 2024.
29. GMFRS were required to submit a list of all discipline, grievance and complaints received over a two-year period and subsequently, full casefiles for 38 cases requested by inspectors. These cases were reviewed in depth as part of the inspection.
30. Whilst in service inspectors undertook reality testing at four stations which had previously had significant investigations as well as with non-uniformed and prevention and protection staff. Seven focus group sessions differentiated by role, rank, managerial responsibility, gender and diversity were also held.
31. A total of 11 interviews were held over the course of the inspection with staff having responsibility within Employee Relations, Culture, EDI and investigations; this included the Deputy Mayor, CFO and GMFRS union leads.

DEBRIEF & FEEDBACK

32. Feedback in the form of a remote Powerpoint presentation was provided to the CFO, Assistant Director of People Services and the HMICFRS Service Liaison Officer on 9th February 2024 by Dean Rukas (HMICFRS Lead Inspector for GMFRS) and Paul Willis (HMICFRS Deputy Portfolio Director) who is writing the national thematic report.

Headline findings were:

- Senior leaders demonstrate service values and behaviours and have a focus on culture.
- Some staff lack confidence in the effective handling of discipline and grievance processes.
- There is a lack of knowledge and understanding of discipline and grievance policies and procedures.
- GMFRS carry out thorough investigations into discipline and grievance cases with wellbeing offered at several points throughout the process.
- Processes could be carried out in a timelier manner.
- Initial training regarding the handling of misconduct is sufficient but more could be done for established managers.
- The Service is tackling watch culture but recognise there is still a long way to go.

We were also told that GMFRS is one of the best FRSs regarding case management, casefiles and wellbeing and that other services could learn from us. Overall, they were very pleased with how we handle misconduct.

PUBLICATION OF THE REPORT

33. There will not be a report written specifically on GMFRS, but a national thematic inspection report will be produced based on the findings of all the information they have gathered throughout the thematic inspection. This is due to be published in June 2024.

NEXT STEPS

34. GMFRS is currently reviewing all aspects of the HMICFRS Round 3 inspection and the thematic inspection. Although both the report and the thematic debrief are undoubtedly positive, there is still much learning we can take from them and the wider inspection feedback from HMICFRS to other fire and rescue services. We have also undertaken a recent independent review of culture in GMFRS which has highlighted areas for further improvement.

35. GMFRS are also in the process of reviewing progress against each of the 16 Fire Standards (soon to be 17), published by the Fire Standards Board and National Fire Chiefs Council, to ensure that, not only do we meet the required standard in each but that we have a high level of maturity which is seen as best practice.

36. Following a peer review of West Midlands Fire Service last year, we have identified further opportunities to learn from within and beyond the fire sector in order to inform our journey to become outstanding across all areas of our work and culture.

37. We are absolutely committed to this journey and the recent HMICFRS results, feedback and the imminent HMICFRS Positive Practice event at our Bury Training and Safety Centre have laid the foundations for continued growth and innovation.