

REPORT OF THE COMMUNITIES, ENVIRONMENT & HIGHWAYS SELECT COMMITTEE

Item under consideration: SURREY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT & HMICFRS INSPECTION

Date Considered: 4 December 2023

The Community, Environment and Highways Select Committee received a report on the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service Performance Report & HMICFRS Inspection. The report was presented by the Cabinet Member for Fire and Rescue, and Resilience and the Chief Fire Officer, Dan Quin.

In considering the report, the Select Committee noted that:

- The service was given a *Cause of Concern* in relation to the service's Risk-Based Inspection Programme (RBIP). Immediate action has been taken to address this Cause of Concern and an action plan was developed and shared with HMICFRS in October 2023. The HMICFRS report found that out of the eleven areas assessed one was graded as *good*, three areas were graded as *adequate* and seven areas graded as *requires improvement*. Twenty-four Areas for Improvement (AFI) have been identified and these have been brought together into the service's Inspection Improvement Plan (IIP). Since submission of the Inspection Report the Service are working closely with their HMICFRS service liaison lead who has reviewed both the *Cause of Concern* action plan and the Inspection Improvement Plan and reported that both are comprehensive and should address the issues highlighted in the report. The Inspection Improvement Plan will be developed and refined further over the coming weeks to ensure the service maintains a focus on the key actions required to meet the recommendations.
- The outcome of the inspection was disappointing for the service but has had a galvanising effect. There is momentum and commitment across the service to seeking further change and improvement. A revised RBIP has been developed covering which prioritises 2955 Very-High and High-Risk sites across Surrey. A new requirement for highest risk sites to be visited annually has been introduced. The new RBIP has been peer reviewed by the National Protection Policy and Reform Unit (PPRU), which sits within the National Fire Chiefs Council, and locally by West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service.

- Additional monitoring and scrutiny arrangements have been put in place including weekly meetings with the Cabinet Member and monitoring by the Place and Communities Board. Some changes have been made at a strategic leadership level to improve oversight, governance and monitoring within the organisation.
- A new Prevent and Protect software solution is being developed and rolled out. This will ensure firefighter's have the most up to date risk information available to them. The system connects premise information with operational risk information alongside service prevention and protection activities. Delivery of this IT project forms a vital part of the improvement plan and will be critical to improving workforce efficiency. The Fire and Rescue Service is confident, with the support of IT colleagues, that this and other aspects of the ICT strategy can be delivered.
- Prosecution rates have improved. Five Prohibition Notices have been issued since April 2022. Work has been undertaken to improve the robustness of processes to support enforcement action and prosecution where appropriate including improved engagement with the Council legal department. The Chief Fire Officer noted that enforcement action and Prohibition Notices do not always lead naturally to a prosecution and that prosecutions are quite rare. The outcome of any prosecution is to satisfy the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order and that premises are safe.
- HMICFRS will return in February 2024 for a four-day visit, which will include talking to the protection officers, reviewing the *Cause of Concern* action plan and conducting interviews with the Heads of Service and Fire Station-based staff. Following this visit a decision will be taken as to whether the *Cause of Concern* is closed. The Chief Fire Officer paid tribute to the incredible and ongoing work of committed members of Surrey Fire and Rescue Service staff.

After detailed discussion and noting the responses to its key lines of enquiry, the Select Committee agreed the following conclusions and recommendations for Cabinet to consider.

RESOLVED

That the Communities Environment and Highways Select Committee:

- I. Expresses appreciation of the efforts of Surrey Fire and Rescue Service and notes ongoing public support for the service and improvements that have been made to bring about a positive working culture.
- II. Expresses concern over the number of areas for improvement identified in the HMICFRS inspection and in particular the general lack of performance management and oversight within protection that is identified. This affects productivity and effectiveness. The Select Committee urges Officers to ensure there is clear direction and guidance to staff on prioritising risk and targeting activity; better performance management and quality assurance to ensure high risk premises are inspected in agreed timeframes; and audits carried out to a consistent and acceptable standard, whilst also maintaining the good progress that has been made in other areas.
- III. Echoes the concern of HMICFRS that only one prosecution was carried out in the five years from 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2022 and that the service doesn't consistently use its full range of enforcement powers or take appropriate opportunities to prosecute those who don't comply with fire safety regulations. The Select Committee notes that prosecution rates have improved since April 2022 and urges the Cabinet Member for Fire and Rescue, and Resilience to keep this issue under review; to ensure that the service's relationship with the Council legal team is effective and that adequate support is provided to enforce fire safety legislation.
- IV. Notes that HMICFRS identifies a number of areas where poor ICT systems are limiting productivity and operational effectiveness (e.g., where records cannot be adequately updated due to system constraints) and even outdated reliance on several paper-based systems which are inefficient and hinder productivity. The Select Committee urges a review of the adequacy of existing systems in supporting and maximising operational efficiency and effectiveness and a check on deliverability of the ICT Strategy to determine whether it remains fit for purpose and whether the Service has the capacity and capability to complete these projects.

Johnathan Hulley

Chairman, Communities, Environment & Highways Select Committee

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