



Promoting improvements
in policing and fire & rescue
services to make everyone safer

6th Floor Globe House
89 Eccleston Square
London, SW1V 1PN
Direct Line: 020 3513 0432
Fax: 020 3513 0650
Email: wendy.williams1@hmicfrs.gov.uk

Wendy Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary
Her Majesty's Inspector of Fire & Rescue
Services

By email

Wayne Bowcock
Chief Fire Officer
Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service
Tri Service Centre
Waterwells Drive
Gloucester GL2 2AX

10 December 2019

Dear Wayne,

GLOUCESTERSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE REVISIT

We inspected Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS) the week of 3 June 2019. During the inspection, we identified a cause of concern in how GFRS keeps the public safe through the regulation of fire safety.

2. We found GFRS doesn't have a clear protection strategy for meeting its statutory responsibilities. We weren't satisfied the service is using its risk-based inspection programme (RBIP) to identify effectively the highest-risk premises in the county. GFRS has too few staff to meet the requirements of its RBIP, although resource levels are being reconsidered. Finally, the service needs to understand how to interpret its protection data effectively.
3. You submitted an action plan setting out how you plan to address our concern.
4. We revisited the service between 20 and 22 November 2019 to review progress against the action plan.
5. During the revisit we interviewed staff responsible for implementing the action plan. This included you as the Chief Fire Officer. We also spoke to Councillor David Norman, the Gloucestershire Council County (GCC) cabinet lead for GFRS. At the end of the revisit we gave feedback on our findings to you, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Mark Astle and Councillor Norman.
6. We identified a separate cause of concern in the culture of the service and the behaviour of some staff. The service has submitted a separate action plan to address this. We will monitor progress against this plan as part of our inspection programme. It wasn't considered as part of this revisit.

Governance

7. We found suitable governance arrangements in place for monitoring progress against your action plan. The GCC's cabinet lead scrutinises progress at regular meetings with you. The GCC's Cabinet has received reports describing the cause of concern and action being taken. Supporting improvements in GFRS is one of two service areas priorities for GCC. Extra funding for improvements in fire safety has been approved by GCC. Further funds from their transformation reserve is being used to cover extra staffing costs this financial year. GCC is willing to support the funding for more fire safety posts in future budgets.
8. You chair a monthly Improvement Programme Board that monitors the progress of various programmes of activities. This now includes actions to address the fire safety cause of concern. The cabinet lead is a member of this board, as are senior members of GCC staff. The service's senior leadership team meeting, which is chaired by the Assistant Chief Fire Officer, also monitors progress.
9. An area manager is the senior responsible owner. He holds a weekly meeting with action owners to monitor progress.
10. Both causes of concern are on the service's risk register which is reviewed at quarterly senior leadership meetings.

Action plan

11. The service has a detailed action plan to address our cause of concern about fire safety. The action plan has a named senior responsible officer, deadlines and action owners. GCC has provided some project management advice and support.
12. The service knows it needs to improve how it manages the action plan programme and other improvement activities, such as those identified through recent audits. This action plan is one of several that the service is implementing. Extra funding has been approved by GCC for a programme manager to help the service co-ordinate all its improvement plans. The service plans to set up a programme management office with trained staff. We welcome this idea, which will help to show interdependencies and sequencing of activities, and to prioritise resources.
13. All 46 action plan tasks are allocated to two members of staff who work in GFRS's fire safety team. Some of these actions may be better owned by other teams, such as those responsible for recruitment, procurement and training.
14. Funding for extra staff in the fire safety team has been approved. This includes another

group manager who should start in January 2020. Although this will help to implement actions in the medium term, several significant actions are due to be completed between now and January 2020. The service may wish to consider how it can provide greater capacity in the short term to complete these actions on time and to the standard needed.

15. You have told staff about the findings from our inspection and causes of concern using video and written updates. Fire safety team staff met the senior responsible owner in early November 2019 to discuss the findings and their views on next steps. We met these staff during our revisit and found that they feel engaged and able to contribute to the improvement plan.

16. The service is making good progress in several actions identified within the action plan.

17. A draft protection strategy has been developed and was due to be considered by the service's senior leadership team on 25 November 2019. This meeting was also to consider a revised definition of high-risk premises and proposed work schedule for future audits of business premises.

18. In the drafting of these documents, the service has sought advice from other fire and rescue services and the National Fire Chiefs Council protection forum. The service should consider whether there is benefit in getting further advice and support from the NFCC to inform decision making in relation to the definition of high-risk and the RBIP.

19. The proposed definition of high-risk premises and the risk-based inspection plan don't refer specifically to local fire incident data. It is important that this information is included in the RBIP definition to ensure that business premises who have higher risk patterns are included in audits.

20. The service's understanding of data has improved since our inspection. Data has been used to develop the risk-based inspection programme and calculate the number of staff needed for audits.

21. During our inspection we identified that the service's fire safety team is under-resourced. At the time of our inspection, fire safety team staffing was being reviewed. It is pleasing to see that the service has acted quickly to address this under-resourcing and is selecting three extra inspecting officers. The service is planning these new inspecting officers will be in place by January 2020.

22. New inspecting officers will need to undergo training to become competent and qualified. The service recognises this will take time. It should consider what short term measures could be taken to increase audit activity, for example using overtime.

23. As an interim measure, the service has established an out-of-hours rota using three fire

safety staff. A long term out-of-hours service is being developed.

24. A pilot is planned for operational crews to support fire safety activities. The pilot proposes using crews for hazard spotting visits at lower risk premises. The service is also considering using operational junior officers for audits.

Conclusion

25. Overall, we are encouraged by what we found on our revisit. It is clear that improving fire safety in Gloucestershire is a priority for the service's leadership and Gloucestershire County Council. We found suitable governance arrangements in place to monitor progress against your action plan. Funding is available to support the improvements with investments in programme management staff, fire safety team managers and inspecting officers.

26. The service is planning to set up a programme management office with trained staff. We welcome this as it will help to identify interdependencies and the sequencing of activities and to prioritise resources. Some of the actions may be better owned by those teams with responsibility for the functions, such as recruitment, procurement and training. A significant number of actions are to be completed in the next three months. The service may wish to assure itself there are enough staff to complete these actions on time and to the standard needed.

27. The service is making good progress in several actions. The understanding of data has improved since our inspection. Data is being used to develop the risk-based inspection programme. The service acted quickly to address under-resourcing in the fire safety team, and extra staff are being appointed. The service should consider what short-term measures would increase audit activities targeted at the premises most at risk.

28. We will revisit GFRS in the summer of 2020 to consider what further progress you have made against your action plan.

Yours sincerely,



Wendy Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services