

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services Inspection 2024: Cause of Concern and Areas for Improvement Update

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

For further information about this report please contact Simon Hardiman, Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260201 or Karen Gowreesunker, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Support), on 01743 260205.

1 Executive Summary

This report provides an update on Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service's (SFRS) response to the 2024 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspection, addressing a Cause of Concern (CoC) and 30 Areas for Improvement (AFIs). It outlines progress in governance, risk management, performance, digital strategy, and financial oversight.

2 Recommendations

The Committee is asked to note the report.

3 Background

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service was inspected by HMICFRS in the summer of 2024 as part of Tranche 3 of the inspection programme. The subsequent [Inspection Report](#), published in November 2024, identified:

- One Cause of Concern (CoC), comprising five key elements.
 - 30 Areas for Improvement (AFIs) requiring service-wide enhancements.
- In response, SFRS has developed a comprehensive action plan to address these issues and drive sustained improvements. This report provides an overview of progress made in implementing these measures.

4 Approach to Addressing the Cause of Concern and Areas for

Improvement

The Service has adopted a structured, collaborative approach to addressing the findings of the inspection. Lessons learned from previous AFIs following the 2021 inspection were reviewed, ensuring a more informed response. Key elements of the approach include:

- Stakeholder engagement – Consulting with staff, Fire Authority Members, HMICFRS, the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), and neighboring fire services to refine governance and oversight mechanisms.
- Enhanced governance structure – Strengthening scrutiny at all levels through increased engagement between the Senior Management Team (SMT) and operational leads.
- Strategic risk management – Embedding a proactive, service-wide risk assessment framework to ensure early identification of challenges.
- Capacity and resource planning – Assessing and addressing resourcing needs to ensure successful implementation of improvements.

5 Progress to date – Cause of Concern (CoC)

Following the 2024 HMICFRS inspection, the Cause of Concern identified weaknesses in strategic risk management, performance oversight, and governance. In response, an action plan was established, addressing five key areas.

Cause of Concern 1 – Governance and Risk Management

The CoC has been broken down into three constituent areas and 23 objectives (completion scheduled for 01/03/2026).

3 of the 23 objectives are now complete.

Progress to date:

- Interim adjustments to corporate meetings have enhanced decision-making processes, with documented evidence supporting governance improvements.
- Recruitment for a Portfolio Manager is underway to strengthen strategic governance.
- The Programme Board's Terms of Reference have been finalised, ensuring structured oversight of key projects.
- A strategic Organisational Assurance Framework is being developed, Fire Standards and a review of sector-wide learning and application.
- The review of Corporate Performance Indicators (CPIs) and Corporate Health Indicators are in the early stages of development, they will align to the Community Risk Management Plan, Strategic Goals and Service Priorities.
- Review of the Service structure is nearing completion. This aims to create a more efficient, resilient and inclusive organisation that is

equipped to deliver high-quality fire and rescue services to the communities of Shropshire.

- The introduction of member champions is also expected to lead Fire Authority scrutiny of Service improvements and ongoing activity.

Cause of Concern 2 – Corporate Risk Management

The CoC has been divided into one constituent area and five objectives (completion scheduled for 01/03/2026).

2 of the 5 objectives is now complete.

Progress to date:

- Training for senior managers and Fire Authority members has commenced to reinforce risk awareness.
- The corporate risk register is under review, removing outdated risks and refining existing entries.
- A leadership workshop is scheduled to define strategic risks and ensure alignment with organisational priorities.
- External facilitation has been utilised to enhance expertise in risk governance.
- A structured review of the risk policy is in progress.

Cause of Concern 3 – Service Planning, Performance, and Leadership Development

The CoC has been divided into three constituent areas and 15 objectives (completion scheduled for 01/03/2026).

5 of the 15 objectives are now complete.

Progress to date:

- The approval of the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP), strategy, and budget has strengthened alignment between planning and strategic objectives.
- A review of Brigade Orders related to performance management has been completed and consultation sought.
- Leadership development is being prioritised through a revised appraisal process and mandatory training for managers.

Cause of Concern 4 – Digital and Data Strategy

The CoC has been divided into four constituent areas and 17 objectives (completion scheduled for 30/11/2028).

4 of the 13 objectives are now complete.

Progress to date:

- A draft Digital and Data Strategy is in development with resource and capacity requirements assessed.
- A skills gap analysis has informed workforce planning and ICT resourcing.
- Work continues to enhance staff awareness of data quality, security, and governance, with completion scheduled by December 2028.

Cause of Concern 5 – Financial Governance and Statutory Oversight

The CoC has been divided into two constituent areas and five objectives (completion scheduled for 01/04/2025).

All 5 objectives are progressing concurrently to meet the deadline.

Progress to date:

- A Project Management Office (PMO) has been included as part of the Service Structure review and a portfolio manager position advertised to enhance financial governance and reporting.
- The role of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer has been approved, strengthening leadership capacity.
- A review is underway to enhance statutory officer engagement in strategic management and FRA arrangements to support scrutiny and oversight.

6 Progress to date – Areas for Improvement

The 2024 HMICFRS inspection of the Service identified 30 AFIs, highlighting the requirement for enhanced resource management, strengthened financial oversight, and more effective governance processes.

The report also emphasised the importance of improving workplace culture, promoting diversity and inclusion, and ensuring more robust performance management systems.

In response, the Service has developed a comprehensive action plan to address the AFIs and implement a new strategic approach. This includes:

- Establishing ownership and oversight – Responsible leads have been assigned to each AFI to identify common themes, provide day to day progress, and prioritise actions effectively.
- Identifying key themes – A review of the 30 AFIs has highlighted that the majority are linked to culture, workforce planning, evaluation, organisational assurance, risk management, and data quality.
- Prioritising key improvements – Strategic leads are now progressing 20 areas for improvement, in conjunction with addressing the cause of concern raised in the inspection.
- Breaking down AFIs into manageable objectives – Each of the 30 AFIs has been further broken down into 168 specific objectives within the action plan. This structured approach enhances resource allocation and helps to identify where additional support may be required from other teams or external partners to achieve the necessary improvements.
- Enhancing tracking and risk management – To monitor progress, collate evidence, and identify risks at an early stage, the Service is utilising Microsoft Teams and MS Planner as part of a digital solution. Staff are

receiving training on these platforms, with support provided by experienced personnel.

- Identifying and managing risks – The process includes a proactive approach to identifying any emerging risks or urgent issues that require immediate action.
- Ensuring alignment with broader strategic objectives – AFI actions are being integrated with the structural review, Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP), and current vacancies, ensuring a joined-up approach to service improvement.
- Developing AFI product packs – Each AFI has a product pack containing key information, best practice examples, and guidance obtained through collaboration with the NFCC, other fire and rescue services, and national fire standards. These packs will provide a framework for success metrics, offer external stakeholder support, and highlight innovative approaches to improvement.

Through this structured approach, the Service is committed to delivering sustained improvements in response to the HMICFRS findings.

7 Governance and Scrutiny

Governance and scrutiny processes have been revised, ensuring oversight and accountability for AFIs) and the CoC. Progress meetings align with the SMT cycle, with four-weekly updates providing structured evidence gathering, monitoring, and scrutiny.

Improvement scrutiny meetings, established in February 2025, track AFI progress, assurance, and governance. Each AFI has an assigned responsible owner, required to provide updates using the AFI Update Template, which includes Risk assessment commentary to highlight risks, barriers, and opportunities.

Microsoft Office suite, such as MSTeams and MSPlanner streamline tracking and communication, with a dedicated Teams channel in place. Awareness sessions have been delivered to support effective use.

The Fire Authority now receives regular updates on progress, emerging risks, and action plan status, ensuring continuous scrutiny, risk identification, and performance management in line with strategic priorities.

To strengthen governance and scrutiny, it is recommended that a progress report be submitted to the Fire Authority's Standards, Audit, and Performance Sub-Committee. This will provide Fire Authority members with a dedicated forum to scrutinise specific areas, ensuring a more in-depth review of progress, risks, and challenges.

By incorporating this additional layer of oversight, the sub-committee will be able to:

- Assess progress on the AFIs and CoC.
- Identify challenges and barriers to implementation.
- Provide assurance that actions are on schedule and aligned with strategic priorities.
- Offer targeted support and recommendations to enhance improvement.

This enhanced scrutiny mechanism will ensure greater transparency, and an opportunity for Fire Authority members to gain a clearer understanding of the service's progress and areas requiring further attention.

8 Risks

Following the inaugural AFI Improvement Scrutiny Meeting and AFI owners' assessments, key risks have been identified in delivering the HMICFRS action plan.

Capacity to Deliver AFIs

The scale of activities required to complete the AFIs presents a significant challenge in terms of capacity, with existing workloads already stretched. To mitigate this, AFIs have been prioritised within the Service Programme Board, ensuring resources are allocated efficiently. Senior Management Team (SMT) oversight is in place to monitor workload balance, and adjustments will be made where needed to maintain momentum.

Interdependencies Across AFIs

Many AFIs are interconnected, meaning delays in one area could hinder progress in others. To address this, clear ownership has been established for each AFI, with structured risk tracking through Microsoft Planner to flag dependencies early. A cross-team coordination approach ensures that linked activities progress in alignment, reducing the risk of bottlenecks.

Skills Gaps in Key Areas (e.g., ICT)

Some AFIs require specialist expertise, particularly in ICT, where data management and digital solutions play a crucial role. Limited availability of these skills or where there are current vacancies could restrict progress, so workforce planning as part of the structure review has been undertaken to identify gaps. Where necessary, current vacancies are being advertised, and external support options are also being considered to ensure the Service has the capacity to meet digital transformation requirements.

9 Capacity

Implementing the action plan may require additional resourcing in particular areas, potentially impacting existing workloads and necessitating additional capacity within teams. Where achieving an element of the CoC or AFI requires additional staffing or financial investment, this will be assessed and scrutinised through SMT and will form part of the Service Programme Board and project methodology to ensure effective resource planning.

10 Fire Alliance / Collaboration / Partnership Working

Collaboration with the NFCC, other Fire and Rescue Services, and external partners will be essential to drive improvements, share best practices, and access additional expertise, ensuring a coordinated approach to service enhancement.

11 Financial Implications

Addressing AFIs may require investment in governance, data systems, training, and workforce planning. Any financial implications will be subject to SMT scrutiny and considered within the Service Programme Board, ensuring cost-effective implementation.

12 Legal Comment

Strengthened governance, risk management, and financial oversight will support compliance with statutory responsibilities and ensure adherence to regulatory frameworks, mitigating legal risks.

13 Communications

Clear internal and external communication, will promote staff engagement, increase stakeholder confidence, and transparency in service improvements.

14 Community Safety

Enhanced risk management, performance oversight, and resource planning will contribute to more effective community safety activities, ensuring the service meets evolving public safety demands.

15 Equality Impact Assessment

Strengthening workplace culture, diversity, and inclusion initiatives will help ensure fair treatment, equal opportunities, and alignment with national equality standards.

16 Fire Standard Core Code of Ethics and Human Rights (including Data Protection)

Improved governance, data accuracy, and reporting processes will support adherence to ethical standards, national fire standards, and data protection regulations.

17 ICT

The ICT team, while currently operating with vacancies, may be impacted by the increased demands and workload associated with delivering the Cause of Concern (CoC) and Areas for Improvement (AFIs). As part of the action plan development, it was identified that ICT involvement is required in over 90% of

the AFIs, highlighting the critical role of digital solutions, data management, and system improvements.

Resource planning within ICT will be subject to SMT scrutiny to ensure the team can effectively support service-wide improvements while managing existing operational pressures.

18 Insurance

No significant impact anticipated; however, improved risk management and governance may contribute to reduced liability exposure and improved organisational resilience.

19 The On-call Service

Workforce planning improvements and clearer risk management processes will help ensure more effective integration, training, and support for on-call staff, contributing to improved service delivery.

20 Public Value / Service Delivery

Enhancing performance management, risk oversight, and governance will drive improved service delivery, increased efficiency, and greater public confidence in the service.

21 Training

Staff training and development will be integral to the implementation of the action plan, particularly in performance management tools, governance processes, and cultural improvements. Training requirements will be assessed through SMT and the Service Programme Board to ensure alignment with organisational priorities.

22 Appendices

There are no appendices attached to this report.

23 Background Papers

[Link to HMICFRS Inspection Report 2024](#)