

Jon Pryce
Chief Fire Officer
Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service

Councillor Kit Taylor
Chair of Fire Authority

20 January 2023

Dear Jon,

Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service revisit

In April and May 2021, we inspected Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service. During that inspection, we identified a [cause of concern](#) that we shared with you and made the following recommendations:

Cause of concern

Prevention activity is not a sufficiently high priority for the service, and it is not adequately identifying those most at risk from fire.

Recommendation

By 31 August 2021, the service should have plans in place for:

- an effective system to define the levels of risk in the community;
- the development and delivery of a prevention strategy that prioritises the people most at risk of fire and ensures that work to reduce risk is proportionate; and
- the review of systems and processes for dealing with referrals from partner agencies. This is to make sure they are managed effectively, and the backlog of [safe and well visits](#) is reduced and resourced in accordance with risk.

You submitted an action plan setting out how you would address the areas of concern and the recommendations.

We have been in regular contact with the service through meetings with the service liaison lead and strategic lead for prevention. These have helped us oversee your improvement programme and progress on the action plan.

Between 22 and 24 November 2022, we carried out a revisit to review progress on the cause of concern. During the revisit we reviewed documents and data. We interviewed staff responsible for implementing the action plan, including you as chief fire officer. We also interviewed staff based at stations. On 28 November 2022, we gave you our initial findings. This letter provides an update on our findings.

Governance

In my letter of 14 December 2021, I highlighted the role of the prevention improvement panel, a cross section of staff from across the organisation tasked with developing and implementing the action plan. We saw on our revisit that this had been disbanded as the service considered all action points had been completed.

The newly formed prevention strategy board, chaired by the head of prevention, now has responsibility to ensure the actions are accepted and understood by everyone.

Monitoring of prevention performance is provided through the service's senior leadership board biweekly meetings. Updates are provided when deemed necessary to fire authority members at the audit and standards committee.

The service is looking to improve the management and scrutiny of prevention at a strategic level through a performance and improvement board. Enhanced monitoring from senior leaders should provide greater assurance that the service's prevention function is operating effectively. I look forward to reviewing future governance arrangements.

Progress against the cause of concern

Defining the levels of risk in the community

The service has used fire incident data spanning the past ten years and analysed a range of additional datasets to produce a definition of risk. This helps the service to identify those people most at risk of having a fire.

Prevention staff we spoke to were knowledgeable about how to identify levels of risk, which has supported them to target the most vulnerable in the community.

Station risk profiles have been provided to fire station staff to help target preventative work in the community. Station prevention champions have been created in each [wholetime fire station](#) to provide peer support and guidance.

More work is required to ensure all station personnel accept and understand these initiatives, and to improve their understanding of the definition of high risk. The service recognises this and intends to improve firefighters' understanding of high risk in early 2023.

Developing and delivering a prevention strategy that prioritises the people most at risk of fire, and ensuring that work to reduce risk is proportionate

Since the action plan, there have been improvements in prevention, including an increase in staff and investment in information technology to improve administrative processes.

In July 2021, the service published its 2021–25 prevention strategy. This sets out the service's main aims and how it links with the community risk management plan. An accompanying action plan sets out specific objectives for every year.

The service set an initial target of 6,000 home fire safety visits (HFSVs) to be completed in 2022/23 by a combination of prevention technicians and [wholetime firefighters](#). This equates to 16 visits per [watch](#), per month, with technicians completing the remainder. The target was reduced to 5,000 by the senior leadership board in November 2022 due to an increase in fires in the summer months.

There is a lack of assurance that prevention visits for people in the community considered high risk are being targeted and prioritised effectively. The prevention technicians (3.8 full-time-equivalent staff, 1 on a fixed-term contract until 31 March 2023) complete high-risk visits, whereas firefighters complete medium-risk visits. This means that capacity for high-risk visits is constrained by the availability of prevention technicians. Between November 2021 and November 2022, approximately three quarters of all HFSVs weren't to people considered high risk.

The effective management of referrals from partner agencies and safe and well visits

The service has improved the way it deals with referrals for HFSVs and safe and well visits from other organisations. It has put in place a method to filter referrals, to prioritise those who are most at risk of fire.

The service told us that it aimed to complete visits to people deemed at very high risk within three days, and to those designated high risk within seven days. However, when we reviewed a sample of HFSVs to people considered high risk, we found that not all visits were completed within those timeframes.

At the time of our revisit, we were pleased to see that the service had cleared the backlog of safe and well visits. Out of the 12 referrals outstanding, only 1 didn't have a date set for a visit. This is a significant improvement.

Conclusion

The inspection team was pleased to see that the service had worked hard to make improvements. Progress has been made in identifying and defining risk in the community. And the service has dealt with the backlog of visits that we identified during our inspection in April 2021.

But the service could do more to use resources to target the people in the community most at risk of fire. The service should assure itself that it effectively monitors and meets its own performance standards.

We are satisfied that the service has made sufficient progress for us to discharge the cause of concern. We will, however, continue to monitor its prevention work during our scheduled inspection of the service in 2023, including:

- understanding of the definition of high risk across the service;
- targeting and prioritisation of high-risk HFSVs; and
- the performance management and monitoring of prevention work.

This letter will be published on our website.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Wendy Williams', with a stylized flourish at the end.

HMI Wendy Williams CBE

His Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary

His Majesty's Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services