

Strategy 2021–25



Contents

Foreword	1
Principal purpose	3
Introduction	5
Purpose and values	6
Strategic context	7
Principal changes	10
Strategic objectives	12
Focus on public value	12
Adopt a smarter systems approach	13
Capitalise on our independent insight and learning	14
Be more proactive in responding to major changes	15
Implementation	16

Foreword

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) provides the public and their elected representatives with independent assessments of the efficiency and effectiveness of police forces and fire and rescue services. Through our programmes of inspections, we assess what is working well and what needs to improve, both locally and nationally, in order to help improve the service provided to the public. With very few exceptions, our reports are published.

In 2016, HMIC (as it was known then) published its organisational strategy. Five years have passed since then, and we have achieved a great deal. Policing in particular has undergone and had to adjust to many changes. In addition, the inspectorate has taken on responsibility for inspecting fire and rescue services and has become HMICFRS. It is therefore now time to revise our published strategy.

We are an inspectorate, not a regulator. We do not have regulatory powers of intervention, direction and enforcement, except in connection with our rights to require the provision of information. Our power is in the quality of our inspections and our reports, in our authority, and in our voice. We use that authority and voice to promote improvements in policing and fire and rescue services to make everyone safer. This strategy sets out how we intend to use that authority and voice.

As society develops and becomes more complex, we must adapt to ensure that what we do is consistent with and reflects the difficulties which public authorities and others face. This means there should be changes in what we inspect and how we do it.

Increasingly, the complex nature of the problems faced by the police and fire and rescue services mean that they have to work ever more closely with others. The same applies to us. That is why this strategy focuses even greater attention on consulting and working with others, and on assessing how well interdependent systems are working to improve public safety.

In developing this strategy, we consulted widely with the principal recipients of our inspections, other interested parties, and with our own staff. It sets an objective which is achievable and focuses our efforts on those activities which are calculated to make the biggest difference. As we now begin to return to ways of working which are closer to how things were before the pandemic, we will further develop our plans and start to make the changes needed to achieve the objectives in this strategy.

I am grateful to all those who gave time to provide their opinions in what were often lengthy discussions with our strategy team. These responses have been valuable in helping us understand what it is we need to do differently.

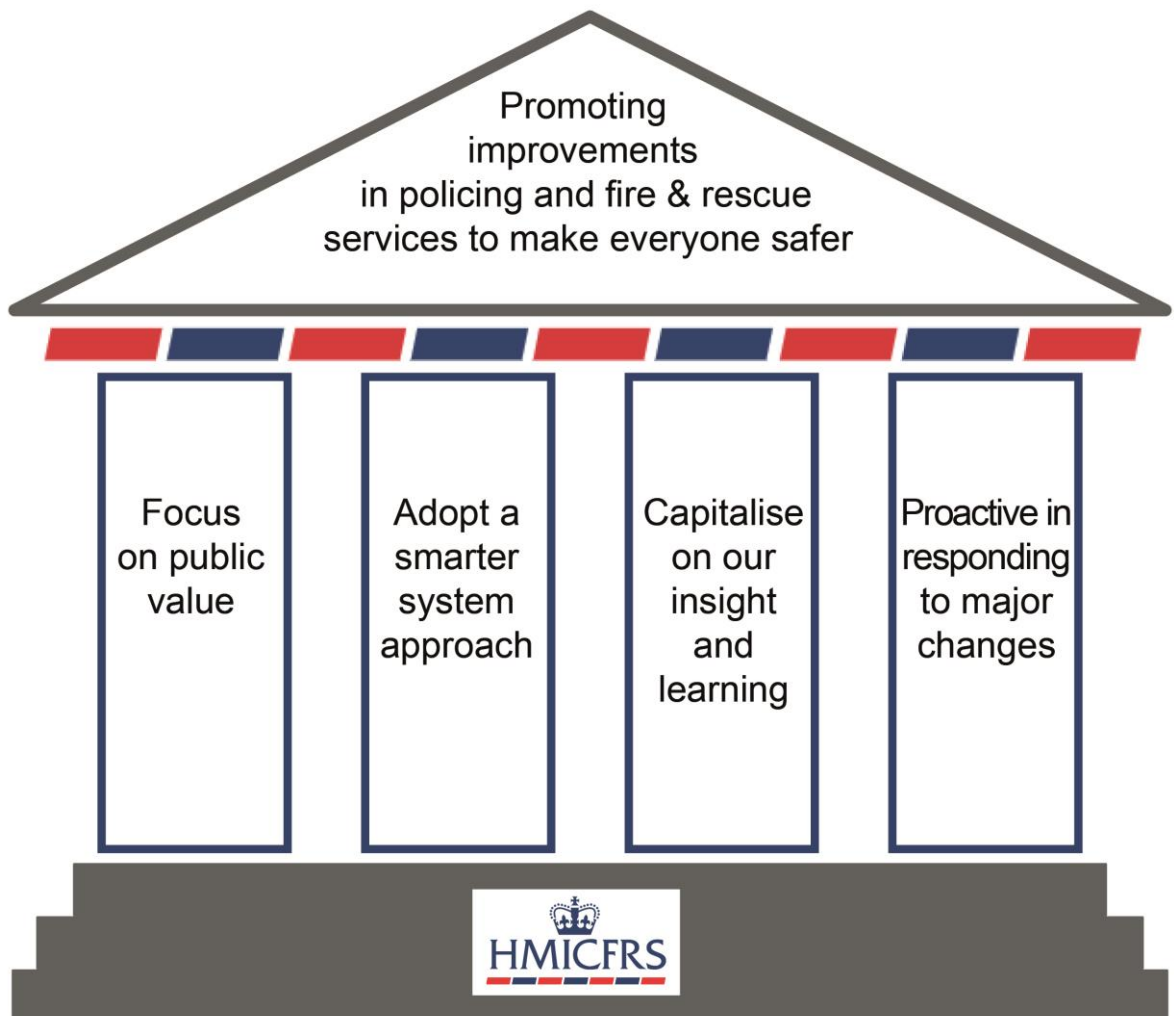
Sir Thomas Winsor WS

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services



Principal purpose



Strategic objective 1: Focus on public value

In order to do this we will:

- focus our staff and money on problems where inspection has the greatest effect, while being innovative in our approach;
- better match the inspection to the problem (for example, match a national thematic inspection to a national problem);
- make clear the potential benefits of implementing our recommendations and the risks of not implementing them;
- make the follow-up of recommendations a routine part of inspection; and
- inspect and report at local, regional and national levels as appropriate.

Strategic objective 2: Adopt a smarter system approach

In order to do this we will:

- establish clear working arrangements with other national organisations;
- work with others to find established problems that are best approached by a more co-ordinated, system-wide approach; and
- shorten the time between identifying the problem and making recommendations for its resolution by co-ordinating more closely with others.

Strategic objective 3: Capitalise on our independent insight and learning

In order to do this we will:

- publicise good practice in our reports;
- disseminate our analysis and insight more broadly;
- use new technology to spread good practice quickly to those who need it (through webinars etc.);
- request structured feedback;
- include learning from thematic findings in local inspections; and
- work with others so that our insights inform future standards.

Strategic objective 4: Be more proactive in responding to major changes

In order to do this we will:

- identify major common problems to inform inspection priorities;
- set priorities in a systematic way, dedicating specialist staff and teams with distinctive skills to tackle complex national problems; and
- identify failures more quickly, through monitoring and one-off inspections.

Introduction

For more than 160 years, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) has independently assessed and reported on the efficiency and effectiveness of police forces and policing. In summer 2017, HMIC took responsibility for inspections of England's fire and rescue services, assessing and reporting on their efficiency, effectiveness and leadership. HMIC then became Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS).

Our statutory objectives are clearly defined, principally in the Police Act 1996 and the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. We must inspect and report on the efficiency and effectiveness of inspected bodies. We may also be commissioned to carry out inspections by the Home Secretary, local policing bodies, and other government departments with law enforcement responsibilities. We also have powers to obtain information, and access to people, papers and premises. With very few exceptions, our reports are published.

In the content of its inspection reports and public statements, HMICFRS is independent of government, local and national. This means there can be no political interference in our objective judgments.

We also have other statutory responsibilities. These include the responsibility to:

- co-operate with other criminal justice inspectorates;
- investigate super-complaints;
- participate in police misconduct proceedings; and
- act as a check on the removal of senior officers.

We are responsible for giving the public clear, comprehensible, reasoned assessments of how well police forces and fire and rescue services are performing. We report whether police forces and fire and rescue services are spending public money wisely, and we report other matters that members of the public are particularly interested in. We also address matters that are beneficial to society (such as the service given to victims, and the treatment of offenders who suffer from mental ill-health).

This revised strategy explains what HMICFRS aims to achieve as we fulfil our statutory objectives, and how we will continue to go about using our powers, insight and influence to best effect.

Purpose and values

Our principal role is summarised in our statement of purpose. We will promote improvements across policing and fire and rescue services to make everyone safer.

We will do so in a manner that reflects our principal values of:

- **Respect** – we respect and value all those we work with, and the contribution that they make.
- **Honesty** – we are always truthful.
- **Independence** – we are objective in all we do, without bias towards or against anyone; we are independent of the police service, fire and rescue authorities and government, and act only in the public interest.
- **Integrity** – we act ethically and openly in all we do.
- **Fairness** – we treat everyone – both within and outside HMICFRS – fairly.

Strategic context



Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, Her Majesty's Inspectors and HMICFRS are independent of the police service, fire and rescue authorities, and government. We use our independence and powers to promote improvements in policing and fire and rescue services, to make everyone safer.

Independence and a clear sense of purpose are the bedrock upon which the inspectorate has operated for over 160 years, but our role has inevitably changed over that time. We don't operate in isolation. And as society has changed – along with the external environment (including politics and economics) and expectations of us – so we have adapted and developed our approach.

In the last five years, police forces and fire and rescue services have had to contend with a significant increase in the rate of change. More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about changes on a scale and magnitude that the organisations we inspect are simply not used to. The longer-term consequences of these changes for police forces and fire and rescue services are hard to predict. What is already clear is that some communities and sectors will bounce back, while others will face a future fraught with uncertainty and anxiety. There is certain to be a

long tail of economic and social consequences when we enter the 'new normal'. These consequences will affect all levels of government and the National Health Service, as well as the police – which is often the service of last resort.

In addition, the environment in which we work has become more complex. And some of the difficulties facing policing and fire and rescue services are intractable. There is no one, optimum solution; no single organisation can work out how to tackle the difficulties. Increasingly, we have a role to play as part of the wider system (which includes the criminal justice system, as well as education, health, housing and social services). We can work alongside others, including those who:

- set standards and policy direction;
- investigate where things go wrong; and
- make investment decisions.

With these changes and challenges in mind, we have carried out a rigorous consultation. We gathered the views of our inspected bodies, as well as external interested parties and our own staff. We listened carefully and have used what we have learned to reflect critically on what we do as an inspectorate.

We will continue to establish the things we do that make the biggest difference, as well as what we should do differently. Our premise is that while our purpose remains constant, the best way of achieving that purpose could be to do some things differently from how we do them now.

When we consulted people, two themes emerged: the need to continuously improve the way we inspect, and the importance and value of independent inspection.

The high expectations of what we can achieve locally and nationally are both a vote of confidence and a call to action.

These expectations can be grouped as follows:

- First and foremost, there is a need for us to **develop a more candid and collaborative relationship based on our common objectives** of promoting improvement. Where this approach works well (as the Care Quality Commission has established in the acute hospital sector), it focuses joint attention on those problems where inspection can have the greatest value. Problems are discussed with us (for example, by chief constables, chief fire officers, police and crime commissioners, and mayors) rather than hidden – a fundamental point emphasised by the [Report of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry](#). Both policing and fire sectors recognise that effective inspection can help to address numerous perennial problems.
- Second, our inspected sectors and the public want our inspections to **give greater insight** into the specific causes of problems. And where new problems emerge, they want us to have the foresight to respond with alacrity. Many of those in policing spoke of wanting us to work alongside the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), the College of Policing and the Home Office; they want us to use a combined insight and our influence to establish the causes of long standing, deep-seated problems (such as disproportionality in the use of stop and search). And, where appropriate, they want us to jointly promote improvements in those

areas. Once its national institutions are in place, the fire service hopes to do something similar.

- Third, we are asked to **highlight good practice and communicate it even more clearly** and proactively throughout the inspected sectors.
- Fourth, there is a sense that while **compliance-based inspections based on relevant standards will always have their place**, after several iterations they may be less effective than they were. The introduction of a new PEEL continuous assessment inspection regime (which was delayed by the pandemic) will address some of this criticism. Even so, those we consulted frequently commented that the incentives to improve tend to affect the few who receive a poor grading rather than the many who do not. By contrast, **relevant, timely thematic reports that give new insights into the problems they identify are considered to be more effective in promoting improvements in performance**. We need to do both.

Our experience of operating in the pandemic has shown that we can adapt quickly to new ways of working. An important reason for developing our new strategy is the chance to establish and sustain more efficient ways of working, while targeting our inspection efforts more effectively. And by focusing on longer-term strategic planning and investment, we can be more innovative and ambitious in what we try to achieve. In particular, we will increasingly base our ability to make and evaluate decisions on data analytics and the insights they yield.

This strategy has three sections:

- The first section addresses some other principal changes in our environment beyond those highlighted by the consultation.
- The second section sets out our objectives in meeting the main challenges we face.
- The final section sets out how we will implement the changes.

Principal changes

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented public health emergency; the resulting pressures on the police and fire and rescue services are also without precedent. The consequences for these sectors, the rest of the criminal justice system and society are far-reaching. They are expected to continue into the longer term.

As a result of the pandemic, there will continue to be considerable pressure on public finances. Increasingly, we (and all public bodies) will be expected to focus on improving our own efficiency and productivity, and to show that we continue to give the public good value.

There is a renewed focus on national crime and policing outcomes, especially in relation to murder, serious violence, domestic abuse, neighbourhood crime and drug supply/county lines. To this end, the government has supported the funding of an additional 20,000 police officers. There is an expectation of a resultant reduction in crime.

Accountability is changing. The governance that is in place for the police and fire and rescue services is being reviewed, including the important role and remit of police and crime commissioners (PCCs), police, fire and crime commissioners (PFCCs) and mayors in holding the police and fire and rescue services to account. There is a new governance framework for policing through the National Policing Board; the Home Secretary is its chair. Increasingly, we are working with organisations such as the NPCC, the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), the College of Policing and the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC).

There are significant new and perennial problems which the police alone can't solve, including terrorism, domestic abuse and serious organised crime threats such as child sexual abuse, cyber-crime, and human trafficking. Many of these wider societal problems cross traditional organisational boundaries and are influenced by complicated, interlinked factors. These factors include the increased power and availability of digital technology and ever heavier financial pressures on public services (including mental health services, and housing and social services).

The use of new technologies, data and artificial intelligence are now commonplace in policing. These technologies have huge potential benefits for policing. But they also pose considerable risks. To date, the benefits have not been fully realised and nor have the risks all materialised.

The legitimacy of the police and fire and rescue services is being highlighted and examined. For example, there are continuing questions about how forces and services can truly represent the diversities of their communities. There are also questions about

the use of police powers, including whether the police are using their powers disproportionately when dealing with some members of the public.

Both locally and nationally, fire and rescue services are facing an urgent need to reform and modernise. This need has been emphasised by criticism of the services' response to the Manchester Arena bombing in May 2017 and the Grenfell Tower fire in June 2017. Similarly, questions have been raised about the role of the services in the response to the pandemic.

More recently, questions have once again been raised about the culture of policing and the values that should be upheld. Increasingly, views on these matters have become both politicised and polarised. For example, questions were asked about policing decisions following events such as the toppling of the statue of Edward Colston in Bristol in June 2020, the vigil on Clapham Common in memory of Sarah Everard in March 2021, and the policing of a high profile funeral in Northern Ireland during the pandemic. The ways in which these were handled were subjects of intense scrutiny and controversy, and they became matters in connection with inspections we carried out.

Strategic objectives



Here, we set out four strategic objectives. These objectives underpin and guide our work. Each one directly addresses problems we face and those which were raised in our consultation process. At their hearts are the needs, expectations and concerns of the public.

Focus on public value

A focus on those areas that make the most significant difference to public safety.

- We will use our insight to focus our effort, our staff and our money more sharply on problems where inspection can have the greatest influence on improving public safety and public value. (We will do this in terms of what the public values as important and what is likely to add most value to the public.)
- We will inspect and report on performance at local, regional and national levels. We will include the effect on the police and fire and rescue services of the acts and omissions of others.

- We will better match our inspection methods to the subjects we are inspecting. We will use a range of inspections (standards and systems-based, and national thematic and cross-sector inspections) in appropriate, targeted ways.
- We will adopt an even more complete inspection process, to enhance the coherence of the cycle of inspection, recommendations, improvements and further inspection.
- We will continue to take an assertive approach and further increase our influence. We will do this by actively pursuing the need for national improvements.
- Where improvements are needed, we will provide clear and reasoned explanations of the potential implications – for example any identified risks to public safety – of failing to make the required improvements and the potential benefits of making improvements.

This objective will allow us to ensure that we focus more staff and money on high-risk topics. It will also ensure that we inspect using the most appropriate inspection methods, with the most suitable staff and efficient technology. These topics for inspection might be established through our own strategic insight and/or according to ministerial priorities. We might also arrive at them by identifying potential significant harms to the public in consultation and co-operation with senior leaders in policing and fire and rescue services, or with PCCs, PFCCs and their mayoral equivalents. This will show that we are making best use of public money. We will be concentrating on how improvements may be made in these areas of especial public importance, and on areas whose high importance may be less obvious to the public. We will also make sure that the inspection methodology we use is the best match for the topic. We envisage that the balance of inspections will shift slightly away from standards-based inspections, although the process is intended to evolve over time, with topics potentially moving from one type of inspection to another.

We can take a bigger picture view of inspection, starting with our insight and strategic analysis, moving through inspection, then to effectively monitoring the results and improvements. In turn, this will inform decisions on future inspections. This broader view will result in a more complete inspection cycle. Where necessary, we intend to follow up matters nationally where this is likely to lead to improvements. This might include us emphasising the risks to the public of not taking action as well as the potential benefits of taking the recommended steps.

Adopt a smarter systems approach

To adopt a collaborative and more targeted approach to inspection across the inspectorate, across the inspected sectors, across the wider criminal justice system and beyond.

- We will continue to improve our working arrangements with others, including the College of Policing, the NPCC, the NFCC, the IOPC and others, as part of a smarter system. We will clearly explain respective roles, governance and resourcing.
- We will work with others to define and target established and enduring problems that could be improved by a smarter systems approach.
- We will make changes to enable us to promote public safety more swiftly.

This objective will allow us to explain the importance of inspecting some of the deepest problems facing our inspected bodies, particularly where crime is a systemic and social problem that arises from a complex number of factors. Crime can't be seen in isolation from the society in which it occurs. By committing to a more collaborative approach, across our inspected sectors and beyond, we will be able to further improve our understanding of the causes of some of these deeper, enduring, systemic problems. We will also be able to work with others, using the power of our authority and our voice, to promote or facilitate the necessary improvements.

Capitalise on our independent insight and learning

To maximise the benefits of our unique insights across the whole of our inspected sectors.

- We will continue to highlight good practice in our inspection reports where we find it.
- We will promote this good practice through our inspection reports, and through examples of good practice that those working across the inspected sectors can find and use easily.
- We will explain our insight more widely. We will make use of the data we collect and the data we analyse, not only as parts of our formal inspection activity, but also in response to requests from ministers, sector leaders and others.
- We will facilitate webinars, conferences, workshops and other events to spread good practice to interested parties across the policing and fire and rescue sectors, working with others where appropriate.
- We will request structured inspection feedback so that we have the evidence to continue facilitating improvements in both the inspected sectors and in our own organisation.
- We will work with the College of Policing, the NPCC, the NFCC, the Fire Standards Board and others to make sure that our insight fully informs new guidance standards when they are produced.
- We will continue to learn as an organisation.

This objective will allow us to ensure our inspections are as effective as possible. We will use our statutory functions and authority to identify and promote good practice. And through a variety of means we will make it easy for people to find, understand and adopt good practice. We will acknowledge that this will have a significant influence on the inspected sectors and may lead to greater improvements in the longer term. We will also try to involve others where we can't find good practice or where the sectors are struggling to solve a problem, especially where new guidance or new standards are needed.

Be more proactive in responding to major changes

Attuned to our external environment.

- Through our inspections, we will identify intractable problems and try to find evidence as to how they could be resolved. We will work with others where necessary to facilitate a whole system approach, even where there are no immediate or straightforward answers.
- We will identify and focus on those problems causing greatest current and future concern at local, regional and national levels in order to respond more quickly and effectively to national problems.
- We will make better use of insight and intelligence, using local and national networks to recognise significant emerging problems.
- We will collate, analyse and use all available data to recognise emerging trends and problems.
- We will use both continuous monitoring and one-off inspection activity in order to develop our insight.
- We will adopt a more intelligence-led and systematic approach to setting priorities.
- We will develop greater access to specialist capacity and capability to enable an agile response to emerging national problems.

This objective will complement the first one. It will allow us to use our insight to identify and respond to the national or systemic problems affecting our inspected sectors as they arise. We will be flexible in prioritising inspection activity and responding quickly to changes in our environment. This approach will further allow us to make the most of our use of data and analysis, while also questioning the use of these technologies by the sectors themselves.

We will stay focused on the need for a strong independent inspectorate and our role in terms of assurance and accountability. We will be equally mindful of the pressing matters of the day and the need to respond to them for the benefit of the inspected sectors and the public. This approach will allow us to be sure that, through our reports and recommendations, the inspected sectors have the information and analysis they need to make the most important improvements, especially where a serious risk to the public needs to be assessed and acted on.

Implementation



We will implement this strategy in stages, with help from a range of staff within the inspectorate and those with whom we work.

During 2021, we will arrange for small teams with extensive experience and specialist knowledge of inspection work to analyse in more detail how we can make some of the principal shifts that are needed to achieve our four strategic objectives.

These teams will be further supported by people who are independent of us, who will make sure we focus on the strategic objectives and will provide feedback, encouragement and challenge where necessary.

Other supporting strategies underpin and enable this one. They include our:

- workforce strategy, communications strategy and digital strategy;
- 'ways of working' programme (including our estates strategy);
- governance review; and
- organisational design programme.

In implementing this strategy, we are committed to adopting modern, digital, environmentally friendly working practices. We will reflect this approach in each of our supporting strategies.

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