

Ceri Sumner
Director
Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service

Councillor Margaret Dewsbury
Chair of Fire Authority

20 January 2023

Dear Ceri,

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service revisit

In November 2021, we inspected Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service. During the inspection, we identified a cause of concern. We shared the cause of concern with you and our recommendations that the service should:

Recommendations

- ensure that joint agency reviews take place after significant or fatal fire incidents; reviews should take place at an appropriate strategic level in the service and with other relevant organisations;
- target the most vulnerable, who are at greatest risk from fire; and
- ensure that all staff have a good understanding of how to identify vulnerability and safeguard vulnerable people.

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

Between 28 November and 2 December 2022, we revisited Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service to review progress against the action plan. We also explored whether the right levels of leadership and oversight were in place.

During the revisit, we interviewed staff from across the service including those responsible for implementing your action plan. We also reviewed documents and data that the service submitted. We concluded the revisit by sharing our initial findings with the director of Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service. This letter provides an update on those findings.

Governance

We found appropriate and robust governance arrangements were in place to monitor progress of your action plan. The service reports progress against the plan to Norfolk County Council Scrutiny Committee. Performance and progress of the plan is monitored by the deputy chief fire officer through the community safety development board.

Action plan

The service has a good action plan, known as the Norfolk Fire and Rescue development plan, covering the cause of concern. The development plan states which senior officers are responsible for implementing it and allocates tasks. It follows a consistent format detailing the action required, progress made, timescales and further work planned. This will help the service to effectively monitor progress. It has made significant progress against some areas in the plan, supported by additional funding.

Progress against the cause of concern

When we inspected in November 2021, we were concerned that the service wasn't making prevention activity a high enough priority and wasn't adequately identifying those most at risk from fire.

By 28 February 2022, the service had put improvement plans in place. The service secured additional funding from Norfolk County Council to increase its dedicated prevention staff from 2 to 13, and for training and support for firefighters to implement its prevention strategy.

Joint agency reviews after significant or fatal fires

The service has made good progress in response to this recommendation. At the time of our revisit, we found the service had undertaken six reviews after significant and fatal fires, including with partner agencies. However, not all had been undertaken in a timely manner or within the time frame defined within the service's policy.

Targeting people most at risk from fire

The service has made good progress in response to this recommendation. It has improved how it targets the most vulnerable, who are at the greatest risk from fire. However, the service is aware that more needs to be done. We found it was making good use of the support available through the National Fire Chiefs Council and learning from partner agencies and other fire and rescue services performing well in this area.

We were told the service planned to increase its range of data sources and work with partner agencies to further improve how it targets the most vulnerable to keep them safe from fire and other emergencies. We found wholetime firefighters had received additional training and been provided with additional risk information, improving how they implement prevention activities. We found more work and further systems needed to be put in place to support on-call firefighters to implement prevention activities. Not all firefighters understand their statutory duty to undertake prevention activities or the benefits of providing information, publicity, encouragement and advice to prevent fires and death or injury by fire.

Identifying vulnerability and safeguarding vulnerable people

The service has made significant progress in response to this recommendation. We found a robust gap analysis had been undertaken, resulting in an improved referral process that staff we spoke to understood. Increased training means staff have a better understanding of how to identify vulnerability and safeguard vulnerable people.

Conclusion

The inspection team was pleased to see that the service had taken steps to address the cause of concern. We recognise the considerable work that has been carried out to support these improvements. The service is making prevention a high priority.

The service has a comprehensive action plan, and governance arrangements in place to oversee it. Improvements have been made in response to all the recommendations, significantly in identifying vulnerability and safeguarding. However, more needs to be done to support on-call firefighters to implement prevention activities and to ensure all firefighters understand and fulfil their statutory duty to undertake prevention activities. More needs to be done to ensure reviews after significant or fatal fires are undertaken in a timely manner or within the service's timeline as defined in its policy.

We will continue to monitor progress through updates from the service and data returns. When we next inspect the service in 2023, we will assess progress against these recommendations.

This letter will be published on our website.

Yours sincerely,



Roy Wilsher OBE QFSM

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