



Foreword

This is my third and final report to the Secretary of State under section 28B of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. It contains my final assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of fire and rescue services in England, based on the inspections carried out between February and August 2021. I report separately every year on the efficiency and effectiveness of police forces in England and Wales, and in early 2022 I will be publishing my final report.

I am also taking this opportunity to reflect on the overall progress made since July 2017, when the inspectorate's remit was extended to include inspections of England's fire and rescue services.

This report's structure and purpose

Part 1 contains my assessment of the state of fire and rescue services in England. In making my assessment, I have drawn on all the fire and rescue service inspection activity carried out since our first round of inspections in 2018.

The 13 inspections between February and August 2021 have informed my assessment of the progress made by the sector, including progress against national recommendations. These 13 inspections formed the first tranche of our current second round of inspections. The second inspection round resumed in February 2021, having been postponed in 2020 as a result of the pandemic.

I have also used the findings and reports of other organisations, and other information and analysis, made available to me.

Part 2 is an overview of the gradings and findings from the 13 inspections between February and August 2021.

Part 3 contains the full list of our fire and rescue reports in the period covered by this report.

The results of our individual inspections enable an assessment of the performance of individual services. I hope those responsible for holding fire and rescue services to account, as well as the public, will draw on the overall conclusions in this report just as much as they draw on the specific conclusions we have reached for each service.

When making this assessment, I wrote to chief fire officers and other interested parties throughout the fire and rescue sector, inviting them to contribute their views on the state of fire and rescue in England. I put on record my warmest thanks to all those who responded for their very thoughtful and insightful contributions. They have been a great help.



Senior staffing changes

My term as Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services ends on 31 March 2022. It has been a privilege to report on the effectiveness and efficiency of the fire and rescue services in England since the inspectorate's remit was extended in 2017, and to discharge my other national duties. I am grateful to my colleagues both in and outside the inspectorate for their support.

Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) have joint responsibility for inspecting fire and rescue services and police forces. HMI Zoë Billingham left the inspectorate in September after 12 years of distinguished service. Zoë has my deep gratitude for her dedication to the inspectorate and for her work with the fire and rescue sector. I wish her every success in the future.

Zoë's successor is HMI Roy Wilsher OBE QFSM, who was the first chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC). I extend to him the warmest welcome as he assumes his responsibilities as the inspectorate's senior lead for the fire and rescue inspection programme and domestic abuse, and the HMI with primary responsibility for the fire and rescue services and police forces in the Eastern region.



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Our approach to inspecting fire and rescue services

The pandemic required us to adapt our approach to inspections of fire and rescue services. In my last annual report, I explained that the inspectorate temporarily suspended all inspection work needing appreciable engagement by services. We postponed last year's planned inspection programme for the second round of our fire and rescue service inspections by 12 months.

In 2020, the Home Secretary commissioned us to inspect how each service had responded to the first phase of the pandemic. We found that many services had adapted well and had provided very valuable additional support to the public.

The pandemic and remaining public health restrictions continue to place strain on public services and on our inspection programme. Firefighters and other service staff continue to go above and beyond their roles to help their communities. Home Office data shows 518,263 incidents were attended by fire and rescue services in England in the year ending 31 March.¹ Of all incidents attended by fire and rescue services, fires accounted for 29 percent, fire false alarms 42 percent, and non-fire incidents 29 percent.

This year, some services faced and responded to additional difficulties caused by flooding and wildfires. Home Office data shows fire and rescue services responded to 14,921 incidents of flooding in England between April 2020 and April 2021. Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service attended 451 flooding incidents, which represents a 273 percent increase from 2020, and Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service attended more than twice as many flooding incidents (236) as in the previous year. In addition, in the year to March 2021, there were 13.3 percent more secondary fires attended in grassland, woodland and crops in England (25,345) compared to the previous year.

In February 2021, we resumed inspections and started our second full round of inspections. This time we inspected 44 fire and rescue services, following the formation of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service.

Firefighters and other service staff continue to go above and beyond their roles to help their communities.

While some services have made material efforts to make improvements, serious problems persist in others.

Between February and August 2021, we carried out our first tranche of inspections and graded 13 services. These inspections were carried out almost entirely virtually as a result of pandemic restrictions. Our inspection teams and the fire and rescue services they inspect have shown fortitude and resilience in doing this. This was the first time we inspected this way; it presented many difficulties.

Since the second round of our inspections was postponed, services have had longer to improve, albeit while also dealing with the pandemic response. While some services have made material efforts to make improvements, serious problems persist in others.



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Our second round of inspections of all 44 services will continue into 2022. We recognise the difficulties of virtual inspections. Depending on how the pandemic develops, we are reintroducing some on-site inspection activity as we complete the remainder of our inspections. Our full findings from our inspection of all 44 services will therefore be available in the 2022 *State of Fire and Rescue* report.

We regularly monitor all services in order to promote improvements. If we identify a serious, critical or systemic shortcoming in a service's practice, we will report it as a 'cause of concern',² which is always accompanied by one or more recommendations. If a cause of concern is identified, it is raised with the fire and rescue service and authority so they can take appropriate action. We conduct a number of follow-up inspections throughout the year.

The inspection programme was designed to follow substantially the same approach as our first round of inspections. We did this to assess the improvements services are making, in respect of effectiveness, efficiency and people.

We have continuously improved our process of design, monitoring and reporting. The sector, particularly our expert reference and technical advisory groups, have continued to provide useful feedback on and support for our ideas, which have led to appreciable improvements. In particular, for our second round of inspections we have made improvements to how we assess risk, protection, and equality and diversity.

I extend my warmest appreciation to all those involved in our work: from our staff who designed inspection processes or spent numerous hours collecting evidence virtually and analysing it, those who contributed to my assessment, and to those services that have facilitated our inspections so well in testing circumstances. This continues to be a difficult time for us all, and I am grateful for everyone's efforts.

Sir Thomas P Winsor

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services