

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**COMMUNITY INFORMATION AND PROTECTION  
SELECT COMMITTEE**

**TUESDAY, 30 OCTOBER 2001 AT**

**HER MAJESTY’S INSPECTORATE OF FIRE SERVICES INSPECTION REPORT 2001**

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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Executive Member: Gerald Game

**1. Purpose of the Report**

To invite the Select Committee to scrutinise the recommendations and suggestions contained within the report from Her Majesty’s Inspector Robin Currie following his inspection of the Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service in February of this year.

**2. Summary**

- 2.1 Keith Emsall has requested that this item should be considered for scrutiny by the Community Information and Protection Select Committee.
- 2.2 Her Majesty’s Inspector made recommendations, negative comments, and suggestions within his report. He also made positive reference to a number of activities which are underway within the Fire and Rescue Service.
- 2.3 Her Majesty's Inspector made the following recommendations:
  - 1) The authority should provide an efficient data recording and management information system within the fire safety department
  - 2) The Service should review, as a matter of urgency, the implementation of policies and procedures relating to the provision of fire risk information to operational crews

Work is currently in progress to address those areas of concern raised within the report.

- 2.3 Members may wish to note that part of the Management Summary states: “*the Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service is notably well managed at a strategic level, and well supported by the Fire authority*” (Inspection Report - Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service - 14 – 15 February 2001, para 3).

**3. Conclusions**

The Select Committee should discuss whether or not they wish to scrutinise the activities underway to address the recommendations within the Inspector’s report and, if so, by what method.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 This inspection was undertaken within Section 24 of the Fire Services Act 1947 to inform the Secretary of State about the manner in which the Fire Authority is performing its functions. Her Majesty's Inspectors Robin Currie, Rodney Pearce and Assistant Inspector Graeme Smith visited the Fire and rescue Service on 14 and 15 of February 2001.
- 1.2 At the end of his inspection, HMI Currie spoke to several elected members and shared with them his general view of the Service. The formal HMI report was published in June 2001 and circulated to all members of the CIP Select Committee.
- 1.3 This report highlights to members the recommendations of the inspector and other comments he has made, both positive and negative.

## **2. Overview of the inspectors report**

- 2.1 The inspector's report contained two recommendations, two suggestions, ten positive comments, and four negative comments.
- 2.2 Within the management Summary the inspector states that "*the Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service is notably well managed at a strategic level, and well supported by the Fire authority*". He further acknowledges that "*the Authority has recognised the need to improve the standard of fire cover in parts of the County*".
- 2.3 In his summation the inspector records that "*although suggestions and recommendations towards improvements are provided in this report, our overall assessment of the performance of the Service is very positive*".
- 2.4 The report focussed on three key areas:

### **Focus area 1 – Performance in Service Delivery**

### **Focus area 2 – Corporate Management**

### **Focus area 3 – People Management**

- 2.5 An overview containing comments and observations is attached at Appendix 1 to this report.

## **3. Recommendations within the inspectors report and the Service response**

- 3.1 Recommendation 1 - In the area of fire safety the inspector recommends that "The authority should provide an efficient data recording and management information system within the fire safety department".
- 3.2 Response - A system for monitoring fire safety data has been in place for some time but has, in recent months, suffered from a lack of reliability. Upgrades have been made to the system and the data inputting processes have been refined to ensure more accurate data is both put into the system and can be retrieved from it.
- 3.3 Recommendation 2 – In the area of operations the inspector recommends that " The Service should review, as a matter of urgency, the implementation of policies and procedures relating to the provision of fire risk information to operational crews".

- 3.4 Response – This weakness relates to a traditional paper based system of risk information that is held on fire stations. Since the date of the inspection in February the current system has been audited and some omissions corrected. Work to introduce a new system whereby data can be transmitted directly to fire appliances is now well underway. Introduction is subject to appropriate funding and cannot happen before the change to new radio frequencies intended for 2003/04.

#### **4. Other comments made by the inspector**

- 4.1 Reference to poor performance in the areas of confidence (the number of firefighters on a fire appliance when responding to a call) and unwanted calls (false alarms from automatic systems) were no surprise to the Service. Various groups have been working to overcome these areas of poor performance over the last year.
- 4.2 Other negative observations stem from the inability to accurately record some of the fire safety data. Activity to overcome this weakness has been raised earlier within this report.
- 4.3 The many positive comments apply to various departments and have been well received by personnel within the Service. It was pleasing to note reference to closer working with the County and the recognition of work in the areas of equality, health and safety, occupational health and community fire safety.
- 4.4 A summary of the Inspector's comments is at Appendix 2.

#### **5. Conclusion**

- 5.1 Overall the inspector's report is very positive and he has found little to criticise in those areas he inspected. Work has been underway since February to address the recommendations and negative comments that were made verbally and then confirmed in the report.
- 5.2 The Service activity plan has been amended to ensure that the issues raised take a high priority and, where required, budget bids will be submitted to implement solutions.

#### **6. Financial Implications**

There are no immediate financial implications arising from this report. However, there may be costs attached to any remedial work or alternative systems required as a result of work currently underway. Any bids for monies will form part of the normal revenue and capital budget process.

*Background papers used by the author in compiling this report:*

Report of Her Majesty's Inspector HMI R Currie – Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service –  
14 to 15 February 2001

## APPENDIX 1

### Focus area 1

*Does the Service deliver good quality services?*

Community fire safety arrangements are being enthusiastically pursued with a range of local initiatives proving successful. County Council members involve themselves in that work, and provide a good level of resources to achieve their aims. Effective enforcement of legislation will be facilitated by changes in service delivery now being implemented. It is difficult to establish current performance, as the fire safety management information system is not yet fully functional. This requires attention. Nonetheless it is clear that improvements could be made in legislative fire safety output.

Work to relocate key fire stations is in progress, with a substantial review in respect of the implications of major development in Stevenage being carried out. There are, however, concerns about crewing levels at operational incidents.

### Focus area 2

*Are corporate management arrangements robust and supported by sound information?*

Service managers are committed to achieving a safer community, and actively support the County Council's aims. Service objectives are clearly stated in the service plan.

Management's decision to implement a restructure of the Service is commended. We support this management initiative which clearly defines service objectives, devolves responsibility for action and encourages all personnel to contribute towards achieving service aims. This initiative is the first step in a process designed to ensure that all departments co-operate to provide an integrated delivery of service.

Effective management of the Service, and achievement of service aims, is adversely effected by the inability of some departments to provide accurate and timely information to managers. However, a new management information infrastructure is being developed. Lower than average performance found in a number of comparative examinations supports the need for the recently introduced Performance Audit Department.

### Focus area 3

*Are people managed effectively?*

The Service has a positive attitude to its staff throughout its work. There are several new developments in relation to health and fitness, which can benefit all personnel. Every opportunity is taken to promote good employee relations, although it is disappointing that Fire Brigades Union national policy, sometimes limits opportunities for positive progress in important areas. Excellent progress is being made with advancing a new management culture with particular attention being paid to Equality and Fairness.