

Lancashire Combined Fire Authority

Planning Committee

Meeting to be held on Monday 13 July 2026

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Update

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Executive Summary

This report provides an update on His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) activity.

Additionally, the report provides information regarding updates on the 25-27 HMICFRS inspection which started in Summer 2025.

Recommendation(s)

The Authority is asked to note the report.

HMICFRS 2025-27 Inspection:

The 2025-27 HMICFRS inspection process is well underway; there is a greater focus on governance arrangements and their effects on services. HMICFRS will not evaluate the governing authority itself; instead, they will assess how Combined Fire Authority (CFA) governance directly influences Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service (LFRS). The people assessment will consider whether governance and oversight frameworks promote a positive organisational culture, as well as whether the established code of conduct standards effectively support workforce health and well-being. Leadership at all levels, values and culture, and a more detailed review of major incident preparedness will also be examined by the HMICFRS.

HMICFRS - Change in Leadership:

Michelle Skeer OBE QPM has been appointed as His Majesty's interim Chief Inspector of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, following approval by His Majesty the King. Michelle took up the role on 1 April 2026, succeeding Sir Andy Cooke, who left office at the end of March. Michelle brings 36 years of experience across policing and fire and rescue and will become the first woman to hold the post.

Speaking about her appointment, Michelle said: “I am honoured to be appointed to this important role at a pivotal time for police forces and fire and rescue services. The inspectorate plays a vital role in identifying problems early, supporting improvements and promoting best practice. I look forward to building on the strong foundations established by Sir Andy Cooke.

Sir Andy Cooke issued key areas of concern following his time with HMICFRS:

Culture and Behaviour in Fire and Rescue Services

- Inspections revealed unacceptable behaviours and cultures where staff felt unable to speak up.
- Some services initially minimised concerns as isolated issues.
- Subsequent action has focused on improving leadership, strengthening behavioural expectations, and enhancing grievance and misconduct processes.

Reform and Strengthening of Inspectorate Powers

Sir Andy has consistently called for enhanced powers for HMICFRS to better drive improvements and intervene where necessary. The Government has responded through the White Paper from Local to National: A New Model for Policing, which proposes:

- A new power of direction for the Chief Inspector
- Increased accountability requirements for local policing bodies
- A tiered performance system chaired by the Chief Inspector to support underperforming forces

Sir Andy has also advocated for similar reforms within fire and rescue services, including operational independence for Chief Fire Officers and expanded inspectorate powers.

Northern Region HMICFRS and Chief Fire Officer (CFO) Roadshow

Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service will host a Northern Region HMICFRS and CFO Roadshow on Monday, 20 July 2026.

The purpose of the roadshow is to provide an opportunity for members of the HMIFRS team to meet with Chief Fire Officers and their Deputies from across the North. This

engagement aims to support constructive dialogue, explore current challenges, enhance transparency around the inspection approach and strengthen working relationships. Early feedback and insight from services will also be gathered in order to shape the development of the 2028-2030 inspection programme.

2025– 27 Inspection Activity Update:

A total of fourteen inspections have now been completed by HMICFRS with ten reports published. Please see below:

- ✓ Greater Manchester
- ✓ Merseyside
- ✓ Essex
- ✓ Bedfordshire
- ✓ Cambridgeshire
- ✓ Cornwall
- ✓ Warwickshire
- ✓ Cheshire
- ✓ Surrey
- ✓ Avon

	Effectiveness	Understanding the risk of fire and other	Preventing fires and other risks	Protecting the public through fire regulation	Responding to fires and other emergencies	Responding to major and multi-agency incidents	-	Efficiency	Use resources to manage risk, making sure it is efficient and affordable	-	People	Promoting the right values and culture	Getting the right people with the right skills	Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity	Managing performance and developing leaders
Bedfordshire	-	G	G	G	A	G	-	-	RI	-	-	I	RI	A	RI
Greater Manchester	-	G	O	A	G	G	-	-	G	-	-	O	G	G	G
Warwickshire	-	G	G	A	A	A	-	-	A	-	-	G	G	G	G
Essex	-	G	G	G	RI	G	-	-	G	-	-	A	RI	A	A
Merseyside	-	G	G	G	G	O	-	-	G	-	-	G	G	A	G
Cambridgeshire	-	G	A	G	RI	A	-	-	A	-	-	A	A	RI	RI
Cornwall	-	A	RI	A	G	RI	-	-	RI	-	-	RI	RI	RI	RI
Cheshire	-	G	G	G	G	G	-	-	G	-	-	G	G	G	O
Surrey	-	G	A	G	A	G	-	-	A	-	-	G	G	A	G
Avon	-	A	RI	RI	RI	A	-	-	RI	-	-	A	RI	RI	A

Key:

Outstanding: The FRS has substantially exceeded the characteristics of good performance.	O
Good: The FRS has substantially demonstrated all the characteristics of good performance.	G
Adequate: The FRS has demonstrated some of the characteristics of good performance, but we have identified areas where the FRS should make improvements.	A
Requires improvement: The FRS has demonstrated few, if any, of the characteristics of good performance, and we have identified a substantial number of areas where the FRS needs to make improvements.	RI
Inadequate: We have causes for concern and have made recommendations to the FRS to address them.	I

National HMICFRS Report Themes:

The Organisational Assurance Team continues to monitor national trends and learning from HMICFRS reports, with key findings captured within the theme tracker. The tracker is available on the Organisational Assurance Team SharePoint page and provides the Executive Board, Service Management Team, and Department Heads with a real-time overview of emerging sector-wide themes arising from HMICFRS inspections.

Department and Service Delivery Visits:

The Organisational Assurance Team has developed and implemented the new reality-testing station visit for Service Delivery. The visit content has been systematically aligned to both the HMICFRS characteristics of good and the Fire Standards Board criteria, ensuring that assurance activity is focused on the most relevant and appropriate areas. The reality-testing visit covers 33 HMICFRS characteristics of good performance and 43 Fire Standards criteria. The primary objective of the visits is to provide assurance to the organisation regarding crew knowledge and understanding across a range of critical topics. The station visits went live on 1 April 2026, and to date 6 units have been completed. The Organisational Assurance Team will keep track of important findings as they arise.

The Organisational Assurance Team has now completed all initial departmental engagement visits. Following these visits, each Head of Department has been issued

with a tailored assurance information pack, comprising: a comparison of Round 3 and Round 4 HMICFRS characteristics of good performance relevant to their department; debrief outcomes from Round 3 interviews specific to their area; Round 3 departmental self-assessment documentation highlighting strengths, weaknesses, and changes since the last inspection; and finally a copy of the Round 4 departmental self-assessment, to be completed in advance of their Organisational Assurance departmental visit Summer 2026.

HMICFRS Annual Spring Data Collection:

The annual data collection was submitted to the HMICFRS on Thursday 4 June 2026. This data collection will form key lines of enquires during our round four inspection.

Round 3 Area for Improvement: (AFI)

The Service received one AFI in the report concerning Equality Impact Assessments (EIA).

AFI Single point of contact (SPOC): Director of People and Development – Liz Sandiford

The service should make sure it has robust processes in place to carry out Equality Impact Assessments and review any actions agreed as a result.

“Although the service has a process in place to assess equality impact, we found inconsistencies with EIAs. We found that most EIAs we reviewed had been completed following the completion of a project or activity. Some only had the initial assessment completed, not the full assessment. Although the service has introduced a quality assurance process for EIAs since our last inspection, four out of the five assessments we reviewed hadn’t been quality assured. Where EIAs had been completed, most recommendations weren’t transposed into the strategy or document. For example, although an EIA was completed for the prevention strategy, there was no mention of the significant findings or mitigations in the strategy itself. This is an area for improvement.”

AFI Update:

1. The EIA Form and Guidance has been updated and published on the intranet.
2. The mechanism for administering EIAs has been built into a SharePoint site, this is currently being tested and should make it easier from a quality assurance and tracking of actions perspective. The SharePoint site is now live.

3. An “on the menu” session was held on Friday 6 March 2026 to raise awareness for staff on the completion of the EIA process
4. A further “On the Menu” session is scheduled for 26 June 2026, focusing on providing staff with step-by-step guidance on completing an EIA.
5. Quarterly meetings are held with Organisational Assurance Team and Human Resources to track progress and submit updates to HMICFRS portal.
6. Organisational Assurance Team are working with HR to ensure that EIA quality assurance processes are robust and embedded.
7. All actions and evidence relating to the AFI is being managed and tracked via the Assurance Monitoring System.
8. Further EIA training scheduled for 02 July 2026.

While LFRS only received one AFI, the report included several recommendations and observations for ongoing development. The Org Assurance Team has identified thirteen actions from these suggestions, which they will also monitor and track.

Service Liaison Lead (SLL) Visit to Lancashire:

Phil Innis, HMICFRS Service Liaison Lead (SLL), conducted a further engagement session with LFRS on 15 May 2026. During the visit, Phil met with various department heads and Executive Board members to provide support, outline key changes to the 2025–27 inspection process, and help manage expectations ahead of the inspection period. Phil also advised that he is due to leave HMICFRS in the coming months and that Lancashire will be allocated a new SLL to support the Service throughout our next inspection.

Business risk

The inspectorate will monitor LFRS’s direction of travel, it could cause reputational damage if it is perceived that we have not made reasonable progress during inspections.

Sustainability or Environmental Impact

None.

Equality and Diversity Implications

None.

Data Protection (GDPR)

Will the proposal(s) involve the processing of personal data? N

If the answer is yes, please contact a member of the Democratic Services Team to assist with the appropriate exemption clause for confidential consideration under part 2 of the agenda.

HR implications

None.

Financial implications

None.

Legal implications

None.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

List of background papers

Paper:

Date:

Contact: