

HM FIRE SERVICE INSPECTORATE IN SCOTLAND
THE CHIEF INSPECTOR'S PLAN 2025–2028



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Introduction



As HM Chief Inspector of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, it gives me great pleasure to present the Chief Inspector's Plan for 2025-2028.

This three-year Plan outlines how HM Fire Service Inspectorate in Scotland (HMFSI) will meet its statutory purpose to inquire into the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) to assist in its continuous improvement, and to provide assurance to the public and Scottish Ministers that the SFRS is performing in an efficient and effective manner.

This Plan describes the role of the Inspectorate, along with our strategy and priorities for the inspection of the SFRS, and information on how inspection will be carried out. The Plan has been prepared to meet the requirements of section 43F of the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005.

We acknowledge that our inspections over the period of this Plan will be carried out at a time when the SFRS faces significant challenge as a consequence of ongoing budget pressures. Our inspections will also take place during a period following the Service imposing a temporary reduction in fire appliance provision, and in which it is considering what further changes may be appropriate for the future. We will of course maintain a focus on any proposed alteration of service delivery arrangements and will provide independent advice and comment where appropriate to do so.

We have consulted with key partners regarding this Plan and will also consult on each of the Annual Operating Plans aligned to this document. We will keep our planning under review and adapt, as necessary, over the course of this three year period to meet any changing or pressing requirements identified or placed on the SFRS.

We remain committed to fulfilling our statutory duty and to supporting the SFRS in its journey of continuous improvement.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R D Scott'.

Robert D Scott QFSM

HM Chief Inspector of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

About the Inspectorate

1. HMFSI exists to provide independent, risk-based and proportionate professional inspection of the SFRS. Its purpose is to give assurance to the public and to Scottish Ministers that the SFRS is working in an efficient and effective way, and to promote improvement in the SFRS. We also provide independent, professional advice to Scottish Ministers and have a determination function in relation to non-domestic fire safety.
2. The statutory basis for the Inspectorate is derived from sections 43A to 43G of the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 (the Act). HM Chief Inspector is appointed by an Order in Council and operates independently of Scottish Ministers and the SFRS. Assistant Inspectors are appointed under Ministerial powers contained in the Act, and also act independently.

3. Our stated values are: Integrity, Objectivity and Fairness.

Integrity – putting the obligations of public service above personal interests

Objectivity – basing inspection conclusions and recommendations on rigorous, unbiased analysis of evidence

Fairness – interacting with persons in a reasonable way and not imposing unwarranted burdens or adversely affecting individuals

4. In addition to our values, our guiding principles are that our inspection work is proportionate, accountable and transparent. We will always act independently, ensure our scrutiny is appropriately targeted, and publish impartial and objective reports. We will be accountable for what we do and will justify our actions and our findings.
5. HMFSI website: www.hmfsi.scot.

The Chief Inspector's Plan

6. Under section 43F of the Act, the Chief Inspector must prepare a Plan setting out priorities for Inquiries to be carried out; and information on how inquiries will be carried out in a way which is proportionate, accountable and transparent.
7. In line with that requirement, this Chief Inspector's Plan gives a general overview of our intended priorities and scrutiny activities for the 2025-2028 period. In association with the Chief Inspector's Plan, we have introduced an Annual Operating Plan which will identify specific inspection work to be undertaken each year.
8. This Chief Inspector's Plan was developed through discussion and consultation, and is informed by our areas of interest, including our knowledge of issues identified through our inspection experiences.



The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

9. The SFRS is the UK's largest fire and rescue service and one of the largest of its kind in the world. The Service was formed on 1 April 2013 and replaced the eight antecedent services that had existed in Scotland since 1975.
10. The SFRS has 356 fire stations: 79% of these are crewed by on-call firefighters (working the Retained Duty System (RDS) or the Volunteer Duty System (VDS)); 21% are Wholetime crewed (this includes 23 Wholetime fire stations which also have an on-call resource working within them).
11. The SFRS has a statutory obligation to “have regard” to our inspection reports. The Service has an internal process for considering HMFSI reports and our recommendations and observations. Officers of the Service compile an action plan for each report we produce, and these action plans are submitted to either the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, or the Service Delivery Committee of the SFRS Board for consideration and scrutiny. The Chief Inspector is invited to attend and contribute to specific agenda items at both of these committees thus providing the Inspectorate with oversight of progress and assurance that recommendations have been considered and action taken.



How inspection is carried out

12. When determining our programme of inspection we take into account the Scottish Government's Scottish Fire and Rescue Framework, which contains strategic priorities for the Service.
13. The Chief Inspector gives as much notice of an inspection as is reasonably practicable to the SFRS. From time to time the Inspectorate may carry out unannounced visits as part of an inspection programme. The Inspectorate has an agreed communication and feedback protocol with the SFRS.
14. When we conduct our inspection activity, the SFRS must provide us with such assistance and co-operation as we may require to carry out our functions, and must comply with any reasonable request that we make. When we publish a report, the SFRS must give consideration to the findings and take such measures, if any, as it thinks fit.
15. Our Inspection Reports are generally laid before the Scottish Parliament. All Inspection Reports are published and can be viewed on the HMFSI website.
16. HMFSI has undertaken a twin approach with thematic inspections and area based inspections. We have adapted to new ways of working to reduce travel. We will ensure that this is considered in all future inspection activities and lessons learned are used to improve our performance and make effective use of available resources.
17. The Chief Inspector's update 2021-2024, available on the HMFSI website, gives an overview of our recent inspection activity.

Area Based Inspections

18. The SFRS operates across three Service Delivery Areas (SDA) (East, West and North). Each SDA contains a number of Local Senior Officer Areas.
19. Over the period 2021 to 2024 we have undertaken a full cycle, having completed an inspection of each of the three SDAs. These inspections considered performance across each Area against a range of key themes. This arrangement replaced a previous inspection regime based on local authority areas.

Thematic Inspections

20. The basis for our programme of thematic inspections is the identification of a number of specific areas of business that have been assessed as being particularly significant.
21. Our thematic inspections are an examination of a particular service-wide theme, and generally seek to understand how the Service as a whole is managing the subject.

Co-operation

22. We have a statutory duty to co-operate and co-ordinate with the Auditor General. We also work with other Inspectorates and agencies across the public sector to share specific expertise and contribute to shared outcomes. We co-ordinate our activities to reduce the burden of inspection and avoid unnecessary duplication. The relationship between the Inspectorate and the Auditor General is supported by a Memorandum of Understanding with Audit Scotland.
23. HMFSI and Audit Scotland are members of the Strategic Public Services Scrutiny Network (SPSSN). The SPSSN is comprised of Scotland's main public sector scrutiny bodies, and seeks to support the delivery of better coordinated, more proportionate and risk-based scrutiny.

Future inspection activity

Potential inspection activity 2025-2028

24. With a full cycle of SDA inspections coming to a conclusion, we will pause our area based inspection regime. We will consider issues that have arisen from the conclusions and recommendations of these reports and moving forward, will consider how corporate functions are delivered in the Service and measure the progress that the SFRS has made in respect of the SDA inspection reports.

25. The thematic inspection activity which we shall undertake during the course of this Plan will be influenced by our previous inspection work and is likely to sit within the themes of People, Partnership, Response, and Prevention. Our areas of interest are listed below: our inspection work will be selected from this list, taking into account the inspection capacity of HMFSI and the demands on the SFRS:

- the training and personal development of operational staff
- organisational culture – including behaviour, conduct and discipline
- organisational culture - equality, diversity and inclusion
- the approach of the SFRS to determining changes in service delivery and response modelling
- specialist resource provision and capability (including national resilience assets)
- planning and preparations for a response to a marauding terrorist act
- Operations Control (the timing of any inspection will aim to avoid an overlap with the SFRS installing a new proposed mobilising system)
- the provision and sustainability of the on-call duty systems
- the effectiveness of governance arrangements
- the suitability of the Service's property estate
- fire contaminants and associated issues
- evaluation of the SFRS's contribution to partnership working.

26. The Chief Inspector reserves the right to modify this list should circumstances require it.

Significant Incidents and Unplanned Events

27. We have a policy that details our procedure for inquiring into significant incidents, that is, incidents the circumstances or outcomes of which are likely to attract public interest or concern. Generally, we will not commence an Inquiry into a significant incident where this would substantially duplicate work being done by other bodies. We reserve the right, however, to undertake our own Inquiry where this would bring benefits that would not be realised by other investigations. We will always consult with bodies holding statutory responsibility for investigating, before deciding to carry out a significant incident inquiry.
28. From time to time, the Inspectorate expects to respond to events either under the description of 'significant incident' or otherwise. This may include instances where Scottish Ministers direct the Chief Inspector to carry out an Inquiry, such as on the SFRS's preparation for a high profile pre-planned event. The Inspectorate may be in a position to deal with such an inquiry with existing staff and resources, or may need to take on additional support for the duration of the work.



Appendix

Inspection powers and duties: Fire (Scotland) Act 2005

Section 43B Inquiries by Inspectors

- (1) An Inspector may inquire into a matter mentioned in subsection (3).
- (2) If directed to do so by the Scottish Ministers, an Inspector must inquire into a matter mentioned in subsection (3).
- (3) The matters are—
 - (a) the state and efficiency of SFRS,
 - (b) whether in carrying out its functions SFRS is complying with its duty under section 39A to make arrangements which secure best value,
 - (c) the manner in which SFRS is carrying out any of its functions.
- (4) In carrying out an inquiry under this section an Inspector may—
 - (a) require SFRS to provide any information or documents relating to the functions of SFRS that the Inspector may require,
 - (b) enter and inspect any premises which are used by SFRS,
 - (c) inspect any equipment which is used by SFRS.
- (5) If an Inspector exercises a power of entry by virtue of subsection (4)(b), the Inspector may—
 - (a) take onto the premises
 - (i) such other persons, and
 - (ii) such equipment,as the Inspector considers necessary,
 - (b) require any person present on the premises to provide the Inspector with any information or documents that the Inspector may reasonably request.
- (6) An Inspector may not under subsection (4)(b)—
 - (a) enter or inspect premises occupied as a private dwelling,
 - (b) enter premises by force.
- (7) SFRS must provide such facilities, assistance and co-operation as an Inspector may reasonably request for the purposes of, or in connection with, an inquiry under this section.

Section 43F Chief Inspector's plan

- (1) The Chief Inspector must prepare a plan setting out—
 - (a) priorities for inquiries to be carried out by Inspectors, and
 - (b) information on how inquiries will be carried out in a way which is proportionate, accountable and transparent.
- (2) The Chief Inspector—
 - (a) must keep the plan under review, and
 - (b) may from time to time revise the plan.
- (3) The Chief Inspector must, in preparing a plan (and any revised plan), consult such persons as the Chief Inspector considers appropriate.
- (4) The Chief Inspector must publish the plan (and any revised plan) in such manner as the Chief Inspector thinks fit.

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HM Fire Service Inspectorate
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

