

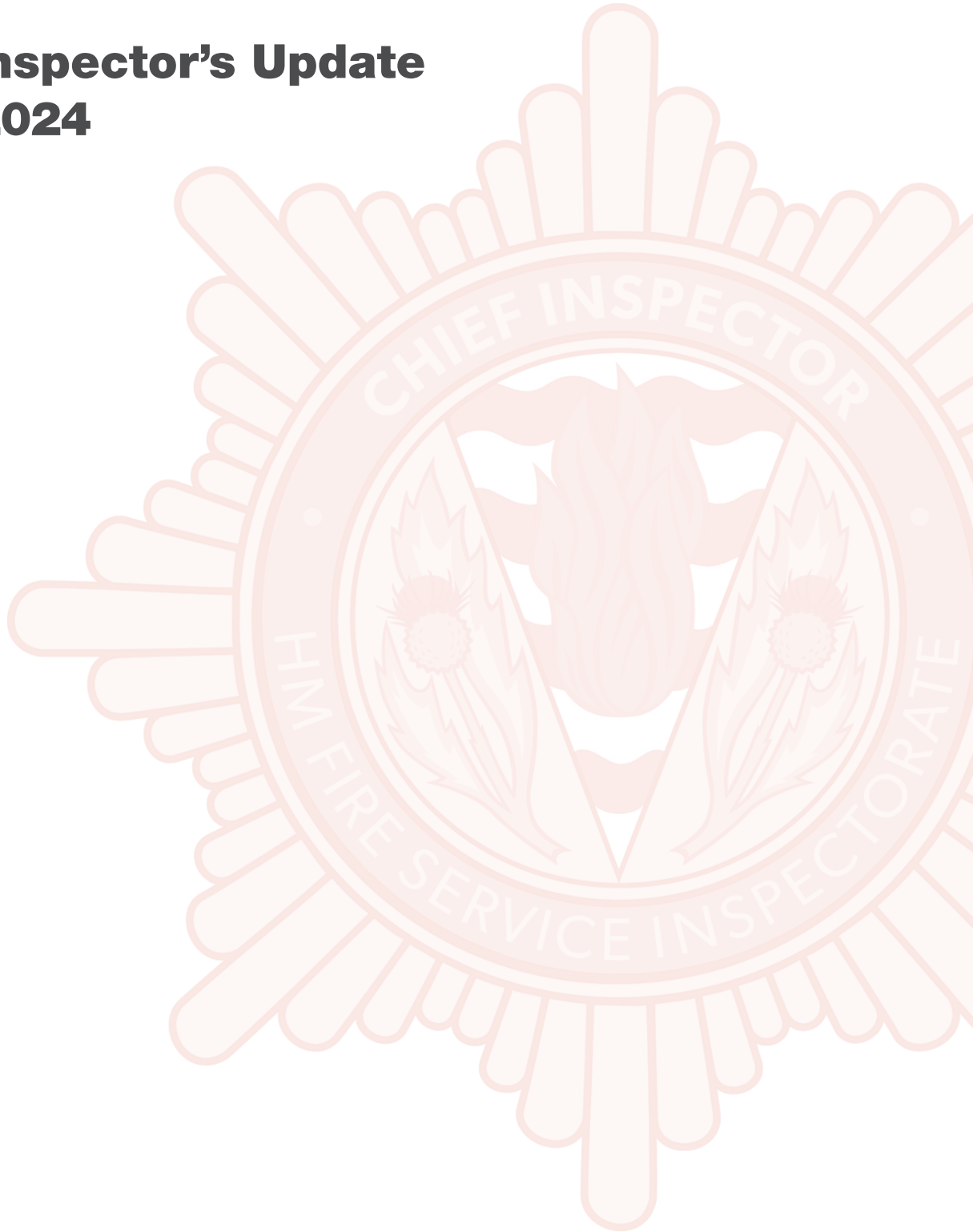


HM Fire Service Inspectorate
Chief Inspector's Update
2021–2024



HM Fire Service Inspectorate

Chief Inspector's Update 2021–2024



Integrity, Objectivity, and Fairness.

Contents

Introduction	02
A look back	03
The time for change	05
Northern Ireland	09
A look forward	10
Our inspection reporting process – adding value	11
The team	14
Our 75th anniversary	15
Summary	15

Laid before the Scottish Parliament by HM Chief Inspector of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
SG/2024/28

To Contact Us

Telephone +44 (0) 131 244 3275
Email HMFSI@gov.scot
Website www.hmfsi.scot

Introduction

His Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI) was established in 1948. The first HM Inspector of Fire Services in Scotland was Angus D. Wilson and his first inspection report covered the period of 16 May 1948 to 31 December 1949.

Since the publication of that first report, there have been many notable changes to the fire and rescue service. Reform in 2013 established the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS), replacing the eight former Services that had protected the people of Scotland. The Inspectorate has continued, over the past 75 years, to provide independent and impartial scrutiny and assurance that the fire service is operating in an effective and efficient manner. We will continue to offer advice and make recommendations for improvement, and are proud to play a prominent role in the evolution of the fire service in Scotland.



I have the privilege of being the Chief Inspector of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and leading His Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate in Scotland (HMFSI). I am at the mid-point of my tenure having held this post since 2021.

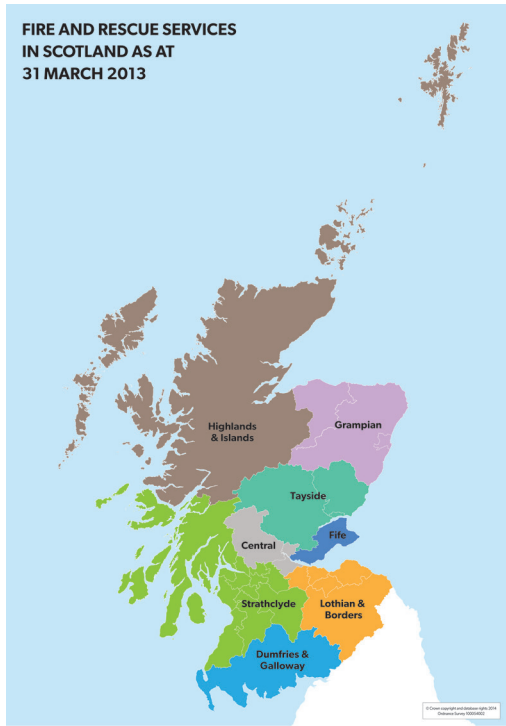
Accordingly, 2024 is an appropriate time at which to reflect on the last three years, to report on the Inspectorate's activity, and to project forward for the next three years. This progress report complements my 'Chief Inspector's Plan'¹ which contains HMFSI work priorities.

Robert Scott QFSM FIFireE

HM Chief Inspector of the
Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

¹ HM Fire Service Inspectorate in Scotland: Chief Inspector's Plan 2022 to 2025

A look back



1. In 2013 the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) was created by the amalgamation of eight legacy Services. Governance of the Fire and Rescue Service passed from local authority control to that of a Board of non-executives appointed by Scottish Ministers. At the same time, and in line with the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012, the inspection and scrutiny role of HMFSI was reinvigorated. Prior to this date the routine inspection role had been removed and, for a period of time, the Inspectorate’s role had moved to being more of an advisory one rather than that of providing scrutiny.

2. On its creation, the SFRS established a three Service Delivery Area (SDA) model, and this structure has now been in place for over ten years. Within each SDA, Local Senior Officers (LSO) were established. These LSO areas were aligned to local authority areas.



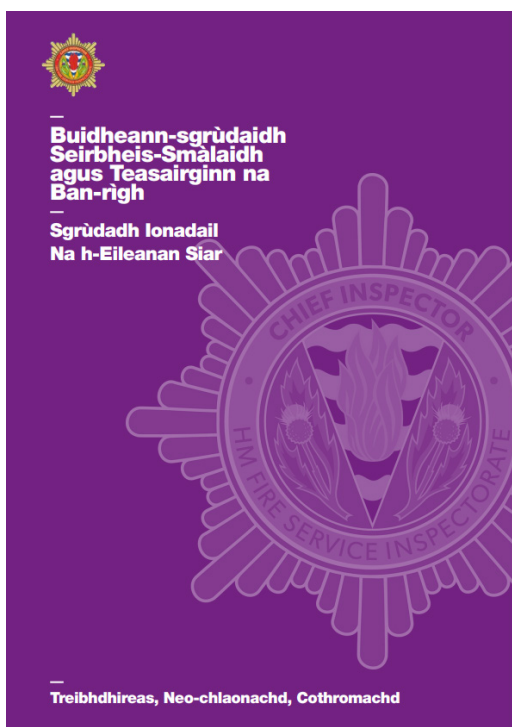
3. An HMFSI inspection regime was established in 2013 which inspected the service delivery of the SFRS in discrete units which corresponded with local authority boundaries across Scotland. There are 32 local authorities in Scotland. Some LSO areas, such as Glasgow and Edinburgh, sat within a single local authority area. Some LSO areas incorporated a number of local authority areas. In terms of the SFRS, this local structure and accountability was largely influenced by the legislation that created the SFRS. Since its creation, the Service has amalgamated some of these LSO areas on the basis of evolving need, experience and efficiency.

4. HMFSI's inspection at a local authority level was influenced by:

- the importance that was perceived at the time in respect of continuing local accountability by the authorities that previously governed the Fire and Rescue Services, and
- the Fire and Rescue Framework²

HMFSI referred to these type of inspections as 'Local Area Inspections' (LAI).

5. Between 2013 and 2020, HMFSI carried out 16 Local Area Inspections. The outcome of these inspections each comprises a report which was issued to the Service and made available on the internet. These reports can be accessed at www.hmfsi.scot.



6. The global pandemic and subsequent restrictions created a short time-barrier when physical inspection work was interrupted. That aside though, over the nine year period since the introduction of the Local Area Inspection process, only 16 local authority areas were inspected with a further 16 awaiting inspection.

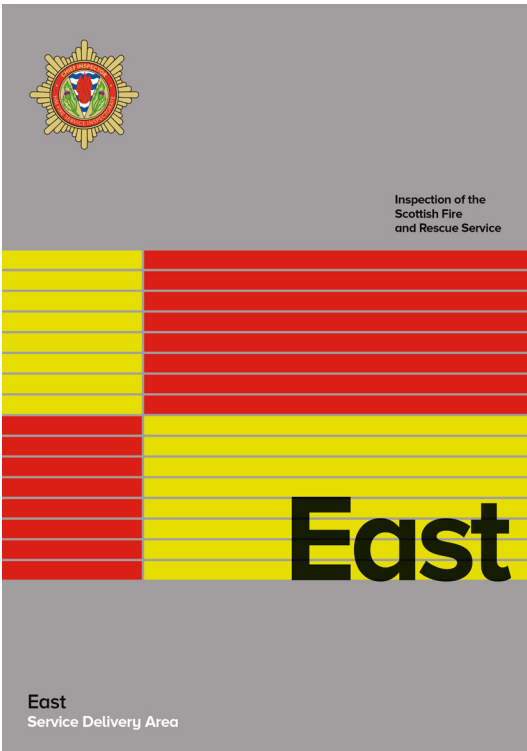
7. During this period HMFSI also undertook thematic inspections of the SFRS and between April 2013 and April 2021 had issued reports on 18 thematic inspections. These included subjects such as 'Preparedness of the SFRS for a serious flooding event', 'Managing Automatic Fire Signals', and 'Risk-based operational decision making in the SFRS'. All these thematic inspection reports are available on our website.

² Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2022

The time for change

8. The Local Area Inspection approach has generally been a success in respect of the process and delivery of feedback to the Service. However, the cyclical nature of the process aligned to the number of local authorities in Scotland meant it would take between 16 to 20 years to complete a cycle.
9. The LAI system was also resource intensive and had become somewhat repetitive for diminishing benefits. In addition, the importance of accountability to the local authority has not, in practice, had the focus originally envisaged.
10. The current Chief Inspector was appointed in 2021. Having prior knowledge and awareness of the inspection process, he had a desire to introduce a system which was more dynamic and capable of refinement. It was perceived that change was necessary and a cyclical inspection regime of the SFRS based on SDA level was developed.
11. Mindful that others might not share that view, an extensive debate and stakeholder engagement on proposed changes was arranged. The principal stakeholders were, the team at HMFSI, the Board of the SFRS and managers across the SFRS, representative bodies, and those local authority members, managers and leaders that expressed an interest in a briefing and input into the process.
12. The principal benefits of SDA inspections are a reduced inspection frequency, greater consistency of approach due to shorter timescales preventing drift, and an improved ability of HMFSI to respond to changing needs.
13. The small team at HMFSI was set the task of designing a methodology and scheme for inspecting SFRS delivery at SDA level and for reporting same in terms of outcomes, with an enhanced user perspective and understanding to be incorporated into the reports.

The SDA inspection process



14. Due to the number of SFRS resources within each SDA and the geography of the areas, the SDA inspection scheme introduced a sampling approach to fire station visits and a greater use of focus groups.
15. The inspection of the East SDA was the first of this inspection type and was carried out in 2022-23. The report of this inspection was laid before the Scottish Parliament in October 2023.
16. An inspection of the West SDA commenced in 2023 and was completed in 2024 with the report, at the time of writing this document, being drafted and readied for publication.
17. With the introduction of a scoring and assessment process for the new SDA Inspections, HMFSI can now accurately benchmark across the SFRS within a meaningful timescale. We believe that this will add value through our ability to make comment and recommendations dependant on what we find during inspections, and this in turn will allow consideration by the Service which helps drive continuous improvement.

18. In addition to the new scoring system, we have also changed the appearance of the report with the use of infographics to give a better feel and improved understanding for the reader.



1.7m

The East Service Delivery Area serves a population of 1.7 million people.



10,424km²

based across a wide ranging geography of some 10,424 square kilometres.

65



East area crews are based at 65 fire stations.

As at 31 March 2022 1,427 SFRS service delivery personnel* were based in the East, of those, 1,412 are uniformed staff.

1,412 uniformed staff



- 19. At the time of publishing this report planning for the North SDA inspection is well underway. The large number of fire stations, the remoteness of many of these resources and their presence on islands, predominantly Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles will no doubt bring an additional level of challenge to HMFSI teams carrying out this inspection. However, we are confident that the SDA inspection cycle will result in a significantly reduced turnaround when compared to the former LAI system.
- 20. With two of the SDA inspections complete, our own subjective assessment is that the system works and has produced the benefits envisaged.

Thematic inspections

21. In addition to area-based inspection work, we undertake thematic inspections on specific subjects. Since 2021, seven thematic inspections of the SFRS have concluded and reported:

Year Issued	Thematic Inspections	Local Area Inspections	Service Delivery Area Inspections	Other Focussed Inspections
2021		Midlothian LAI		COP26
		Argyll and Bute LAI		
2022	Health and Safety	Angus LAI		
	High rise firefighting			
2023	Climate change		East SDAI	CCMS
	Mental health			Industrial action
				Northern Ireland

22. The full titles and descriptions of the non-cyclical inspections in Scotland are listed below.

- **COP26 Climate Change Conference 2021: Scottish Fire and Rescue Service preparedness**
A self-directed inspection that considered the appropriateness of steps taken by the SFRS in preparing for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26).
- **Management of health and safety: an operational focus**
A self-directed assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of health, safety and welfare arrangements in place within the SFRS with a particular focus on health and safety in an operational context.
- **Arrangements for firefighting in high rise buildings**
A self-directed assessment of the SFRS's arrangements and readiness to fight fires in high rise buildings in Scotland.
- **The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Command and Control Mobilising System (CCMS)**
A self-directed inspection which examined the challenges and future of the SFRS's Command and Control Mobilising System.
- **Contingency Planning Arrangements for Industrial Action in the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service**
An inspection and report on industrial action preparation requested by Scottish Ministers.
- **Climate Change: managing the operational impact on fires and other weather-related emergencies**
A self-directed inspection that focused on the SFRS's operational activity due to climate change.
- **Mental Health and Wellbeing Support in the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service**
An examination of the mental health and wellbeing support arrangements for all staff within the SFRS.

23. The Chief Inspector's Plan identifies in advance our inspection work priorities. In 2022 unforeseen developments required the interruption of two of these thematic inspections to commence other short-term inspection work that had a higher priority. While not an ideal situation, the ability of the team members to put one inspection on hold and then return to complete the inspection, did demonstrate a flexibility of approach.

Northern Ireland



24. Northern Ireland does not have its own Fire Service Inspectorate, and whilst HMFSI has no statutory standing or powers outwith Scotland, there is a long-established professional relationship between HMFSI and the Department of Health (DoH) in Northern Ireland. HM Chief Inspector(s) of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service have been asked to provide advice to DoH on several occasions since this relationship was first established.
25. In 2022 the DoH requested that the Chief Inspector carry out an independent inspection of Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, and report on same.
26. This inspection ran for six months and required additional resources to be put in place to supplement the HMFSI team. The report, containing a total of eleven recommendations, was presented to the Permanent Secretary for Health in Northern Ireland in August 2023. The Chief Fire and Rescue Officer and the Board of the NIFRS welcomed the report and accepted its recommendations in full.

A look forward

27. Through the Chief Inspector's Plan, notwithstanding the need to address short notice issues within the fire and rescue environment in Scotland, it is possible to map out the work activity for HMFSI on a rolling annual basis. This planned approach allows the Inspectorate to add value and to contribute towards the drive for continuous improvement within the SFRS.
28. Our SDA and thematic reports always aim to produce a balanced and objective view that accurately reflects what we observe during the inspection process. Each report will note and comment on good practice that we find within the SFRS, but also make recommendations on the practices we observe where this is appropriate. These recommendations are the outputs for the HMFSI that allow us to contribute to the process of increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the SFRS, and thus advise Scottish Government Ministers accordingly.

Our inspection reporting process – adding value

29. By examining how the Service is delivering its functions we can add value by:

- applying independent and external assessment and public reporting which contributes to public accountability
- promoting reflection and learning that flows from credible professional perspectives and challenge
- highlighting good practice and areas for improvement
- acting as an improvement lever which contributes to making the SFRS self-reflective
- contributing to our own team's sector-wide learning
- addressing the 'insight gap' and level of self-awareness in the Service

30. Our Inspection work looks at service provision. It normally includes three interdependent broad evaluation models:

PROCESS – We consider a policy or function and look at how it is implemented and delivered, what actually happens in practice and what works well.

IMPACT – We look at implementation, consider benefits and what is being delivered (including any unintended benefits), objectives achieved and use of resources.

OUTCOME – We consider the benefit and effort to determine whether benefit justifies effort.

31. In summary we consider how the policy is delivered, the difference made, and the benefit derived from it.

Laying Our reports before the Scottish Parliament

32. Our inspection reports include findings on how well the Service is delivering its functions. They also identify innovation and good practice and normally contain recommendations for the SFRS. The Service has a legal requirement to ‘have regard’ to these recommendations and does so through the creation of an action plan and progress reporting to the Board of the SFRS.
33. While HMFSI is independent of the SFRS, we seek to maintain positive and professional working relationships with the Officers and managers of the Service. A key aspect of identifying and agreeing good practice and making recommendations within our inspection reports is the consultation processes that we go through with the SFRS prior to the initiation of an Inspection, and in advance of report publication. This allows the Inspectorate team to seek and then consider comments from the SFRS during the Inspection process.
34. For an Inspectorate report to be laid before Parliament it must go through an inspection and publication process. These processes have several key steps:
- agree and establish terms of reference for the inspection and the parameters of the Inspectorate’s field work
 - establish a Single Point of Contact within the SFRS, agree an interview and/or an investigations schedule
 - initiate the inspection field work, gather data, analyse information, consider outcomes and conclusions and compile the inspection report
 - ongoing informal consultation with the Service SPoC
 - three-week formal consultation period with SFRS when a final draft of the inspection report is produced
 - consider the SFRS’s formal consultation comments and produce the final draft for publication
 - three iterative stages of draft proofing with the Inspectorate’s appointed professional publications partner
 - agree date for publication and laying before the Scottish Parliament with the Scottish Statutory Instruments Unit
 - lay the inspection report before the Scottish Parliament and publish on HMFSI website
35. The working relationships that the Chief Inspector has established with the SFRS has ensured that the recommendations made through our inspection reports are fully understood and that active ownership of these recommendations is taken up by the Service. Our governance approach allows a journey of improvement to be taken alongside the SFRS whilst maintaining our independence and appropriate professional distance.
36. The Chief Inspector and members of his team attend a range of Board committee’s and SFRS groups that reflect upon and action the recommendations that are made in our Inspection reports. This approach closes the governance loop and provides positive confirmation of the Service having due regard of the reports that are laid before Parliament.

Other improvements

37. In addition to our new cyclical way of inspecting the SFRS, there have been several improvements introduced in the way that we operate.

Website



38. It has been a long-held desire of staff to have a dedicated website. In 2023 we introduced a new stand-alone HMFSI web site. The web address is <http://www.hmfsi.scot>. The new arrangement replaces the previous approach where our online presence comprised a number of pages within the Scottish Government website. Our website now reflects our style and underlines the reality that HMFSI is an independent organisation. The website is much more intuitive and helpful to users and allows us to upload our reports and post relevant information without relying on third-party assistance.

Relationships and engagement

39. Engagement with the SFRS management team has improved with HMFSI inspectors developing appropriate working relationships with SFRS strategic level managers aligned to job functions and areas of special interest. This new arrangement ensures that both the Inspectorate and the SFRS are updated routinely on key developments and strategic direction across a wide range of business areas. This engagement takes the form of regular scheduled face to face information exchange sessions between the aligned Service and Inspectorate staff members.

“As Chief Officer of the SFRS, I am committed to continuous improvement and welcome the professional, value adding, scrutiny applied by HMFSI. Whilst we fully respect the statutory role of the Chief Inspector, we have fostered a healthy working relationship built on trust and mutual respect.”

Ross Haggart

Chief Officer
Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

The team



40. There is a small and effective team at HMFSI which supports the Chief Inspector. The HMFSI team comprises four Assistant Inspectors (3.5 full time equivalent - FTE), one inspection Manager (0.6 FTE), and two key members of support staff (1.6 FTE).
41. Details of each team member is contained on our website.

SFRS Secondees

42. There is a long-standing arrangement between the SFRS and HMFSI that has enabled regular opportunities for secondees from the Service to work within the inspectorate team. The aim is always to generate value for the SFRS through secondees being exposed to situations that enable them to gain valuable experience and to grow professionally.

Our 75th anniversary



43. In November 2023, to mark the 75th anniversary of the formation of HMFSI, a sponsored reception was held at the Scottish Parliament, allowing the work of the Inspectorate to be recognised and celebrated. Our ongoing scrutiny work enables Scottish Ministers and Members of Scottish Parliament to be kept fully informed of the work that SFRS undertakes to safeguard the communities of Scotland.
44. Among invited guests were those who currently play a significant role in the work of HMFSI, or who have done so previously. The attendance at the event of a number of former Chief Inspectors was particularly pleasing as it allowed their previous valuable work within the Inspectorate to be recognised. Other guests included the Minister for Victims and Community Safety; MSPs from across political parties; current serving members of HMFSI in Scotland; members of the Board of the SFRS; the Chief Officer of the SFRS, members of the SFRS Senior Leadership Team; and members of the Scottish Government's Fire and Rescue Unit.

Summary

45. Over the past seventy-five years HMFSI has provided scrutiny of the fire service in Scotland through its work and inspection programmes. Our aim has been, and continues to be, to assist with a journey of improvement for the Service as it seeks to fulfill its commitment to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the people of Scotland.



© Crown copyright 2024

ISBN: 978-1-910349-51-9

PPDAS7994224

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

APS Group Scotland