

REPORT REFERENCE NO.	PC/21/4
MEETING	PEOPLE COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	23 JULY 2021
SUBJECT OF REPORT	ANNUAL FITNESS TESTING UPDATE
LEAD OFFICER	DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER
RECOMMENDATIONS	<i>The Committee is asked to note the improvement in performance on Firefighter Fitness Testing as set out within this report together with the action being taken to address the HMICFRS cause for concern as identified in paragraph 1.5.</i>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<p>Her Majesties Inspectorate of Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) visited the Service in 2019 and subsequently wrote to the Service with a formal Cause for Concern that the Service could not assure itself that all members of operational staff could meet the minimum fitness levels required to perform the role of a firefighter.</p> <p>The Service implemented a new fitness test and has now completed two cycles of annual testing for operational staff in both 2019 and in 2020. In 2020, the testing also included senior officers within the organisation.</p> <p>HMICFRS revisited the Service to check progress against the Cause for Concern in the first week of March 2021. They then wrote to the Service in May 2021 commented that, although good progress had been made and a positive trend of fitness pass rates was evident, there were some improvements identified regarding data recording and storage and the and Service hadn't yet been able to fully test the new Fitness policy due to the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Fitness testing is underway for 2021 with improved data collection and storage. The Service welcomes the HMICFRS inspection in autumn 2021 and hopes that the Cause for Concern for Fitness testing is lifted though it should be noted that due to COVID-19 restrictions not all Fitness tests will be available for 2021.</p>
RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	Existing resource
EQUALITY RISKS AND BENEFITS ANALYSIS	A People Impact Assessment was undertaken in the development of the Physical Fitness Policy and an ERBA has been completed.
APPENDICES	<p>A. Fitness Testing Timeline</p> <p>B. HMICFRS Cause for Concern revisit letter</p>

BACKGROUND PAPERS	None
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1. **BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. HMICFRS undertook their first annual assessment of fire and rescue services in 2018/19. The assessment examined services' effectiveness, efficiency and how well they look after their people. During the visit HMICFRS highlighted that the service had not conducted annual fitness tests for some operational staff and were concerned that the Service could not assure itself that all members of operational staff could meet the minimum fitness levels required to perform the role of a firefighter. At that time, the Service had stopped undertaking fitness tests whilst a trial of the Drill Ground Test was undertaken (as described in Appendix A). HMICFRS identified Fitness testing as a Cause for Concern and wrote to the Service in December 2019 (Appendix B).
- 1.2. The Service responded by undertaking an annual fitness assessments, introducing a new Physical Fitness Policy and adding an additional post to the Fitness team.
- 1.3. The Service was anticipating that a full range of annual fitness assessments would be in place in 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, however, the Service has had to restrict the type of tests available. Despite these restrictions, the Service has been successful in operating interim Fitness Assessments through 2020 including testing for officers. The Service has seen a significant improvement from a pass rate (Green & Amber categories) of 73.82% in 2019 to an 87.60% pass rate in 2020, an improvement of 13.78%. The full test results are included within this report at section 2.
- 1.4. HMICFRS Inspectors revisited the Service in March 2021 to review progress against the cause for concern. They then wrote to the Service in May 2020 (Appendix C) commenting that, although good progress had been made and a positive trend of fitness pass rates was evident, the Service hadn't yet been able to fully test the new Fitness policy due to the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure there are sufficient resources. They also found that out of 51 records sampled, one was not in line with policy and six were either recorded inconsistently or had missing data. Inspectors also commented that a further improvement could be for the Service to collect equality data for the annual assessments in line with 3 yearly medicals.
- 1.5. The Service has responded to these findings and now has a central repository for all Fitness data that also includes equality data. Data cleansing has been carried out to bring test records in line with policy. The Fitness team has moved department from Human Resources into Service Delivery where there is additional administration resource available and capability to ensure the policy has adequate resources to carry out testing. A fitness assurance review has been carried out by the Service assurance team to ensure that HMICFRS feedback has been fully implemented with the results due to be reported to the Executive Board in July 2021.

1.6. The Service will be unable to fully implement the full range of Fitness Testing in 2021 due to continued COVID-19 restrictions, however, this will be reviewed at regular intervals in line with Government guidance. Annual testing is underway with the results due before April 2022.

2. **ANNUAL FITNESS ASSESSMENT TEST RESULTS**

2.1. The current figures on operational staff fitness testing are shown below with also a comparison with the annual fitness testing from 2019:

Operational staff (Firefighter to Watch Manager)	2020	2019
Green	1,007 (72.13%)	1044 (67.31%)
Amber	216 (15.47%)	101 (6.51%)
Red (removed from duty)	173 (12.39%)	406 (26.18%)
Total	1396	1551

2.2. 1,223 of 1,396 operational staff (Firefighter to Watch Manager) achieved a Green or Amber rating from this year’s annual tests = 87.60%. The comparative pass rate from 2019 was 73.82%. This is an improvement over a year of 13.78%.

2.3. In addition, operational officers (Station Manager to Chief Fire Officer) were tested in 2020 as set out in the table below:

Operational Staff - Officers (Station Manager to Chief Fire Officer)	2020
Green	20 = 86.95%
Amber	3 = 13.04%
Red (removed from duty)	0
Total	23

2.4. The monitoring of performance against fitness testing (% of Operational staff who have passed the annual fitness test and three yearly medical) is one of the measures considered elsewhere on the agenda for this meeting.

2.5. The Committee is asked to note the improvement in performance on Firefighter Fitness Testing as set out within this report together with the action being taken to address the HMICFRS cause for concern as identified in paragraph 1.5.

JOE HASSELL
Deputy Chief Fire Officer

FITNESS TESTING TIMELINE

2016: Three yearly fitness tests in conjunction with occupational health medicals placed on hold in order for a 12 month trial of the new nationally proposed Drill Ground Fitness Test (DGT). DSFRS also contributed 30 data sets for the national Fire Fit / Bath University research project.

2017: Drill ground test research project conducted within DSFRS and results presented to EB and also at national Fire Fit conference (November 2017). This research project focused on the impact of adopting the DGT as the sole fitness test within the organisation.

2018: Fitness testing paused to determine results of project. Draft Fitness Policy and ERBA completed.

2019: Inspection by HMICFRS who highlighted cause for concern as the service could not ensure whether its workforce were fit for duty. Fitness testing added to Corporate Risk Register. Immediate measures (bleep test) implemented for all station based staff in September and October. Fitness Policy approved by EB and put into operation.

The resumption of fitness tests in conjunction with three yearly medicals re-introduced. A third full time fitness advisor employed in order to help comply.

2020: Policy updated with Officer Fitness testing and additional annual fitness tests to allow for greater choice regarding diversity. These include Bleep Test, Treadmill Walk Test, 1.5 Mile run Test and DGT, there is also the option for a gas analyser test. However due to the Covid 19 pandemic the policy was not able to be fully implemented, which resulted in a second year of Bleep tests only.

2021 (present): Policy updated to reflect amendments to amber group and the addition of officer testing. HMICFRS revisit with resulting recommendations which have been implemented.