Emergency services sector update

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Introduction

Welcome to RSM's latest Emergency services sector briefing which provides a useful source of insight into recent developments and publications affecting the sector.

Since our previous edition, the sector has seen a number of changes following the arrival of a new Prime Minister. With Boris Johnson moving to number 10, his cabinet reshuffle saw Priti Patel appointed as the new Home Secretary, replacing Sajid Javid. The Prime Minister has since announced a police recruitment drive to employ 20,000 new officers, with the aim of making our streets safer. The drive to deliver more frontline officers will start in September with the launch of a national campaign, led by the Home Office. Mr Johnson has said that he wants recruitment completed over the next three years. To support this, the government had announced a new national policing board, the first meeting of which was attended by senior policing figures. The government has also lifted emergency stop and search restrictions as part of their efforts to tackle violent crimes, making it simpler for forces to stop and search someone without needing reasonable grounds for suspicion. A stop and search pilot has been rolled out to all 43 forces across England and Wales.

In this edition, we look at progress made in the delivery of the Emergency Services Network (ESN). The already delayed ESN, intended to replace Airwave, is likely to be pushed back further than expected and the government's already increased forecast costs are highly uncertain, according to the National Audit Office's report.

We also delve into a number of police publications from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS). These include the Inspectorate's report on effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy of police forces (PEEL), an annual assessment of policing in England and Wales providing an overview of findings of inspections conducted over the past year, and a report highlighting the inconsistent approach in tackling fraud.

In looking specifically at fire and rescue services, we cover HMICFRS overview of the second tranche of independent inspections, the Home Office's statistics on fire and rescue incidents and the Local Government Association's guide for fire authority members.

We hope you find this update a useful source of insight. As ever, if you have any queries, or have any suggestions for topics for future editions, please contact either myself, or your usual RSM contact and we will be delighted to help.

Daniel Harris
National Head of Emergency Services and Local Government

Police and Fire

Progress on delivering the Emergency Services Network

The National Audit Office (NAO) has published a report examining the progress made in delivering the Emergency Services Network (ESN). The ESN, funded by the Home Office, Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), the Scottish and Welsh governments, and by the emergency services that will ultimately use it, is the government's selected option to replace the Airwave system. The ESN was intended to 'allow users to take advantage of high-speed mobile data' and cost less than Airwave.

By 2017, the Home Office realised that its plan for delivering ESN was 'not achievable' and announced a reset of its approach in September 2018, which involved revising the whole programme. The report examines the implications of the 2018 'reset', and what this means for the ESN programme.

Key points include:

- in strengthening its programme management, the Home Office adopted a staged approach to ESN development;
- the NAO notes that the new approach will require the Airwave system to be extended by three years, with the contract ending in December 2022, with the Home Office still having the option to extend this further;
- in February 2019, the Home Office re-forecast the cost of its new strategy for ESN to be £9.3bn to 2037. This is an increase of £3.1bn compared with the 2015 business case, of which, £1.4bn is the 'cost of extending the Airwave contract', £0.5bn is an 'increase in contingency' and £1.2bn reflects a 're-forecasting of all other costs';
- the ESN is projected to deliver benefits of £1.5bn, of which £756m is financial savings and £718m is the economic benefits. Representing the largest economic benefit, the ESN is expected to save each police officer five minutes on each shift compared with other arrangements;
- the NAO notes that the Home Office's cost forecast is uncertain due to a number of assumptions made, most significantly, the timetable for switching off Airwave;
- the NAO predicts that under a potential 'near worst-case scenario', the Airwave shut-down could be delayed by four years, from the current date in the Airwave contract of December 2022 to December 2026;
- despite the progress made by the Home Office, the key technology for ESN is not yet 'proven in real-world conditions' and there are risks that parts of the system will not be available in time;
- the Home Office lacks clarity on how the various components of the ESN will work together as a 'single, coherent system';

successful implementation of the ESN will depend on whether emergency services are satisfied that this is an 'adequate replacement' for Airwave, raising the risk of further delays;

the Home Office does not have a 'coherent plan' for switching off Airwave. The plan currently in place contains 'significant uncertainty';

emergency services have raised concerns about the affordability of implementing the ESN, with some users concerned that additional costs will place further financial pressures on the wider range of services they deliver;

the NAO notes that the Home Office is taking longer than it expected to renegotiate the programme's main contracts;

there is no agreement in place on who is to be responsible for the ESN service once it is live; and

the NAO concluded that the Home Office's management of this programme has 'represented poor value for money.'

The NAO has set out a number of recommendations, including that the Home Office:

- should test its overall programme plan, determining whether the new schedule for launching ESN and closing Airwave is achievable;
- should determine how all necessary ESN technology will be integrated;
- once fully operational, ensure appropriate arrangements for managing ESN are established with both sponsors and users; and
- will create a contingency plan that explains what it will do if the 'technology on which the overall ESN programme is dependent does not work.'

Questions for committee's consideration

- Have you considered whether you need a risk on your risk register around the associated costs/ management of the ESN once it goes live?
- Have you been sighted on the contract implications of the extension of the Airwave contract including service delivery and equipment replacement and any contingency plans if the ESN technology fails?

Police

Time for police to choose how to tackle fraud

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) has published the report 'Fraud: time to choose – an inspection of the police response to fraud.' The report follows its inspection of the effectiveness and efficiency of the police response to fraud commissioned by the Home Secretary. The inspection took place between March and July 2018 and looked to assess whether forces have a well-designed strategy for tackling fraud; whether the necessary capacity, capabilities and partnerships are provided by organisational structures; and whether high-quality responses are given to victims of fraud. Key findings from the report include:

1. the law enforcements response to fraud is 'disjointed and ineffective'. HMICFRS notes that a national strategy for tackling fraud is not in place. Despite some efforts made on good practice, it is not always 'disseminated or widely adopted';
2. there was little evidence on the effectiveness of fraud-related initiatives being reviewed;
3. it is unclear 'who is responsible for fraud-related activities or what the expected level of performance is';
4. fraud was 'generally not prioritised' which resulted in analysis that was limited;
5. the proportion of staff dedicated to fraud varied considerably with some forces having small fraud investigation units of two staff while others have no dedicated fraud team;
6. HMICFRS were told that resources have moved away from fraud to priority crimes;
7. HMICFRS noted that some frauds, including cases that are complex or complicated, were assigned to investigators who were not appropriately trained;
8. during the inspections, HMICFRS found that there was a delay of up to three months on processing cases;
9. good examples of locally led fraud prevention work was found. HMICFRS also notes that the cases dealt with by specialist fraud investigators were 'generally investigated well';
10. some organisational structures were deemed to be 'not working well' albeit there was a small number of police forces with 'local strategies or clear guidance' on how they planned to tackle fraud; and
11. 'vulnerable victims receive a good service', but the majority of victims do not. HMICFRS notes that victims were often failing to receive advice on fraud prevention and there was little evidence that forces sought victim satisfaction information.

Questions for committee's consideration

- How does your force compare with the main findings of the HMICFRS review and are action plans in place to address weaknesses?
- What ongoing assurance do you receive that fraud is being managed/identified, and that sufficient fraud training is in place?
- Have you received any second or third line assurance that systems are in place to tackle fraud robustly?

HMICFRS has set out 16 recommendations to the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) Coordinator for Economic Crime, Chief Constables, the Home Office and the Economic Crime Strategic Board.

Recommendations to the NPCC Coordinator for Economic Crime include:

- to publish a timetable for implementing the revised 'Know Fraud system', clearly outlining the services that are to become available at each stage of implementation, so forces are able to make use of each service as 'early as practicable';
- redesign the 'National Fraud Intelligence Bureau dissemination for enforcement documentation' for easier interpretation and use for recipients; and
- to provide guidance to Action Fraud and Chief Constables.

Chief Constables:

- should publish their force's policy for responding to and investigating allegations of fraud.

The Home Office:

- should publish information regarding its agreement with City of London Police to act as the national lead force for fraud.

The Economic Crime Strategic Board:

- should extend its remit to be inclusive of 'all forms of fraud against individuals and businesses, not just serious and organised fraud.'

Questions for committee's consideration

- Have you considered the recommendations and how they should be taken forward?
- Has your Chief Constable published their force's policy?

PEEL spotlight report

HMICFRS has published the 'PEEL spotlight report: a system under pressure.' The report on the effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy of police forces (PEEL) provides an overview of the emerging themes from the first group of 2018/19 Integrated PEEL Assessment reports. These themes are based on findings from 14 police force reports. Key points from the report include:

1. in relation to the overall effectiveness judgement, one force was graded as 'outstanding', 12 as 'good' and one as 'requiring improvement';
2. for the overall efficiency judgement, three forces were graded as 'outstanding', eight as 'good' and three as 'requiring improvement';
3. for the overall judgment of legitimacy, one force was graded as 'outstanding', 11 as 'good' and two as 'requiring improvement;
4. a wider range of activities are undertaken by officers and staff, in turn leading to crimes being investigated by staff that are 'inexperienced and underqualified' and 'often without good enough supervision';
5. despite pressures, several forces were developing good practice in how they utilise technology to better manage their demand and resources;
6. the health and wellbeing of the workforce is affected by the pressures of demand. It is noted that while forces were taking action on wellbeing, officers and staff do not 'always feel' that they are able to access the support offered;
7. changing demand and confined resources are leading to higher workloads, longer working hours, and cancellation of leave and rest days;
8. HMICFRS found that there were some forces that were not monitoring their 'use of stop and search well enough'; and
9. to meet the changing demand, forces are 'refocusing their resources'.

Questions for committee's consideration

- Are you sighted on how your force performed and whether there are any improvement areas (with action plans) or areas of significant risk?
- Are there any lessons that can be learnt from this and applied to your force?

State of policing

HMICFRS has published its 'annual assessment of policing in England and Wales 2018.' The report provides an overview of the findings of HMICFRS' inspections conducted over the last year, including its PEEL inspections, youth offending services inspections and child protection inspections.

Overall, HMICFRS found that the forces inspected are performing well, yet some are 'straining under significant pressure as they try to meet growing complex and high-risk demand with weakened resources.' This pressure has increased since 2017 and is affecting different forces in different ways.

Other key points include:

- the criminal justice system is 'dysfunctional and defective' in some respects, with the Inspectorate noting that crime and disorder will continue to increase unless improvements are made;
- it is often the most vulnerable people that enter the criminal justice system;
- almost all costs in the criminal justice system are incurred after the crime has been committed. It is highlighted that prevention is much cheaper than cure and is also an important factor for the public. Following HMICFRS's perception survey, two thirds of respondents stated that they are interested in what the police are doing to prevent crime. The public's top priorities for policing were responding to emergencies and preventing crime;
- despite improvements, there remains some inconsistency in the way forces identify some vulnerable groups and allocate the right specialist resources to investigate crime against them;
- there is a 'mismatch between police funding and public expectations' where police funding arrangements do not take into consideration the 'unique circumstances of each force' and funding is provided on 'too short-term a basis.' Principally, there is a 'widening gap' between the public's needs and the police's capacity and capability to meet them;
- police in poorer areas are more stretched and therefore people in those areas less safe. Each force should receive a proportion of funding that recognises the characteristics and policing challenges of the area the force operates in. However, police services are not presently funded this way and 'not all forces receive their fair shares';
- four years ago, the Home Office postponed their plans to fix the limitations in the funding formula. The Inspectorate points out that the inequities in police funding 'should not be allowed to continue';
- there is a clear need for 'multi-year settlements.' In relation to funding, police forces need 'certainty, stability and predictability' and settlements that are short-term are 'incompatible with efficient and effective long-term planning.' It is essential that the police are given the funds to invest for the longer term, particularly in technology, to become more efficient;
- should the funding formula be revised, and multi-year settlements become the norm, neither would solve the bigger issue faced by the police: the 'widening gap between the needs of the public and the police's capacity and capability to meet them';

- whilst the demand for policing is changing and becoming more complex, few forces have plans in place to meet the demands they have identified;
- several forces are developing good practice in how they use technology to manage their demand and resources better;
- the change and pressures in demand affect the health and wellbeing of the workforce;
- some forces are not 'monitoring their use of stop and search well enough';
- HMICFRS has received and analysed the first year's force management statements (FMSs) from all 43 forces (now required as part of the inspection process). The Inspectorate notes that the first FMSs are 'too focused on being a snapshot of today' and need to 'reflect and explain forces' plans to be more effective and efficient' in the longer term; and
- FMSs need to be developed collaboratively to achieve the maximum benefit from the investment that the FMS represents for the police service.

Questions for committee's consideration

- Are you sighted on the outcome of the HMICFRS inspections and the pressures faced by your force?
- Have you got assurance on the force demand model vs financial plan, how one impacts the other and what this means for the future of the force?
- How does the FMS fit into the force assurance map?

Home Office allocates £35m to police forces for violence reduction units

Former Home Secretary, Sajid Javid provisionally allocated £35m to set up violence reduction units (VRUs). The funding will be allocated to Police and Crime Commissioners in 18 local areas. VRUs will take a 'multi-agency approach, bringing together police, local government, and other key partners to tackle violent crime and its underlying causes.'

As presented in the Serious Violence Strategy published last April, the introduction of VRUs is a key element of early intervention being pursued by government and are funded from the £100m serious violence fund announced in March. In seeking to tackle violent crimes, each local area will set out plans indicating ways in which they will utilise 'their provisional allocation to build a public health approach delivering both short and long-term action prior to being awarded the funding.' The Home Office will work with VRUs to evaluate how the funding is being utilised to reinforce the response to serious violence.

Questions for committee's consideration

- If you have received this funding, are you assured your force has considered how this money will be spent and how the effectiveness can later be measured?
- How does this fit in with your long-term strategy/ police and crime plan priority in this area?

Fire

Fire and rescue service inspections

HMICFRS has published an overview of the first independent inspection into fire and rescue services (FRSs) for 12 years. The report covers 16 fire services which were part of the second tranche of inspections. Findings from inspections of 14 services were published in December 2018, and the final tranche of 15 reports will be published later this year.

The inspections focused on three key areas: the 'effectiveness' of FRSs in keeping people safe from fire and other risks, how 'efficient' FRSs are at keeping people safe from fire and other risks, and how well do FRSs look after its 'people' including how well they train, manage and support their staff. As part of its inspection, HMICFRS gave each FRS a graded judgement on each of these areas. Key findings include:

- in relation to the overall effectiveness judgement, nine FRSs were graded as 'good' and seven FRSs were graded as 'requires improvement';
- for the overall efficiency judgement, nine FRSs were graded as 'good and seven FRSs were graded as 'requires improvement';
- for the overall judgment of people, eight FRSs were graded as 'good', seven as 'requiring improvement' and one as 'inadequate';
- services are able to respond effectively when the public need help however HMICFRS notes that they are concerned with the resources available to support staff;
- there were some services where firefighters were working with information that was out-of-date or inaccurate, or were unable to efficiently access information due to poor technology;
- HMICFRS notes that they are concerned about the ways in which services protect the public through the 'regulation of fire safety.' The Inspectorate highlights that 'services need to be confident that people who are responsible for fire safety in buildings are making sure they are safe';
- while some services are well resourced, others are struggling to execute their core functions of prevention, protection and response effectively;
- overall, the gradings given under the people pillar are more positive in this tranche compared to the previous group inspected. There is an increased focus on health, wellbeing and mental health support;
- HMICFRS notes that not a lot of progress is being made to improve workforce diversity and services do not have a workforce that reflects their communities;
- there is variation in the way things are done including how often 'high-risk premises should be audited', how 'risk should be mitigated', and how 'response standards are calculated';
- despite services undertaking a range of prevention work, sometimes this work isn't organised in order of priority, so resources aren't always focused on those at most risk. HMICFRS also notes that this is 'very rarely evaluated' and so consequently, services cannot always be certain that they are achieving what was hoped;
- almost half of the services inspected are using IT systems that are broken, dated or unreliable. Some services rely on using 'inefficient paper-based systems', which is holding back their productivity;
- HMICFRS highlights that services are often working in isolation and notes that by working collaboratively there is potential for new ideas to be adopted, whilst being more cost-effective in the long term; and
- not enough fire services are evaluating, reviewing and monitoring their collaboration activities.

Questions for committee's consideration

- Has the authority reviewed the key HMICFRS findings against their own organisation to see if there is any learning that could be applied?
- Are you assured that your service is taking sufficient action in this area?

Fire and rescue incident statistics

The Home Office has published statistics on fire and rescue incidents in England for the year ending December 2018. Key statistics include:

- fire and rescue services (FRSs) attended 576,586 incidents, an increase from 565,777 (or two per cent) in the previous year;
- of all incidents attended by FRSs, fires accounted for 31 per cent, fire false alarms accounted for 40 per cent and non-fire incidents accounted for 29 per cent;
- FRSs attended 177,844 fire incidents, a five per cent increase from the previous year and 167,620 non-fire incidents, a decrease of two per cent; and
- FRSs attended 231,122 fire false alarms, a three per cent increase compared with the previous year (224,034).

Fire authority members guide

The Local Government Association (LGA) has published its 'Fire authority members guide' for new members. The guide provides information on the various support and training opportunities available, including: the 'Leadership Essentials Programme' to help members develop skills in a specific area; the Firefighters' Pension Scheme Manager; and culture, diversity and inclusion 'masterclasses'.

The guide also outlines the roles and responsibilities of fire and rescue authorities and provides an overview of governance models and LGA membership structures.

Questions for committee's consideration

- Have you made this available to your authority members and compared your arrangements to the guide?

Sources of further information

NAO
'Progress on delivering the Emergency Services Network'
https://www.nao.org.uk/report/progress-delivering-the-emergency-services-network/

HMICFRS
'Time for police to choose how to tackle fraud'
https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/news/news-feed/time-for-police-to-choose-how-to-tackle-fraud/

HMICFRS
'PEEL spotlight report'
https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/peel-spotlight-report-a-system-under-pressure.pdf

HMICFRS
'State of policing'
https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/state-of-policing-the-annual-assessment-of-policing-in-england-and-wales-2018/

Home Office
'Home Office allocates £35m to police forces for violence reduction units'
https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-office-allocates-35-million-to-police-forces-for-violence-reduction-units

HMICFRS
'Fire and rescue service inspections'
https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/fire-and-rescue-service-inspections-2018-19-tranche-2.pdf

Home Office
'Fire and rescue incident statistics'
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fire-and-rescue-incident-statistics-england-year-ending-december-2018

LGA
'Fire authority members guide'
https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/10.35_New_Fire_Authority_Members_Guide_WEB_0.pdf

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