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Surrey’s smokescreen over Fire Service failings

19 September 2023



Dear Editor,

Last week saw the publication of His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Report of Surrey Fire and Rescue Service.

The accompanying press release from the Conservative Leaders of SCC headlined the fact that the “Inspectors praised our fire and rescue service’s cultural improvements and the positive behaviours that were demonstrated during their visit”. Residents might therefore be forgiven if they were to think that the Inspection Report itself was something to celebrate.

However, the HMICFRS Report makes 11 judgments on the Fire Service in Surrey and, of the 11 areas inspected, just one is good and the rest judged as adequate and below.

Under the watch of the Conservatives in Surrey, key factors relating to keeping our residents safe; preventing fire and risk, public safety through fire regulation, responding to fires and emergencies and the best use of resources, all require improvement. And seven of the 11 judgments show the service as less than adequate.

Crucially, our Fire Service Officers are also being failed, with the Inspectors reporting concerns over the lack of adequate training for incidents in tall buildings, failures to identify high-risk premises and delays to the upgrade of vehicles.

Worryingly, the Inspectors also say, “We were disappointed to find that the service hadn’t made the progress we expected since our 2021 inspection”.

The lack of openness regarding the Inspection outcomes is unacceptable. However, far more serious are those judgments themselves. In a letter to the Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety I have called for a plan to turn this situation around, to be formulated as a matter of urgency. Our residents, our local businesses and our Fire Officers deserve much better than this.

Yours faithfully,

Eber Kington

Surrey County Councillor (Residents Association – Ewell Court, Auriol & Cuddington).

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Image: Councillor Eber Kington

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