

Fire & Rescue Service

Effectiveness, efficiency and people 2018/19

An inspection of Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service



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About this inspection

This is the first time that HMICFRS has inspected fire and rescue services across England. Our focus is on the service they provide to the public, and the way they use the resources available. The inspection assesses how effectively and efficiently Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service prevents, protects the public against and responds to fires and other emergencies. We also assess how well it looks after the people who work for the service.

In carrying out our inspections of all 45 fire and rescue services in England, we answer three main questions:

1. How effective is the fire and rescue service at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?
2. How efficient is the fire and rescue service at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?
3. How well does the fire and rescue service look after its people?

This report sets out our inspection findings. After taking all the evidence into account, we apply a graded judgment for each of the three questions.

What inspection judgments mean

Our categories of graded judgment are:

- outstanding;
- good;
- requires improvement; and
- inadequate.

Good is our 'expected' graded judgment for all fire and rescue services. It is based on policy, practice or performance that meet pre-defined grading criteria, which are informed by any relevant national operational guidance or standards.

If the service exceeds what we expect for good, we will judge it as **outstanding**.

If we find shortcomings in the service, we will judge it as **requires improvement**.

If we find serious critical failings of policy, practice or performance of the fire and rescue service, we will judge it as **inadequate**.

Service in numbers



Public perceptions

Bedfordshire

England

Perceived effectiveness of service
Public perceptions survey (June/July 2018)

84%

86%



Response

Bedfordshire

England

Incidents attended per 1,000 population
12 months to 31 March 2018

9.0

10.2

Home fire risk checks carried out by FRS per 1,000 population
12 months to 31 March 2018

3.2

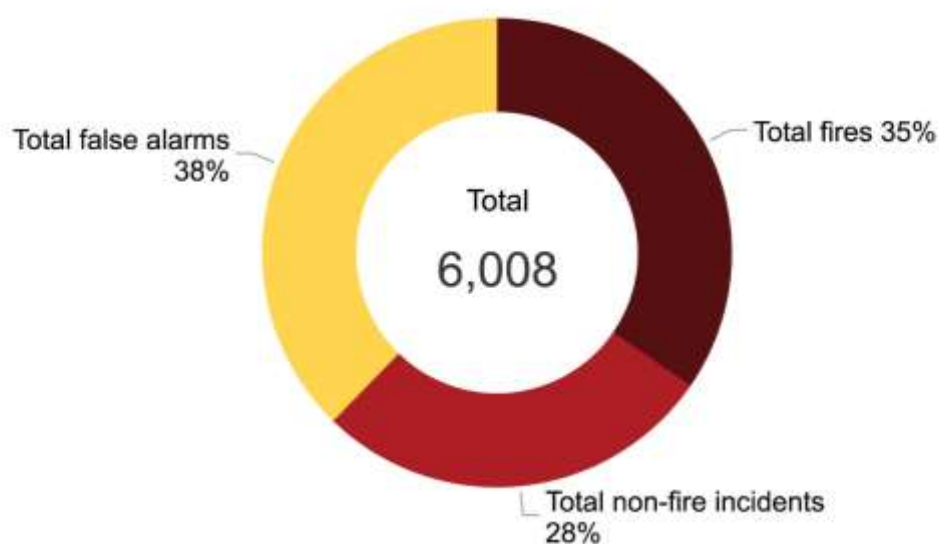
10.4

Fire safety audits per 100 known premises
12 months to 31 March 2018

6.7

3.0

Incidents attended in the 12 months to 31 March 2018





Cost

Bedfordshire

England

Firefighter cost per person per year
12 months to 31 March 2018

£23.31

£22.38



Workforce

Bedfordshire

England

Number of firefighters per 1,000 population
As at 31 March 2018

0.6

0.6

Five-year change in workforce
As at 31 March 2013 compared with 31 March 2018

-4%

-14%

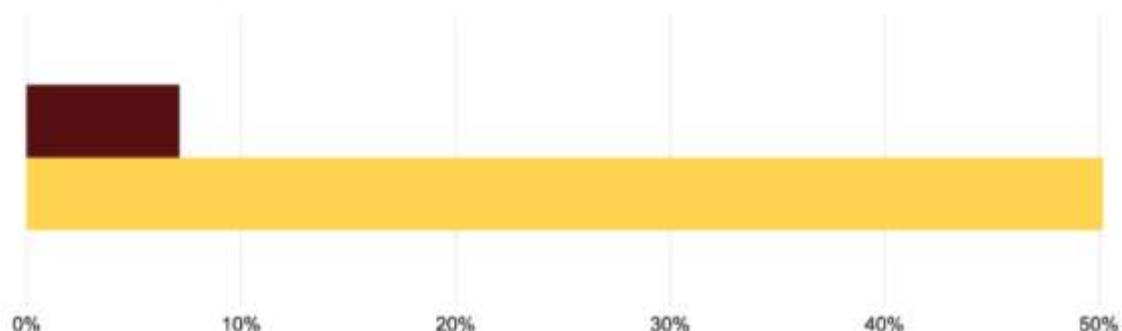
Percentage of wholetime firefighters
As at 31 March 2018

72%

70%

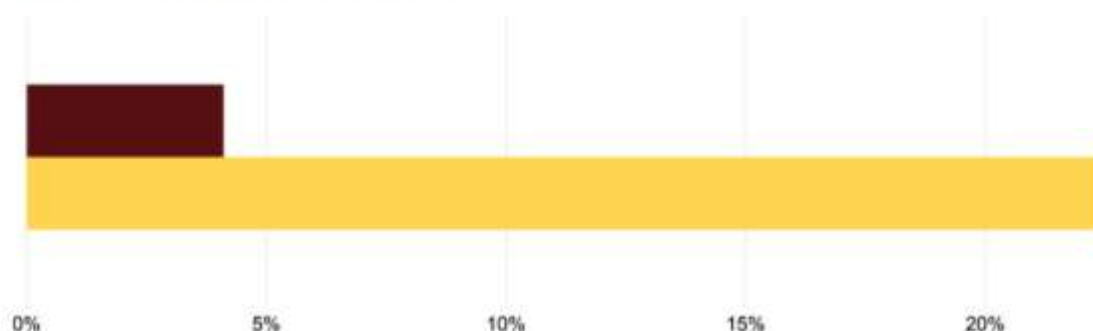
Percentage of female firefighters as at 31 March 2018

● Female firefighters ● Female residential population














Percentage of black, Asian and minority ethnic firefighters as at 31 March 2018

● BAME firefighters ● BAME residential population



Please refer to annex A for full details on data used.

Overview

 Effectiveness	 Good
Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies	 Good
Preventing fires and other risks	 Requires improvement
Protecting the public through fire regulation	 Requires improvement
Responding to fires and other emergencies	 Good
Responding to national risks	 Good
 Efficiency	 Requires improvement
Making best use of resources	 Requires improvement
Making the fire and rescue service affordable now and in the future	 Requires improvement



People



Requires improvement

Promoting the right values and culture



Requires improvement

Getting the right people with the right skills



Good

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity



Requires improvement

Managing performance and developing leaders



Requires improvement

Overall summary of inspection findings

We are satisfied with some aspects of the performance of Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service. But there are areas where the service needs to make improvements.

The service is effective at keeping people safe and secure. It is good at:

- understanding risk;
- responding to emergencies; and
- responding to national risks.

But it does need to improve how it prevents fires and other emergencies and the way it uses fire regulation to protect the public.

It should improve how it looks after its people. Specifically, it should do better at:

- promoting the right values and culture;
- ensuring fairness and promoting diversity; and
- managing performance and developing leaders.

But it is good at getting the right people with the right skills.

It needs to provide a more efficient service. In particular it needs to improve the way it uses resources. And it needs to improve the affordability of its service.

Overall we would like to see improvements in the year ahead.

Effectiveness



How effective is the service at keeping people safe and secure?



Good

Summary

An effective fire and rescue service will identify and assess the full range of foreseeable fire and rescue risks its community faces. It will target its fire prevention and protection activities to those who are at greatest risk from fire. It will make sure businesses comply with fire safety legislation. When the public calls for help, the fire and rescue service should respond promptly with the right skills and equipment to deal with the incident effectively. Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service's overall effectiveness is good.

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service is good at understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies. It uses data from partners to help set its priorities. Station plans reflect risks and priorities. The service uses social media more and more often to communicate with local people. But it should engage better with local minority communities. It gathers risk information about buildings well. It regularly tests response plans for high-risk buildings.

Generally, the service directs its extended [home fire safety checks](#) (known as [safe and well visits](#)) at those most likely to be at greatest risk from fire. Not all operational staff fully understand the value of these visits.

We found limited evaluation of prevention work. Also, not all staff are sufficiently aware of [safeguarding](#) and of how to refer [vulnerable people](#) for support.

While the service takes a risk-based approach to fire safety audits, it could improve its prioritisation. It should monitor its protection resources to maximise efficiency.

Both operational [wholetime](#) and [on-call](#) staff do fire safety audits. The service has:

- taken effective action with partners against rogue landlords; and
- reduced false fire alarms between the 12 months to 31 March 2017 and 12 months to 31 March 2018.

But it needs to be sure that staff use enforcement powers when needed.

The service responds well to incidents. It takes risk into account. It seeks to understand why response times are getting longer.

Some supervisors don't understand the up-to-date national guidance. This relates to incident command. The service must also learn more from debriefing. It should share this more regularly with frontline staff.

The service prepares well with partners for major incidents. We found that staff know what procedures to follow, and test plans regularly. But not all operational staff know how to access risk information from other fire and rescue services.

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies



Good

Bedfordshire FRS is good at understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies. But we found the following area in which it needs to improve:

Areas for improvement

- The service needs to improve how it engages with the local community to build up a comprehensive profile of risk in the service area.

All fire and rescue services should identify and assess all foreseeable fire and rescue-related risks. They should also prevent and mitigate these risks.

We set out our detailed findings below. These are the basis for our judgment of the service's performance in this area.

Understanding local and community risk

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service has a comprehensive community risk profile, which takes into account data from partner and other organisations. It uses this profile to shape its community risk management plan (CRMP), commonly referred to as an [integrated risk management plan](#), and aligns activities to risks.

To help protect people, the service uses a range of socio-demographic data sources. It uses this data to classify people into risk groups. These groups define how at risk a person may be from fire within their home. The service uses this data to help understand risk and to direct its prevention activities.

To reduce the risk of fires in buildings, the service uses a risk-based inspection programme to ensure that each year it inspects the highest risk buildings.

To evaluate the operational risk that higher-risk premises may present, the service has an established process to identify and gather site-specific risk information. We found this to be well understood by operational staff.

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service understands its broader community risks, as defined through the community risk register. It works well as an integral part of the [local resilience forum](#) (LRF) and has plans to support responses to larger incidents with other emergency services and organisations.

The service carries out some activities to inform the public of its functions. Many fire stations increasingly use social media to engage and communicate with their local communities. While we found positive examples of this on the part of the service, we identified some inconsistency across the county.

The service makes good use of Beds Fire Alert, a community messaging service for communicating key messages and gaining community feedback. We found positive examples of this being used to ask the public for its views on proposed changes to the service's website.

The service seeks out customer feedback. Following a fire, safe and well visit or fire safety audit, it uses customer satisfaction surveys to gain feedback on its service, for which it receives a high level of return.

Data provided by the service on the 12 months to 31 March 2018 showed that 94 percent of people, in their feedback to the question: "How satisfied were you with the overall service provided?" responded that they were "very satisfied".

Having an effective risk management plan

The service strategically assesses every six months how its risks may change in the future, for example, as a result of major changes to road or rail infrastructure, or proposed new building and housing developments. This information informs its CRMP, which the service plans to refresh in 2019; the current plan uses data as old as 2010.

Across the service, each station has a station plan. This is considered annually and sets out the local objectives in relation to prevention, protection and operational activity. They clearly link the risks contained within the CRMP and corresponding local activity. Responsibility for the local provision of each station plan is devolved to the relevant borough command team.

The population of Bedfordshire presents a broad and complex range of diversity and vulnerability. We found that some opportunities to better engage with hard-to-reach communities had been missed. The service needs to do more to understand and identify the people who are at greatest risk from fires among these diverse communities. This could lead to other benefits, such as better engagement.

Maintaining risk information

Information about building risks within the county is systematically gathered by staff. It is used to prepare for an operational incident, such as a fire or rescue. The service categorises the level of building risk, and this determines the inspection frequency and operational response, namely the number of fire engines that the service will send to a reported emergency at that address.

The service has robust plans to test its operational response at high-risk buildings. It does this through familiarisation visits, and desk-top and practical exercises.

Practical exercises often use multiple fire engines and other emergency services to test the response plan against a mock incident.

When undertaking fire safety inspections, operational staff also ensure that operational risk information is gathered. Risk information is available through fire engine [mobile data terminals](#) (MDTs). We found that the service's operational teams have a good working knowledge of accessing local risk information through their MDTs.

Through its participation in the LRF, the service is aware of its role in larger multi-agency incident responses. The community risk register is well understood, and we found evidence of the active testing of response plans. These tests comprise both desk-top exercises and live practical exercising at high-risk sites.

Preventing fires and other risks



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure it targets its prevention work at people most at risk.
- The service should ensure staff carry out prevention work competently. This includes understanding how home fire safety checks help keep people safe. The service should ensure staff understand how to identify vulnerability and safeguard vulnerable people.
- The service should evaluate its prevention work, so it understands the benefits better.

We set out our detailed findings below. These are the basis for our judgment of the service's performance in this area.

Prevention strategy

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service's CRMP sets out its strategic vision for preventing fires, which focuses mainly on house fires. Detail is limited on wider prevention activities, such as road safety, water safety and arson. The overall objectives for prevention activities are unclear.

The service has a dedicated prevention strategy, known as the community safety strategy 2014–18. Similarly to the CRMP, the information that it contains doesn't provide specific objectives against prevention areas.

The service's station plans define local risk and target prevention activity. Through these plans, staff have a good understanding of what is required from them, with specified prevention activities across the year. These plans are used to direct activities and are positive for local communities.

Promoting community safety

The CRMP defines the service's broader prevention objectives. The station plans use [Experian data](#) to obtain local risk information; they are used to target local prevention activities. Staff carry out a range of activities to promote safe practices. These are based on an assessment of local risk and include arson reduction, road safety, preventing chimney fires and electrical fires. Local community safety activities are also based both on national, and the service's own, campaign schedules.

In the 12 months to 31 March 2018, the rate of fires per 1,000 of the population in Bedfordshire was higher than the national rate. However, over the same period, the number of non-fatal injuries from fires in Bedfordshire was low compared with other services in England.

To reduce the number of house fires, the service conducts extended safe and well visits. The service began undertaking extended prevention activity in April 2017. In addition to fire safety advice, these visits enable staff to give broader advice covering areas such as slips, trips and falls, and smoking cessation.

Using its data sources to define at-risk groups, the service seeks to target its safe and well visits towards those most likely to be at greatest risk from fire. The service provides training for partner organisations, such as adult social services, so that they, too, can identify high-risk addresses and make referrals for safe and well visits.

The service knows further work is needed to better target those most at risk, in relation to safe and well visits and other community safety activities. Improvement to the referral system is needed: how referrals are prioritised and the timescales in which they are made. At present, the service doesn't prioritise referrals made from partner organisations (for example, risk assessments made by adult social care services) over those identified as a 'potential risk' through its own data.

We found that many operational staff did not show an understanding of the link between the wider aspects of safe and well visits, for example alcohol and smoking dependency, and keeping people safe from fire. We found that operational staff are reluctant to ask broader questions during visits. This meant not all staff were carrying out safe and well visits competently. Vulnerability is linked to the occurrences of fires, although staff did not generally understand this. The service should ensure its staff understand vulnerability. Similarly, we found safeguarding knowledge to be inconsistent, both among operational staff and central specialist teams, in relation to identifying vulnerable people and on how to refer to other organisations for support.

In the 12 months to 31 March 2018, Bedfordshire FRS conducted three safe and well visits per 1,000 population. This rate is lower than many other services in England. The service recognises that it can improve in this area and has increased the targets for visits.

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service conducts limited evaluation of its prevention activities, such as reviewing the benefits of safe and well visits and of local campaigns. In a rare example of the service making an internal assessment, it withdrew its support for an initiative relating to arson prevention following concerns about its value. The service should evaluate its main prevention activities, to identify learning and improve outcomes.

We found positive examples of the service working with partner organisations in the Luton area, such as the Safe at Home scheme.

Road safety

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service carries out a variety of road safety activities. This includes promoting the national Brake campaign, [Biker Down](#) courses, and work with the Fire Bike Team. Through the Bedfordshire Strategic Road Safety Board, the service conducts road safety initiatives with other organisations. Its involvement in promoting road safety extends further: during the recent World Cup tournament, it worked with a local council to raise awareness of the dangers of drink driving.

The service's local operational teams support road safety initiatives according to their station plans. Plans are used to identify the at-risk road user groups. Staff then devise and conduct local campaigns to promote road safety, targeting those groups. Staff we spoke to were passionate about the value of these activities.

As with other aspects of prevention, in our inspection we weren't able to see how, or whether, the service was evaluating some of these activities. Evaluation is needed to ensure the service understands which activities are most effective in promoting safety messages, so that good practice can be identified and shared more widely.

Protecting the public through fire regulation



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure it makes better use of its specialist resources in implementing its risk-based inspection programme.
- The service should assure itself that its enforcement plan prioritises the highest risks and includes proportionate activity to reduce risk. It should also include appropriate monitoring and evaluation.
- The service should assure itself that its operational staff carry out fire safety audits competently.

All fire and rescue services should assess fire risks in buildings and, where necessary, require building owners to comply with fire safety legislation. Each service decides how many assessments it does each year. But it must have a locally-determined, risk-based inspection programme to enforce the legislation.

We set out our detailed findings below. These are the basis for our judgment of the service's performance in this area.

Risk-based approach

The service identifies buildings that require inspection through its risk-based inspection programme. This is used to define both the level of risk and the inspection frequency for a building. The service's aim is to inspect all buildings deemed to be of the highest risk each year.

A team of specialist protection officers carry out fire safety audits on high-risk buildings. In the 12 months to 31 March 2018, Bedfordshire FRS inspected 89 percent of the 112 buildings identified as of high risk.

The service also carries out a large number of audits on non-high-risk premises. In the 12 months to 31 March 2018, it audited 1,321 premises, which equates to 6.7 percent of all known premises in Bedfordshire. This is higher than the proportion of known premises audited in England as a whole.

It is positive to note that, in addition to the specialist staff, both wholetime and on-call firefighters carry out protection audits of low-risk buildings. Operational staff go through a four-day internal training course before undertaking fire safety audits. However, the service should assure itself that operational staff are appropriately trained; its internal training course doesn't enable staff to achieve the accredited status for carrying out certain types of audits, in accordance with national guidance.

The organisational oversight and monitoring of the service's protection function could be improved. At the time of our inspection, the service was drafting a new strategy to guide its approach to protection activity. There is no formal performance management system to monitor the activity of the central protection team. Protection staff told us that they regularly reached their individual target number of inspections and had capacity to do more. Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service should ensure it makes the full use of its specialist protection staff. Moreover, there is no formal quality assurance process to review and learn from inspection findings. The service should ensure quality assurance as part of its audit process.

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service's approach to inspections is adaptable, to meet changes in risk and demand. Following the Grenfell Tower fire, all residential high-risk buildings across the county were inspected.

The service is currently developing a bespoke software package to support the administration of the protection department. It should ensure that this software is effective and works well within its overall ICT system.

Through its work with premises' owners, the service has implemented a policy change, which is not to attend automatic fire alarms in the daytime in certain circumstances. This risk-based approach means that less time is wasted attending false alarms, while firefighters and appliances are available to attend genuine emergencies more quickly. In the 12 months to 31 March 2018, the service attended 2,266 false alarms, a reduction from 2,635 over the same time period in 2017.

Enforcement

The service's approach is one of working with and supporting businesses to ensure they comply with fire regulations, with legal enforcement action considered only as the last resort. There have been no fire and rescue service-initiated prosecutions since at least 2011. Over the past few years, the levels of recorded enforcement and prohibition notices served against building owners who do not comply with fire safety legislation have been consistently low.

The service should assure itself that it makes effective use of its enforcement powers.

The service receives legal support through a contract with another fire and rescue service. This contract is currently being reviewed; the service is considering how best to secure appropriate legal advice to support protection action.

Working with others

The service works with partner organisations to support and educate business owners through events such as 'business action days'.

As noted earlier, we found evidence of effective work with premises' owners to reduce the burden of unwanted fire signals. This happens at premises protected by automatic fire detection and fire alarm systems.

The service has well-established collaboration with partner organisations to tackle rogue landlords in the Luton area. This has resulted in many successful prosecutions under housing legislation, which have been led by the local authority.

The service has an agreement with another [fire and rescue service authority](#) to provide technical support, such as fire engineering advice, should it be required.

The service's customer satisfaction survey report for the 12 months 31 March 2018 shows that 97 percent of 474 responders were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the fire safety audit they had received.

Responding to fires and other emergencies



Good

Bedfordshire FRS is good at responding to fires and other emergencies. But we found the following areas in which it needs to improve:

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure staff know how to command fire service assets assertively, effectively and safely at incidents.
- The service should ensure it has an effective system for staff to use learning and debriefs to improve operational response and incident command.

We set out our detailed findings below. These are the basis for our judgment of the service's performance in this area.

Managing assets and resources

The service has access to a range of operational resources. These enable it to respond to incidents involving people, property and environmental risks. The service is aware of the varying risks associated with different incidents types, such as fires in high-rise dwellings and multi-vehicle road traffic collisions. It has pre-determined attendance protocols for different incident risks, so that the appropriate resources can be sent to incidents.

The service has 14 fire stations, eight of which are retained stations that have fire engines staffed by on-call staff. There are three further on-call staffed fire engines based at [wholetime stations](#). However, the availability of fire engines staffed by on-call firefighters varies. Maintaining daytime availability for many on-call fire engines is a known challenge for the service. The service tries to manage staffing deficiencies by moving staff and fire engines to different locations as needed. If there is an incident and the nearest fire engine is not available, the next nearest will be called to attend the incident. This may delay the time for getting a fire engine to an incident.

The service's on-call staff turnover is high. As at 31 March 2018 on-call made up 23.4 percent of all staff headcount. In the 12 months to 31 March 2018 on-call staff accounted for 37.9 percent of all staff leavers from the FRS. As such, the service has a continual need for recruitment and training. On average, it takes an on-call firefighter three years to achieve competence in the full range of skills required.

The service has implemented a new system of attending incidents to ensure the most appropriate fire engine is [mobilised](#). However, this is not fully integrated with the system used by control staff. Operational staff continue to update their location on their MDTs. However, these are not always accurate on location. As a result, control staff continue to confirm the exact location by contacting the fire engine. The service is in the process of procuring an improved mobilising system, which should resolve this issue.

The use of previous years' data for average attendance times for each station helps to ensure that the most appropriate fire engine is sent. However, we found that the service does not deploy neighbouring fire service resources as frequently as it could, even where they may be nearer and have a faster attendance time. The service should ensure that it sends the most appropriate response to an incident.

We asked the service to provide data on its target and actual availability of fire engines for one week in June 2018. The data we received indicated that the availability target was not always met. During our inspection, we noted that on-call fire engine availability varied: a small number were unavailable during our visits. When a fire engine is unavailable, it is likely to increase the attendance time to an incident. It can also reduce the service's effectiveness at protracted incidents.

In the 12 months to 31 March 2018, the service recorded 28 failures to mobilise a fire engine to attend an incident. However, we found that even in those instances when the service was unable to mobilise a fire engine, it was always able to find an alternative to attend, although the response was probably slower.

During our inspection week, the service sent ten fire engines and specialist vehicles and four senior officers to an emergency incident. This was a pre-determined incident response. Although no support was available from a neighbouring service, it achieved a full incident response; on-call fire engines were used to maintain appropriate fire cover across the rest of the county.

Response

The service is in the process of adopting the new [national operational guidance](#). A gap analysis has been carried out, and an action plan is to be implemented.

At present, the service works to the 2014 (not to the available 2018) guidance in relation to breathing apparatus.

The service has not yet adopted the latest national guidance procedures for searching buildings, which involve the use of breathing apparatus by firefighters. The service is working with neighbouring fire and rescue services to do this as part of a regional partnership. The service should ensure it uses the most effective search and rescue procedures, and that it can operate with other services at cross-border incidents.

All of the service's fire engines have MDTs, which are used to access local risk information. Staff are proficient in accessing and using various types of risk information.

Command

All operational commanders undertake an initial training course. They then maintain their skills through e-learning packages. All commanders have an annual or bi-annual assessment, depending on their seniority.

We found knowledge gaps in certain technical areas of some supervisory-level commanders. These concerned changes that had been made to national command practices in 2015. The service should ensure all commanders have the required level of current technical command knowledge. Our checks of the command knowledge of more senior commanders showed a good level of understanding.

We found that there is no role-specific command assessment for strategic commanders; a more junior-level assessment has been adapted for this purpose. However, it is positive to note that strategic command assessments are peer-assessed by another service.

Keeping the public informed

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service's website contains information about the service it provides. However, information about the latest news and current incidents is out of date.

The service uses a number of social media platforms to engage with the public. Centrally, a corporate Twitter account is updated regularly with safety messages and information of note (although there is little about incidents).

Each fire station has its own Facebook site, which station staff see as largely positive. Confidence in the use of social media varies across the service and its stations.

[Fire control](#) staff undertake regular fire survival training, to advise people making emergency calls what to do if they are involved in a house fire. However, the processes in relation to high-rise building fires were unclear; staff did not have consistent levels of fire survival knowledge. The service should ensure control staff have a clear understanding of the advice to be given to those in high-rise buildings.

Evaluating operational performance

The service sets targets to measure its attendance times to incidents. Currently, it isn't meeting its target for attendance times to critical fire incidents. The average time taken for the first fire engine to attend a [primary fire](#) has been increasing since 2013. The service is in the process of commissioning research on its response performance to understand this better.

The practice of hot (immediate) debriefing straight after an incident is widespread; all commanders we spoke to are aware of the process. However, we noted that no structure is in place on how to conduct a debrief; practices varied across the service.

The service conducts a more formal debrief after incidents involving more than three fire engines. We found examples of where learning through experience had directly led to a change in operational practice and policy, such as a change of practice relating to cross-county radio-communication, and policy change relating to attendance at bariatric rescues.

All commanders we spoke to said they know how to feed information into the debrief process (in which a central team reviews information to seek out trends and learning). However, most operational staff are not aware of how to access learning from incidents or exercises in which they are not directly involved. The service should continue to ensure that all parts of the service are involved in the formal debrief process, and consider how to improve its dissemination of learning to support improvements.

Operational incident monitoring is in place. The service focuses on areas for specific scrutiny. They include road traffic collisions, bariatric cases and incidents involving breathing apparatus. Operational commanders we spoke to told us that feedback from this process was inconsistent and was normally limited to the specific areas for scrutiny, rather than command. As with the process of debriefing, we weren't able to see how learning is shared with the wider workforce.

We found that findings from fire investigations, most notably after serious and fatal house fires, are not shared consistently with staff. Doing so would help staff to better understand how fires start and develop, and how vulnerability affects people differently in fires. As well as supporting operational learning, use of this information would reinforce to staff the benefits of extended prevention activities undertaken during safe and well visits.

We found positive examples of the service contributing to [national operational learning](#) (NOL) and joint operational learning (JOL), and of using e-learning to communicate to staff learning from other services.

Responding to national risks



Good

Bedfordshire FRS is good at responding to national risks. But we found the following areas in which it needs to improve:

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure it understands national and cross-border risks and is well prepared to meet such risks.
- The service should ensure operational staff have good access to cross-border risk information.
- The service should arrange a programme of over-the-border exercises, sharing the learning from these exercises.

All fire and rescue services must be able to respond effectively to multi-agency and cross-border incidents. This means working with other fire and rescue services (known as intraoperability) and emergency services (known as interoperability).

We set out our detailed findings below. These are the basis for our judgment of the service's performance in this area.

Preparedness

The service is an active member of the county's local resilience forum (LRF). The forum prepares an annual plan of multi-agency exercises, in which the service takes part. This includes testing plans for dealing with events such as a major incident, widescale flooding, and major transport incidents. Incident preparation includes virtual and practical exercises and setting up tactical and strategic co-ordinating groups. Fire control and commanders have good knowledge of the procedures required in relation to major incidents.

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service has a marauding terrorist attack (MTA) capability. Plans are in place to prepare for an incident of this type. These are rehearsed through an exercise programme, often with other fire and rescue and emergency services. The most recent exercise programme took place in February 2018.

Fire control has an effective process to direct staff in what to do when attending a MTA incident. However, unlike other incident types, there are no prompts for the operator to challenge calls reporting such an incident, or to advise them on what information to take from callers. The service should consider providing call-handler guidance in this area.

Working with other services

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service shares a county border with four other fire and rescue services. It holds risk information for three of the neighbouring services which, if needed, can be accessed via fire engine MDTs. When tested, we found many staff are unaware of what cross-border risk information is held or how it can be accessed. We found some evidence of cross-border exercising, but no evidence of how regularly this is carried out.

The service should ensure it can work effectively with neighbouring fire and rescue services. Operational staff should know how to access cross-border risk information via their MDTs, and the service should develop a regular programme of cross-border exercises.

The service intends to align some of its operational practices with Cambridgeshire FRS. It shares a single area commander operational rota with Cambridgeshire. Area commanders from both services are part of the rota, to increase resilience across both service areas in case of a significant incident.

Both services have intentionally procured the same type of command vehicle so that staff from either can operate the technology. They have also standardised some of their pre-determined incident attendances. Further collaboration through procuring the same fire control mobilising software will enable both fire controls to view and mobilise each other's assets, providing more resilience and opportunities for future collaboration.

Working with other agencies

The service works with other partner organisations, such as the police, ambulance and local authority, to prepare for non-premises-based risks. These include large community events, such as the Bedford River Festival. These events are normally managed through a safety advisory group (SAG), on which a representative from the service sits.

The service works well with such partner organisations to ensure an effective response to more significant incidents and events. The partner organisations we spoke to commented positively on working relations with the service, and on its willingness to share appropriate information and data. In terms of [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles](#), the service is better equipped because of the good working relationship between the service and the police.

Efficiency



How efficient is the service at keeping people safe and secure?



Requires improvement

Summary

An efficient fire and rescue service will manage its budget and spend money properly and appropriately. It will align its resources to its risk. It should try to keep costs down without compromising public safety. Future budgets should be based on robust and realistic assumptions. Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service's overall efficiency requires improvement.

The service bases its budget on realistic assumptions. But the service has taken limited steps to bring about efficient working practices. Its plans are largely based on what it did previously.

We found a lot of inefficient working practices at stations. These include:

- duplication;
- too much bureaucracy; and
- reliance on paper-based systems.

The service invested in some ICT. But it hasn't invested as much in improving working practices which are inefficient.

It is continuing to rely on using its financial [reserves](#), alongside its medium-term financial plan and efficiency plans, to ensure sustainability.

The service works well with partner bodies. It intends to collaborate further. But it should do more to evaluate the benefits to make sure it gets as much as it can from collaborating and other initiatives.

The service doesn't consistently monitor operational staff workload. This differs between stations. Control room costs are high. The service recognises this. It must make sure it uses resources effectively. It uses wholetime staff to fill staffing gaps at other stations. On-call staff aren't part of this process. The service should review this.

The service's operational equipment is good. Staff appreciate this.

Making best use of resources



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure it is making best use of its transformation reserve to improve how the service works.
- The service should ensure its workforce's time is used efficiently and effectively. This relates specifically to the use of wholetime and fire control resources, and the potential use of on-call staff in the strategic reserve system.
- The service should ensure it effectively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and outcomes of any initiatives. This should include collaboration.

We set out our detailed findings below. These are the basis for our judgment of the service's performance in this area.

How plans support objectives

The service has developed its budget using realistic planning assumptions for pay awards, non-pay inflation and expected levels of council tax precept. In anticipation of austerity measures, it started several years ago to look for cashable savings and has built up a transformation reserve totalling nearly £5m. This reserve is being used to mitigate the effects of budget reductions and is expected to be used entirely by March 2022. The service also has a general reserve.

The service has identified that it should increase its capacity to support organisational and operational improvements. There are plans to make modest investments in both its HR and ICT support by creating one new post in each function. There are a number of areas where the transformation reserve could be used to improve the service rather than simply meet a budget gap. For example, there could be further investment in technology to improve frontline processes, such as the administration of fire prevention activities, to enhance both efficiency and effectiveness.

Budgets are generally set using the previous year as the base, although we found a few examples of [zero-based budgeting](#). We saw evidence of budget scrutiny and challenge, with sizeable savings made as a result. Budgets are devolved to managers, who have some autonomy in reallocating funds within the year to meet local priorities.

Productivity and ways of working

As at 31 March 2018, the service employed the equivalent of 393 full-time equivalent firefighters of whom approximately 30 percent were on-call staff and approximately 70 percent were wholetime staff. The service has one wholetime 'day crewing' station. The remaining five wholetime stations are staffed on a shift system: 24 hours on duty followed by three days off. It is the only fire service in England using this working pattern. This shift pattern was introduced in 2010 and enabled the service to remove 24 posts.

The shift pattern has been well received by firefighters as it seeks to improve their work/life balance, providing flexibility for family commitments, and supports their health, safety and wellbeing. It has also resulted in a significant reduction in potential recruitment costs. Although the service has a station audit process, which considers station outputs, we found the levels of activities between stations were inconsistent. As a result, we are not satisfied that the service can show that it monitors and reviews the effectiveness of its workforce.

Working arrangements for on-call staff are subject to a review that began in 2015. While some progress has been made, the introduction of 'phased alert' (a system whereby only the required number of staff are called to attend incidents, rather than all who are on call), hasn't yet been implemented. On-call staff are unclear about the progress of the review and have concerns about how the changes may affect them.

Flexible working arrangements are in place for non-operational staff.

We saw evidence of flexible and resilient deployment; wholetime firefighters are moved between on-call and wholetime crews and stations. This is achieved through a strategic reserve process, which is managed by fire control and borough commanders. On-call staff are not included in the strategic reserve; the service should consider whether their inclusion would improve operational resilience.

In the 12 months to 31 March 2018, as a result of the recent reduction in wholetime firefighter posts, the service had a slightly 'top-heavy' management structure compared with other services: 10 percent of wholetime firefighters are at station manager level or above, compared with 9 percent nationally. The firefighter cost per head of population in the 12 months to 31 March 2018 is also slightly higher when compared with other services. The service recognises the need to make better use of fire control resources.

Collaboration

We saw many positive examples of the service working constructively with partner organisations and other agencies. These include sharing premises with police and ambulance services; joint procurement; and some joint provision of services, such as the Fire and Rescue Indemnity Company.

A shared ICT service with Cambridgeshire FRS is well established but limited in scope. It offers the potential for further collaboration to improve efficiencies and resilience. We saw more examples of the service working closely with others. They include 'ride along' schemes with other blue-light services, and work with licensing and housing authorities on rogue landlords and licensed premises.

However, such initiatives have been largely uncoordinated and lack thorough evaluation. Aside from some cost savings on premises and procurement, benefits aren't always considered or realised. Continuing initiatives haven't generally been systematically reviewed or evaluated.

Nevertheless, there is clearly an intent to do more in this area, especially with Bedfordshire Police. We welcome the recent introduction of the blue light collaboration board, a group set up to better coordinate the benefits achieved through collaboration.

Continuity arrangements

In conjunction with Essex FRS, business continuity arrangements are in place for the control room, telephone network, and wider area networks. We were told of some testing of these arrangements in fire control. However, the business continuity plan does not specify a testing and exercising regime, or timescales for review of the plan.

The service has an established ICT shared service with Cambridgeshire FRS. This ensures back-up arrangements exist at different locations to mitigate the threat of cyber-attack.

Making the fire and rescue service affordable now and in the future



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service needs to secure an affordable way of managing the risk of fire and other risks now and in future. Its future budget gap is increasing, but it has no plans to address and reduce it other than to use reserves. This is not sustainable.
- The service needs to make better use of technology to improve bureaucratic frontline working practices that rely on paper-based processes.

We set out our detailed findings below. These are the basis for our judgment of the service's performance in this area.

Improving value for money

The service has made realistic assumptions about its future income and costs. It has a saving and efficiency plan to 2021/22. Budgets have been subjected to scrutiny over a number of years, with substantial savings identified and placed in reserve. We didn't find evidence of a systematic review of service provision. Savings have been achieved by identifying opportunities to carry over underspends, rather than by the service examining the way it functions.

Although this approach has enabled the service to accumulate savings into a transformation reserve, it hasn't addressed the underlying budget gap. This gap is increasing every year and is expected to reach £1m by 2022. The service should make robust future plans to meet its forecasted gap past 2022.

Non-pay costs are actively managed; we found examples of joint procurement and the use of [framework agreements](#). We found the service to be well equipped; vehicles and other equipment and buildings are in reasonable condition. However, aside from the investment in central ICT infrastructure, there is evidence of widespread inefficient working practices in stations. Throughout the service, we found evidence of duplication, excessive bureaucracy and burdensome paper-based systems. It is clear that administrative and approval processes aren't subject to scrutiny or process improvement; this is needed if the service is to operate more efficiently and make the required savings.

Innovation

While the service has some innovative practices, there remains scope for innovation in some areas. Plans are largely based on what was done previously, with some marginal changes. There are strategies for managing the fleet and estate, but these essentially maintain the status quo.

Although the overarching CRMP links together strategies with individual station plans, it fails to identify better ways of achieving the service's objectives. There is little challenge to the established ways of doing things; we found no evidence of an approach based on benefits, or of effective evaluation of investments.

The service is a member of the Fire and Rescue Indemnity Company (FRIC). This company provides indemnity against risk normally covered by larger insurance premiums. In addition to making financial savings, the nine member FRSs work together to reduce risk and share best practice. We view this as a positive way to spread the risk and cost of mitigating claims across a number of fire and rescue services.

Technology is the service's biggest area of inefficiency. We consistently found staff expressing dissatisfaction about the lack of ICT provision to support their day-to-day activities, such as attending incidents, safe and well visits, and audits. We found systems used by staff to be cumbersome and unreliable; often paper-based and with layers of duplication and bureaucracy. Despite plans to provide staff with mobile data tablets and replace some existing MDTs, more change is needed to improve cost-effectiveness. The service is reviewing its processes and a number of projects are underway. However, the service recognises that more must be done to improve the way its front line and administrative staff work.

Future investment and working with others

The service told us that in addition to its transformation reserve of £5m, there is a general reserve of £2.6m. There is a further £6m of earmarked reserves, which the service intends to use for capital expenditure and to cover a variety of risks.

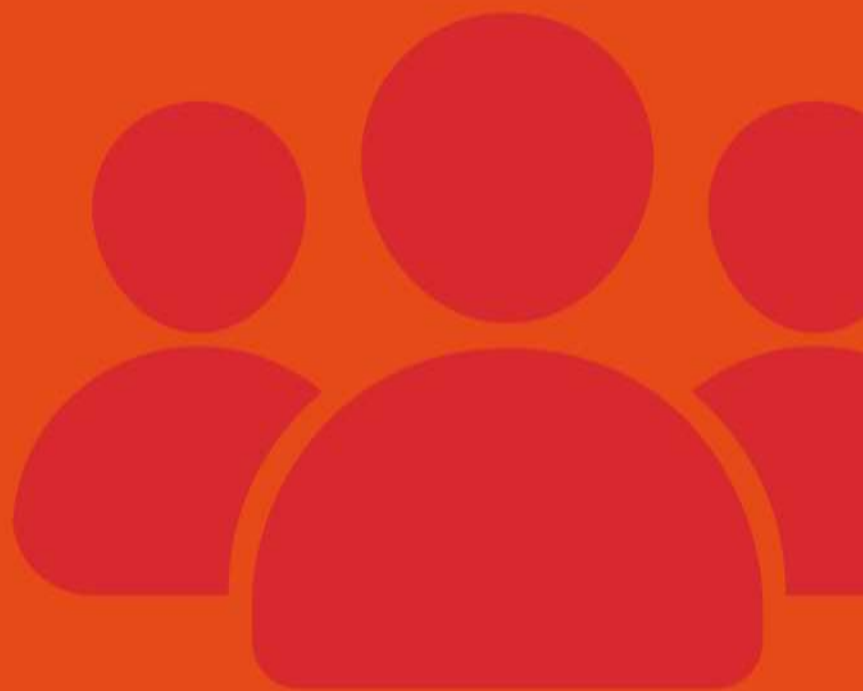
The service isn't using its transformation reserve to transform, but to meet an increasing budget gap. It should consider how to use this reserve more effectively.

We think it could be invested both in a rigorous operational review and in digital technology, to improve efficiency.

The service receives some income, although this is mainly through payments received from supporting other fire and rescue services, rental income, and payments associated with shared premises. The service has taken up some opportunities for additional funding through grants: a transformation grant from the Fire and Rescue Indemnity Company; and for its work with Bedfordshire Police.

The service's current arrangements for joint working aren't central to its work. They focus on sharing premises, better relationships and information exchange, rather than on collaborative work. Nevertheless, we were pleased to see it starting to collaborate more strategically, especially with Bedfordshire Police. Recently, a joint workshop with staff from both organisations identified more ways in which they can work together.

People



How well does the service look after its people?



Requires improvement

Summary

A fire and rescue service that looks after its people should be able to provide an effective service to its community. It should offer a range of services to make its communities safer. This will include developing and maintaining a workforce that is professional, resilient, skilled, flexible and diverse. The service's leaders should be positive role models, and this should be reflected in the behaviour of the workforce. Overall, Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at looking after its people.

Wellbeing and fitness of staff are priorities for the service. Staff value the occupational health team and the support that the service provides. The service carries out a staff survey every two years. The last survey, in 2017, raised concerns about the behaviour of some leaders. Staff do not have confidence in raising grievances. Although it has since made some progress, the service recognises it needs to do more.

The service is good at training staff. Training facilities are excellent. But some operational supervisors did not understand current guidance on commanding incidents. The service trains already competent on-call staff who join the wholetime service. This might be inefficient and the service is reviewing this.

Turnover of on-call staff is high. A project started in 2015 has yet to improve this. The service should make its workforce more representative of the communities it serves. Some staff do not understand the value of this, or the case for taking positive action to increase diversity. A wholetime recruitment process in 2017 did not improve the situation. The service has reviewed the process and is making changes.

Staff feel positive about the staff appraisal system. Completion rates are high. But the service has no formal talent management process. There is no process to identify high potential staff. Staff lack confidence in the promotion process. Some operational supervisors have been reluctant to apply for promotion. The service is trying to understand why.

Promoting the right values and culture



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure its values and behaviours are understood and demonstrated at all levels of the organisation.

We set out our detailed findings below. These are the basis for our judgment of the service's performance in this area.

Workforce wellbeing

Promotion of the wellbeing, fitness and healthy lifestyles of its workforce is a priority for the service.

The occupational health department is proactive in promoting health and wellbeing. We found evidence of regular communication on wellbeing promotion, including advice on nutrition, hydration and mental health. Staff from the department arrange events for the workforce, to raise awareness of specific health-related topics.

We found that staff see mental health as a priority for the service. Staff from the occupational health department have visited all its stations to discuss mental health; their work is supported by a mental health awareness e-learning package. Staff we spoke to were positive, both about the occupational health team and the employee assistance programme, which provides confidential advice and information on work and personal matters.

Wholetime and on-call staff have access to fitness equipment in gyms in all the service's stations. There are 54 members of staff trained to support physical training across the service.

The service has a [trauma risk management](#) (TRiM) process to provide support to staff following a [critical incident](#). Many staff we spoke to know of and value TRiM and know how to access this support. However, this wasn't the case for all staff we spoke to. The service should ensure that all staff know about TRiM, and how to seek out support.

The service is making positive steps to improve its management and review of staff sickness data. At present, the system for collating sickness data relating to on-call staff doesn't allow the service to review trends. It recently introduced a new ICT system to solve this. The new system is better able to record staff availability, and the service expects it to lead to better management of sickness records across the service.

Health and safety

The service's health and safety policy sets out both organisational and employee responsibilities to support safe working practices. The service consults with the workforce and representative bodies on the development of this policy.

Health and safety training, including manual handling (i.e. heavy lifting), is part of the new starter induction process. Health and safety responsibilities are given in job descriptions and person specifications. The service provides role-specific training for every level of service operation.

Fire safety audits of premises include a requirement to make a note of and report any hazards that could affect the safety of operational firefighters responding to an incident. When working alone, staff members book in and out of appointments with fire control, giving an address and predicted duration for the appointment. If fire control receives no contact within 60 minutes of the visit's scheduled conclusion, a follow-up call is made to check on the staff member.

Culture and values

The service has an organisational vision, which defines its objectives, priorities and values. This is displayed on posters in all its fire service buildings and communicated to the public via its website. However, it is not easy to find on the staff intranet.

Every two years, the service carries out a staff survey operated by an independent company. The most recent survey, in 2017, identified a significant number of concerns about the behaviour of some senior leaders, specifically, that some had overly autocratic management styles and disciplinary processes. Some management practices were seen as inappropriate.

Staff told us of a divide in the organisation between those based in the north and south of the county. Many staff spoke of mistrust in the disciplinary system; some matters were too quickly escalated for formal action and the resulting management action was deemed harsh. We learned that, following the 2017 survey, a number of disciplinary cases were reviewed, and decisions changed.

Following the recent staff survey, some senior managers were offered coaching and mentoring. However, the service could not confirm to us whether the relevant members of staff had taken this up.

Some staff told us they had seen recent improvements in the practices of some leaders. However, many staff doubted these improvements would last. It is clear that leaders still have to do more to demonstrate that they model and maintain the service's values.

The findings of the survey were used to develop the Moving Forward Together programme. Staff from across the service told us there has been some improvement to the organisation's culture since the launch of the programme.

Many staff were positive about the chief fire officer and his changes following the 2017 survey. These included introducing management briefing sessions and the 'ask the chief' initiative, and enhancing work with representative bodies.

Senior leaders told us the service has made improvements but acknowledged more work is needed to ensure that staff feel engaged and part of a positive culture.

The service recognises this as a priority area for improvement and is acting to address concerns.

Getting the right people with the right skills



Good

Bedfordshire FRS is good at getting the right people with the right skills. But we found the following area in which it needs to improve:

Areas for improvement

- The service should assure itself that its requirement for competent on-call staff who join as wholetime to complete a probationary training course is value for money and the best use of resources.

We set out our detailed findings below. These are the basis for our judgment of the service's performance in this area.

Workforce planning

The service is aware of the imbalance in its current senior management structure. There is a high ratio of senior managers. To address this, it intends to carry out a review of the service, including the management structure.

The service has a people strategy. However, a recent station manager recruitment process attracted no applications; the service needs to do more to understand the reasons for this.

The service recently appointed a new deputy chief fire officer, who joined from another fire and rescue service. It has started a national recruitment process for managerial roles. Following staff feedback, it recently cancelled an external transferee process, in order to allow internal candidates to apply for supervisory-level roles. The service has a significant number of staff who have been in positions of temporary promotion; some for months, and in a few cases, for over a year.

In 2017, the service began its first wholetime firefighter recruitment campaign in a number of years. Further wholetime firefighter recruitment has taken place in 2018.

On-call firefighters make up approximately 30 percent of firefighters, and the service relies on its on-call staff to enable it to provide the right level of cover to respond to fires and other emergencies. However, the turnover of on-call employees is a problem: 16 percent of on-call staff left in the 12 months to 31 March 2018. Exit interviews indicate the main reason for on-call staff leaving the service is that the rota system isn't family-friendly. The service has been aware for some time that improvements are needed. A project started in 2015 to review various aspects of the on-call system but this hasn't yet improved staff retention.

The service requires on-call staff who are successful in the wholetime recruitment process to undergo the same 12-week probationary trainee course as all new recruits. This applies even if they are fully competent in their on-call role. We recognise that when competent on-call staff go on recruit training, their presence enhances the course for all attendees. But the service could consider whether this maximises efficiency. Some staff are having to undergo training in areas where they have been assessed as competent, often for many years. In addition, in transferring from on-call to wholetime posts, staff do not automatically keep their most recent on-call rank; they will be employed at whatever rank the recruitment exercise is recruiting people for.

Learning and improvement

The wholetime and on-call staff we spoke to were consistently positive about the training they receive. They told us of their access to good quality training facilities and of the high standard of the training itself. On-call staff told us they appreciate the flexible approach to scheduling and the availability of the central training team, which provides them with good access to training.

Practical training is supported by a well developed e-learning system. Training records and requirements to maintain skills are managed well, both by individuals and their supervisors, who have good management oversight. We found that nearly all training records are up to date across all skill areas.

Through testing, we identified gaps in the technical knowledge of supervisory commanders. Specifically, we found knowledge gaps in command practices that were implemented in 2015. While there is no specific re-assessment in strategic command, staff should maintain competency, including through exercises and simulations.

To gain new skills, staff attend courses at the service's training centre, where they are instructed by specialist trainers. Responsibility for maintaining these skills then falls to individuals and line managers. Practical station-based training sessions are supported by technical learning through e-learning packages.

We note that there is periodic, central maintenance training in most safety-critical areas, such as fire behaviour and water rescue techniques. For example, operational staff are formally assessed in breathing apparatus competence every two years. The service also has online learning, mentoring, monitoring and periodic assessments in place for incident command.

The service should consider whether more standardised training input from its specialist trainers would better support maintaining the competence of its workforce, particularly for safety-critical training areas.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- To identify and tackle barriers to equality of opportunity, and make its workforce more representative, the service should ensure diversity and inclusion are well-understood and become important values of the service, led by chief officers.
- The service should assure itself that it has effective grievance procedures.

We set out our detailed findings below. These are the basis for our judgment of the service's performance in this area.

Seeking and acting on staff feedback

The service carries out a staff survey every two years. Its most recent staff survey identified some areas of culture and behaviour that needed exploring. It commissioned an independent research company to gain a better understanding.

One of the improvements that came out of the findings from the last staff survey was the 'ask the chief' initiative. This has been well received. It enables all members of the workforce to take part in online two-way communication sessions with the chief fire officer. Staff told us that senior leaders are becoming more accessible, and now have more contact with staff at stations. Staff also told us that the service had broadened the range of staff permitted to attend management briefing sessions, which was welcomed.

Groups have been established to gain staff views in certain areas. For example: a HR focus group with female firefighters to review operational welfare provisions; and the Voices Plus scheme, a new group set up for LGBT staff to provide feedback to the service.

We found improvements are still needed for staff to feel confident in raising and reporting problems. We found many staff do not have confidence in raising problems through the grievance procedure. Staff also told us they would be unwilling to use the service's confidential reporting line in case they were identified. We found that some staff didn't have confidence in speaking to managers outside of their immediate teams. Senior leaders acknowledge that cultural changes take time; they are actively trying to increase levels of trust across the workforce, to help staff feel more engaged.

Diversity

The service knows it needs to do more to increase the diversity of its workforce. To help with this, in 2017, a female firefighter focus group was established to gain feedback on women's experiences in the service and to help develop ways through which more women might be recruited. The service also hosts 'have a go' days for underrepresented groups: potential applicants can try some of the activities that form part of the recruitment process and speak to operational staff about the work. The service has recently attracted 14 'positive action volunteers' from its workforce to support future recruitment processes for wholetime and on-call firefighters (such as for the 'have a go' days). At the time of our inspection, it was recruiting for a new recruitment and positive action post.

The 2017 wholetime recruitment process didn't achieve the increase in the number of women and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) candidates and appointees that the service had hoped for. It has made efforts to learn from this, by ensuring the tests are not biased against underrepresented groups. It also conducted a comprehensive review of its recruitment processes; the proposed changes are intended to promote equal opportunity. It is important that the learning and leadership focus on improving representation within the workforce is also applied to on-call and support staff.

The service recognises it has more to do in relation to its workforce's equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). We agree: some staff we spoke to, including managers, do not understand the value of having a diverse workforce, or the rationale behind the positive action to promote the service as an employer of underrepresented groups.

Our sample review of training records for on-call staff found no records of any EDI training. For wholetime staff, some training was recorded, although many of these dated back to 2011. Non-uniformed staff receive EDI training as part of their induction. However, there was no evidence of a refresher period for this training.

We think more attention must be paid to ensuring that EDI is well understood across the workforce, and that senior managers themselves must demonstrate the organisation's commitment. A recent requirement to set EDI objectives has been added to senior leaders' appraisals.

Managing performance and developing leaders



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service should put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders.
- The service should ensure its selection, development and promotion of staff is open, transparent and fair.

We set out our detailed findings below. These are the basis for our judgment of the service's performance in this area.

Managing performance

The service's staff appraisal system has developed notably over the last three years and the completion rate is high. All staff have an annual appraisal, which is reviewed after six months. Appraisals are linked to a continual professional development payment for operational staff. They are subject to first and second-line manager review and sign-off. Appraisals that are held by HR are dip-sampled for completion standards.

The service supports staff well through its provision of bespoke training. Through their appraisals, staff can request additional training appropriate to their role. We found this process to be managed well; we saw that a significant number of requests had been reviewed and approved.

The service acknowledges that further training is required for some managers to better support the appraisals process. An internal review found that completion of appraisals is of varying standards, and objectives are not always set in a timely manner. Overall, however, we found that staff view the appraisals process as positive in setting personal goals and supporting development.

Newly-appointed commanders are allocated a senior manager to act as mentor and support them in command decision-making and use of tactics at incidents, while they develop competence and gain experience.

Data supplied by the service shows it has 145 staff members on development programmes. Their purpose is to provide extra training and support for those who have held their role for less than three years and aren't yet fully competent.

Firefighters expressed frustration at the lack of opportunity to develop other skills. Some would like to develop in more specialist roles, such as prevention, protection or training, but these posts are only for more senior staff.

Developing leaders

The service has a mix of uniformed and non-uniformed senior leaders.

The service doesn't have a formal talent management process, or one that seeks out high-performing or high-potential staff. There is no process in place to fast-track progression to a higher role. However, we did find examples of informal coaching and mentoring to support individuals' development.

For operational roles, there are prescribed development programmes to complete at each tier of promotion. This ensures role-specific development.

We found that many staff don't have confidence in the promotion process. A recent internal opportunity for promotion to the role of station manager didn't attract any applicants, despite some staff being on the middle manager development process. The service is considering the reasons for this.

Staff reported that, to be promoted to a substantive role, they would have to take on a position of non-shift working, i.e. daytimes from Monday to Friday. Many shift-based staff told us they felt reluctant to apply for promotion; giving up their existing shift pattern would negatively affect their family and work-life balance. Other factors relating to staff reticence to seek promotion that we were told of included potential loss of continual professional development payment and concerns about the management culture.

On-call staff told us that some felt little incentive to apply for promotion, particularly from the role of firefighter to crew manager. They told us there was very little difference in remuneration compared with the significant increase in responsibility and time commitment. We learned that, for [retained](#) watch managers who show high potential, there are no opportunities to join the wholetime system other than going through a full recruitment process, which would mean their loss of rank.

Some non-uniformed staff told us they believe a 'glass ceiling' exists, and that opportunities for their promotion or skill diversification are very limited. We found that, too often, the managers of largely non-operational teams are uniformed officers, limiting the opportunities for non-uniformed staff still further.

Annex A – About the data

Data in this report is from a range of sources, including:

- Home Office;
- Office for National Statistics (ONS);
- Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA);
- our inspection fieldwork; and
- data we collected directly from all 45 fire and rescue services in England.

Where we use published Home Office data, we use the period to 31 March. We selected this period to be consistent across data sets. Some data sets are published annually, others quarterly. [The most recent data tables are available online.](#)

We use different data periods to represent trends more accurately.

Where we collected data directly from fire and rescue services (FRSs), we took reasonable steps to agree the design of the data collection with services and with other interested parties such as the Home Office. We gave services several opportunities to validate the data they gave us, to ensure the accuracy of the evidence presented. For instance:

- We checked and queried data that services submitted if notably different from other services or internally inconsistent.
- We asked all services to check the final data used in the report and correct any errors identified. Data that services submitted to the Home Office in relation to prevention, protection and workforce figures was published in November 2018. This data was updated after reports had been checked by services, so we haven't validated it further.

We set out the source of Service in numbers data below.

Methodology

Population

For all uses of population as a denominator in our calculations, unless otherwise noted, we use [ONS mid-2017 population estimates](#). This is the most recent data available at the time of inspection.

BMG survey of public perception of the fire and rescue service

We commissioned BMG to survey attitudes towards fire and rescue services in June and July 2018. This consisted of 17,976 interviews across 44 local fire and rescue service areas. This survey didn't include the Isles of Scilly, due to its small population. Most interviews were conducted online, with online research panels.

However, a minority of the interviews (757) were conducted via face-to-face interviews with trained interviewers in respondents' homes. A small number of respondents were also interviewed online via postal invitations to the survey. These face-to-face interviews were specifically targeted at groups traditionally under-represented on online panels, and so ensure that survey respondents are as representative as possible of the total adult population of England. The sampling method used isn't a statistical random sample. The sample size was small, varying between 400 and 446 individuals in each service area. So any results provided are only an indication of satisfaction rather than an absolute.

[Survey findings are available on BMG's website.](#)

Service in numbers

A dash in this graphic indicates that a service couldn't give data to us or the Home Office.

Perceived effectiveness of service

We took this data from the following question of the public perceptions survey:

How confident are you, if at all, that the fire and rescue service in your local area provides an effective service overall?

The figure provided is a sum of respondents who stated they were either 'very confident' or 'fairly confident'. Respondents could have also stated 'not very confident', 'not at all confident' or 'don't know'. The percentage of 'don't know' responses varied between services (ranging from 5 percent to 14 percent).

Due to its small residential population, we didn't include the Isles of Scilly in the survey.

Incidents attended per 1,000 population

We took this data from the Home Office fire statistics, '[Incidents attended by fire and rescue services in England, by incident type and fire and rescue authority](#)' for the period from 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018.

Please consider the following points when interpreting outcomes from this data.

- There are six worksheets in this file. The 'FIRE0102' worksheet shows the number of incidents attended by type of incident and fire and rescue authority (FRA) for each financial year. The 'FIRE0102 Quarterly' worksheet shows the number of incidents attended by type of incident and FRA for each quarter. The worksheets 'Data fires', 'Data fire false alarms' and 'Data non-fire incidents' provide the raw data for the two main data tables. The 'Figure 3.3' worksheet provides the data for the corresponding chart in the statistical commentary.
- Fire data, covering all incidents that FRSs attend, is collected by the Incident Recording System (IRS). For several reasons some records take longer than others for FRSs to upload to the IRS. So totals are constantly being amended (by relatively small numbers).
- We took data for Service in numbers from the August 2018 incident publication. So figures may not directly match more recent publications due to data updates.

Home fire risk checks per 1,000 population

We took this data from the Home Office fire statistics, '[Home fire risk checks carried out by fire and rescue authorities and partners, by fire and rescue authority](#)' for the period from 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018.

Each FRS's figure is based on the number of checks it carried out and doesn't include checks carried out by partners.

Please consider the following points when interpreting outcomes from this data.

- Dorset FRS and Wiltshire FRS merged to form Dorset and Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.
- The England total hours figures for 'Number of Fire Risk Checks carried out by FRS' include imputed figures to ensure a robust national figure. These imputed figures are: '2016/17 – Staffordshire'.
- Figures for 'Fire Risk Checks carried out by Elderly (65+)', 'Fire Risk Checks carried out by Disabled' and 'Number of Fire Risk Checks carried out by Partners' don't include imputed figures because a lot of FRAs can't supply these figures.

Home fire risk checks may also be referred to as Home Fire Safety Checks by FRSs.

Fire safety audits per 100 known premises

Fire protection refers to FRSs' statutory role in ensuring public safety in the wider built environment. It involves auditing and, where necessary, enforcing regulatory compliance, primarily but not exclusively in respect of the provisions of the [Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005 \(FSO\)](#). The number of safety audits in Service in numbers refers to the number of audits FRSs carried out in known premises.

According to the Home Office definition, “premises known to FRAs are the FRA’s knowledge, as far as possible, of all relevant premises; for the enforcing authority to establish a risk profile for premises in its area. These refer to all premises except single private dwellings”.

We took this from the Home Office fire statistics, [‘Fire safety audits carried out by fire and rescue services, by fire and rescue authority’](#) for the period from 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018.

Please consider the following points when interpreting outcomes from this data.

- Berkshire FRS didn’t provide figures for premises known between 2014/15 and 2017/18.
- Dorset FRS and Wiltshire FRS merged to form Dorset and Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.
- Several FRAs report ‘Premises known to FRAs’ as estimates based on historical data.

Firefighter cost per person per year

We took the data to calculate firefighter cost per person per year from the annual financial data returns that individual FRSs complete and submit to CIPFA, and [ONS mid-2017 population estimates](#).

You should consider this data alongside the proportion of firefighters who are wholetime and on-call / retained.

Number of firefighters per 1,000 population, five-year change in workforce and percentage of wholetime firefighters

We took this data from the Home Office fire statistics, [‘Total staff numbers \(full-time equivalent\) by role and by fire and rescue authority’](#) as at 31 March 2018.

Table 1102a: Total staff numbers (FTE) by role and fire authority – Wholetime Firefighters and table 1102b: Total staff numbers (FTE) by role and fire authority – Retained Duty System are used to produce the total number of firefighters.

Please consider the following points when interpreting outcomes from this data.

- We calculate these figures using full-time equivalent (FTE) numbers. FTE is a metric that describes a workload unit. One FTE is equivalent to one full-time worker. But one FTE may also be made up of two or more part-time workers whose calculated hours equal that of a full-time worker. This differs from headcount, which is the actual number of the working population regardless if employees work full or part-time.
- Some totals may not aggregate due to rounding.

Dorset FRS and Wiltshire FRS merged to form Dorset and Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.

Percentage of female firefighters and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) firefighters

We took this data from the Home Office fire statistics, '[Staff headcount by gender, fire and rescue authority and role](#)' and '[Staff headcount by ethnicity, fire and rescue authority and role](#)' as at 31 March 2018.

Please consider the following points when interpreting outcomes from this data.

- We calculate BAME residential population data from ONS 2011 census data.
- We calculate female residential population data from ONS mid-2017 population estimates.
- Dorset FRS and Wiltshire FRS merged to form Dorset and Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.

Annex B – Fire and rescue authority governance

These are the different models of fire and rescue authority (FRA) governance in England. Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service is a combined FRA.

Metropolitan FRA

The FRA covers a metropolitan (large urban) area. Each is governed by locally elected councillors appointed from the constituent councils in that area.

Combined FRA

The FRA covers more than one local authority area. Each is governed by locally elected councillors appointed from the constituent councils in that area.

County FRA

Some county councils are defined as FRAs, with responsibility for fire and rescue service provision in their area.

Unitary authorities

These combine the usually separate council powers and functions for non-metropolitan counties and non-metropolitan districts. In such counties, a separate fire authority runs the fire services. This is made up of councillors from the county council and unitary councils.

London

Day-to-day control of London's fire and rescue service is the responsibility of the London fire commissioner, accountable to the Mayor. A Greater London Authority committee and the Deputy Mayor for Fire scrutinise the commissioner's work. The Mayor may arrange for the Deputy Mayor to exercise his fire and rescue functions.

Mayoral Combined Authority

Only in Greater Manchester. The Combined Authority is responsible for fire and rescue functions but with those functions exercised by the elected Mayor. A fire and rescue committee supports the Mayor in exercising non-strategic fire and rescue functions. This committee is made up of members from the constituent councils.

Police, fire and crime commissioner FRA

The police, fire and rescue commissioner is solely responsible for the service provision of fire & rescue and police functions.

Isles of Scilly

The Council of the Isles of Scilly is the FRA for the Isles of Scilly.

