His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services

Fire and rescue services 2025–27

Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Avon Fire and Rescue Service

Contents

Overall summary 1

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies 5

Area for improvement 5

Main findings 5

Preventing fires and other risks 8

Cause of concern 8

Innovative practice 9

Main findings 9

Protecting the public through fire regulation 15

Areas for improvement 15

Main findings 16

Responding to fires and other emergencies 22

Areas for improvement 22

Main findings 22

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents 30

Area for improvement 30

Main findings 30

Making best use of resources to provide an efficient and affordable service 36

Areas for improvement 36

Main findings 37

Promoting, embedding and improving values and culture 47

Area for improvement 47

Innovative practice 47

Main findings 48

Training and developing the right people with the right skills **55**

Areas for improvement 55

Main findings 55

Ensuring fairness and diversity **58**

Areas for improvement 58

Main findings 59

Leading people effectively **64**

Areas for improvement 64

Main findings 65

Overall summary

In our inspection, we assessed how well Avon Fire and Rescue Service has performed in ten areas. We have made the following graded judgments:

Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate
		Understanding fire and risk	Preventing fire and risk	
		Responding to major incidents	Public safety through fire regulation	
		Promoting values and culture	Responding to fires and emergencies	
		Leading people effectively	Best use of resources and future affordability	
			Right people, right skills	
			Ensuring fairness and diversity	

In the rest of the report, we set out our detailed findings about the areas in which the service has performed well and where it should improve.

Changes to this round of inspection

We last inspected Avon Fire and Rescue Service in May 2023. And in November 2023, we published our inspection report with our findings on the service's effectiveness and efficiency and how well it looks after its people.

We followed this up with four re-inspections to specifically review progress against the two accelerated causes of concern that were previously issued for its:

- risk information process; and
- mobilisation system.

And two further causes of concern about its:

- prevention activities; and
- values and culture.

We carried these out in:

- December 2023, with our findings published in January 2024;
- March 2024, with our findings published in May 2024;
- September 2024, with our findings published in October 2024; and
- July 2025, with our findings published in September 2025.

This inspection contains our fourth assessment of the service's effectiveness and efficiency and how well it looks after its people.

In our previous rounds of inspections, we assessed and gave graded judgments for 11 areas. For this inspection programme, we have combined our efficiency areas and reduced the overall number to ten. This is to reduce duplication and concentrate more on outcomes for communities and the workforce. Although we continue to use our five-tier system of judgments, these changes mean it isn't always possible to directly compare grades awarded in this round of inspections with those in previous years.

This report sets out our inspection findings for Avon Fire and Rescue Service.

Our inspections provide a rounded assessment of the service. More information on how we assess fire and rescue services and our graded judgments is available on our website.

Terminology in this report

We inspect and report on policing in England and Wales and on fire and rescue services in England only. Our reports contain references to, among other things, 'national' definitions, priorities, policies, systems, responsibilities and processes.

In some instances, 'national' means applying to England and Wales. In others, it means applying to England and Wales and Scotland or the whole of the United Kingdom.

About the data

More information on data and analysis in this report is included in the 'About the data 2025–27' section of our website.

HM Inspector's summary

It was a pleasure to revisit Avon Fire and Rescue Service, and I am grateful for the positive and constructive way in which the service worked with our inspection team.

The service is predominantly urban and covers an area of 512 square miles. It has a population of 1.2 million, which is growing. Risks in the area include four universities with a total of 79,000 students, the Severn Tunnel and Bristol Airport. According to the latest indices of multiple deprivation, 12.1 percent of Avon residents live in the most deprived 20 percent of neighbourhoods in England.

Governance for this service is the responsibility of the Avon Fire Authority. Matt Cook was appointed Chief Fire Officer in May 2025.

The service didn't submit a finance data return to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, which means we were unable to benchmark its overall costs against other fire and rescue services. And, as a result, there is reduced assurance that public money is being used as efficiently as possible.

I am satisfied with some aspects of the performance of Avon Fire and Rescue Service in keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks. However, there are areas in which the service needs to improve. For example, the service still has work to do to adequately resource its prevention function and it needs to improve how it oversees and monitors enforcement activity.

We were pleased to find that the service had made some progress since our 2023 inspection. For example, the service has worked hard to improve its culture and make sure its Core Code of Ethics is accepted and understood by everyone across the service.

My main findings from our assessments of the service over the past year are as follows:

- The service needs to improve oversight and scrutiny across all its functions and empower and upskill its managers to effectively manage performance.
- Prevention remains an area that is under-prioritised, despite the service being issued with a cause of concern in the last inspection and not meeting its targets.
- The service understands and mitigates its future financial challenges, and has put together a range of savings options to balance its budget.

The service has commissioned an internal governance review to help it improve oversight and scrutiny. However, it hasn't yet increased resources in prevention or considered other ways to meet its home fire safety objectives.

Staff told us that they felt that senior leaders communicated, listened and promoted a positive culture. However, we found evidence of some staff not understanding how their role fitted into the strategic aims of the service. From April 2026, the service is implementing annual delivery and local risk management plans, which it hopes will create a clear link to its service plan and support improvements in this area.

Staff were positive about leaders modelling the service values and it was clear the senior leadership team were committed to creating a safe and inclusive culture. While the service has processes in place to identify, promote and develop leaders, it needs to do more to make sure that its leaders have the skills and confidence to robustly manage performance.

Overall, it is encouraging that staff feel the service is in a good position under the leadership of the new chief fire officer. And I can see the positive changes that have already been made, particularly over the past year. The service still has more work to do across all areas; however, there is a clear positive direction of travel and I commend the service for the progress it has made since our last inspection.

Kathryn Stone OBE

His Majesty's Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies

Adequate

Avon Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at understanding risk.

Fire and rescue services should identify and assess all foreseeable fire and rescue-related risks that could affect their communities. They should use their prevention, protection and response capabilities to prevent or mitigate these risks for the public. They should adjust these arrangements as appropriate, following robust feedback, scrutiny and oversight.

Area for improvement

The service should make sure the service plan clearly links to its strategies and that it adequately resources core functions.

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

Main findings

The service effectively identifies risk to inform its service plan

The service has assessed a suitable range of risks and threats using a thorough community risk management planning process. In its assessment of risk, it uses information it has collected from a range of internal and external sources and datasets. It takes account of both local and national risk registers including data from the Office for National Statistics, Ordnance Survey, incident data and intelligence shared from the local resilience forum. The service considers future risks and completes an annual analysis about risks to the community and organisational operations.

The service uses software for risk modelling, workload modelling and response mapping. It has found that its fire stations are generally located in the right places to respond to local risk. The service also analyses seasonal demand, which informs its business continuity plans. For example, it makes sure there are enough resources in Weston-super-Mare to meet the needs of the surge of visitors in the summer.

Each year, the service consults with staff, the community, partner organisations and local businesses on its service plan. However, this is mostly through a digital survey and the latest consultation in January 2026 only had 650 responses.

The service has a clear service plan but needs more detail on how it will reduce risk and threats to its communities

Once it has assessed the risks, the service records its findings in an easily understood service plan. The plan sets out six commitments:

- prevention
- protection
- response
- resilience
- improving our service
- investing in our staff.

The plan describes how the service intends to mitigate or reduce the risks and threats its communities face, both now and in the future. For example, it describes how the service values collaboration with partners such as the Avon and Somerset Local Resilience Forum and the South West Emergency Services Collaboration Forum to co-ordinate a joined-up approach to risk.

But it isn't clear from the plan how the service intends to use its prevention, protection and response activities to mitigate risk. It refers to the service strategies for prevention, protection and response; however, the strategies don't clearly align to the service plan. We found evidence that the strategies didn't direct activity and were used more as statements of intent. There was also no clear link to a workforce plan to make sure there were enough resources to achieve the service's targets.

The arrangements described in the plan don't clearly take account of the issues identified in the service's corporate risk register, which could compromise the implementation of these activities. For example, although climate change is referenced in the service plan, there is no information about how the service will make sure it responds appropriately to wildfires or large-scale flooding incidents.

The service has policy and business continuity plans in place to make sure it can continue to provide a minimum level of risk-critical functions during periods of industrial action. The service has also included industrial action on its corporate risk register, which it reviews regularly.

We have issued a new area for improvement that the service should make sure the service plan clearly links to its strategies and that it adequately resources core functions.

The service could improve how it monitors performance against its objectives

Senior leaders have monitoring, feedback and scrutiny arrangements in place to make sure the aims they have set out in the service plan for prevention, protection and response are being achieved. The service regularly reports on specific objectives and uses an action plan to monitor progress. For example, there are objectives for:

- prevention to carry out 7,000 home fire safety visits each year; and
- protection to carry out 900 audits per year.

Each month, the senior leadership team reviews a scorecard dashboard for the key performance indicators. A new performance board has also been established to strengthen oversight.

However, where commitments made to the public aren't being met, senior leaders aren't always aware of this and aren't always making sure suitable plans are in place to meet them. Some key performance indicators are missing from the dashboard. For example, the service doesn't monitor call handling times and on-call fire engine availability. This means that the service isn't making sure that it is meeting its priorities to deploy firefighters effectively against its response standards.

The service told us it intended to implement annual delivery plans and local risk management plans from April 2026. We look forward to seeing, during our next inspection, how these support improvements to performance management.

The service has effective governance arrangements in place to monitor the service plan

To make sure the service is accountable to members of the public and is meeting the commitments it has made to them, it is essential the service has robust oversight and governance arrangements in place. This provides assurance that its plans to reduce or mitigate risk are effective or are being adjusted where they aren't working.

The fire and rescue authority receives regular, meaningful updates on the arrangements the service has in place for prevention, protection and response. This helps it to hold the chief fire officer to account, set priorities for the service, reduce risk for the public and protect the health and safety of staff.

The service updates a service action plan, which details progress against each objective. It gives an annual update on the overall progress against the service plan to the fire authority. And, on a quarterly basis, it presents performance updates to the audit, governance and oversight committee. We saw minutes of these meetings and were satisfied that the service had applied appropriate levels of scrutiny.

Preventing fires and other risks

Requires improvement

Avon Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at preventing fires and other risks.

Fire and rescue services must promote fire safety, which includes giving fire safety advice. To identify people at greatest risk from fire, services should work closely with other organisations in the public and voluntary sectors, including police and ambulance services. They should share intelligence and risk information with these other organisations when they identify vulnerability or exploitation.

Cause of concern

Following our 2023 inspection, we issued a cause of concern stating that prevention activity wasn't a sufficiently high priority for the service, and there was no prevention strategy, which should inform its day-to-day activities. The service doesn't adequately prioritise home fire safety visits (HFSVs) based on risk. We found that HFSVs were arranged based on staff's availability as opposed to risk. We found several HFSVs that were outstanding for a significant period of time due to resourcing issues.

In September 2024, we carried out a revisit to review progress against this cause of concern and our recommendations. In our letter, published in October 2024, we were pleased to close three out of the six recommendations.

In July 2025, a further revisit took place. In our letter, published in September 2025, we closed a further two recommendations. One recommendation remained open. In this inspection we found there hasn't been enough progress made to close it.

Recommendation

The service has one outstanding recommendation:

- The service should make sure the prevention department has enough resources to implement all its prevention activity and review whether wholetime firefighters can offer more capacity to prevention.

Innovative practice

The service is working to build trust with the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller and Boater communities

Following a fatal fire and a carbon monoxide-related death in a caravan, the prevention team developed a targeted response. This included working with Bristol City Council. The team visited van dwellers and Gypsy, Roma, Traveller and Boater sites, and worked directly with individuals. When residents weren't present, the team left leaflets, smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms.

The service has created an engagement plan to help create a better understanding of these communities and how best to support and serve them. It includes activities such as:

- cultural awareness sessions across the service;
- completing a full demographic data review across the service area;
- identifying ways to work with these communities;
- celebrating Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month; and
- reviewing recruitment processes to understand barriers to recruitment.

The engagement plan runs until 31 March 2027. The service hasn't yet evaluated the plan, but it told us there had already been a good community response and this activity was helping build trust.

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

Main findings

The service's prevention strategy isn't directly linked to the service plan and hasn't been clearly communicated

Since our last inspection, the service has developed a prevention strategy. However, it isn't clearly aligned with the risks in its service plan. For example, there are strategic priorities for prevention listed in the service plan that don't feature in the prevention strategy. Targets for HSFVs are also inconsistent between the two documents.

Leaders responsible for prevention haven't clearly communicated the strategy or the main prevention aims to the workforce. As a result, we found some of the prevention staff we talked to didn't understand how they contributed to the prevention aims of the service individually or as a team.

The service effectively shares information about vulnerable people to reduce risk

The service's teams work well together and with other relevant organisations on prevention. They share relevant information when needed. The service uses information to adjust its planning assumptions and direct activity between its prevention, protection and response functions. For example, there has been an increase in post-incident activity by crews and there is now a robust system in place to share information between prevention, protection, response and control where risks, such as oxygen cylinders or hoarding, have been identified.

The service hasn't adequately resourced its prevention function

Following our inspection in 2023, we issued a cause of concern for prevention with six recommendations. During re-inspections, we closed five of the six recommendations and one recommendation remained outstanding. This was that the service should make sure the prevention department has enough resources to implement all its prevention activity and review whether wholetime firefighters can offer more capacity to prevention.

During this inspection, we were disappointed to find that the service hadn't yet increased resources in its central prevention team. This means that it still isn't meeting its HFSV targets.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service had completed 81 percent (5,673 of 7,000) of its target for HFSVs. And the service told us that, as at 31 December 2025, it had only completed 81.9 percent (4,298 of 5,250) of HFSVs against its year-to-date target. At the time of our inspection, the service had submitted a business case to the service leadership board which aimed to increase staffing levels in its central prevention team.

The service has increased the number post-incident HFSVs wholetime firefighters carry out. However, it isn't yet making full use of its available resources. We reiterate our advice from our last inspection that the service should explore whether wholetime firefighters could carry out HFSVs for higher-risk individuals, rather than limiting their involvement to medium-risk visits.

There still aren't any local targets for wholetime firefighters to complete HFSVs, although they are now required to give leaflets to 30 neighbouring properties following an incident.

The service still has more to do in this area. We are therefore keeping this recommendation, and the associated cause of concern, open.

The service targets its prevention activity to the most vulnerable

The service uses a risk-based approach to clearly prioritise its prevention activity towards people most at risk from fire and other emergencies.

It uses a range of information and data to target its prevention activity at vulnerable individuals and groups including those from under-represented communities. This includes incident and census data, as well as information from partners and multi-agency forums such as health and well-being boards and community safety partnerships.

The prevention team identifies partners to work with based on the service's risk criteria. It also trains partners' practitioners to identify and refer high-risk individuals for HFSVs. Once it receives a referral, the team prioritises visits for the most vulnerable people. It applies scores for various vulnerabilities including:

- age
- hoarding
- smoking
- hard of hearing
- domestic abuse
- risk of arson.

The service will then prioritise visits. It has time targets in place for very high, high and medium-risk individuals. Station-based crews carry out medium-risk visits and dedicated community safety workers carry out the high and very-high-risk visits.

The service effectively targets its HFSVs. In the year ending 31 March 2025, 94.3 percent (5,347 of 5,673) of its HFSVs were to vulnerable people. The service also identifies high-risk areas to target with prevention activity through the indices of multiple deprivation. Both the vulnerable adults team and the children and young people team use this information to target their activities.

The service carries out a range of interventions and campaigns, which it adapts to the level of risk in its communities. These range from 'stop smoking' and BBQ safety campaigns to locally targeted campaigns such as water and mud safety in Weston-super-Mare. The service has evaluated some of its campaign activity, including Home Fire Safety Month, which achieved good coverage and engagement on social media, and highlighted lessons learned.

Staff are competent to carry out HFSVs

Staff told us they had the right skills and confidence to carry out HFSVs. These visits cover an appropriate range of hazards that can put vulnerable people at greater risk from fire and other emergencies. The service fits smoke and heat alarms, and flame-retardant bedding, where appropriate.

Crews have received HFSV training. There is also a prevention training plan in place, which details that the service will provide face-to-face training every other year, with e-learning on alternative years.

The service carries out proportionate quality assurance of its HFSV activity. Each quarter, a different watch is subject to the quality assurance process and there is also a process in place to assure the work of community safety workers. There is central oversight in place and any learning gathered from the process feeds into the prevention training.

The service evaluates its prevention activity

In our last inspection, we issued an area for improvement that the service should evaluate its prevention activity, so it understands what works.

The service has evaluation tools in place to measure how effective its activity is and make sure all sections of its communities get appropriate access to the prevention services that meet their needs. For example, the service has started to make follow-up phone calls to residents to evaluate HFSVs using National Fire Chiefs Council methodology. It told us early findings from this evaluation showed few residents were testing their smoke alarms. As a result, the service added messaging about this to its social media communications plans.

The service has also started to evaluate its work with children and young people, included its key stage 1 and 2 packages, to identify the time, effort and resources used and whether the activities are achieving its objectives. This evaluation identified a gap in early years road-safety messaging, which the service plans to incorporate into future education packages.

Prevention activities take account of feedback from the public, other organisations and other parts of the service. For example, following feedback from the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, the service has improved its water-safety education packages.

The service uses feedback to inform its planning assumptions and change future activity to make sure it focuses on what its communities need and what works.

The service has made improvements in this area and we have therefore closed this area for improvement.

The service works well with prevention partners

The service works with a range of other organisations to prevent fires and other emergencies.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service carried out 5,673 HFSVs. The service completed 4,724 visits that were referrals from other agencies and 396 visits that led to the service making an onward referral to at least one other organisation.

We found good evidence that it routinely referred people at greatest risk to organisations that may better meet their needs. Staff can create an alert of concern, which is sent to the community partnership advisor to refer on to the appropriate agency for action and support; for example, local authorities.

Arrangements are also in place to receive referrals from other organisations. These include South Western Ambulance Service, Somerset Police, Age UK, dementia groups and the local authority. The service's dedicated community partnership advisor supports this work. The service acts appropriately on the referrals it receives. For example, when it receives referrals about domestic abuse and threats of arson, it completes an HFSV and fits an arson-proof letterbox plate.

Staff monitor how many referrals they receive from each partner, including how many progress to a visit, and they maintain quarterly contact with referral partners.

The service routinely exchanges information with other public sector organisations about people and groups at greatest risk. It uses this information to challenge planning assumptions and target prevention activity. For example, the service has worked closely with the Royal National Lifeboat Institution to develop water-safety education, better understand water-safety risks and carry out joint water-safety activity, including at sites such as Bristol Harbour.

The service is an active member of collaborative groups such as the Water Safety Forum, Community Safety Partnership and the Road Safety Partnership.

Staff have a good understanding of safeguarding and there are effective processes in place

The service has a comprehensive safeguarding policy along with a specific action plan. At the time of our inspection, it had recently started to produce a quarterly safeguarding report for the senior leadership team.

The service works with other organisations to safeguard individuals and attends partnership meetings such as safeguarding adult reviews and regional safeguarding boards.

Staff we interviewed told us about occasions when they had identified problems. They told us that they felt confident and trained to act appropriately and promptly.

Staff use an electronic form to complete a safeguarding referral and the safeguarding team then quality assures the referral. The team follows this up with the local authority and, where appropriate, passes feedback to crews.

Although staff have a good understanding of the process and there is safeguarding training in place for them, some staff told us that they hadn't received training recently. The service has put in place a new prevention and protection training plan 2025–30 which addresses this.

The service is good at tackling fire-setting behaviour

In the year ending 30 June 2025, the service attended 1,408 deliberate fire incidents, which has increased from 1,274 in the previous year. The rate of attendance at deliberate fire incidents was 114.9 per 100,000 population in the year ending 31 March 2025. This is lower than the England rate of 125 per 100,000 population.

The service carries out a range of suitable and effective interventions to target and educate people with different needs who show signs of fire-setting behaviour. This includes its fire setter’s intervention programme, which offers tailored support to young people. Partners, including schools and the Bristol Lifeskills Centre, generate referrals. The service follows up after six months to evaluate long-term impact.

Protecting the public through fire regulation

Requires improvement

Avon Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at protecting the public through fire regulation.

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

Areas for improvement

The service should make sure that it oversees and scrutinises enforcement activity effectively to make sure the risk to the public is reduced.

The service should assure itself that its use of enforcement powers prioritises the highest risks and includes proportionate activity to reduce risk.

The service should make sure it has an effective quality assurance process so staff carry out audits to an appropriate standard.

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

Main findings

The service's protection strategy doesn't link to the service plan and isn't clearly communicated to staff

Since our last inspection, the service has developed a protection strategy alongside its enforcement strategy and risk-based inspection programme. However, the strategy isn't clearly linked to the risks identified in its service plan. For example, some objectives listed under protection in the service plan aren't reflected in the protection strategy. It isn't clear from the service's strategy what level of activity it aims to take. And it isn't clear how it evaluates what benefit its protection activity will give the public.

Leaders responsible for protection haven't clearly communicated the strategy or main protection aims to the workforce. As a result, we found some of the protection staff we talked to didn't understand how they contributed to the protection aims of the service individually or as a team. Staff are allocated a number of audits per month and don't necessarily have an awareness of how this activity fits with the strategic aims of the service.

Staff across the service are involved in protection activity and share information as needed. For example, crews are allocated a number of operational fire safety checks and, if a risk is identified, there is a process to share this information with the protection team. The service then uses this information to adjust planning assumptions and direct activity between its prevention, protection and response functions. This means it properly aligns its resources to risk.

The service is mostly meeting its risk-based inspection programme targets

The service focuses its risk-based inspection programme on its highest-risk buildings. The service uses metrics such as indices of deprivation data, building size, occupancy type, incident data and previous enforcement data to develop the prioritised programme. Team leaders then allocate the audits based on competency levels of the inspecting officers. For example, suitably qualified inspecting officers are allocated more complex audits such as care homes and hotels.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service carried out 1,185 fire safety audits (1.2 per 1,000 population). This is within the typical range for England. This number has increased from 618 audits in the year ending 31 March 2024.

The service also has a small team that looks after its higher-risk residential buildings. The service told us it had inspected 61.3 percent (149 out of 243) of the higher-risk residential buildings in the area as at 31 December 2025.

When we reviewed the service's audits of high-risk buildings, we found that the service had completed them in the time frames it had set itself.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service set itself a high-risk building audit target of 900. It didn't quite achieve this target as it carried out 821 high-risk building audits. This is 91.2 percent of its target achieved.

The service has a well-resourced protection team and effective arrangements for out-of-hours provision

The service has enough qualified protection staff to meet the requirements of its risk-based inspection programme. In 2024/25 the service had 12 competent, dedicated protection staff and a further 15 staff in development. This helps it provide the range of audit and enforcement activity needed both now and in the future.

Staff get the right training and work to appropriate accreditation. The service uses the National Fire Chiefs Council Protection Competency Framework for staff to work towards and the protection team run fortnightly continuing professional development (CPD) sessions. The service also uses the local authority building control portal for CPD.

The service learns from international incidents. For example, it has reviewed details of a nightclub fire in Switzerland in January 2026 and considered the potential risk to the night-time economy in the service's area, specifically premises with basements.

Following our last inspection, we issued an area for improvement that the service should make sure it has effective arrangements for providing specialist protection advice out of hours.

The service established a dedicated out-of-hours provision in September 2025, funded by its protection uplift grant. There are now eight qualified inspecting officers who cover the rota 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The service has used this resource several times; on one occasion this led to the identification of a lack of compliance and a potential case for prosecution.

We have closed this area for improvement.

The service has adapted well to new fire safety legislation

The Building Safety Act 2022 and the Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 have been introduced to bring about better regulation and management of tall buildings.

This legislation has led to an increase in the time the service spends assuring the safety of tall buildings. It expects this demand to increase with the increased pace of remediation work that is underway to replace flammable cladding. The number of known high-risk premises has increased by 71.5 percent from 7,382 in the year ending 31 March 2024 to 12,662 the following year.

The service is supporting the Building Safety Regulator. It has allocated staff time to carry out training and work on auditing high-risk residential premises and collaborating with partner agencies. It expects these arrangements to have manageable impact on its other protection activity.

The Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 introduced a range of duties for the managers of tall buildings. These include a requirement to give floor plans to the fire and rescue service and inform it of any substantial faults to essential firefighting equipment, such as firefighting lifts.

We found the service had good arrangements in place to receive this information through an online portal on its website. And it updates the risk information it gives its operational staff accordingly. However, the service told us that only approximately 51 percent of relevant building information had been submitted by responsible persons.

The service completes fire safety audits to a good standard

We reviewed a range of audits that the service had carried out at different buildings across its area. These included audits carried out:

- as part of the service's risk-based intervention programme;
- after fires at premises where fire safety legislation applies;
- after enforcement action had been taken; and
- at high-rise, high-risk buildings.

In our review, we found the service had completed the audits to a high standard, in a consistent way and in line with its policies. The service makes relevant information from its audits available to operational teams and control room operators. For example, staff share risks, such as oxygen use within a domestic property or a sprinkler system out of commission, with colleagues using a formal process.

The service has started to quality assure its protection work

Following our last inspection, we issued an area for improvement that the service should make sure it has an effective quality assurance process, so staff carry out audits to an appropriate standard.

The service has started to carry out limited quality assurance of its protection activity. In summer 2025, it introduced a quality assurance process which consists of one quality assurance visit each year plus a simulation per inspecting officer every two years. It doesn't carry out dip sampling or any additional checks.

As part of this process, the service identifies any trends or themes from the quality assurance, which it then incorporates into its training and CPD.

The service doesn’t have good evaluation tools in place to measure how effective its activity is or make sure all sections of its communities get appropriate access to protection services that meet their needs. For example, we found no evidence of the service evaluating its business engagement activities such as the ‘don’t block with stock’ campaign before Christmas.

The service needs more time to embed its new quality assurance process to evaluate its effectiveness. We are therefore keeping this area for improvement open.

The service doesn’t have a robust system to make sure its enforcement processes are effective

The service doesn’t use its full range of enforcement powers consistently. We found it didn’t always take appropriate opportunities to prosecute those who don’t comply with fire safety regulations. The service told us it had issued one simple caution this year and, in the five years to 31 March 2025, it carried out two prosecutions. There is a process to consider prosecutions; however, this discussion isn’t recorded and the outcomes aren’t tracked.

The service uses enforcement as a last resort and implements it when co-operation fails. The service prefers to work with responsible persons to achieve what it says are better outcomes. However, the service hasn’t evaluated its methodology and there is a lack of oversight which could potentially mean that it doesn’t revisit some premises to ensure compliance.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service told us that it had issued 0 alteration notices, 619 informal notifications, 11 enforcement notices and 25 prohibition notices. It carried out 0 prosecutions.

Considering this evidence, we have issued a new area for improvement that the service should assure itself that its use of enforcement powers prioritises the highest risks and includes proportionate activity to reduce risk.

The service doesn’t have effective oversight of enforcement activity

We identified a discrepancy in the number of enforcement, alteration and prohibition notices served by the service. The data provided didn’t match up with the information held on the National Fire Chiefs Council enforcement register. We found that there was no oversight in place to make sure enforcement activities were followed up. When we reviewed the subsequent spreadsheets the service provided to us, we found that some enforcement, alteration and prohibition notices had potentially not been followed up. This hadn’t been escalated to the senior leadership team.

Due to the risk associated with the lack of follow-up activity, we highlighted this to the service during our inspection. The service promptly addressed this issue, creating a robust plan to follow up all premises quickly. It has strengthened oversight and monitoring processes, and has added the issue to the corporate risk register.

In November 2025, the service set up an enforcement development group to improve the oversight and consistency of enforcement action. We look forward to seeing at the next inspection the impact this team has.

We have issued an area for improvement that the service should make sure that it oversees and scrutinises enforcement activity effectively to make sure the risk to the public is reduced.

The service works well with partner agencies to reduce risk

The service works closely with other enforcement agencies to regulate fire safety, and it routinely exchanges risk information with them. It has an enforcement protocol in place with local authorities and works well with the local authority building control team, keeping in contact on a regular basis to make sure the process runs smoothly. The service also regularly gives presentations to the local authority, which helps reinforce good relationships. The service receives referrals from partners, such as the Health and Safety Executive, about fire safety concerns in buildings.

The service responds to building and licensing consultations promptly

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service responded to 97.7 percent of building consultations (1,038 of 1,062) within the required time frame. This means it consistently meets its statutory responsibility to comment on fire safety arrangements at new and altered buildings.

The service also responded to 90.7 percent of the licensing consultations received (703 out of 775) within the specified time frame. The percentage completed within the specified time frame has reduced as the demand has increased. In 2022/23, the service responded to 93.3 percent (415 out of 455), and in 2023/24, the service responded to 99.9 percent (529 out of 530) within the required time frame.

The service is effective in supporting local businesses to comply with fire safety legislation

The service proactively works with local businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation. At the time of the inspection, the service told us that over the past eight months, it had improved its website to provide responsible persons with the information they need to comply with fire safety legislation.

In September 2025 the service took part in Fire Door Safety Week, during which it distributed leaflets to shopping centres and surrounding areas outlining a five-step process for checking fire doors. It also distributed ‘don’t block with stock’ leaflets ahead of the Christmas period and logged all activity on a business engagement spreadsheet.

The service has introduced operational fire safety checks for low-risk premises. In the year ending 31 March 2025, it completed 1,185 audits, and told us that it had also completed 1,287 operational fire safety checks. To support this, all operational supervisory managers have completed the level 2 fire safety course and all wholetime staff received two days of fire safety training. Station liaison officers based in protection also provide ongoing support.

Responding to fires and other emergencies

Requires improvement

Avon Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at responding to fires and other emergencies.

Fire and rescue services must be able to respond to a range of incidents such as fires, road traffic collisions and other emergencies in their areas.

Areas for improvement

The service should make sure it has an effective system to learn from operational incidents.

The service should assure itself that it has procedures in place to record important operational decisions made at incidents and that staff understand these procedures well.

The service should make sure it understands how to adopt national operational guidance, including joint and national learning, and puts a plan in place to implement this.

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

Main findings

The service's response strategy doesn't align to the service plan or direct activity

Since our last inspection, the service has developed a response strategy. However, it hasn't clearly linked the strategy to the risks identified in its service plan. There are actions listed in the service plan that aren't referenced in the response strategy, and we found that the response strategy didn't direct activity.

Leaders in charge of response haven't clearly communicated the strategy or its main aims to the workforce. As a result, we found that some staff we talked to didn't understand how they contributed to the response aims of the service either individually or as part of a team.

However, the service locates its fire engines and response staff, and designs its working patterns, to help it respond flexibly to fires and other emergencies with the appropriate resources. For example, the service has used software to test different station configurations and how these would affect response times. It found that stations were generally in the right locations for the distribution of risk and incident demand.

The service needs to improve how it monitors performance against its response standards

There are no national response standards, but the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) does publish data on response times to primary and secondary fires. However, locally set standards may be calculated differently to the data the MHCLG produces.

MHCLG data shows that in the year ending 30 June 2025, the service's average response time to primary fires was 9 minutes and 52 seconds. This is slower than the average for services that are predominantly urban.

Using this measure, the service's average response time has increased from 9 minutes and 21 seconds in the year ending 30 June 2024. This decline is predominantly due to an increase in call handling time, which has steadily increased from 1 minute and 59 seconds to 2 minutes and 12 seconds during the same period. The service doesn't monitor its call handling times and was therefore unaware of this decline.

The service hasn't set out any response standards in its service plan or its response strategy. According to service data, its response time targets are 12 minutes for a non-critical incident and 8 minutes for a critical incident. The service measures this from the point of mobilisation to the arrival at the incident. The service meets the standards it sets for itself. In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service achieved an average response time of 7 minutes 28 seconds to a critical incident and 7 minutes 46 seconds to a non-critical incident. This data doesn't include call handing time.

The service is working to improve fire engine and on-call availability

In the year ending 31 March 2025, availability of wholetime fire engines was 95.9 percent. This is a decrease from the previous year when availability was 97.9 percent. During the same period, availability of on-call fire engines was 59.1 percent. This is a decrease from the previous year when availability was 66.8 percent.

The service is developing an on-call improvement plan to improve availability and retention of on-call firefighters, and a targeted recruitment plan is underway. The service has also introduced more flexible contract options to attract a more diverse range of applicants.

Staff told us that they weren't confident the data about on-call staff availability was accurate. The service is investing in its systems to monitor this.

It has recognised that the system can sometimes show inaccurate information about which staff are available to be mobilised, which has the potential to lead to an increase in the time to mobilise a crew. The service has a project underway to replace the tool with one that is more reliable and easier to use.

The service has created a tactical establishment group which meets monthly and oversees fire engine availability. This group has been analysing the reasons for fire engines not being available. These include firefighters attending non-essential training, leaving gaps in staffing at stations. The group reviews staffing numbers four weeks in advance to find shortfalls, which allows time to put plans in place. For example, during the Christmas period, station managers covered for crew and watch managers. This helped the service keep fire engines available. The service told us that, through the work of this group, the number of unavailable fire engines decreased from July to December 2025.

We look forward to seeing how these measures affect the service's response times.

The service has accurate and accessible risk information

The service routinely collects and updates information about the highest-risk people, places and threats it has identified. The service has improved its risk information process and told us that, to date, it had identified close to 2,000 sites that posed more risk to firefighters if an incident took place.

In the year ending 30 September 2024, the service had identified 1,135 sites that posed more risk to firefighters if an incident took place. During the same period, the service visited 857 sites to update its records and familiarise itself with the firefighting risks. This is an increase from the previous year when the service completed 598 visits.

This information is readily available for the service's prevention, protection and response staff. This means that these teams can identify and reduce risk effectively. For example, when risk is identified, staff will complete a form which then gets sent to relevant teams and control, who will update the mobilising system to make sure information is accessible to crews attending an incident. Where appropriate, the service shares risk information with other organisations. For example, during protests in 2025, the service shared risk information held on asylum hotels with the police to support ease of access in and out of the buildings.

We sampled a range of risk information for high-risk sites, including the information in place for firefighters responding to incidents at high-risk, high-rise buildings and the information held by fire control.

The information we reviewed was up to date and accurate. Staff could easily access and understand it. Encouragingly, the service's prevention, protection and response functions had contributed to this information when appropriate.

We saw a positive example of site-specific risk information (SSRI) being used for a large incident at St Michael's Hospital. The information held about the structure of the roof was valuable in creating the tactical plan. The service has also completed SSRIs for every tunnel in the area. It plans to use the SSRI information it has collected for The Galleries shopping centre in a marauding terrorist attack training exercise in 2027.

In our last inspection, we highlighted an area for improvement that the service should make sure its mobile data terminals were reliable so firefighters could easily access up-to-date risk information.

The service has updated its mobile data terminals and invested in a second terminal for each fire engine. This means that risk information is accessible to more staff and provides resilience for the crew. We have closed this area for improvement.

The service could improve how it manages performance against its risk information targets

The watch manager quality assures SSRI records, and the SSRI team and station managers also sample the records.

Although there have been improvements to the SSRI process, at the time of our inspection the service told us that it was only achieving 65 percent of its revisit target. This is due to the increase in premises on the system and the process taking longer than before. The service has identified this as a performance metric of concern and has a plan in place to review the revisit programme.

In addition, we found no evidence that the service had any oversight in place for familiarisation visits to assure itself that all crews had knowledge of the risks within different premises.

The service has improved its access to cross-border risk information

In our last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should make sure its operational staff have good access to relevant and up-to-date cross-border risk information.

The service has improved the way staff can access cross-border risk information. Crews have access to risk information for high-risk sites within 10 km of the service's border and very high-risk sites across the whole of the neighbouring service area. However, some staff told us they were unaware that they could access this information. The service could do more to assure itself that staff are aware they can access this information.

We are satisfied with the progress made and have closed this area for improvement.

The service has improved how it processes temporary risk information

In our last inspection, we issued a cause of concern about the service not having an effective system to make sure it gathers and records up-to-date risk information.

Following a revisit, we closed this cause of concern on 5 September 2025 and moved one of the recommendations relating to temporary risks into an area for improvement. This area for improvement was that the service should make sure that temporary risks, including individual vulnerabilities, are added onto the risk information system and managed appropriately.

The service effectively gathers and records temporary risk information including about buildings or vulnerable people. For example, sprinklers being out of commission, oxygen used on premises or where there is a hoarding issue.

The service has now improved its process for managing the information it holds on its systems and has a clear process in place to remove it where appropriate. It has communicated this to staff. The service has updated its data-retention policy to delete a temporary risk record from the system after ten years. There is also a flag system in place to review temporary risks and a revisit process is being put in place for medium and long-term risks.

The service has made good progress in this area and we have closed this area for improvement.

Incident commanders are well trained to lead a wide range of emergencies

Following our last inspection, we issued an area for improvement that the service should make sure incident commanders know how to command fire and rescue service assets assertively and effectively.

The service now has incident commanders who are trained regularly and properly assessed. This includes internal and external assessments, regular CPD sessions, and training and exercising, which incident commanders log as command hours. Revalidation takes place every two years. This helps the service to safely, assertively and effectively manage the whole range of incidents it could face, from those that are small and routine to major and multi-agency incidents.

As part of our inspection, we interviewed incident commanders from across the service. They were familiar with risk assessing, decision-making and recording information at incidents in line with national best practice as well as the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles.

The service has increased its number of accredited incident commanders. In 2024/25, the service needed 197 accredited incident commanders and had 190 accredited. There were no incident commanders who were no longer accredited but still carried out the same work.

We are satisfied with the progress the service has made in this area and have closed this area for improvement.

The service doesn't make sure that incident commanders consistently command incidents in line with operational guidance

During our inspection we found that, despite the service guidance and training about using M/ETHANE as a messaging protocol, some incident commanders were still using an old method. And we found evidence of one incident where M/ETHANE hadn't been used to communicate safety critical information to other agencies. The service should put processes in place to make sure that incident commanders are using messaging in line with its procedures.

In our last inspection, we issued an area for improvement that the service should assure itself that it has procedures in place to record important operational decisions made at incidents and that staff understand these procedures well.

We were disappointed to find that the service didn't consistently follow its policies to make sure that staff commanded incidents in line with operational guidance. Despite the service introducing guidance about how decisions should be recorded, we found that it needed to improve this. We reviewed incidents where decisions hadn't been appropriately logged and some incident commanders told us that they only logged decisions using messages to fire control. For one incident we reviewed, the incident commander had logged their decisions using the notes application on their mobile phone. There was no knowledge of where these logs went following the incident or where they should have gone.

The service has recognised this issue. In December 2025, it sent out a communication to remind staff of the process. However, we found no evidence of any planned assurance activity to make sure staff were recording decisions effectively.

We are therefore keeping this area for improvement open.

The service has improved its debrief process, but staff aren't always following this

Following our last inspection, we issued an area for improvement that the service should make sure it has an effective system for learning from operational incidents. This has been a consistent area for improvement since our first inspection in 2018.

As part of our inspection, we reviewed a range of emergency incidents and training events. These included complex building fires including a hotel, a large-scale incident at St Michael's Hospital and exercises including Exercise Blue Core, a multi-agency tabletop marauding terrorist attack exercise, and a cross-border exercise in the Severn Tunnel.

The service has improved its operational debrief process. Staff submit debrief forms to the service's formal learning system through the operational learning app. The operational learning and feedback group collates and disseminates the learning. There is also a dedicated intranet page for operational learning. Control staff are regularly involved in structured debriefs and hold their own debriefs to learn from incidents.

However, we found evidence that staff weren't always following the debrief process and managers were manually chasing staff to complete the forms. Automatic reminders are sent out, but these aren't tracked. For one incident we reviewed, 13 debrief forms were sent out but only 1 was returned. In addition, while actions are uploaded to the system and allocated to a responsible person, these aren't monitored. We were shown historic debrief actions that were still outstanding. Some staff told us that when they did complete debrief forms, they didn't get any feedback on their submissions.

We were pleased to find that the service consistently updated internal risk information with the information it received. And it exchanged this information with appropriate organisations, such as the local resilience forum.

The service has responded to learning from incidents to improve its services to the public. For example, it shares learning through fire alert bulletins and service delivery memos. Staff record that they have read these alerts. The operational learning and feedback group meets monthly and reviews national operational learning and joint organisational learning submissions, as well as learning from incidents. We were told about an example of shared learning from a cross-border incident which resulted in some joint training with the neighbouring fire service.

Although progress had been made in this area, the lack of assurance around staff completing debrief forms means that we are keeping the area for improvement open.

The service integrates fire control staff in its command, training and assurance activity

We were pleased to find that the service’s control staff were integrated into its command, training, exercise, debrief and assurance activity.

Control staff told us that they took part in regular cross-border, multi-agency and major incident exercises. For example, in January 2026, control staff were involved in an exercise in the Severn Tunnel with South Wales Fire and Rescue Service, Network Rail and other partner agencies. Control staff are also routinely invited to structured debriefs.

The service hasn’t completed a national operational guidance gap analysis

The service couldn’t provide us with a national operational guidance gap analysis to clearly show which policies had been aligned with it.

Some policies showed evidence of being aligned to national operational guidance, but we couldn’t find evidence of any oversight or assurance that this had been carried out.

We are therefore issuing a new area for improvement that the service should make sure it understands how to adopt national operational guidance and put in place a plan to implement this.

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents

Adequate

Avon Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at responding to major and multi-agency incidents.

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).

Area for improvement

The service should make sure it has an effective method to share fire survival guidance information with multiple callers and that it has a dedicated communication link in place.

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

Main findings

The service plans well for major and multi-agency incidents

The service has effectively anticipated and considered the reasonably foreseeable risks and threats it may face. It has listed these in both local and national risk registers as part of its community risk management planning. These include flooding, drought, heatwaves, grass fires and other climate-related risks. The service reviews the national risk register annually with the local resilience forum (LRF) to identify gaps in training and capability.

It is also familiar with the significant risks that neighbouring fire and rescue services may face, which it might reasonably be asked to respond to in an emergency. Firefighters have access to risk information from neighbouring services and can access risk information for sites up to 10 km across the border on their mobile data terminals. The service has also made sure that risk information for its sites is available for neighbouring services.

The service can effectively respond to major and multi-agency incidents

During this inspection, we considered how well prepared the service is to respond to foreseeable major incidents including a fire involving a tall building, a marauding terrorist incident and a fire at a COMAH site.

Since our last inspection, the service has declared three major incidents and formed part of the response when the police and ambulance services declared a major incident at St Michael's Hospital.

We found that the service had well-developed policies and procedures in place for safely managing these incident types. Staff at all levels understand them, and robust training and exercises have taken place to test them. This includes Exercise Blue Core, a quarterly multi-agency tabletop exercise, and several tall building exercises, including in student accommodation. The service has also carried out a mass decontamination exercise with Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service completed 80 multi-agency, 82 national resilience and 21 cross-border training exercises. The service completed 325.4 training exercises per 1,000 full-time equivalent firefighters, which is higher than the England rate of 102.6.

The service is working with other emergency responders to make local communities more resilient. For example, the service has collaborated with local authorities, the local resilience forum, National Highways and Network Rail to develop the Severn Tunnel response plan and review how it can mitigate the risks.

We also reviewed the service's response to the fire at St Michael's Hospital. The service contributed to the multi-agency debrief following this incident and implemented learning from it.

As a result, the service can show that the plans it has in place are fit for purpose, including:

- declaring and responding to a major incident;
- co-locating and co-ordinating with other emergency responders;
- information sharing; and
- helping to move the incident to a recovery phase and a return to normality for affected communities and businesses.

The service doesn’t yet have an electronic fire survival guidance system in place

In our last inspection, we issued an area for improvement that the service should make sure it has an effective method to share fire survival guidance information with multiple callers and that it has a dedicated communication link in place.

At the time of inspection, the service had a process in place to deal with multiple fire survival guidance calls and to share this information between the staff at the incident and the control room. It has carried out training to make sure crews are fully aware of the process and there is a procedure in place where trained staff from Bath fire station would mobilise to the control room if needed. This process has limitations and is based on using a spreadsheet, whiteboards and paper systems. Staff told us that the process was slow and there was the potential for information to be lost.

We also found that there were some inconsistencies in the use of radio talk groups within the service to manage a high level of information being transferred. The service guidance states that control should consider establishing a second line of communication through a dedicated Airwave talk group. However, some staff told us that they thought the service didn’t have the capability to create more than one talk group. The service should make sure that staff are aware of the arrangements for using more than one talk group.

The service hasn’t yet progressed to using an electronic fire survival guidance system. It has been working on a project with a developer to design and implement a new fire survival app. This will include:

- a dashboard which can show multiple fire survival guidance calls, including multiple calls related to the same person;
- information relating to the person’s whereabouts;
- whether the person has been advised to stay put, evacuate or wait to be rescued;
- a view of the building; and
- a feature that calculates how many flats still need attention.

Staff in the control room and at the incident will be able to update the status to show whether the person has evacuated or been rescued. The app refreshes every 30 seconds.

The app was tested in April 2025 and was deployed to the live test environment in January 2026. At the time of writing this report, it was due to be deployed imminently. We look forward to seeing how the new app is being used in our next inspection.

Considering this evidence, we are keeping this area for improvement open.

The service works well with other fire and rescue services

The service supports other fire and rescue services when they are responding to emergency incidents. For example, it has a buddy system with Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service where they can answer each other's emergency calls as part of their business continuity arrangements.

It has successfully deployed resources to other services and has well-understood processes in place to request national resilience assets such as high-volume pumps, mass decontamination, urban search and rescue and detection, identification and monitoring assets. We didn't see any evidence that these had been requested for incidents.

The service has tested cross-border arrangements through a range of exercises with other services.

Incident commanders have a good understanding of Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles

The incident commanders we interviewed had been trained in and were familiar with Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP).

During our inspection, we found good evidence that the service incorporated JESIP into both training and operational practice.

The service could give us strong evidence that it consistently followed these principles. This included incident commanders' application of co-location, communication and co-ordination arrangements, and the joint understanding of risk.

We saw evidence of incident commanders showing shared situational awareness during the St Michael's Hospital incident, when discussions took place about the possibility of evacuating the hospital and where patients would then be located.

We sampled a range of debriefs the service had carried out after multi-agency incidents and exercises. Debrief reports following multi-agency incidents and exercises are shared with partners through ResilienceDirect. There are also quarterly debrief meetings held with the LRF. We were pleased to find that the service had identified any problems it had with applying JESIP and took appropriate, prompt action with other emergency services.

The service trains effectively with cross-border services

In our last inspection, we issued an area for improvement that the service should make sure it takes part in a programme of cross-border exercises and records and shares learning from these.

The service has a cross-border exercise plan and memorandum of understanding with neighbouring fire and rescue services. This helps them work together effectively to keep the public safe. The plan includes the risks of foreseeable major incidents where the service could be required to give support or ask for help from neighbouring services. We were pleased to find that the service used learning from these exercises to inform risk information and service plans. We heard about several cross-border exercises that had taken place, including one in the Severn Tunnel where there was significant learning for emergency services and railway companies.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service completed 21 exercises with neighbouring services. This has increased from ten exercises the previous year. The service completed 37.3 training exercises with neighbouring services per 1,000 full-time equivalent firefighters, which is higher than the England rate of 24.5.

The service has made satisfactory progress in this area and we have therefore closed this area for improvement.

The service works well with the LRF

The service has good arrangements in place to respond to emergencies with agencies that make up the Avon and Somerset LRF. The service is a valued member of the LRF. It takes part in regular training events with other members of the forum and uses the learning to develop planning assumptions about responding to major and multi-agency incidents.

It also works with the LRF to:

- act as a rest centre provider for LRF exercises;
- take part in structured debriefs;
- share intelligence and risk information; for example, with the severe weather group and risk assessment working group; and
- work together on site-specific risk information plans for high-risk buildings, including high-rise and heritage buildings, battery energy storage sites and asylum seeker accommodation.

In addition, the service takes part in the LRF warning and informing group, and it attends quarterly core, tactical and executive group meetings. It also works together with the local authority to assess the impact of low-traffic neighbourhoods.

The service shares national operational learning but doesn't effectively contribute to it

The service makes sure it knows about national operational learning updates from other fire and rescue services, and joint organisational learning from other organisations, such as the police and ambulance services. It has a single point of contact that receives this information. The operational learning and feedback group reviews and shares this via the operational assurance bulletin. Learning is also shared on the operational learning intranet page. It uses this learning to inform the planning assumptions it makes with other organisations.

We didn't find evidence that the service had submitted any national operational learning or joint operational learning entries over the past 12 months, despite identifying learning that would be useful to share with others. The service should make sure that it shares relevant learning with other fire services and organisations.

Making best use of resources to provide an efficient and affordable service

Requires improvement

Avon Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at making the best use of its resources to manage risk and to make sure it is efficient and affordable.

Fire and rescue services should manage their resources properly and appropriately, aligning them with their risks and statutory responsibilities. Services should make best possible use of resources to achieve the best results for the public.

Services should continuously look for ways to improve their effectiveness and efficiency. This includes transforming how they work and improving their value for money. They should have robust spending plans that reflect future financial challenges and efficiency opportunities, and they should invest in better services for the public.

Areas for improvement

The service needs to show a clear rationale for the resources allocated between prevention, protection and response activities. This should reflect, and be consistent with, the risks and priorities set out in its service plan.

The service should have effective measures in place to assure itself that its wholetime workforce is productive and that its time is used as efficiently and effectively as possible to meet the priorities in the service plan.

The service should assure itself that all processes in place to support performance management are effective.

The service should make sure it has effective internal governance arrangements in place to hold senior officers to account for the corporate management of the service.

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

Main findings

The service has ineffective internal governance and scrutiny to hold senior leaders to account

The Avon Fire Authority oversees the service. Its governance role includes setting the strategic direction of the service and providing scrutiny to monitor the service's performance and make sure its strategic aims are achieved.

The service has ineffective strategic oversight arrangements in place to manage performance and resourcing risks. The processes, controls and internal governance arrangements it has in place to manage these strategic risks are ineffective.

The service provides quarterly reports to the audit governance and oversight committee and the policy and resources committee, and annual reports to the fire authority. There are important key performance indicators missing from the reporting process. These include call handling time, on-call availability, staff diversity and overtime spend, all of which affect the service's performance. This means that the service isn't effectively held to account when it is under-performing in these areas.

During our inspection, we found a lack of oversight for the service's enforcement activity. The service didn't have accurate data for the number of enforcement notices it had served, and some enforcement and prohibition notices hadn't been followed up. This issue had been identified but not escalated to the senior leadership team through the internal governance structure, and it wasn't recorded on the corporate risk register.

The scheme of delegation clearly sets out responsibilities for the chief fire officer, monitoring officer and statutory finance officer, but it doesn't set out responsibility for the service's other senior leaders or budget holders. The internal governance arrangements it has in place to hold senior leaders to account for the corporate management of the service are ineffective. There are limited performance indicators in place for departments such as training, communications, fleet and protection. This means the service isn't holding underperforming departments to account and issues aren't being escalated quickly for a resolution.

At the time of our inspection, the service was carrying out an internal governance review. We look forward to seeing the results of this at our next inspection.

We are issuing a new area for improvement that the service should make sure it has effective internal governance arrangements in place to hold senior officers to account for the corporate management of the service.

The service hasn't clearly aligned its resources to risk

In our last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service needs to show a clear rationale for the resources allocated between prevention, protection and response activities. This should reflect and be consistent with the risks and priorities set out in its service plan.

The service's financial and workforce plans, including allocating resources to prevention, protection and response, aren't consistent with the risks and priorities it has identified in its service plan. For example, the service has only recently started to formalise its workforce planning and the workforce plan hasn't clearly been aligned to the service plan. The service has recently established a strategic establishment board to support this work. It is too early to see the impact of these activities.

The service sometimes uses its resources well to manage risk, but there are still weaknesses that need addressing. For example, in our last inspection we issued a cause of concern about the lack of resources for prevention. At the time of this inspection the service hadn't yet addressed this and the function remains under-resourced. This has resulted in missed targets for home fire safety visits (HFSVs).

The service has started to use its resources appropriately to mitigate the issues identified in the corporate risk register that affect implementation of its service plan. It is using a business case process which helps with prioritisation and resource allocation. For example, additional resources were used to address the causes of concern about culture and site-specific risk information (SSRI).

The service has sustainable plans in place to resource its protection function if grant funding is reduced or withdrawn. Its protection posts are included in its base budget to make sure the function continues to be adequately resourced.

The service has started to evaluate its mix of crewing and duty systems. The service has commissioned an external consultancy service to review its fire cover arrangements. It hasn't yet analysed the results to show whether it deploys its fire engines and response staff to manage risk efficiently.

At the time of our inspection, the service had recently changed the station duty system at Yate fire station to flexible day crewing. Although the revised crewing model reduces the staff numbers from 14 to 12, the evaluation of the trial found that this self-rostering approach had enhanced flexibility while maintaining operational effectiveness.

The service should do more to maintain availability of its on-call crews. On-call availability has been steadily decreasing and for 2024/25 was 59.1 percent.

The service relies too much on overtime and still has a substantial number of vacancies. The service's overtime spend has increased from £935,000 in 2023/24 to £1.42 million in 2024/25. This is partly due to the service pausing wholetime firefighter recruitment due to the lack of certainty around its financial position. This has had a knock-on effect with firefighters being unable to secure leave and more detachments (staff being transferred to another station for the day, often at short notice) taking place, which has affected staff well-being. To address this, the service has now reopened the recruitment process for wholetime firefighters, with another process planned for later in 2026.

The service needs to do more in this area and we are therefore keeping this area for improvement open.

The service has developed a sound understanding of future financial challenges

Service data shows that in 2025/26, the service's net revenue budget was £65.6 million. The net revenue budget for 2024/25 was adjusted for inflation from £61.5 million to £63.4 million. This means the budget increased by 3.4 percent between 2024/25 and 2025/26 in real terms. The budget was funded by £35.7 million from council tax, £5.1 million from business rates and £22.5 million from revenue support and other grants. The service's total funding was £63.7 million, which is £51.99 per head of its population. This is within the typical range compared to all services in England.

The service told us that an updated version of its budget was approved in June 2025 and grant income was increased by £108,000. This takes its total funding to £63.8 million.

At the time of our inspection, the service's medium-term financial plan showed a savings requirement of £5.5 million by 2028/29. During our inspection, the service was told about the outcome of the government's Fair Funding Review as part of the provisional local government finance settlement. The service told us it would receive around £3.5 million more than it previously forecast. This has improved the service's financial outlook, although, at the time of our inspection, the service was working through the full details to update its forecast.

It plans to mitigate its main financial risks and has recorded this on its corporate risk register. The service has identified borrowing costs as a significant risk because it will increase its future capital financing costs and affect its revenue budget. It is mitigating this risk by appointing treasury management specialists to help manage its investments and reduce the costs of borrowing. The service is also continuing to develop its savings options and is lobbying for a capital funding grant from the government.

The service's capital programme is set at £37.2 million, covering 2025/26 to 2027/28, of which £30 million is allocated to premises, £4.8 million to fleet and £1.4 million to IT. It includes investment in its on-call stations, the refurbishment of Weston-super-Mare fire station at a cost of £7 million, investment in its training facilities and the redevelopment of Bath fire station, which will cost around £15.5 million. The capital programme will be funded by £34.3 million of borrowing, £2.6 million from capital reserves and £355,000 from capital receipts.

This level of borrowing is expected to increase capital financing costs, which are 1.5 percent of the net revenue budget. Costs are set to increase to 4.6 percent by 2027/28 under existing capital plans.

By 2027/28, the service has forecasted debt and reserves (general and earmarked) to be 57.8 percent and 4 percent, respectively, of the net revenue budget. This compares to forecasted levels of 28.7 percent and 5 percent, respectively, for 2025/26. This shows that the service expects debt levels to increase over the period of its medium-term financial plan. And it shows that the service expects reserve levels to decrease over the period of its medium-term financial plan.

The service reviews its reserves strategy each year and had a general reserve of £1.5 million in 2024/25. In addition to general and earmarked reserves, the service holds some capital reserves. The service told us it expected that it would deplete its capital reserves before the end of 2025/26.

Its planning assumptions are robust and realistic. They take account of the wider external environment and some scenario planning for future spending reductions. The service has established an efficiencies and savings team to review and propose savings options, which regularly reports to the service leadership team. The service builds its plans on sound scenarios. This helps make sure it is sustainable and underpinned by financial controls that reduce the risk of misusing public money.

The service needs to improve how it manages performance

In our last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should assure itself that all processes in place to support performance management are effective.

We also identified an area for improvement that the service should have effective measures in place to assure itself that its wholetime workforce is productive and uses its time as efficiently and effectively as possible to meet the priorities in the service plan.

The service's arrangements for managing performance continue to be ineffective and don't clearly link resource use with its service plan and its strategic priorities. For example, wholetime firefighters have targets for SSRIs and training, but not for prevention activity such as HFSVs.

We found that the protection function wasn't managing performance effectively. We identified several areas of underperformance that senior leaders weren't aware of, including lack of oversight of enforcement activity and overdue enforcement notices.

The service has started to improve how it manages performance. For example, it has established an internal improvement board, which oversees a continuous improvement register and progress against HMI recommendations.

The service collects some data but doesn't use it effectively to improve staff productivity, make sure resources are used efficiently and effectively, and provide value for money. Departments work in silos, interpreting their own data, and some older systems don't support data analysis. For example, staff told us that the HR system couldn't produce useful reports and the service lacked robust data about its estate, which was affecting its ability to effectively performance manage its contractors.

The service has recognised that it needs to do more to collect and analyse data to improve its performance. It has commissioned a data insights review with the objective of providing a coherent, modern data practice.

The service could do more to understand how it uses its wholetime firefighters. It has started to collect data on how they spend their time across day and night shifts. The data has shown that staff are too busy at stations. At the time of our inspection, this data hadn't been checked to assess its validity and, without a full understanding of what capacity staff have, the service couldn't allocate any additional work to staff at stations. For example, the service hasn't asked operational staff to carry out more HFSVs, even though it isn't meeting its prevention targets. The service should do more to make sure its workforce is as productive as possible. This includes considering new ways of working and continuing to make better use of technology to improve efficiency.

The service still needs to do more, so we are keeping these areas for improvement open.

The service is effectively addressing the burden of unwanted fire signals

In our last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should make sure it effectively addresses the burden of unwanted fire signals.

The service now has an effective, risk-based system in place to manage its response to unwanted fire signals. In the year ending 30 June 2025, 35.1 percent of incidents attended in Avon were fire false alarms. The rate of attendance at incidents that were fire false alarms was 3.6 per 1,000 population. This is lower than the England rate of 4.3.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, 30.5 percent (7,810 out of 25,630) of emergency calls to the service were automatic fire alarms. Of these, 62.2 percent weren't attended. In the same period, the average percentage of automatic fire alarms not attended for England was 44.6 percent.

The service created a media campaign to communicate the impact of unwanted fire signals and give advice on how to reduce them. It designed and distributed a new business fire safety leaflet to local businesses and carried out training and development for crews. There is now a monthly report in place with a new process. If there have been three unwanted fire signals within three months, the service works with the responsible person to reduce these. The service has reported that, so far, these initiatives have reduced unwanted fire signals by approximately 16 percent. The service is now planning the next phase of the project, reviewing whether it should charge to attend false alarms or explore non-attendance.

The service has made good progress in this area; therefore, we are closing this area for improvement.

The service is improving how it plans for efficiencies and savings

In 2024/25, the service's expenditure was £61.2 million. The service didn't submit a finance data return to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, which means we were unable to benchmark its expenditure against other fire and rescue services.

There are regular reviews to consider all the service's expenditure, including its non-pay costs. This scrutiny makes sure the service gets value for money. For example, there is a new efficiencies and savings team sitting in the portfolio directorate that has been reviewing potential savings options.

It made £2.2 million of savings between 2022/23 and 2024/25, which is more than its planned savings of £130,000. The service didn't have any planned savings forecast in either 2022/23 or 2023/24. Some of these savings relate to vacancies due to issues with recruiting and pausing the planned wholetime firefighter recruitment. Many of the savings are non-recurrent.

The service is taking steps to make sure it achieves efficiency gains through sound financial management and best working practices. It is doing this in important areas such as estate, fleet and procurement.

We have seen examples of heads of departments achieving value for money through improved supplier management. For example, the service has put in place a performance management plan with one of its IT suppliers to better hold them to account against the key performance indicators in its contract.

The service also told us that it had anticipated a spend of £700,000 for a new hovercraft vehicle but managed to reduce costs on this through effective communication with the hovercraft pilots on stations and trialling various options on the beach at Weston-super-Mare before purchasing. The team also managed to avoid costs of £500,000 on the Bath fire station redevelopment project through negotiation with contractors and suppliers.

Through its approach to value for money, the service has identified and achieved efficiencies that have improved its services to the public. For example, when there are staffing gaps, trained day duty operational staff, who usually work in non-operational teams, ride fire engines. This means that the fire engine can be mobilised if needed. At the time of our inspection, the service had been running this as a trial for 12 months and planned to produce a close-out report to identify whether this practice would continue.

In our last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should make sure it effectively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and outcomes of any collaboration activity.

The service now monitors and reviews the benefits and results of its contract arrangements, collaborations and improvement projects. It has used the collaborations register to evaluate its collaborations and make decisions on whether to continue with them. It has taken the decision to stop one of its collaborations as the organisation's values and culture didn't align with those of the service.

The service has a new benefits register alongside its collaborations register, which the programme management office oversees. The service has recently incorporated benefits realisation into its new business case and project close-out reporting processes.

The service has made good progress in this area and we are therefore closing this area for improvement.

The service is improving how it manages its fleet and estates

The estates strategy the service gave us was high-level and would have benefited from more depth and a clearer link to the service plan. At the time of our inspection, the service was reviewing its estates strategy. During our inspection, the policy and resources committee approved a new estates strategy for the period until 2028/29. The service has plans to carry out a full condition review of all its buildings, including the gender appropriateness of its facilities. The service co-locates with other emergency services where possible. For example, the service shares Nailsea fire station with both police and ambulance services.

In November 2025, the service established a strategic fleet risk review group to oversee the purchasing and maintenance of vehicles and equipment. While this was new at the time of our inspection, we did find examples of where the service had aligned its spending to its identified risks. For example, the service has purchased dual response cars which are located at stations for crews to travel on detachments to support availability. It has also purchased a hovercraft to support mud rescue at Weston-super-Mare. And, in response to the planned construction of 64-storey buildings in its area, the service is considering purchasing new vehicles to support rescues from tall buildings.

We found examples of both the fleet and estates teams exploring ways to work more efficiently. For example, the fleet team has been trialling using hydrogenated vegetable oil (HVO) fuel for the service’s vehicles. The trial has shown that the use of HVO fuel can reduce the cost per mile as well as wear and tear on the vehicles. The service told us that the roll out of HVO fuel could reduce the service’s carbon footprint related to fuel consumption from 540 tonnes to 7.5 tonnes per year.

The service is also carrying out a review of the use of its specialist vehicles, which will inform its future purchases. Both fleet and estates are affected by the lack of data about faults in equipment and premises, so are unable to effectively performance manage, particularly when it comes to contract management. The service has recognised this and is introducing a new IT system to support improvements.

We were told about an issue with the Hicks Gate hot fire training facility. The facility had been deteriorating for a number of years, and the service had attempted several temporary repairs. Refurbishment was carried out approximately six months before our inspection, but the service wasn’t satisfied with the results of its testing. Therefore, for health and safety reasons, it isn’t being used for hot fire training. The service acknowledged that this issue was due to historic under-investment and a lack of planned asset management. It has now escalated this issue to its corporate risk register and will be carrying out a ‘lessons learned’ review. It is planning to replace this building by February 2027. Some elements of the capital programme have been shifted into later years to accommodate this.

We look forward to seeing how the service uses the lessons it has learned from the Hicks Gate project to improve how it manages future estates projects.

The service has improved its use of technology, but has more to do

We were pleased to find that the service had made improvements in its use of technology since our last inspection.

In our last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should assure itself that its IT systems are resilient, reliable, accurate and accessible, and that strategic oversight arrangements are in place to manage its IT infrastructure.

The service had previously under-invested in IT, leading to outdated systems. It now has a digital, data and technology strategy in place for 2025/26, which sets out how it will provide an improved service.

Since the last inspection, it has improved the system for recording SSRI, the mobile data terminal software and the personal development record system.

It has also introduced a debrief app, a system to monitor IT system availability, a cyber-risk platform and biometric logins. There is also a six-monthly checkpoint survey to assess user experience.

In addition, the service has:

- reduced system instability on the mobilisation system from 19 to 6 instances per month;
- started a hardware replacement programme;
- progressed the fire survival guidance app;
- completed a tender process for the new mobilisation system; and
- created a business case to bring IT support in-house from April 2026.

The service actively considers how changes in technology and future innovation may affect risk. For example, the service is planning to invest in systems to help it proactively identify threats and therefore improve its cyber security.

The service plans to use artificial intelligence (AI) and has tested a proof of concept AI bot in the control room for troubleshooting and translating error codes into human useable format. Due to historical underfunding in IT, the service isn't yet in a position to fully explore how changes in technology and future innovation can improve the effectiveness and efficiency of its workforce. For example, the service has made many improvements to the SSRI process but is still reliant on the use of PDF documents. The service should make sure it fully explores available products that may be more effective and efficient.

Historically, the service hasn't always carried out IT projects on time and within budget and managed risks appropriately; however, this is improving. For example, the on-call mobilisation system project was started in January 2024 and hasn't been adequately progressed due to the lack of knowledge about effective supplier management. Since then, the service has supported staff to develop supplier management skills and has put new service level agreements in place. As a result, the project has progressed. The updated version is due to go live in summer 2026.

To help it work more effectively and efficiently, the service still needs to improve its IT systems. For example, staff told us that the system for monitoring skills and competence was old and ineffective, making it difficult to oversee and manage staff competencies.

The service has, however, made good progress in this area, and therefore we have closed this area for improvement.

The service has improved how it manages change

In our last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should assure itself that it has the capability and capacity it needs to achieve future change.

The service has put in place the capacity and capability it needs to achieve sustainable change. The service has created a portfolio directorate, established a programme management office and introduced a monthly improvement board to oversee continuous improvement. There is also a special projects team that works on priority projects.

The service manages change through effective projects and programmes. It has a clear internal structure with appropriate governance arrangements to make sure progress against projects and programmes is monitored, scrutinised and challenged.

It has recently approved a new project management framework which aligns to industry best practice and has strengthened its project business case process. There are now three lines of assurance for projects, which include the project manager as the responsible person and a head of department as the accountable person. Priority projects have a project sponsor in place. For example, the chief fire officer is the sponsor for the culture project. The programme management office records the projects in the projects register and there is a quarterly check-in with project managers, who produce highlight reports for priority and major projects to be scrutinised by the service leadership team. At the time of our inspection, the service told us it had plans to give all middle managers project management training.

Project working groups include all relevant stakeholders. For example, the communications team has supported priority pieces of work, including the consultation on amendments to the crewing system at Yate fire station. IT is involved in a range of projects such as the Bath redevelopment project including the requirements for the temporary site.

The service carried out a project prioritisation exercise in 2025 to make sure that all projects were necessary and aligned to the service plan. This helped the service to stop, pause or merge some projects to make sure resources were prioritised to important improvement areas.

The service has made sufficient progress in this area and therefore we are closing this area for improvement.

Promoting, embedding and improving values and culture

Adequate

Avon Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at promoting, embedding and improving values and culture.

Fire and rescue services should have positive and inclusive cultures, which are maintained and improved through feedback from staff, scrutiny by leaders and oversight by the fire and rescue authority. Workforce well-being, both physical and mental, should be a priority, and unacceptable behaviour should always be challenged and managed appropriately.

Area for improvement

The service should proactively monitor working hours (including overtime and secondary contracts) to make sure staff don't work excessive hours.

Innovative practice

The service has created a mental health podcast to support staff and its community

The service has introduced a new podcast about mental health called 'Ignite the Conversation'. It was created by two firefighters who are passionate about mental health and wanted to use their experiences to support others. As well as discussing their experiences of mental health issues, they explore the impact on firefighters of attending incidents involving suicide attempts.

The service creates two versions of the podcast, with links to support for internal and external audiences. The internal version is available on the staff intranet and signposts staff to advice and support available, such as well-being pages, trauma risk management and the Fire Fighters Charity. The external version is available to the public on YouTube and Spotify.

The service told us that the podcast had been very well received by staff and its local community.

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

Main findings

The service has improved its culture

In our last inspection, we issued a cause of concern to the service about values and culture. We stated that the service had shown an intent to improve its culture, with some staff reporting improvements across the service. However, more needed to be done.

In this inspection, we found that the service had invested in its values and culture and had made improvements in all these areas. We have therefore closed this cause of concern, along with the associated recommendations.

The service is committed to creating a culture that reflects its core values and encourages positive behaviours at every level

The service has well-defined values, which staff understand. We found that staff at all levels of the service showed behaviours that reflected service values. The service moved from its own service values to the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Core Code of Ethics in November 2025. We found that most staff were aware of the change. The service is embedding the Core Code of Ethics throughout the organisation.

It has included it in policies, training and personal development records. The code of ethics is discussed at governance meetings and is part of recruitment and promotion processes. The service has also aligned its staff award categories to the code of ethics.

In our workforce survey, 88 percent of respondents (282 of 322) agreed that their colleagues consistently modelled and maintained the service's values; 86 percent (278 of 322) agreed their managers did this; and 75 percent (242 of 322) agreed senior leaders did.

The service is compliant with safeguarding legislation by completing appropriate background checks for all existing members of staff. Depending on their role, some staff, such as firefighters, also have an enhanced background check. The service carries out background checks every three years. If anything is flagged on the check, the service follows a risk assessment process which is aligned to NFCC guidance. In the year ending 31 March 2025, 100 percent of existing employees who needed a background check had one.

The service is also reducing the risk of abuse, harm and neglect for both the public and staff by completing background checks on new recruits and, if appropriate, existing staff who are applying for new roles. In the year ending 31 March 2025, 100 percent of new recruits who needed a background check had one.

The service has effective oversight and scrutiny of people-related issues in place

The service has robust systems in place to gather feedback from a range of activity, scrutinise it and understand the impact on staff and the public. Activity includes public complaints, staff grievances and disciplinary action. The head of people services reports regularly to the fire authority's policy and resources committee on trends and themes emerging from disciplinary action, grievances, complaints and whistleblowing.

The service has established a professional standards board which oversees all disciplinary action. To increase staff trust in the process, it publishes outcomes of disciplinaries. The service also holds 'lessons learned' exercises after employment tribunals.

The fire and rescue authority receives regular, meaningful updates about people-related issues. This helps it to hold the chief fire officer to account, set priorities for the service, reduce risk for the public and protect the health and safety of staff. The chair of the fire authority also attends stations on a regular basis to gain feedback from staff on the culture and direction of the service.

The service has developed a culture of open and transparent communication

The service has effective arrangements in place to communicate with staff and representative bodies, such as trade unions, and to take account of their legitimate concerns. It has a range of formal and informal arrangements, including:

- weekly 'Shout' newsletters including a blog article from a service leadership board member;
- 'keeping us connected' sessions;
- regular staff surveys;
- a staff engagement network;
- a 'you said, we listened' area on the intranet;
- an annual service plan consultation; and
- a staff suggestion scheme.

In our workforce survey, 65 percent of respondents (210 of 322) agreed that they felt confident in the processes for providing feedback to all levels of leadership.

Individual members of staff, representative bodies and staff network groups we spoke to gave examples of where they had raised legitimate concerns with leaders. The service had been active in resolving them.

In our workforce survey, 48 percent of respondents (155 of 322) agreed that they were confident their feedback would be acted on.

In November 2024 the service commissioned an independent review into the culture of its fire control team. This was in response to concerns about low morale, limited career development and communication breakdowns within the team. The review identified ten recommendations for improvement.

The service put in place a structured cultural improvement programme called Control SHIFT (Support, Hear, Include, Facilitate, Transform). Over five months, the inclusion team worked with control staff to review ways to improve the culture. The service has provided regular reports to the audit, governance and oversight committee to show how it is addressing the recommendations. This programme has led to a positive cultural shift, which is shown in improved metrics in the service's recent staff surveys.

We found other evidence of collaboration with staff. For example, the service told us about a project to improve the staff intranet. Following engagement activities with over 200 staff members, the new intranet was introduced in March 2025. The service has also reacted to feedback about how it can improve the staff awards ceremony.

The staff engagement network is always invited to service leadership team meetings and is actively involved in all programmes, projects and health checks that pass through the programme management office.

The service has held five 'keeping us connected' sessions providing updates on important projects. These sessions rotate around different venues, and staff can join in person or online. The service also records the session to make sure it reaches as many staff as possible.

The service regularly consults with representative bodies through 'keep in touch' meetings with area managers. The service worked closely with them on its efficiencies and savings options before presenting these to the fire authority.

The service has plans to introduce a connectivity plan to further improve how it communicates with staff.

The service effectively deals with unacceptable behaviour

In our last inspection, we identified two areas for improvement. We found the service should make sure it has effective grievance procedures. It should identify and implement ways to improve staff confidence in the grievance process. And the service should make sure it resolves discipline and work-related concerns promptly and that officers investigating these concerns have the specialist skills required.

There is a positive working culture throughout the service, and staff feel empowered and willing to challenge unacceptable behaviours when they come across them. In our workforce survey, 73 percent of respondents (235 of 322) agreed that they felt safe to challenge unacceptable behaviour in their service. We heard about instances where colleagues and line managers had challenged and dealt with inappropriate language at a local level, avoiding the need to escalate to a more formal process.

Staff have a good understanding of what bullying, harassment and discrimination are and their negative effects on colleagues and the culture of the organisation.

In our workforce survey, 12 percent of respondents (40 of 322) told us that they had felt bullied or harassed by members of their service in the past 12 months. And 15 percent of respondents (47 of 322) told us that they had felt discriminated against by members of their service during the same period.

We were pleased to find that the discipline and grievance cases we reviewed were all progressed in a timely manner. However, as at 31 March 2025, the average length of time a grievance case had been open was 212 days and for discipline cases this was 217 days. These are above the England averages of 93 days and 111 days respectively.

We asked the service to tell us about grievances that were related to conduct matters only (and not to include, for example, those against organisational policy).

As at 31 March 2025, there were four live grievances and eight disciplinary cases. Of these disciplinary cases, two were gross misconduct cases.

The service follows the policies and procedures that it has in place. It has reviewed its discipline and grievance policies and there are comprehensive dignity and respect, discipline, and grievance toolkits on the intranet. The cases we reviewed were managed by the right people at each step of the process. This led to well-justified decisions with clear reasons.

The service offers good support to staff who are the subject of disciplinary action as well as those who raise concerns or grievances or who are victims of bullying or harassment. The service has put in place welfare officers to support those in the complaints process, as well as assigned HR support managers, with contact recorded on a log to make sure the process is followed.

The staff we talked to had confidence that if they raised a misconduct concern with their line manager, it would be dealt with in an appropriate and confidential manner.

There are various ways staff can raise concerns; for example, through HR business partners, the inclusion team or the well-being team. They can also use the toolkit to raise a discipline or grievance. And they can call the confidential reporting line.

Managers have the confidence and training to deal with grievance and discipline issues and feel able to do so. The HR team also provides support to investigating and hearing officers throughout the process.

In 2025, the service established a professional standards board. The board reviews, triages and manages all discipline cases through a transparent process which means that one individual doesn't make decisions. It keeps momentum on the cases by reviewing blockers and making sure staff have what they need to progress their case. The service told us that since the introduction of the board, the length of time taken to resolve cases had reduced. Staff spoke positively about the board; they felt it had the potential to improve both fairness and proportionality of case outcomes.

The service can show that it is adapting its processes and sharing with staff the learning it has gained from dealing with grievance and discipline cases. The service publishes the outcomes of disciplinary cases monthly on the staff intranet and carries out debriefs after every case, with learning recorded in a log to inform training and help the service improve.

The service also learns from others. It attends a south west professional standards working group, which meets every two months to share best practice. It also shares hearing officers for cases involving senior officers.

The service has made good progress and we have therefore closed both areas for improvement.

The service doesn't effectively monitor working hours

In our last inspection, we issued an area for improvement that the service should proactively monitor working hours (including overtime and secondary contracts) to make sure staff don't work excessive hours.

As at 31 March 2025, 18 percent of wholetime firefighters were on a dual contract within Avon Fire and Rescue Service, 1.7 percent were on a dual contract with a different service, and 22.5 percent had registered secondary employment. The service doesn't have effective policies in place. And it doesn't centrally monitor staff who have secondary employment or dual contracts to make sure they don't work excessive hours.

To keep fire engines available, some staff told us that they were showing themselves as 'booking available' in between or directly after wholetime night shifts. This meant they weren't taking appropriate rest periods.

The service has more work to do on monitoring working hours; therefore, we are keeping this area for improvement open.

The service has effective processes in place to support workforce well-being, and managers are aware of them

In our last inspection, we identified three areas for improvement:

- The service should assure itself that managers are appropriately trained and understand the well-being provisions available to them and wider staff.
- The service should assure itself that managers are appropriately trained to manage staff absence.
- The service should make sure it has effective absence and attendance procedures in place.

The service has effective and well-understood health and safety policies and procedures in place. These health and safety policies and procedures are readily available, and leaders at all levels promote them effectively to all staff. The health and safety team provide targeted training modules and contribute to training such as supervisory management courses and station fitness advisor sessions. The team also shares learning outcomes from incident debriefs, manages reporting platforms for accidents and injuries, leads investigations and supports individuals through reporting and investigating processes.

The service has started a project to carry out a gap analysis around decontamination, using NFCC guidance. Two stations are trialling a zoning approach and staff are now able to digitally record exposures to fire contaminants, water contaminants and bodily fluids. The service has also published relevant information on its intranet and decontamination is included in the annual station health and safety audit process.

The service also has well-understood and effective well-being policies in place, which are available to staff. A significant range of well-being support is available to support both physical and mental health. For example, the service has mental health first aiders, a well-being team, trauma risk management practitioners, occupational health provision and signposts to the Fire Fighters Charity.

The service is trialling a private healthcare contract which includes both physical and mental health services. Staff have received this very positively. The service is closely monitoring this trial and plans to fully evaluate and review whether the provision offers value for money.

In our workforce survey, 96 percent of respondents (309 of 322) agreed that they knew how to access support for their mental health through their service.

The service is proactive in building resilience among staff and we found examples of where it had intervened to support an individual's needs. The service has recently introduced inclusion, community, allyship, representation, equity (ICARE) allies across the service. We were told about an example of someone who was in crisis, who had contacted an ally and was able to access appropriate support within the hour.

There are good provisions in place to promote staff well-being. There are a range of initiatives listed on the intranet, including support for veterans, Avon walks, financial well-being and crisis phone lines. In our workforce survey, 72 percent of respondents (232 of 322) agreed that service leaders treated their well-being as a priority. Staff reported that they understood and had confidence in the well-being support processes available.

The service has updated its attendance policy and has provided information sessions to support managers to manage absence. Detailed guidance is also located in a manager's toolkit on the intranet.

The service has made good progress with all three areas for improvement in this area, and we have therefore closed them.

Training and developing the right people with the right skills

Requires improvement

Avon Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at training and developing the right people with the right skills.

Fire and rescue services should have a workforce plan in place that is linked to their service plan. The workforce plan should set out current and future skills requirements and address capability gaps. This should be supplemented by a culture of continuous improvement, including appropriate learning and development throughout the service. And the service should make sure that barriers to the development and progression of all staff groups have been identified and removed.

Areas for improvement

The service should put in place a credible succession plan, for the whole organisation.

The service should assure itself that all staff are appropriately trained for their role.

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

Main findings

The service hasn't made enough progress with its workforce planning

In our last inspection, we identified an ongoing area for improvement that the service should put in place a credible succession plan for the whole organisation. This has been an area for improvement since our first inspection in 2018.

The service does some workforce planning, but it doesn't take full account of the skills and capabilities it needs to effectively carry out its service plan. We found limited evidence that the service's planning allowed it to fully consider workforce skills and overcome any gaps in capability. For example, the service has been reactive rather than proactive with wholetime firefighter recruitment, pausing and restarting it twice due to funding uncertainties. This has affected the workload of the recruitment team, increased overtime spend and led to more detachments (staff being transferred to another station for the day, often at short notice) to fill the gaps. This in turn has negatively affected staff well-being.

At the time of our inspection, the service had recently established a strategic establishment board to oversee the service's staffing arrangements, including retirement profiles and vacancies, and a tactical establishment group. The tactical group has already made progress in maximising crew availability and has reduced the number of unavailable fire engines from July to December 2025.

The service needs to do more to improve the way it considers its future needs and succession planning. The service introduced its workforce development plan in October 2025. It has carried out a succession planning exercise across departments to understand its current position. We look forward to seeing how this work progresses in our next inspection.

The service hasn't made sufficient progress in this area, therefore we are keeping this area for improvement open.

The service doesn't assure itself that staff have the right skills and capabilities to carry out their roles

In our last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should assure itself that all staff are appropriately trained for their role.

Most staff told us that they could access the training they needed to be effective in their roles. In our workforce survey, 78 percent of respondents (251 of 322) agreed that their service gave them the necessary training to carry out their roles. However, some staff highlighted concerns around the hot fire training facility at Hicks Gate fire station, which had been out of use for several months. They told us that this meant staff weren't able to access effective and timely training, and they were concerned that this had led to an increase in breathing apparatus revalidation failures. The service told us it was aware of this issue and was putting a plan in place to address it.

Training isn't just focused on operational skills. It also includes management skills, such as training on carrying out people impact assessments, interviewing and carrying out discipline and grievance investigations.

The service's training plans make sure staff can maintain competence and capability effectively. For example, there is an on-call station training planner in place with all stations aligned to the same training activity each month. If an on-call watch member isn't available to attend training at their own station, they can attend another one to maintain their competency.

In our workforce survey, 79 percent of respondents who had operational roles (166 of 209) agreed that they could access relevant learning and development opportunities.

Additionally, 82 percent of respondents who had non-operational roles (116 of 142) also agreed that they could access relevant learning and development opportunities.

Although there is a system in place to review workforce capabilities, staff told us it was ineffective and there was a risk that staff might lack important skills for the future. The service runs reports on an ad-hoc basis and the number of staff who have attended training isn't regularly overseen or scrutinised. We saw evidence that watch managers were monitoring competencies and skills at a local level. However, staff told us that the maintenance of skills and training (MOST) system used to record skills and competencies was old and ineffective. And incorrect competencies are listed for some station staff, which makes it difficult to monitor and report on these accurately.

In addition, we found no evidence of a training plan for the new fire survival guidance app, which the service is due to roll out to staff imminently.

The service has more work to do in this area, therefore we are keeping this area for improvement open.

The service is developing its culture of continuous learning and improvement

The service promotes a culture of continuous improvement throughout the organisation, and it encourages staff to learn and develop. For example, the personal development review template has a section which encourages staff to look back at what they have achieved. This is designed to generate questions about learning outcomes. There is also a look forward section for career development.

We were pleased to find that the service had a range of easily accessible learning and development resources. These included various e-leaning packages and toolkits. They allow staff to do their jobs effectively.

The quality of training has improved for staff working in the control room. Staff told us that there had been a reduction in the amount of e-learning and an increase in in-person training. Briefings and involvement in exercises help staff to keep their skills fresh and current. Staff have also been able to attend other types of training, such as the mental health first aider and trauma risk management practitioner courses.

We found no evidence that the service had considered whether any parts of its training and development provision were disproportionately difficult to access or use for any staff group or individual.

Ensuring fairness and diversity

Requires improvement

Avon Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at ensuring fairness and diversity.

Recruiting, retaining and developing a diverse and representative workforce gives fire and rescue services huge benefits. These include greater access to talent and different ways of thinking. It also helps them better understand and work with local communities. Each service should make sure that staff throughout the organisation firmly understand and show a commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). This includes successfully taking steps to remove inequality and making progress to improve EDI at all levels of the service. It should proactively encourage feedback from staff and respond to it and make sure any action it takes is meaningful.

Areas for improvement

The service should make sure all staff understand the benefits of equality, diversity and inclusion and their role in promoting it.

The service should make sure it improves the way it collects equality data so it can better understand its workforce demographic and needs.

The service should identify and overcome barriers to equal opportunity, so its workforce better represents its community; this includes making sure staff understand the value of positive action and having a diverse workforce.

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

Main findings

The service needs to do more to fairly recruit a diverse range of talented staff

As part of this inspection, we reviewed a range of recent recruitment campaigns for firefighters, supervisors and senior leaders.

We found that the service had an open, fair and honest recruitment process for existing staff or those wishing to work for it. The service needs to do more to make sure its recruitment policies are fair and accessible to applicants from a range of backgrounds. The service recruitment policy is lacking detail in the analysis of campaigns, attracting diverse leaders and direct entry schemes.

Recruitment campaigns at all levels aren't directed at or accessible to under-represented groups. And the service isn't leading change in this area to increase the diversity of its workforce. There are no robust plans in place around positive action, and the service doesn't analyse the data from recruitment campaigns to understand barriers. For example, we found no evidence of equality data being analysed from wholetime firefighter campaigns.

There are some areas of good work. For example, the service:

- hosts 'have a go' days;
- attended the Race in the City recruitment event hosted by Bristol City Council, targeted at under-represented groups;
- has used the direct entry scheme on one occasion;
- has improved its website to make it more accessible;
- gives interviewees the questions 20 minutes in advance of an interview; and
- is a disability confident employer.

On-call support officers also collect local data to help understand barriers to recruitment.

But there is no co-ordinated plan or performance monitoring in place to make sure these initiatives are having the desired effect.

In addition, the service is becoming more reliant on on-call staff progressing into wholetime roles. This means that the service isn't bringing in new staff, which has a negative impact on diversity.

The service needs to do more to increase staff diversity. There has been little progress to improve ethnic and gender diversity. In 2024/25, 0 out of 45 new joiners (where ethnicity is known) were from an ethnic minority background.

As at 31 March 2025, 3.7 percent (30 people) of the service's staff were from an ethnic minority background, compared to 11.9 percent in the local population and 6.4 percent throughout all fire and rescue services in England. However, 11.5 percent of the workforce hadn't stated their ethnicity.

For the same period, 22 percent (196 people) of the service's staff were women compared to an average of 20.8 percent throughout all fire and rescue services.

The proportion of firefighters from an ethnic minority background increased from 3.1 percent (19 people) as at 31 March 2024 to 3.7 percent (22 people) as at 31 March 2025.

The proportion of women firefighters stayed broadly the same, from 8.2 percent (56 women) to 8.4 percent (55 women) over the same period.

The service has no key performance indicators for staff diversity. The service IT systems restrict the ability to record and report on equality data, and the service doesn't provide specific diversity reports to its leadership team or the fire authority.

The service needs to do more to retain and develop staff from under-represented groups

The service isn't identifying and addressing barriers that disproportionately prevent individuals from particular groups from progressing. It doesn't collect and analyse data from recruitment and promotion activity to identify issues and evaluate whether its activity has achieved its objectives.

We found some positive evidence that the service had put in place programmes to support under-represented groups to develop. For example, the service has introduced a talent/leadership academy, which is an 18-month targeted development programme. All but one of the delegates was successful in achieving promotion. The service won training provider of the year for this programme in the Excellence in Fire and Emergency Awards.

The service also has a programme in place for the personal and professional development of women. However, at the time of inspection, the service told us that only around 20 percent of staff in the middle manager talent pool were women.

The service promotion and progression processes are comprehensive and cover opportunities in all roles. The service has reviewed the promotion processes for fire control staff. There are now clear development pathways for control staff from firefighter to group manager, and the service has established talent pools to align with other operational roles in the service.

There is a strategic intent to embed EDI across all service activity

In our last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should make sure it improves the way it collects equality data so it can better understand its workforce demographic and needs.

We found a lack of collection and analysis of equality data across several functions including recruitment and retention, disciplines and grievances, and protection activities such as audits.

The service has more to do to improve in this area and we are therefore keeping this area for improvement open.

Despite this, the service prioritises EDI. It makes sure it can offer the right services to its communities and support staff with protected characteristics. For example, the service has a clear EDI policy with evidence of strategic intent. The service updated this policy in August 2025. The service provides EDI training to staff including face-to-face training from the inclusion team and e-learning about neurodiversity.

During this inspection, we reviewed a range of policies that affect different parts of the service.

The service has developed several ways to work with staff on issues relating to EDI that affect them. These include methods to build all-staff awareness of fairness and diversity and targeted initiatives to identify matters that affect different staff groups.

The service has a staff engagement network and has also established staff network groups such as the neurodiversity group and groups for women, LGBTQ+ and staff from black and ethnic minority backgrounds. The service told us that there hadn't been much interest from operational staff so far, and it was reviewing ways to improve this. We look forward to seeing the impact these new staff networks are having at our next inspection.

The service has a reasonable adjustment passport process in place to support staff with additional requirements.

We found that there were a range of provisions to support women in operational roles to return to work following maternity leave, including:

- an occupational health welfare check;
- modified duties;
- 12 months' maternity pay;
- flexible working provisions;
- continuing to keep them informed of training and promotion information while on leave; and
- the ability to access additional support from service fitness trainers.

Staff told us that there were issues with a lack of gender-appropriate facilities at some fire stations. We were told about an issue where the service had responded to requests from staff and changed one of its toilets from unisex to female use only, because it was the only toilet on that station with a sanitary waste bin. The lack of communication about this issue led to staff at the station repeatedly removing the sign. Another station we visited didn't have any sanitary waste facilities provided. The service is aware that it needs to improve its facilities and is installing additional sanitary facilities and addressing these issues in its new estate strategy.

The service has memoranda of understanding with Stand Against Racism & Inequality (SARI) and Bristol Women's Voice which provide training and support, such as lunch-and-learn sessions on microaggressions. It also introduced inclusion, community, allyship, representation, equity (ICARE) allies in June 2025. ICARE allies offer peer support, sharing of lived experience and involvement in community events. Many of the ICARE allies are senior leaders and this signals a strong organisational endorsement.

The inclusion team maintains a diversity calendar with over 70 national and international events. This is used to raise awareness, promote conversations and deliver campaigns; for example, Inclusion Week and Hate Crime Awareness Week.

In our workforce survey, 84 percent of respondents (270 of 322) agreed that they felt comfortable being themselves at work. Most staff we spoke to across the service told us that they felt comfortable and valued.

The service has improved its process for people impact assessments

In our last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should make sure it has robust processes in place to carry out equality impact assessments and review any actions agreed as a result.

The service now has an effective process in place to assess equality impact. It has revised its people impact assessment (PIA) process (its name for equality impact assessments). The service told us that it had completed 461 PIAs, an increase from 15 in the previous inspection. The inclusion team quality assure all completed PIAs. In addition, the service has an ongoing project underway to create a system to monitor actions from PIAs.

There is a lack of accessible and relevant data in the service. This means that some PIAs were missing useful data about the impact on people with protected characteristics.

We reviewed a range of PIAs relating to workstreams including the Bath redevelopment project, the ICARE allies and the purchase of a new rescue buoy. The service acts as needed to improve equality. For example, the PIA for the Bath development project identified negative impacts for those with disabilities. To mitigate this, the service updated its plans to include improved wayfinding signage, a breakout quiet space and inclusive toilets.

The service had made good progress in this area for improvement and we have therefore closed it.

Some staff still don’t understand the benefits of EDI, including positive action

In our last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should make sure all staff understand the benefits of EDI and their role in promoting it.

The service carries out EDI training for all its staff. This includes face-to-face training from the inclusion team and two e-learning packages that are carried out yearly. The service also hosts bitesize packages and signposts to webinars and external EDI training opportunities on its intranet.

During this inspection, we were told of examples of staff not wanting to attend Pride or drive the Pride-wrapped fire engine. We were also told that there was a negative view of positive action across the service and an “old school” culture of resistance to change. There is no information on the intranet about positive action. The service hasn’t done enough to educate staff across the service on the benefits of positive action.

The service needs to do more in this area, therefore we are keeping this area for improvement open.

We have also issued a new area for improvement, that the service should identify and overcome barriers to equal opportunity, so its workforce better represents its community. This includes making sure staff understand the value of positive action and having a diverse workforce.

Leading people effectively

Adequate

Avon Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at leading its people.

To be effective, fire and rescue services should identify and develop leaders throughout the organisation. Leaders should be able to translate and communicate the objectives of the service's service plan to all staff and the public in a meaningful way. They should communicate openly, build trust, challenge unacceptable behaviour and use every contact with staff to maintain and improve a positive culture.

Areas for improvement

The service should equip its leaders with the skills, tools and clear direction to support them to achieve the objectives set out in its service plan and manage performance of its activities.

The senior leadership team should make sure all staff are aware of the service's strategic objectives and how they contribute towards implementing them.

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

Main findings

Leaders haven't yet effectively communicated the strategic aims of the service

Senior leaders have started to effectively communicate the aims and objectives in the service plan to staff at all levels. They are doing this in a variety of ways, which promote open, two-way communication. For example, the service has introduced monthly 'keeping us connected' sessions. Senior leaders rotate these sessions around different venues and they are broadcast live. The service also records them so that staff can view them later. Staff can send in questions in advance or ask them in person. In addition, in the weekly staff newsletter, one of the service leadership board members writes a blog as an introduction, and the service communicates important information via emails to all staff.

As a result, staff have a high level of trust in their leaders. In our workforce survey, 77 percent of respondents (247 of 322) agreed that senior leaders clearly communicated the service's objectives.

Leaders at all levels aren't making sure that staff understand the service plan. This means that staff aren't fully involved in implementing the service's objectives. Some of the staff we spoke to didn't understand how they contributed to the aims of the service plan, either individually or as a team. Some staff told us that they felt that managers gave them directives and targets to meet but they didn't feel involved in working towards the service plan. For example, some station-based staff told us that the service had changed their priorities but they didn't understand why.

The service has identified this as an issue and plans to introduce a connectivity plan to increase staff engagement and better target communications to staff who need it. We look forward to seeing how this progresses at our next inspection.

Considering this evidence, we have identified a new area for improvement that the senior leadership team should make sure all staff are aware of the service's strategic objectives and how they contribute towards implementing them.

The service identifies and develops leaders through open and fair processes

In our last inspection, we identified two areas for improvement that the service should put in place a system to actively manage staff careers, with the aim of diversifying the pool of future and current leaders, and the service should make sure its selection, development and promotion of staff is open and fair.

We found that the service had well-understood arrangements in place to identify and develop talented leaders.

Staff clearly understand and trust career development pathways. The service proactively removes any barriers and supports all staff in accessing leadership development opportunities. There are structured development pathways in place for operational roles as well as corporate leadership pathways. These outline the qualifications, training and experience required for each level of leadership, supported by a competency framework.

The service has also introduced development pathways and talent pools for staff in the control team, which have been positively received.

There are talent management schemes in place to develop leaders and high-potential staff. The service has introduced a leadership academy and supported the National Fire Chiefs Council direct entry programme. The service advertises all talent and leadership opportunities fairly through its bulletins and on the intranet. Staff are also able to access other leadership programmes such as:

- the Lighthouse and Beacon programmes, which aren't fire-service specific;
- the Springboard programme for women;
- the Navigator programme for men; and
- the Spring Forward programme for supervisory managers.

The service has put considerable effort into developing its promotion and progression processes so that they are fair and all staff can understand them. But in our workforce survey, only 52 percent of respondents (166 of 322) agreed that the promotion process in the service was fair.

The service manages selection processes consistently. And it uses temporary promotions appropriately to fill short-term resourcing gaps. As at 31 March 2025, 3.7 percent of the workforce were on temporary promotion. The average length of temporary promotions was 203 days, which is lower than the England average of 295 days.

The service has made sufficient progress in this area and we have closed both areas for improvement.

The service needs to do more to develop its leaders to manage performance

The service isn't doing all it can to equip its leaders to lead effectively.

The service has a good process in place for leaders to manage individual staff performance and development. Staff have specific and individual objectives or have had their performance assessed in the past year. In our workforce survey, 65 percent of respondents (210 of 322) agreed that the service's performance management systems allowed them to achieve their potential.

Leaders at all levels have received appropriate training, which helps them to confidently manage a range of challenges. This includes training such as managing difficult conversations, leading high-functioning teams and project management, as well as bitesize sessions such as finance, governance and assurance.

Staff can access coaching and mentoring through the National Fire Chiefs Council online portal. Leaders are exposed to different management scenarios that match and stretch their skills. The service uses 360° feedback (feedback from multiple sources) to develop its leaders, with a coaching session to go through the results. Staff spoke positively about the process and felt that it contributed towards their development. This means the service has leaders who are confident to progress to the next level of management when opportunities arise.

We found that some areas of the service didn't have effective systems in place for performance management, including key performance indicators for important areas of work, or local departmental plans and objectives. This meant that it wasn't meeting its targets and important issues weren't being escalated effectively. The service hasn't equipped or empowered its leaders with the skills and tools to achieve the service plan objectives.

We are therefore issuing a new area for improvement that the service should equip its leaders with the skills, tools and clear direction to support them to achieve the objectives set out in its service plan and manage performance of its activities.

The service has effective processes in place to manage individual staff performance

In our last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should improve all-staff understanding and application of the performance development review process. Leaders are equipped to confidently manage staff performance and deal with any poor performance or behavioural issues.

There is a good performance management system in place, which allows leaders to effectively develop and assess the individual performance of all staff members. As at 31 March 2025, the proportions of completed personal development reviews (PDRs) across all workforce groups were as follows:

- on-call staff: 99.1 percent
- wholetime staff: 98.2 percent
- fire control staff: 93 percent
- support staff: 82.1 percent.

Each staff member has individual goals and objectives and regular performance assessments. In June 2025, the service revised its PDR process to be more employee led, incorporating look forward and look back sections, and including a focus on culture. It carried out a quality assurance exercise and results have been fed back to staff. Promotion pathways and development programmes are linked to PDRs. Staff feel confident in the performance and development arrangements in place. At the time of our inspection, the service told us it had a 99.1 percent PDR completion rate.

The service has made satisfactory progress and we have closed this area for improvement.

Leaders promote a positive culture and act as role models

Leaders at all levels act as role models. Most of the staff we spoke to told us that they felt that the senior leadership team positively modelled the service values and that they were committed to providing an inclusive and safe place to work. In our workforce survey, 62 percent of respondents (199 of 322) agreed that leaders at all levels promoted a positive culture.

As a result, leaders are maintaining and constantly developing the positive culture we found throughout the organisation. We found that the service expanded the service leadership team meeting attendance to include heads of departments, which was positively received. Staff feel listened to, included in decision making and empowered to contribute towards strategic pieces of work.

Leaders are active in challenging misconduct, including bullying, harassment and discrimination. And staff trust them to take their concerns seriously.

hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk