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

Fire and rescue services 2025–27

Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service

Contents

Overall summary

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

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

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 Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service in March 2023. And in September 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 a re-inspection in March 2024 to specifically consider the cause of concern that was previously issued for ensuring fairness and promoting diversity. And we published our findings in May 2024.

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 Cornwall 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 Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service, and I am grateful for the positive and constructive way in which the service worked with our inspection staff.

The service is predominantly rural and covers an area of 1,369 square miles. It has a population of 579,400, which is decreasing.

Governance for this service is the responsibility of Cornwall Fire and Rescue Authority.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service cost £54.01 per head of population, which is more than the England average of £51.71.

In the same period, the firefighter cost per head of population was £32.89, which is more than the England average of £30.80 and 13 percent more than the previous year.

In 2024/25, there were 31 fire stations and 43 fire engines. As at 31 March 2025, the service had 177 full-time equivalent wholetime firefighters and 385 full-time equivalent on-call firefighters. Total employees were 698. Cornwall has the highest number of full-time equivalent firefighters per 1,000 population (due to the number of on-call firefighters).

I am satisfied with some aspects of the performance of Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service in keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks, and with the response it is providing to its communities. However, there are areas in which it needs to improve. For example, we saw a lack of clear direction and performance management. We saw community risk management plan priorities not being met and some staff not being appropriately trained for their roles.

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

The service's prevention work is limited by a lack of direction

The service's prevention work is limited mainly to home fire safety checks. However, it isn't meeting targets for these and we identified a backlog. The department lacks appropriate direction to make sure it is keeping members of the public safe.

Staff aren't prepared for major and multi-agency incidents

The service has arrangements to respond to major and multi-agency incidents. However, staff aren't effectively trained for these types of incidents, including marauding terrorist attacks.

The service needs to continue improving its estate

The service has improved its estate to make sure it is gender appropriate. This includes installing changing facilities in some of its fire stations. However, it needs to continue this work to make sure its facilities are appropriate for all staff, which should support recruitment and retention.

Leaders are becoming more visible but need to communicate priorities more clearly

The service has started improving leadership visibility and communication. It is doing this by introducing a leadership conference, new governance, and weekly updates to all staff. Some managers are effective and teams generally have a positive culture. However, senior leaders aren't consistently visible or clear about strategic priorities, and could improve communication. In a review of culture, an external company found staff felt disconnected from leadership. Staff also told us two-way feedback was limited. Culture improvement work has had a mixed impact, and there is a lack of performance management. On a positive note, the service has carried out work on its promotion and talent processes.

The service should continue improving how it protects the public

We have seen some positive developments, particularly in how effective the service is at protecting the public and in the quality assurance work in this area. The introduction of a fire setters intervention programme is also positive. However, while the service has carried out good work, we look forward to seeing further improvements.

Kathryn Stone OBE

His Majesty's Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies

Adequate

Cornwall 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 assure itself that it has suitable arrangements to manage the performance of the priorities in its community risk management plan and that there is effective monitoring to achieve effective performance.

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 could improve how it identifies and understands community risk to better inform the community risk management plan

The service hasn't fully assessed the risks it faces as part of its community risk management planning process. When assessing risk, it has considered only limited information from internal and external sources, which doesn't help it to build a comprehensive risk profile. For example, it has used a range of data sets including quantitative and qualitative data to identify risk and inform the priorities in the community risk management plan (CRMP). However, we found risk information analysis didn't inform the service's response standards in the CRMP.

There is a process to identify and manage corporate risk, which the service reviews quarterly. The service also reviews risk in the county annually to identify new and emerging risk. And it commissioned an independent risk review to make sure fire stations are in the right locations to provide an appropriate response.

In our last inspection, we identified the following area for improvement: "The service needs to improve how it engages with its local community to build a comprehensive profile of risk in its service area." Since then, the service has improved the way it consults with the community. As part of the new CRMP process, it consulted with a wide audience across 5 strategic areas over a 12-week period. It received 922 responses, of which 65 percent (599 responses) were from the community and 35 percent (323 responses) were from members of staff. Considering this evidence, we have closed the area for improvement.

The service has an effective CRMP

Once it has assessed risks, the service records its findings in an easily understood plan called the CRMP. This plan describes how the service intends to use its prevention, protection and response activities to mitigate or reduce the risks and threats its communities face both now and in the future. The service has described its highest risks in the CRMP, which classifies risks into five risk areas – incidents, people, places, spaces and tourism.

The arrangements described in the plan also take account of the issues identified in the service's corporate risk register, which could compromise the implementation of its prevention, protection and response activities. And the service reviews resources, staff, budget and IT, and adjusts priorities in the CRMP and the service if necessary.

The service has continuity plans to make sure it can continue to provide a minimum level of risk-critical functions during periods of industrial action.

The service needs to improve how it implements CRMP priorities and monitors performance

Senior leaders don't have effective monitoring, feedback and scrutiny arrangements to make sure the aims they have set out in the CRMP for prevention, protection and response are being achieved.

Where commitments made to the public aren't being met, senior leaders are aware of them but aren't making sure suitable plans are in place to meet them. We found that departments including prevention, protection and response weren't achieving performance targets in the CRMP. Performance is reported on internally, yet there is no accountability or action taken to address this. As a result, service to the public could be compromised, so we have issued an area for improvement.

The service could improve internal governance of CRMP priorities

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 it has robust oversight and governance arrangements. 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 does receive regular, meaningful updates on the arrangements the service has for prevention, protection and response.

Preventing fires and other risks

Requires improvement

Cornwall 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.

Areas for improvement

The service should make sure resource is effectively aligned and co-ordinated to meet its prevention strategy.

The service should make sure there is effective performance management with clear direction to implement its prevention strategy.

The service should evaluate its prevention activity, so it understands what works.

The service should make sure it quality assures its prevention activity, so staff carry out home fire safety checks 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 prevention strategy is linked to the community risk management plan but the service needs to address its aims to ensure public safety

The service's prevention strategy is clearly aligned with the risks identified in its community risk management plan. However, the service isn't meeting the priorities in the strategy. There is no clear prioritisation of what the prevention department needs to do to keep the public safe. Time is focused on home fire safety checks (HFSCs) and other community involvement is affected. For example, although the prevention strategy sets out a commitment to working with the community on road safety and the service is a member of the Vision Zero road safety partnership, the prevention department's activities aren't well co-ordinated and take place locally without clear direction from the prevention manager.

Leaders responsible for prevention haven't clearly communicated 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, either individually or as a team.

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. Two examples are the sharing of HFSCs between wholetime and on-call fire stations, and the carrying out of other prevention activity such as road safety and school visits by operational crews.

In our last inspection, we identified two areas for improvement in relation to the service's prevention work:

- "The service should make sure it allocates enough resources to meet its prevention strategy."
- "The service should make sure it adequately resources prevention work in areas covered by on-call stations."

Since then, the service has supported prevention activity by using staff from other departments, such as the trading company, which has all but ceased to run. In addition, some on-call stations now carry out HFSCs. Considering this evidence, we have closed both areas for improvement.

While the service has carried out work to resource prevention, prevention staff told us they didn't have capacity to carry out anything other than HFSCs. The prevention department sees these checks as a priority and often carries out checks previously assigned to stations to make sure targets are met. This is at the expense of other prevention activity, for example water safety, road safety and school visits. Staff told us the prevention department would like to do more prevention work, yet there was no time. Considering this evidence, we have identified this as an area for improvement.

The service targets safety checks at the most vulnerable but doesn't complete them within the required time frame

The service uses a risk-based approach to clearly prioritise its prevention activity towards people most at risk from fire and other emergencies. For example, in the year ending 31 March 2025, 99.2 percent (5,457 out of 5,499) of HFSCs were for households that contained at least one vulnerable person.

It uses a range of information and data to target its prevention activity at vulnerable individuals and groups including those from under-represented communities. It scores the risk of individual vulnerabilities to determine the level of priority: either very high or high. Vulnerable people include:

- hoarders;
- adults over the age of 65 and children under the age of 5;
- those with no alarm;
- those living alone; and
- those with underlying health conditions.

The service told us HFSCs were triaged accordingly and should be carried out within 15 days. However, during our inspection, we found evidence that 180 HFSCs hadn't been carried out within this timescale. The longest delay was 257 days. We highlighted this to the service and it produced a statement of assurance. It carried out work immediately to address the backlog and make sure it visited high-risk individuals. As at 14 January 2026, the service told us there were 44 outstanding HFSCs with the most overdue being from 7 August 2025. The service stated it would gather learning from this incident and review systems to make sure this didn't happen again.

We found limited evidence of prevention interventions and campaigns. Station staff carry out some activities, for example motorbike safety and cliff edge safety. This is because prevention staff don't have enough time for any prevention activity other than HFSCs. The service should make sure it is carrying out a wide range of prevention activity to keep the public safe. This is an area for improvement.

The service needs to improve its training and quality assurance of prevention work

Staff in specific departments receive training to carry out HFSCs. It is enhanced for specific roles such as tri-service officers (with responsibility for fire, ambulance and police) who are located in on-call areas. Some operational staff told us they had initial training to carry out HFSCs, yet this wasn't ongoing. Other staff told us they hadn't received any formal training and their knowledge and understanding came from what was being taught locally at stations.

The service told us there was no quality assurance process for HFSCs or other prevention activity. This applied both within the prevention department and on station. There is a lack of resource to develop a policy, and the service is awaiting National Fire Chiefs Council best practice for quality assurance. The service can't be assured its prevention work is of an appropriate quality, so we have issued an area for improvement.

The service doesn't evaluate its prevention activities

In our last inspection, we identified the following area for improvement: "The service should evaluate its prevention activity so it understands what works."

In this inspection, we found the service didn't have good evaluation tools to measure how effective its activity was or make sure all sections of its communities got appropriate access to the prevention services that met their needs. For example, there was no rigorous evaluation of prevention initiatives.

Data and measures of success are limited to engagement numbers, and there is a lack of demographic data collected. The service has also not evaluated its partnership agreements to make sure they are providing the best service to the public. It stated it was awaiting National Fire Chiefs Council guidance and has limited capacity. However, it has evaluated some individual station initiatives to better understand what works best, and to provide support to staff carrying out prevention at station level.

We were disappointed we didn't find any evidence of the service receiving feedback to improve what it did.

As a result, the service is missing opportunities to improve its prevention work for the public. The area for improvement remains open.

The service works well with partner organisations to carry out prevention activity

The service works with a range of other organisations to prevent fires and other emergencies. For example, it is a member of the Market Quality Assurance Board. It also joins a multi-agency meeting, which includes the Care Quality Commission, that focuses on services and support available in the community. An issue was identified with fire safety precautions at a residential care home. The meeting shared the information so participating agencies were aware of the issue.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service carried out 5,499 HFSCs. It completed 1,100 HFSCs that were referrals from other agencies and 326 that led to the service making an onward referral to at least 1 other organisation.

We found good evidence that it routinely referred people at greatest risk to organisations that may better meet their needs. It has a safeguarding officer to make appropriate referrals, for example to refer people with dementia to organisations including Age UK, Cornwall Housing and adult social care.

Arrangements are also in place to receive referrals from others. These include South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust, private sector housing associations and Age UK. The service acts appropriately on the referrals it receives.

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, it works in a group called Sanctuary with the police and Cornwall Housing. Each organisation takes responsibility to make sure members of the public are kept safe from domestic violence. The service's contribution is to complete an HFSC.

Staff have the skills and training to respond appropriately to safeguarding concerns

Staff we interviewed told us about occasions when they had identified safeguarding problems. They told us they felt confident and trained to act appropriately and promptly. They told us they had mandatory e-learning training annually that covers adult and child safeguarding. They also received in-person training. The training is different depending on the role. For example, prevention staff receive more extensive training.

We found good evidence of staff raising safeguarding concerns to keep members of the public safe. The service has a dedicated safeguarding officer. Their time is split equally between fire and police, and they are actively involved in the multi-agency safeguarding hub. The hub meets daily to discuss safeguarding concerns, identify risk and inform prevention activity.

The service has introduced a fire setters intervention programme

In the year ending 30 June 2025, the service attended 426 deliberate fire incidents, which has increased from 296 in the previous year. The rate of attendance at deliberate fire incidents was 73 per 100,000 population in the year ending 30 June 2025. This is lower than the England rate of 125.

In our last inspection, we identified the following area for improvement: "The service should introduce a proportionate programme to reduce deliberate fire setting." In this inspection, we found the service carried out a range of suitable and effective interventions to target and educate people with different needs who showed signs of fire-setting behaviour. For example, it has introduced a fire setters intervention programme. This works on referrals from partners including the Probation Service, police and schools. It is for young people under 18 or people under 25 with learning disabilities. From its introduction in April 2025 until December 2025, it had received 32 referrals. The service has trained staff to run the programme. The programme is yet to be evaluated. Considering this evidence, we have closed the area for improvement.

Protecting the public through fire regulation

Adequate

Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service is adequate 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.

Area for improvement

The service should assure itself its risk-based inspection programme prioritises the highest risks and includes proportionate activity to reduce risk and staff understand what should be prioritised.

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 protection strategy is linked to the community risk management plan but the service needs to prioritise work to implement the plan's priorities

The service's protection strategy is clearly linked to the risks identified in its community risk management plan.

Leaders responsible for protection have clearly communicated the strategy and main aims to the workforce. As a result, protection staff understand how they contribute to the aims of the service individually and as a team. However, we found there was no clear direction in terms of prioritisation of work in the protection department. High demand in the department means the service isn't auditing its risk-based inspection programme.

Staff across the service are involved in protection activity and effectively share information as needed. For example, operational firefighters carry out low-risk fire safety visits and escalate any concerns appropriately to the protection department. Staff told us there was a process to highlight risk and share information about it with different departments. If there is a fire safety concern, the relevant station and control room are notified.

The service uses this information to adjust planning assumptions and direct activity between its prevention, protection and response functions. This means it properly aligns its resources with risk. Appropriately qualified operational staff on stations are used, if resourcing allows, to support protection activity.

The service must make sure its risk-based inspection programme focuses on the highest risk

The service has a risk-based inspection programme (RBIP), but it is limited in scope and not up to date. The service uses a five-year RBIP that included 1,340 premises as of December 2025. However, there is uncertainty about the accuracy of the information in the RBIP. The service said it was carrying out work to review it using improved data. This is to make sure it is current and all relevant very-high-risk and high-risk premises have suitable inspection periods assigned. The review is part of wider work in this area, which includes a number of systems communicating through a new interface to create efficiencies. We look forward to seeing how this work has progressed in our next inspection.

We found the service wasn't consistently completing audits of high-risk buildings in the time frames it had set itself. Targets are set in the protection department and are outlined in the community risk management plan but aren't being met. Staff aren't clear on what the priorities are in the department. This affects the implementation of the RBIP.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service set itself a high-risk building audit target of 750 but carried out only 236 high-risk building audits. This is 31.4 percent of its target. The service told us this was due to other demands on the department. Considering this evidence, we have identified this as an area for improvement.

The service's out-of-hours support is limited

There is limited access to out-of-hours support in the protection department for other departments. There is no dedicated duty fire safety officer. Although some individuals carry out this role, it is on an ad-hoc basis. The service said staff were recalled to duty, if necessary, yet this wasn't reliable. It has acknowledged this is something that must improve to make sure staff are supported regarding fire safety concerns. A proposal has been drafted for senior managers to consider.

Protection staff are appropriately trained

In our last inspection, we identified the following area for improvement: "The service should make sure it allocates enough resources to complete its risk-based inspection programme." In this inspection, we found the service had enough qualified protection staff to meet the requirements of its RBIP. As at 31 March 2025, there were 16 competent protection staff, which is an increase from the 12 in the previous year. This helps it provide the range of audit and enforcement activity needed both now and in the future. In addition, operational crews at wholetime stations carry out low-risk fire safety visits and qualified protection staff in operational roles are used when resourcing allows to support protection activity such as RBIP audits. Considering this evidence, we have closed the area for improvement.

Staff get the right training and work with appropriate accreditation or are working towards it. Continuing professional development is ongoing in the department. Common themes in protection activity are highlighted and used in discussion sessions.

The service is supporting new protection 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. It has identified about 250 premises that will be affected by remediation work, and there are plans to include them in the RBIP if necessary. It is aware of how this may affect work and demand in the protection department.

The service is supporting the Building Safety Regulator. It has allocated staff time to carry out training and work on tall buildings and remediation. It has a project to provide support and regulation to all buildings between 11 and 18 metres tall in Cornwall. It will include these buildings in the next RBIP and inspect them accordingly. 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 to receive this information. When it doesn't receive the right information, it takes action. And it updates accordingly the risk information it gives its operational staff.

The quality of audits is satisfactory

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

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

We found the service had completed audits to a high standard, in a consistent, systematic way and in line with its policies. There was evidence audits had been carried out by a suitably qualified inspector, with responsible persons at premises being notified accordingly.

The service makes relevant information from its audits available to operational teams and control room operators. There is a clear process for this that also covers sharing risk information with partner organisations. There is also a system for referrals and concerns received externally or internally.

The service carries out quality assurance of protection work

In our last inspection, we identified the following area for improvement: "The service should make sure it has an effective quality assurance process so staff carry out audits to a consistent standard."

In this inspection, we found the service carried out proportionate quality assurance of its protection activity. It has introduced a new quality assurance process in protection. This includes a fire safety manager shadowing a fire safety officer on an audit visit. The manager reviews records and any associated information recorded. The process helps make decision-making consistent. Any themes identified from the process are discussed with the individual at the time, as well as during their performance development review. Themes also form part of quarterly continuing professional development team training sessions.

The service also carries out quality assurance of enforcement activity and building regulation consultations.

Considering this evidence, we have closed the area for improvement.

All sections of the service's communities get appropriate access to protection services that meet their needs. For example, we saw good evidence of the service working with businesses regarding building consultation and licensing inspections. And there are systems for electronic referrals to be made to the service and acted on.

The service uses enforcement powers appropriately to make sure buildings are safe

The service consistently uses its full range of enforcement powers and, when appropriate, it prosecutes those who don't comply with fire safety regulations.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, there were 262 unsatisfactory audits, which led to the service carrying out 245 enforcement activities. These included:

- 193 informal notifications;
- 28 enforcement notices;
- 2 alteration notices;
- 19 prohibition notices; and
- 3 prosecutions.

The service completed nine prosecutions in the five years from 2020/21 to 2024/25.

We reviewed recent fire safety audits that had resulted in enforcement action to make sure buildings were safe. Staff told us the new quality assurance process in protection ensured consistency of approach regarding enforcement activity. A second enforcement officer reviews all formal fire safety notices before issue. All notices are logged and can be viewed on the community fire risk management information system. Staff also told us referral meetings were held weekly to allow officers to discuss and agree issues such as enforcement and prohibition. This also supports a consistent approach to enforcement.

The service works effectively with partner organisations to inspect buildings and carry out enforcement

The service works closely with other enforcement agencies to regulate fire safety, and it routinely exchanges risk information with them. It works with relevant partners to draw on appropriate powers for the situation and establish the best course of action to keep buildings safe. The service told us it worked with partners such as building control, the Food Standards Agency and the Health and Safety Executive. It shared risk information with them using the exchange of risk information system.
This electronic system records actions, reminders and audit trails.

The service works with businesses on enforcement action and reducing unwanted fire signals. It also has a number of partnerships as part of the Partner Authority Scheme.

The service has it improved how many building consultations it completes

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service responded to 97.9 percent of building consultations (695 of 710) within the required time frame and 99.4 percent of licensing consultations (488 of 491) within the required time frame. These percentages have improved over the past three years. The service acknowledged there was a small percentage of consultations that hadn't been completed in the allocated time. The protection department allocates consultations to officers based on their skills.

The service works with businesses to support them, yet can do more

The service works proactively with local businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation. It has a dedicated primary authority officer who works full time in this function. The post is funded through the primary authority scheme, and there are nine partnership agreements. Staff are also involved with business safety activities, but the service acknowledged that, due to limited time and resources, this involvement was minimal and could be improved.

Responding to fires and other emergencies

Good

Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service is good 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.

Innovative practice

The service has an effective electronic system for sharing risk information between departments and externally

The service uses an electronic system to share risk information between internal departments and external partners. The system records and tracks this information to make sure appropriate actions have been carried out.

There were good examples of prevention, protection and response departments using it to quickly share risk information. For example, the control room can electronically notify operational staff attending incidents. This helps to ensure the safety of staff and the public.

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 response strategy is linked to the community risk management plan

The service has linked its response strategy to the risks identified in its community risk management plan (CRMP).

Leaders responsible for response have clearly communicated the strategy and main response aims to the workforce. As a result, response staff understand how they contribute to the response aims of the service individually and as a team.

The service's fire engines and response staff, as well as its working patterns, are designed and located to help it respond flexibly to fires and other emergencies with the appropriate resources. For example, the service commissioned an independent review to make sure fire stations and fire engines were suitably located to provide an appropriate response for the public.

The service isn't meeting response standards

The service has set out response standards in its CRMP. It aims to attend 70 percent of incidents in 11 minutes with wholetime fire engines and 16 minutes with on-call fire engines. However, it hasn't met its standards for a number of years, and we noted this in our last inspection. The service acknowledged it needed to review these and was carrying out this work in line with its new CRMP. It is using data analysis to inform the new 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 12 minutes and 43 seconds. This is slower than the average for services that are predominantly rural.

Using this measure, the service's average response time has increased from 12 minutes and 23 seconds in the year ending 30 June 2024. This decline is predominantly due to an increase in crew turnout time, which has increased from 2 minutes and 31 seconds to 2 minutes and 48 seconds during the same period.

Fire engine availability has decreased, yet remains good

In the year ending 31 March 2025, availability of wholetime fire engines was 96.8 percent. This is a decrease from the previous year when availability was 97.7 percent. During the same period, availability of on-call fire engines was 74.9 percent. This is a decrease from the previous year when availability was 78.2 percent. The service acknowledged the decline in availability and was working to address this, including reviewing on-call contracts to maximise availability.

The service records risk information and it is accessible

The service routinely collects and updates information about the highest-risk people, places and threats it has identified. This is available in the control room and subsequently in turnout information for the crew's knowledge.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service had identified 889 sites that posed more risk to firefighters if an incident took place. During the same period, the service visited 389 to update its records and familiarise itself with the firefighting risks at the sites. This is an increase from the previous year when the service completed 266 visits.

This risk information is readily available for the service's prevention, protection and response staff. This means these teams can identify and reduce risk effectively. For example, we saw good evidence of all departments using the exchange of risk information system to share information about risk with the appropriate departments. This information is overseen by the risk department. Where appropriate, the service shares risk information with other organisations, using the same system.

We sampled a range of risk information on residential and commercial risks, including the information 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, and staff could easily access and understand it. Encouragingly, it had been completed with input from the service's prevention, protection and response functions where appropriate. Risk information is available for control room staff and operational crews through mobile data terminals. The service also uses ResilienceDirect to gather and share risk information.

The service carries out proportionate quality assurance of its risk information. The risk department manages risk information and sites, and allocates visits to the appropriate stations and watches. Trained station managers then quality assure completed site-specific risk information plans. However, we did see some information in plans that wasn't effectively quality assured. The service intends to roll out further training to station managers to make sure risk information is accurately quality assured.

Incident commanders are trained and assessed appropriately

The service has incident commanders who are trained and regularly and properly assessed. The service told us incident commanders at all levels received initial training as part of their roles. They were then assessed regularly to ensure competency in incident command, as well as receiving regular training. 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. However, we did hear that individuals were responsible for their own training, and some training wasn't mandated and recorded appropriately.

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.

In 2024/25, the service needed 203 incident commanders and had 249 accredited. There were no incident commanders who were still carrying out the same work after their accreditation had expired.

The service should make sure its debriefs are prompt

As part of our inspection, we reviewed a range of emergency incidents and training events. These included dwelling fires, special service calls (non-fire incidents) and a large-scale incident. Hot debriefs, formal debriefs and fire investigation debriefs took place afterwards. Assigned officers are expected to complete these in the required time frames outlined in policy. However, there was uncertainty about the capacity that officers had for this. In some cases, debriefs weren't completed within the time frame, actions weren't addressed accordingly or learning wasn't shared with all staff effectively. Some staff said they weren't involved in the debriefing process, and they hadn't accessed any learning following debriefs.

We were pleased to find the service consistently followed its policies to make sure staff commanded incidents in line with operational guidance. It updates internal risk information with the information it receives.

It has responded to learning from incidents to improve its service to the public. For example, it updated safeguarding training after a debrief. However, there was uncertainty about whether everyone had been made aware of these updates.

The service includes control staff in exercises and debriefs

We were pleased to find the service's control staff were integrated into its command, training, exercise, debrief and assurance activity. The service told us of a number of exercises in which control room staff were involved and how they were fully involved in the debrief process following an exercise or incident.

The service is working to make sure it is effectively implementing national operational guidance

In our last inspection, we identified the following area for improvement: "The service should make sure it understands how to adopt national operational guidance and put in place a plan to implement this."

In this inspection, we found the service was making sure its policies were in line with national operational guidance. It uses a tracker to record and monitor progress on actions to achieve compliance with national operational guidance and to assign actions to relevant staff. Progress is then displayed on a Microsoft Power BI dashboard, reports are generated and performance is reported at six-weekly fire leadership team meetings. The service was managing 2,038 actions as at January 2026. It prioritises actions appropriately and has identified 15 high-priority actions out of 277 non-compliant actions.

The service should continue this work to ensure compliance with national operational guidance. However, considering this evidence, we have closed the area for improvement.

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents

Requires improvement

Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement 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).

Areas for improvement

The service should make sure it is well prepared to form part of a multi-agency response to major incidents. It should make sure its procedures for responding are understood by all staff and are well tested.

The service should make sure it is well prepared to form part of a multi-agency response to a terrorist incident and its procedures for responding are understood by all staff and are well tested.

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 considers the possible risks associated with a major and multi-agency incident

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. For example, it told us it had completed risk assessments of high-risk sites in Cornwall and shared them with Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly local resilience forum partners to access in the event of an incident. It has done the same for thematic national strategic assessments such as power outages and civil unrest. It told us risk information was available on ResilienceDirect, which officers used to support them at incidents.

The service 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. These include the threat of marauding terrorist attacks (MTAs). The service was involved in an MTA multi-agency exercise at a theme park in Devon, which was organised by Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service. Firefighters have access to risk information from neighbouring services. The service told us how firefighters could access this on mobile data terminals.

The service needs to do more to prepare staff for responding to a major or multi-agency incident

In our last inspection, we identified the following area for improvement: "The service should make sure it is well prepared to form part of a multi-agency response to major incidents. It should make sure its procedures for responding are understood by all staff and are well tested."

During this inspection, we considered how well prepared the service was to respond to foreseeable major incidents including a severe weather event, such as a flood, or a wildfire. We found the service had major incident plans and procedures for safely managing these incident types. The plans focused on incidents related to road traffic collision, railways, terrorism and mass decontamination.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service completed ten multi-agency training exercises. This is a rate of 19.6 per 1,000 full-time equivalent firefighters, which is lower than the rate for England of 54.2.

Not all staff at all levels properly understand the service's policies and procedures. We found a number of staff weren't confident in the level of training and understanding regarding a major incident. When we asked about mobilisation considerations or the declaration of a major incident, staff were unsure of the actions they would take.

The service has carried out a limited amount of realistic training and exercises to test its policies and procedures for safely managing multi-agency incidents. But when we spoke to staff, a large number hadn't been involved in these. This type of training isn't mandatory, and attendance isn't clearly recorded to make sure different people attend. The service would benefit from running major or multi-agency incident exercises to support staff confidence in responding to this incident type.

Considering this evidence, the area for improvement remains open.

The service needs to do more to prepare staff for responding to a terrorist incident

In our last inspection, we identified the following area for improvement: "The service should make sure it is well prepared to form part of a multi-agency response to a terrorist incident and its procedures for responding are understood by all staff and are well tested."

Although the service doesn't have a dedicated MTA team, it does have access to Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service's MTA response team. All staff receive mandatory MTA training, which is offered via e-learning and local presentations. And the service held a practical MTA training day at its training centre, although only limited numbers attended. When we asked staff if they felt confident to respond to this incident type, they said they felt under-prepared.

Considering this evidence, the area for improvement remains open.

The service has effective plans to respond to a large-scale incident

The service hasn't declared a major incident or completed a major incident exercise in the past two years. However, we reviewed its response to a large-scale waste fire it attended, which lasted 26 days. The multi-agency approach followed Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP) and made good use of ResilienceDirect to share risk information and update partners. The service contributed to the multi-agency debrief following this incident and implemented learning from it.

As a result of this, the service can show its plans are fit for purpose. These plans cover:

- co-location with other emergency responders;
- sharing information and working with other emergency responders;
- recording and sharing learning; and
- helping move incidents to a recovery phase and a return to normal for the community and businesses affected.

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 supports Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service when an incident occurs over the border. A dedicated officer attends the incident with crews for support. The service is intraoperable with this service and can form part of a multi-agency response.

The service has successfully deployed resources to other services and has used national resilience assets such as high-volume pumps to support large-scale incidents, most recently at a large-scale waste fire. It also hosts a number of other national resilience assets.

The service works closely with the Isles of Scilly Fire and Rescue Service through a service level agreement to provide support. This includes prevention, protection and response support. It handles calls on behalf of the service and can provide incident support, when necessary, over the phone or in person.

Incident commanders have good knowledge of JESIP

The incident commanders we interviewed had been trained in and were familiar with JESIP.

The service could give us strong evidence that it consistently followed these principles. This included the use of the Information, Intent, Method, Administration, Risk Assessment, Communications and Humanitarian Issues briefing format and M/ETHANE. During one incident, there was good use of co-location to distribute resources at the scene of the incident effectively. Officers use prompts for following JESIP at multi-agency incidents.

We sampled a range of debriefs the service had carried out after multi-agency incidents. We were pleased to find the service had identified any problems it had with applying JESIP and took appropriate and prompt action with other emergency services. For example, during one incident, the use of M/ETHANE was limited. This was acknowledged during the debrief and learning was shared with all services emphasising the importance of the use of M/ETHANE messaging.

The service could improve the effectiveness of cross-border exercises

In our last inspection, we highlighted the fact that there was no cross-border exercise plan and only limited exercises took place. Since then, the service has signed the south-west regional cross border exercising memorandum of understanding. The memorandum confirms different levels of responsibility – strategic, tactical and operational – and there is representation at meetings for each level. It also states there will be an annual exercise schedule, yet we didn't see any evidence of this.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service completed 13 training exercises with neighbouring fire and rescue services. This is a rate of 25.5 per 1,000 full-time equivalent firefighters, which is higher than the rate for England of 24.3.

While the service has carried out work in this area, we still found a large number of staff hadn't been involved in these training exercises. These included firefighters and officers of various ranks. Training takes place mainly at those stations on the county border.

Working relationships with partner organisations are effective

The service has good arrangements to respond to emergencies with agencies that make up the Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly local resilience forum. These arrangements include strategic, tactical and operational representation from service staff.

The service is a valued member of the forum and has representatives at executive meetings. It has developed good working relationships within the forum and is heavily involved in the tactical group, the warning and informing group, and strategic command continuing professional development events.

The service 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 was involved in an exercise in Devon that simulated a marauding terrorist attack. We also heard the chief fire officer was the portfolio lead in the forum for debriefing and learning.

The service uses and shares national learning within the organisation

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. We found evidence of joint organisational learning being shared that focused on M/ETHANE messaging. The service shares learning using a system called pdrPro and staff acknowledged reading the learning and understanding it. The service uses learning to inform the planning assumptions it makes with other organisations.

The service has worked to be able to effectively respond to an incident in a high-rise building

In our last inspection, we assessed the service on its ability to respond to an incident in a high-rise building. We identified the following area for improvement: "The service should make sure it has an effective method for sharing fire survival guidance information with multiple callers and that it has a dedicated communication link in place."

In this inspection, we found the service had access to an electronic system that shared information between control room staff and firefighters at the incident. The system tracks people who are in a building and shares information between all parties in real time. The service has trained officers and dedicated teams, including control room staff, to support building evacuation and test the new system. However, when we spoke to staff at various stations, not all were aware of it.

Considering this evidence, we have closed the area for improvement.

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

Requires improvement

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

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

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

The service should assure itself it has access to enough capacity and capability to meet its reasonably foreseeable needs for managing service development and change alongside business as usual.

The service should make sure it effectively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and outcomes of any collaboration activity.

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 should improve internal governance

As part of Cornwall Council's overall governance arrangements, the Cornwall Fire and Rescue 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 strategic oversight arrangements to manage financial and resourcing risks, performance and improvement plans. However, we identified ineffective internal governance arrangements to manage performance and change. This is affecting progress on implementing the priorities in the community risk management plan (CRMP) and wider improvements.

Cornwall Council has introduced new oversight and scrutiny arrangements within the council, including the service. These include the budget development overview and scrutiny committee, the corporate finance performance overview and scrutiny committee, and the community well-being and scrutiny committee. It has also established a fire management board, attended by strategic directors from the council.

The service reports accurate and suitably detailed financial, risk and performance information to the fire and rescue authority. It produces a quarterly report that details performance against the 18 key performance indicators in the CRMP and progress on implementing the priorities in the CRMP. The chief fire officer also meets regularly with a strategic director from the council and the fire and rescue authority chair.

The scheme of delegation clearly sets out responsibilities for the service's senior leaders. However, the internal governance arrangements it has for holding senior leaders to account for the corporate management of the service are ineffective.

The service has recognised this gap and introduced new internal governance arrangements. It has brought the senior leadership team and the senior management team together to form the fire leadership team as an enhanced level of strategic oversight. The team meets regularly and discusses performance. However, we found evidence that, while performance was reported in these meetings, the meetings didn't adequately manage underperformance. There are several departments that are underperforming and not achieving targets, including targets for response times, home fire safety checks and fire safety audits.

Considering this evidence, we have identified two areas for improvement related to internal governance and performance management.

The service has worked to better align resources with the CRMP, yet it could still use them more efficiently

In our last inspection, we identified the following area 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 community risk management plan." Since, then the service has improved how it allocates resources to manage risk, and is able to carry out its functions more efficiently and effectively. Considering this evidence, we have closed the area for improvement.

The service has fully reviewed its budget allocation against the priorities in the CRMP. As a result, it has increased and reallocated resources, adjusting its budget accordingly. Where necessary, it has secured growth funding from Cornwall Council. As a result of this work, the service has:

- increased resources in protection by two new posts;
- increased resources in prevention by two posts through moving staff from Phoenix Services (the service's training provider);
- reallocated nine watch manager posts from the tactical organisation reserve to response, which has increased the size of wholetime watches to seven; and
- at the time of inspection, made further growth funding bids to Cornwall Council to support priorities in the next CRMP.

The service has reviewed its crewing arrangements and fire station locations. It is assured these are appropriate to support its response to high-risk communities, areas of deprivation and the most vulnerable. Its duty systems include wholetime, day crewing and on-call.

In the year 2024/25, the service's overtime cost per wholetime firefighter was £2,585, which is higher than the England cost of £2,157. The service told us it anticipated the changes it had made to watch sizes would reduce overtime costs.

The service is taking steps to maintain availability of its on-call crews. It has introduced new on-call contracts to help with recruitment and retention. They provide more flexible contract options for staff. This helps to maximise the availability of staff when they are needed to provide a response.

The service has used its protection grant funding to increase the number of staff in the protection department, provide training and improve technology. It told us it didn't believe it was at financial risk if the funding was reduced or withdrawn. However, this could affect how the service resources its protection function in the future.

The service could still use its resources more efficiently and effectively. We found a lack of clear strategic direction and performance management. Where the service doesn't make full use of the capacity available, this has affected the implementation of CRMP priorities. Some staff told us they had high workloads and workforce planning was reactive rather than proactive.

The service has an improved understanding of its future financial challenges

In our last inspection, we identified the following area for improvement: "The service must make sure scenario plans for future spending reductions are subject to rigorous analysis and challenge, including the impact on services to the public. The service should make sure it has sufficiently robust plans in place which address the medium-term financial challenges beyond 2023/24 and secure an affordable way of managing the risk of fire and other risks."

In 2025/26, the service's net revenue budget was £28.1 million. The net revenue budget for 2024/25 has been adjusted for inflation from £25.6 million to £26.0 million. This means the budget increased by 8.2 percent between 2024/25 and 2025/26 in real terms. Its parent authority, Cornwall Council, entirely funds the budget.

We were pleased to find the service had made improvements since our last inspection. It has continued to work closely with its parent authority to improve understanding of future financial challenges and plan its budget more effectively.

As a result of this work, the service has developed a four-year medium-term financial plan (MTFP), which feeds into Cornwall Council's MTFP. Assistant chief fire officers were involved in the financial planning process to develop the MTFP. Each assistant chief fire officer signs a financial management assurance statement every year. It sets out the service's budget and any agreed savings required, and aligns to responsibilities in the scheme of delegation. The statement has improved accountability concerning the understanding, development and management of budgets.

Considering this evidence, we have closed the area for improvement.

The service plans to reduce its main financial risks

The service plans to mitigate its main financial risks. At the time of our inspection, it had made growth funding bids to Cornwall Council to support the priorities in its next CRMP. This includes funding related to prevention, protection, response and professional standards. The council also requires the service to make 2 percent efficiency savings in each year of the MTFP. At the time of our inspection, the service had identified options, along with the anticipated risks and impact on the service.

Its planning assumptions are reasonable. These include pay awards, contract inflation, growth and savings. Scenario planning is carried out at council level rather than departmental level. As a result, the MTFP doesn’t include sensitivity testing of its assumptions or different financial scenarios.

Financial controls help prevent misuse of public money. Cornwall Council’s internal audit has confirmed these are generally effective. Financial procedures and the annual financial management assurance statement support this control framework.

The service’s capital programme is part of Cornwall Council’s wider capital plans. The council manages capital financing costs. The service’s capital plans include fire station improvements and fleet replacement.

Cornwall Council holds the service’s reserves. There is a robust process for the service to access them. The level of the council general reserves is informed by risk, which includes fire and rescue service risks, such as a large number of incidents. The service has used the organisational improvement reserve to support projects such as the critical control centre project.

The service should do more to improve performance and productivity

In our last inspection, we identified the following area for improvement: “The service should have effective measures in place to assure itself that its workforce is productive and that its time is used as efficiently and effectively as possible to meet the priorities in its community risk information plan.”

The service’s arrangements for managing performance are weak and don’t clearly link resource use with its CRMP and its strategic priorities. There is a lack of clear strategic direction, which is affecting the effectiveness of performance management processes. Some staff were unclear on the service’s priorities and how their work fitted in. Staff in several departments told us they weren’t meeting their targets, and work in some areas was compromised due to competing priorities. Work was often poorly co-ordinated and not fully aligned with the service’s objectives. As a result, some CRMP priorities aren’t being implemented as intended.

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. Each department reports performance against key performance indicators to the fire leadership team. However, while underperformance was identified, we found limited action to improve performance. Some managers told us they didn't have the capacity to effectively manage the performance of their teams due to workloads. And there was a lack of quality assurance in some areas of work such as prevention and home fire safety checks. The service needs to make sure its performance management processes are effective.

Disappointingly, the service hasn't made enough progress to address the area for improvement, so it remains open.

The service is reviewing use of staff time

The service has started work to understand how it uses its wholetime firefighters. However, at the time of inspection, although staff were recording their activity on a watch planner, the service hadn't analysed or reported on this data. And no targets had been changed since our last inspection. During this inspection, the service began a trial of an electronic system at some wholetime fire stations to record what work was being done and how much time was used. It intended to expand this to all wholetime fire stations on 1 April 2026. It told us this would help it collect more accurate data and analyse how it could improve staff productivity. We look forward to seeing how this work has progressed in our next inspection.

Fire false alarms are incidents where the service attends a location but, on arrival, discovers that no resources are required to resolve the incident or that no incident occurred. In the year ending 30 June 2025, 40.8 percent of incidents attended in Cornwall 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.

The service is taking action to manage its response to unwanted fire signals. For the year ending 31 March 2025, 33.9 percent of emergency calls to the service (2,950 of 8,714) were automatic fire alarms (AFAs). Of these, the service didn't attend 51.1 percent, which is higher than the England average of 44.6 percent. It has reviewed its pre-determined attendances to AFAs (the number of fire engines assigned) and has increased call challenging to reduce unnecessary mobilisations. Although one CRMP priority is to charge for attending false alarms at commercial premises, the service hasn't implemented it.

The service has taken some steps to make sure its workforce is as productive as possible. For example, it has trained some staff members in fire safety. If resourcing is sufficient, an individual comes off operational shift to provide support in the protection department and carry out audits.

The service has made efficiency savings but should also compare its expenditure with that of other fire and rescue services

In 2024/25, the service's expenditure was £31.5 million, which is £54.01 per head of its population. This is more than the England average of £51.71, but within the typical range compared to all services in England.

In our last inspection, we identified the following area for improvement: "The service should make sure that it is taking action to reduce non-pay costs and can demonstrate how it is achieving value for money." In this inspection, we found there were 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, Cornwall Council's finance team works closely with the service's budget managers to produce monthly budget monitoring reports. These reports set out the service's expenditure and forecast end-of-year position, and are presented and discussed at fire leadership team meetings. The service also has a capital programme board, which scrutinises capital investment. Considering this evidence, we have closed the area for improvement.

The service consistently achieves the savings identified in its financial and efficiency plans. It made all of its planned £416,500 savings between 2022/23 and 2024/25. At the time of our inspection, it had achieved £30,000 of non-pay efficiency savings in 2025/26, as set out in its efficiency and productivity plan. This included ending a contract with an external barrister for fire safety prosecution and increasing the hours during which the service won't attend AFAs.

Phoenix Services (the service's training provider) hasn't achieved its income targets in either 2024/25 or 2025/26. These targets weren't based on clear evidence. As a result, the service has removed its income target for 2026/27 and moved most staff from the company to its prevention department. One staff member will remain in the company to provide training on using fire extinguishers, and to act as fire warden and offer first aid for other organisations on a cost recovery basis only.

The service is taking steps to make sure it achieves efficiency gains in important areas such as procurement. It uses procurement frameworks to get the best possible purchasing power. For example, it worked with Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service to buy 4x4 vehicles. And it bought personal protective equipment using a national framework. The service has also introduced additional procurement card checks. All procurement card expenditure now needs to be authorised by a budget manager and the council's procurement team.

We found the service carried out only limited benchmarking with other fire and rescue services to show value for money. It told us it did access some data that showed its fire station and fire engine costs were comparatively high. This is due to the extensive coastline and bordering only one service. It would benefit from participating in the National Fire Chiefs Council's financial benchmarking work. By comparing with other services, it can identify if any areas of expenditure are above average and if it needs to review them to provide better value for money.

The service should do more to review the benefits of contracts, collaborations and improvement projects

The service needs to do more to monitor and review the benefits and results of its contract arrangements, collaborations and improvement projects. Its reviews are limited in scope, and the service doesn't use them to learn, change decisions or make sure it achieves value for money. It can't show the intended outcomes are consistently achieved.

Where reviews do take place, they are inconsistent. The service doesn't have a benefits register. It told us some benefits were recorded in the closedown report at the end of a project. But this means there is no corporate understanding or record of the benefits due, or whether they are being realised in accordance with the service's plans. By monitoring benefits individually, there is a risk that some benefits aren't being recorded, and the service can't highlight or monitor trends or risk.

The service has collaborative arrangements, including:

- tri-service officers (with responsibility for fire, ambulance and police);
- ambulance co-responders;
- shared estate with other emergency services;
- joint procurement with other organisations; and
- a service level agreement with the Isles of Scilly Fire and Rescue Service.

In our last inspection, we identified the following area for improvement: "The service should make sure it effectively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and outcomes of any collaboration activity." At the time of this inspection, its partnership register showed all collaborations were under review. Yet it isn't effectively evaluating collaborative activity. For example, it last evaluated tri-service officer arrangements in 2020. This is despite recruiting additional officers in April 2025. Considering this evidence, the area for improvement remains open.

The service told us it had carried out work to review and gain better oversight of its contracts. However, some staff told us there was limited evaluation of procurement projects and, as a result, some lessons that could be learned hadn't been documented.

The service should focus on improving its benefits realisation processes, including those for its improvement projects. This will help it provide assurance that it is achieving expected outcomes to improve services for the public.

Estate and fleet strategies are clearly linked to the CRMP and focused on risk

The service's capital programme and estate and fleet strategies have clear links to its CRMP. Both strategies exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness. In 2024, the service secured additional capital funding from Cornwall Council to support the reduction of the average age of its fleet of vehicles. It has bought vehicles specifically to manage local risks in Cornwall. For example, a specially built, smaller fire engine is located at Fowey fire station for use on smaller roads that aren't suitable for a standard fire engine.

The service has carried out a gap analysis and condition survey of its estate. As a result, it has a prioritised and costed plan for the improvements it needs to make. It has secured additional capital funding from Cornwall Council. In the short term, it has focused on improving its facilities so they are suitable for women. It is also preparing to exit from a private finance initiative partnership in 2028.

The service regularly reviews these strategies so it can properly assess the effect any changes in estate and fleet provision, or future innovation, have on risk. It has a process for recording and reporting estate and fleet risks to the fire leadership team.

The service has improved the reliability and resilience of its IT systems

In our last inspection, we identified the following area for improvement: "The service should assure itself that its IT systems are resilient, reliable, accurate and accessible." Since then, the service has made its IT systems and infrastructure more reliable and resilient. It has upgraded its network, introduced new servers and modern cloud technology, and replaced ageing hardware. Considering this evidence, we have closed the area for improvement.

The service actively considers how changes in technology and future innovation may affect risk. Cornwall Council's cybersecurity team supports the service with future-proofing new IT products when they are bought. And the service has signed a contract with the National Cyber Security Centre to provide cybersecurity services out of hours.

The service also aims to exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness presented by changes in technology. Staff told us how the service had improved IT to support them with their work. It has upgraded laptops, computers and mobile data terminals. It is trialling a handheld device for staff to use when carrying out prevention and protection work. And it has introduced a new availability system that is easier to use.

The service manages its IT projects appropriately. It told us it had been able to make it clearer to its parent authority what it needed. As a result, four out of Cornwall Council's ten IT priorities are for the service. Improvements in the pipeline include a new protection data system, which the service told us would go live shortly after our inspection.

The service needs to improve how it implements change

In our last inspection, we identified the following area for improvement: "The service should assure itself that it has access to enough capacity and capability to meet its reasonably foreseeable needs for managing service development and change alongside business as usual." In this inspection, we found the service had limited capacity and capability to achieve sustainable change. Capacity constraints in some departments hinder improvements across the service. As a result, implementation of the CRMP is weakened, and progress is affected by competing priorities. Many staff told us about high workloads, not achieving targets, a lack of performance management and siloed working. They were also concerned about whether departments could sustain the improvement they have achieved due to these capacity constraints. Considering this evidence, the area for improvement remains open.

Although internal structures exist for managing projects and change, some staff told us change wasn't managed well. They told us the service could improve how it worked with and communicated with staff. For example, staff we spoke to weren't consulted on improvements being made at fire stations.

Promoting, embedding and improving values and culture

Requires improvement

Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement 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.

Areas for improvement

The service should assure itself that leaders at all levels are visible and open to alternative views.

The service should improve communication between staff and senior managers, so questions and feedback receive prompt and appropriate responses.

The service should proactively monitor working hours of dual-contract staff to improve well-being.

The service should assure itself that staff workloads are monitored to improve well-being.

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

Main findings

There is a positive culture in the service, yet the service could make some improvements to make sure all staff feel included

The service continues to have well-defined values, which staff understand. We found staff at most levels of the service showed behaviours that reflected service values.

The service has worked with an external company to understand and improve on culture. Surveys, focus groups and interviews were used to find out what the culture in the service was like. The findings were communicated to senior leadership, and the service identified three themes to address. While some staff saw the benefit of this work, not all staff did, and communication with some staff could have been improved.

The service has implemented the Core Code of Ethics well, staff understand it and it is integrated within policies and procedures.

In our workforce survey:

- 85 percent of respondents (175 of 205) agreed their colleagues consistently modelled and maintained the service's values;
- 87 percent of respondents (179 of 205) agreed their manager did so; and
- 79 percent of respondents (162 of 205) agreed senior leaders did so.

We heard some on-call and non-operational staff felt undervalued and excluded, and that there was a divide between groups of staff.

The service carries out appropriate background checks

The service is compliant with safeguarding legislation by completing appropriate background checks for existing employees. In the year ending 31 March 2025, 67.3 percent of existing employees who needed a background check had one. The service recognised that a small number of existing employees still needed a background check, and it was working to complete these.

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, all 42 new recruits who needed a background check had one.

The service deals appropriately with any positive disclosures resulting from a background check.

The service could improve its internal governance arrangements

The service has robust systems to gather and review feedback from complaints, staff grievances and disciplinary cases. We saw clear examples of the service updating policies and procedures as a result. The service also analyses grievance trends and outcomes to support learning and improvement.

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 service reports grievance and disciplinary outcomes to the authority and Cornwall Council.

The service has internal performance reporting processes. But they aren't working effectively as underperformance in several departments isn't being addressed, potentially creating culture issues. We also heard some managers didn't prioritise well-being, and excessive workloads were raised but not acted on, leaving staff without support.

Communication between senior leaders and staff is ineffective

While meetings do take place between senior leaders and some trade union representatives, the service has limited formal arrangements for ongoing communication with staff and representative bodies, and for consistently addressing their legitimate concerns. We heard from many staff that, although their station managers and, in some cases, their group managers were visible, senior leaders weren't visible throughout the service.

In our last inspection, we identified the following area for improvement: "The service should improve communications between staff and senior managers so questions and feedback receive prompt and appropriate responses."

In this inspection, we found staff had limited confidence in the service's feedback processes and didn't think they were effective. In our workforce survey, 67 percent of respondents (138 of 205) agreed they felt confident in the processes for providing feedback to all levels of leadership. The service uses staff surveys and fire leadership team visits to stations to gain feedback. However, many staff told us feedback and communication were mainly one way, through weekly chief fire officer communications and monthly dial-ins.

The service acknowledged it could do more to communicate effectively with staff. This work is ongoing and is being managed through the new communications framework.

Staff told us they didn't believe senior leaders acted on feedback, and some staff avoided speaking up because they feared how it would be perceived and how it would affect their future. We also heard examples of staff challenging managers in meetings and then being criticised in front of colleagues in an unprofessional way, leaving them unwilling to raise issues again. In our workforce survey, 58 percent of respondents (118 of 205) agreed they were confident their feedback would be acted on.

Individual members of staff, representative bodies and staff associations we spoke to gave examples of where they had raised legitimate concerns with leaders. But the service had taken limited steps to resolve them. Representative bodies and staff associations said they wanted better involvement in leading improvement, for example in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion. We heard examples of leaders not consulting them, including on actions to provide gender-appropriate facilities, where consultation was minimal.

Considering this evidence, the previous area for improvement remains open and we have issued an additional area for improvement.

The service has good processes to challenge and address inappropriate behaviour

Staff feel empowered and willing to challenge unacceptable behaviours when they come across them. In our workforce survey, 78 percent of respondents (160 of 205) agreed they felt safe to challenge unacceptable behaviours in the service. Most staff we spoke to felt confident in challenging unacceptable behaviours and had done so to maintain a positive and inclusive culture. The service told us this has been reflected in an increase in the number of discipline and grievance cases.

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, 10 percent of respondents (20 of 205) told us they had felt bullied or harassed by members of the service in the past 12 months. And 11 percent (23 of 205) told us they had felt discriminated against by members of the service during the same period.

We were pleased to find the discipline and grievance cases we reviewed were all progressed in a timely manner. 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 0 live grievances and 17 disciplinary cases. Of these disciplinary cases, seven were gross misconduct cases.

The average length of time a grievance case had been open as at 31 March 2025 was 86 days. This is slightly below the England average of 93 days. The average length of time a discipline case had been open as at 31 March 2025 was 92 days. This is below the England average of 111 days.

The service follows its policies and procedures. 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 told us welfare officers were assigned to staff involved in investigations. A confidential record is kept of each time a welfare officer tries to make contact with a staff member and any refusal of support by them. This allows the service to know what welfare support has or hasn't been accessed.

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.

Managers have the confidence and training to deal with grievance and discipline issues and feel able to do so. The service told us managers selected to carry out investigations were reviewed to make sure they had enough capacity. This is intended to keep investigations progressing at an appropriate pace.

The service can show it is adapting its processes and sharing with staff the learning it has gained from dealing with grievance and discipline cases.

The service has effective and well-understood health and safety policies and procedures

In our workforce survey, 93 percent of respondents (191 of 205) agreed they understood the service's policies and procedures for working safely. They are easily accessible on the service's SharePoint site, and leaders actively promote them. Everyone completes mandatory health and safety training, tailored to their rank and role. For example, officers complete health and safety qualifications. These include National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health qualifications and the Qualsafe Level 2 Award in Health and Safety in the Workplace. Staff understand the process for reporting accidents and near misses, and the service shares health and safety updates.

The service is working to reduce exposure of firefighters and other staff to toxins at incidents, on fire engines and at stations. There is a 'clean cab' policy, so staff understand what is acceptable on fire engines. There are procedures for staff to follow at incidents and at stations. And the service has introduced designated clean and dirty areas to some stations. This work will continue alongside the service's estate project.

The service has introduced a well-being strategy

In our workforce survey, 86 percent of respondents (177 of 205) agreed they knew how to access support for their mental health through the service. In our last inspection, we identified the following area for improvement: “The service should develop a well-being strategy and a system to improve how well staff understand health, safety and well-being.” Since then, the service has introduced a well-being strategy that sets out available support and clarifies line managers’ responsibilities, including helping with access to services, encouraging open communication and monitoring concerns. Considering this evidence, we have closed the area for improvement.

The service has well-understood and effective well-being policies, which are available to staff. A range of well-being support is available for physical and mental health. For example, staff told us they had access to fitness equipment and there was time assigned throughout the day for physical exercise to support staff in their roles and to promote individual well-being. The service tests staff fitness annually and has a clear process to follow if they don’t pass.

However, the service could do more to work with staff to understand how to support their well-being. In our workforce survey, 71 percent of respondents (145 of 205) agreed service leaders treated their well-being as a priority. Staff reported they understood and had confidence in the well-being support processes available, although they didn’t feel it was always a priority for the service.

The service should do more to monitor working hours and workloads to improve staff welfare

As at 31 March 2025, 21.3 percent of wholetime firefighters were on a dual contract within the service and 19.7 percent had secondary external employment.

In our last inspection, we identified the following area for improvement: “The service should monitor secondary contracts to make sure staff don’t work excessive hours” Since then, the service has strengthened its process for reviewing and approving secondary contracts, including checks on rest periods and compliance with policy. Considering this evidence, we have closed the area for improvement.

There is guidance on monitoring the hours of dual-contract staff. However, some staff were unaware of it or didn’t follow it, and we saw no evidence of effective oversight. As a result, the service can’t assure itself dual-contract staff receive appropriate rest between wholetime and on-call duties. We also heard high workloads at officer level left little time for workload monitoring. Considering this evidence, we have issued two areas for improvement related to monitoring working hours and workloads.

Training and developing the right people with the right skills

Requires improvement

Cornwall 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 community risk management 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 make sure its workforce plan takes full account of the necessary skills and capabilities to carry out the community risk management plan.

The service should make sure managers maintain their competence and professional skills and this is clearly recorded.

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

Main findings

Workforce planning isn't sufficient

In our last inspection, we identified the following area for improvement: "The service should make sure its workforce plan takes full account of the necessary skills and capabilities to carry out the community risk management plan."

In this inspection, we found the service did some workforce planning, but it didn't take full account of the skills and capabilities it needed to effectively carry out its CRMP. We found limited evidence the service's planning allowed it to fully consider workforce skills and overcome any gaps in capability. The service recognises that, although it holds workforce planning meetings and considers retirement profiles and specialist skills, workforce planning has been more reactive than proactive, with other improvements taking priority. It has a people strategy, but no workforce strategy aligned to the CRMP.

The service needs to do more to improve the way it considers its future needs and succession planning, which is largely reactive. We also found concerns about resource shortages in areas such as IT, with no mitigation.

The service will develop a new workforce plan covering skills, talent and succession for the new CRMP due in April 2026. Some work has begun to identify skills and gaps for the CRMP.

Considering this evidence, the area for improvement remains open.

Staff can access the training they need and have enough time to complete it

Some staff told us they could access the training they needed to be effective in their roles. In our workforce survey, 85 percent of respondents (174 of 205) agreed the service gave them the necessary training to carry out their roles.

Training isn't just focused on operational skills. It also includes management skills. This includes training to carry out discipline and grievance investigations, a Cornwall Council training package to support staff in having difficult conversations, and absence management training.

In our last inspection, we identified the following area for improvement: "The service should assure itself there are effective plans, with enough time available, for all staff to maintain competence." In this inspection, we found the service's training plans made sure staff could maintain competence and capability effectively. For example, operational training is scheduled using a three-year planner with monthly themes that include theoretical and practical training. For on-call staff, there are scheduled training days and times to maintain competence, and training instructors monitor and support on-call stations to ensure maintenance of competence. Considering this evidence, we have closed the area for improvement.

In our workforce survey, 86 percent of respondents who had operational roles (143 of 167) agreed they could access relevant learning and development opportunities. These included training courses run by Cornwall Council, for example a mental health first aider course.

The service effectively records and monitors skills and training but could improve this for officers

The service monitors operational staff competence and records training on a system called pdrPro. The service records non-operational staff learning on the council's learning hub. Core skills are reported to the operational response group and the leadership team. If staff are due to complete e-learning, line managers are notified.

The service regularly updates its understanding of staff skills and risk-critical safety capabilities by reviewing maintenance of competence. If individuals haven't kept up training for risk-critical equipment, for example breathing apparatus, they are removed from operational duties. This approach means the service can identify gaps in workforce capabilities and resilience. It also means it can make sound and financially sustainable decisions about current and future needs.

We found officers weren't keeping their training records up to date with practical professional development, formal officer training and people-skills training, including employee relations and discipline and grievance investigations. The service told us officers were responsible for maintaining their own records and training wasn't consistently mandated. This includes training for major incidents and multi-agency exercises. Accurate, up-to-date training records are essential to make sure officers remain competent to command incidents. This is an area for improvement.

The service promotes an environment for learning and improving

The service promotes a culture of continuous improvement throughout the organisation, and it encourages staff to learn and develop. Protection staff contribute to their development and receive training aligned to the National Fire Chiefs Council framework. Station staff also spoke positively about their structured training, which progressed from theory to practical application and then consolidation, with opportunities to catch up on the month's training theme.

We were pleased to find the service had a range of easily accessible learning and development resources. These included training with the BEST Foundation, through Cornwall Council. We found evidence of staff using this to access further training and development for their roles.

In our last inspection, we identified the following area for improvement: "The service should make sure corporate/professional staff have equitable access to appropriate learning and development training." In this inspection, we found the service had identified parts of its training and development provision that some staff had found difficult to access or use. We were pleased to find it had taken proactive steps to remove these barriers. It has focused on using the staff appraisal process to highlight training and further development needed. While we did hear of some non-operational staff not having the same development opportunities due to budget constraints, many staff spoke highly of the service's training and development provision. As a result, we have closed the area for improvement.

Ensuring fairness and diversity

Requires improvement

Cornwall 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 assure itself it has the capacity and capability it needs to improve equality, diversity and inclusion throughout the organisation.

The service should make sure its facilities are gender appropriate.

The service should introduce a recruitment strategy that clearly shows how it plans to increase the diversity of its workforce.

The service should make sure it has robust processes in place to undertake equality impact assessments and review any actions agreed as a result.

The service should consult and work more effectively with internal and external networks to gain improved support and insight into equality, diversity and inclusion matters.

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

Main findings

Recruitment and promotion processes are fair and transparent

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

We found the service had an open, fair and honest recruitment process for existing staff or those wishing to work for it. There is an effective system to understand and remove the risk of disproportionality in recruitment processes. For example, the service has introduced measures in its recruitment campaigns to promote openness.

The service uses Oracle HR to manage applications. Adverts are checked to make sure they comply with operational and non-operational conditions and reflect the Core Code of Ethics, reasonable adjustments and the National Fire Chiefs Council leadership framework where needed. Criteria are clear, and adverts are generally open for 28 days. They are published internally or both internally and externally depending on the role. Interviews cover a broad range of questions, and the highest-scoring candidates are appointed.

The service has worked to increase diversity declaration rates, yet there is still a large percentage of the workforce that doesn't declare this information. It is important for staff to understand why the service is asking for this data to make sure the service is supporting those individuals accordingly. This is an ongoing piece of work with Cornwall Council.

The service could do more to increase diversity

The service needs to do more to increase staff diversity. There has been little progress to improve ethnic and gender diversity.

In 2025, 0 out of 46 new joiners (where ethnicity is known) were from an ethnic minority background.

As at 31 March 2025, 1.3 percent (6) of the service's staff were from an ethnic minority background compared to 3.2 percent in the local population and 6.4 percent throughout all fire and rescue services in England. However, 35.5 percent of the workforce hadn't stated their ethnicity.

For the same period, 13.5 percent 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 remained broadly the same between 31 March 2024 – 1.2 percent (4 people) – and 31 March 2025 – 1.3 percent (5 people).

The proportion of women firefighters remained broadly the same between 31 March 2024 – 7.7 percent (43 women) – and 31 March 2025 – 7.7 percent (45 women).

During our inspection, we reviewed a range of documents, including recruitment documentation. The service submitted to us an outdated Cornwall Council resourcing policy from 2021, due for review in 2022, which didn't address fire-specific recruitment, workforce diversity or how data would inform these recruitment aims. In our last inspection, we identified the following area for improvement: "The service should introduce a recruitment strategy that clearly shows how it plans to increase the diversity of its workforce." Although the service has made some progress in increasing diversity, evidence remains limited, so this area for improvement remains open.

We found positive instances of where the service had identified and addressed barriers that disproportionately prevented individuals from particular groups from progressing. Examples included 'have-a-go' days, promoting opportunities for women in managerial roles through advice and support, and reviewing recruitment campaigns to identify improvements. However, we found not all promotion processes used positive action to improve diversity, and equality impact assessments weren't consistently completed. This limits the service's understanding of potential barriers to progression and how to address them.

The service has improved its process for performance development reviews, yet not all staff complete them

In our last inspection, we identified the following area for improvement: "The service should improve all staff understanding and application of the performance development review process."

In this inspection, we found each staff member had individual goals and objectives and regular performance assessments. The service has a performance development review process, which is aligned with Cornwall Council, and consists of 4 stages over 12 months. Meetings are recorded with monitoring reported through fire leadership team meetings.

Some staff expressed confidence in the process. They told us they had used it to support their development and promotion, such as carrying out mental health first aid training or applying for promotion following discussions with their line manager.

However, not all staff complete performance development reviews. As at 31 March 2025, the proportions of staff who had completed one were as follows:

- 43.5 percent of wholetime firefighters
- 94.2 percent of on-call firefighters
- 56.6 percent of non-operational staff
- 69.2 percent of fire control staff.

Nevertheless, considering this evidence, we have closed the area for improvement.

The service's promotion and progression processes are comprehensive and cover opportunities in all roles. It has introduced development programmes for firefighters to progress to watch managers, with plans to introduce programmes for station managers to progress to area managers. The programmes provide staff with additional learning, guidance and support to help them in their roles. However, non-operational staff told us progression opportunities were limited due to the number of roles available.

The service needs to make sure EDI is a strategic priority

The service needs to improve its approach to EDI. The service has EDI network leads, but they aren't consistently involved in important projects, such as consultations on gender-appropriate facilities. The purpose and impact of the EDI forum remains unclear and the service recognises the need for better representation in the forum. It would help the service to involve both internal staff and external EDI stakeholders to strengthen its understanding and implementation of EDI work.

The service has an EDI strategy that outlines its equality objectives, developed by Cornwall Council. The service would benefit from setting out its own EDI strategy so it can properly focus on objectives and priorities set, so we have issued two areas for improvement related to this.

The service has improved EDI but can do more

Staff complete mandatory EDI e-learning, with content tailored to their rank and role. The service provides equality impact assessment training to relevant staff. This uses National Fire Chiefs Council material and incorporates Cornwall Council's decision-wheel approach, which the service has adopted.

In our workforce survey, 86 percent of respondents (177 of 205) agreed they felt comfortable being themselves at work. Staff also told us how they would challenge inappropriate behaviour they witnessed, to support staff being themselves at work.

During this inspection, we reviewed a range of policies that affected different parts of the service including the health, safety and well-being policy, the well-being strategy and the EDI strategy. Some policies lacked clear aims and objectives including those related to, for example, how progress was measured, how the policies were consulted on and implemented, and how data was used to inform them.

The service has a process to assess equality impact and completes equality impact assessments. Work is still at an early stage with processes for recording and reporting in place. The service acknowledged further progress was needed, as highlighted in our previous inspection and resulting area for improvement: “The service should make sure it has robust processes in place to undertake equality impact assessments and review any actions agreed as a result.” Our review found several equality impact assessments lacked enough detail, with impacts not clearly identified and actions to support people with protected characteristics not specified. We also found instances where assessments hadn’t been completed at all, for instance during the estate project on gender-appropriate facilities. As a result, this area for improvement remains open.

The service has worked to provide gender-appropriate facilities and uniform for staff, yet needs to do more

We found the service was making positive progress regarding the availability of female uniform and fire kit, and has increased stock levels. Female workwear shirts and maternity shirts are now available for staff. Most female staff are aware of the changes.

The service assessed its estate to make sure it is gender appropriate. As a result, several stations were identified where structural improvements were needed to bring them up to the required standards. We saw stations in which changing cubicles had been installed to maintain privacy for responding firefighters.

Progress is regularly reported in internal and external governance meetings. Some staff were involved with the changes to stations and the service communicated plans to staff. However, while there has been some improvement, it is important the service progresses further with this work to make sure staff have gender-appropriate facilities. This will further support the recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce.

In our last inspection, we identified a cause of concern in this area. Considering this evidence, we have closed the cause of concern but have issued an area for improvement.

Leading people effectively

Requires improvement

Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement 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 community risk management 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

Leaders at all levels should make sure all staff are aware of the service's strategic objectives and how they contribute towards implementing them.

The service should have effective assurance to make sure managers are held accountable for managing staff performance and addressing underperformance promptly.

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

Main findings

Senior leaders haven't made the service's priorities clear to staff

Senior leaders haven't effectively communicated the priorities in the CRMP to staff at all levels. Leaders at all levels aren't making sure staff understand them. This means staff aren't fully involved in implementing them. We found several examples of departments missing targets due to competing work demands. Staff were unsure about the service's priorities and said they did what they could without clear direction. They told us they raised concerns about performance and workload with managers, yet nothing changed. As a result, the staff we spoke to had little trust in their leaders.

Not all staff were aware of departmental strategies and station plans. Strategies aren't being implemented effectively because their aims and objectives and their links to the CRMP are unclear. This is undermining the service's ability to keep the public safe.

In our workforce survey, 66 percent of respondents (136 of 205) agreed senior leaders clearly communicated the service's objectives. Staff were aware of performance targets in various departments and as part of station plans. But they didn't understand how the service's objectives related to implementation of the CRMP as they didn't understand how work was prioritised. The service has introduced leadership conference sessions. These help leaders communicate with managers, give them service updates and set direction, so managers can communicate these to their staff. However, this is still at an early stage. We have identified this as an area for improvement.

The service has a process for identifying and developing leaders

We found the service had well-understood arrangements to identify talented leaders. Staff clearly understand and trust career development pathways. And the service proactively removes any barriers and supports all staff in accessing leadership development opportunities.

In our last inspection, we identified the following area for improvement: "The service should promptly agree a permanent promotion policy and communicate this clearly, so all staff understand what they need to do to achieve promotion." Since then, the service has introduced a clear promotion process for non-operational staff up to area manager, which is set out in the wholetime promotion policy. The policy defines eligibility for temporary and permanent promotion, outlines the application and assessment processes, and includes scoring criteria. It has been communicated across the service. Considering this evidence, we have closed the area for improvement.

There are talent management schemes to develop leaders and high-potential staff. In the first stage of the promotion process, staff have a talent conversation with their line manager before applying for and being assessed for the talent pool. Staff remain in the pool for up to 24 months. All candidates from crew manager to watch manager receive a performance development folder, and the service plans to extend this to all roles up to area manager. The process differs for on-call staff due to smaller numbers.

The service advertises all talent and leadership opportunities fairly through internal and external advertisements. It also uses performance development reviews to discuss promotion and career development opportunities, and to identify talent.

The service has worked to improve its promotion processes

In our last inspection, we identified the following area for improvement: "The service should put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders." Since then, the service has put considerable effort into developing its promotion and progression processes so they are fair and all staff can understand them. Some staff said the promotion process now feels fairer and more transparent, with clear criteria that place everyone on an equal footing. The use of external agencies for some roles also adds fairness and transparency. In our workforce survey, 70 percent of respondents (143 of 205) agreed the promotion process was fair. Considering this evidence, we have closed the area for improvement.

The service manages selection processes consistently. Recruitment and promotion records show candidates who have applied, how they have performed at each stage, scores and moderation, and who has been successful.

The service uses temporary promotions appropriately to fill short-term resourcing gaps. As at 31 March 2025, 4.4 percent of the workforce were on temporary promotion. The average length of temporary promotions was 459 days, which is higher than the England average of 295 days. The service told us a tracking system monitored temporary promotions and made managers aware of when to review a temporary position. A policy outlines the procedures and criteria for temporary promotions and acting-up periods.

The service could do more to support its leaders

The service isn't doing all it can to equip its leaders to lead effectively. It has an inconsistent process for leaders to manage performance and development. Not all staff have specific and individual objectives or have had their performance assessed in the past year. In our workforce survey, 70 percent of respondents (144 of 205) agreed the service's performance management systems allowed them to achieve their potential.

The service is providing limited training to equip leaders to confidently manage the range of challenges they face. Some staff had received training in performance management and carrying out disciplinary or grievance investigations, but this wasn't consistent across all managers. We found examples of managers who weren't qualified to lead investigations or who were qualified but hadn't completed refresher training. Managers carrying out investigations are assigned a single point of contact – and, in some instances, a mentor – for support. HR also provides support. Managers dealing with performance issues told us they asked for support from the Cornwall Council HR team. Training records for managers were also inconsistently maintained.

Coaching and mentoring are available to staff through the council, and the service has its own programmes to support leadership development. The service wasn't using the National Fire Chiefs Council coaching and mentoring portal and acknowledged it could make better use of this resource.

This means leaders struggle to manage effectively, even when challenges are foreseeable. We heard many departments and managers worked in silos and didn't know how they were helping to meet the priorities of the CRMP and were unaware of each other's demands. Many managers are responsible for multiple projects and find it difficult to manage both their own workload and their teams effectively.

The service isn't effectively managing staff performance

Leaders aren't equipped to confidently manage staff performance and deal with any poor performance or behavioural issues. There isn't a good performance management system that allows leaders to effectively develop and assess the individual performance of all staff members. For example, the service introduced a new performance management policy in August 2025 for all staff. Yet we found extensive evidence that individual, team and departmental performance wasn't being managed effectively.

Although performance issues are reported through internal governance meetings, underperformance, such as missed response time targets, incomplete home fire safety checks and missed protection audit targets, doesn't lead to meaningful action. This is an area for improvement.

Leaders don't act consistently as role models

We were disappointed to find leaders didn't always act as role models. For example, we heard some managers didn't feel confident speaking up in meetings with senior leaders and didn't feel safe expressing their views. Some managers also reported feeling undervalued, unsupported and not empowered.

In our workforce survey, 70 percent of respondents (144 of 205) agreed leaders at all levels promoted a positive culture. Some staff said they didn't feel included in the service, and culture and values weren't aligned between all staff groups, especially between leaders and the rest of the staff.

As a result, leaders aren't proactively developing or supporting a positive workplace environment. We heard of a disconnect between the fire leadership team and the rest of the service. This was identified in the review of culture that an external company carried out, and the service will continue to address it.

We did hear, though, that leaders were active in challenging misconduct, including bullying, harassment and discrimination. And staff trusted them to take their concerns about misconduct seriously.

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