

Fire and rescue services 2025–27

Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service

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Overall summary

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

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

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

Changes to this round of inspection

We last inspected Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service in July 2023. And in November 2023, we published [our inspection report](#) with our findings on the service's effectiveness and efficiency and how well it looks after its people.

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 Hereford and Worcester 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 Hereford and Worcester 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 urban with significant rural communities and covers an area of 1,514 square miles. It has a population of approximately 805,700, which is growing.

Governance for this service is the responsibility of Hereford and Worcester [Fire Authority](#). The chair of the fire authority is Councillor Roger Phillips. Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive Jon Pryce has overall responsibility for the day-to-day running of the service.

I congratulate Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service on its performance in keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks. We were pleased to see that the service had made progress against all the [areas for improvement](#) we found in our last inspection. We have closed 9 of the 11 previously identified areas for improvement and issued only 1 new area for improvement from this inspection. This progress has been achieved through the work of dedicated staff at all levels, effective internal governance and the service's monitoring processes.

To achieve a consistently good service, there are some areas the service still needs to address. For example, it needs fair and open processes to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders.

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

- The service has demonstrated improved performance across most areas of our inspection, with six positive grade changes from adequate to good.
- The service has developed an effective [community risk management plan](#) that comprehensively identifies and mitigates the risks and threats faced by its communities.
- Improved quality assurance and evaluation have enhanced the service's prevention activity, meaning that it can have confidence in the support it provides to the public.
- The service manages financial challenges while making improvements in its estates, fleet and use of technology.
- The service has improved how it shares learning from operational incidents and modernised its operational training packages.

The service has made strong progress and continues to demonstrate clear and sustained improvement. This is supported by a robust governance structure with stable, self-aware leadership and improved data and [intelligence](#) to support decision-making at all levels.

There are still some areas that need more work, including the monitoring of the secondary employment of staff and the evaluation of its collaboration activity to make sure it is effective. Overall, I commend the service on the changes it has made and expect it to continue working to resolve the few areas for improvement remaining.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'K' followed by a smaller 'S' and a period.

Kathryn Stone OBE

His Majesty's Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies

Good

Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is good 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.

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

Main findings

The service has a comprehensive risk assessment process

The service has assessed a suitable range of risks and threats using a thorough [community risk management planning](#) process. In its assessment of risk, it uses information it has collected from a range of internal and external sources and datasets, taking account of both local and national risk registers.

In preparation for its 2025–30 community risk management plan (CRMP), the service carried out a strategic assessment of risk, which examined political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal factors (known as a PESTEL analysis). This helped it understand the risks and threats it faces both now and in the future.

The service created definitions of risk to identify and assess risk in Herefordshire and Worcestershire. These definitions are based on [intelligence](#) and data, using findings from risk analysis, and follow [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) guidance. They include definitions for domestic [dwelling fires](#), other building fires and road traffic collisions. The service also developed its own definition of risk for water-related incidents and flooding.

The service has an effective CRMP

Once it has assessed risks, the service records its findings in an easily understood plan called the 2025–30 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. For example, by making sure it has fully trained competent firefighters, equipped with the right resources to protect the public at emergency incidents. The plan also outlines the prevention and protection activities that the service will complete, and the resources that it has available to achieve its aims in these areas. It sets out what people can expect from the service and it provides performance indicators so the service can track and manage progress.

The arrangements described in the plan also take account of the issues identified in the service's strategic risk register, which could compromise the implementation of these activities. This includes organisational risks, such as the impact of not having enough staff to provide core services. The service has established contingency arrangements, such as active workforce planning and recruitment.

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

The service tracks progress against strategic objectives through its monitoring and feedback systems

Senior leaders have effective monitoring, feedback and scrutiny arrangements in place to make sure the aims they have set out in the CRMP for prevention, protection and response are being achieved.

Where the service isn't meeting its commitments to the public, senior leaders are fully aware of emerging issues and are holding leaders at all levels to account. They do this through regular performance reviews, governance meetings and escalation processes that provide transparency and accountability. For example, monthly oversight reports highlight areas of underperformance, and senior leaders agree and monitor corrective action plans. Service performance dashboards provide early indicators of issues, which means senior leaders can respond promptly and maintain public confidence.

The service has effective governance arrangements in place

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

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

For example, the service presents quarterly performance reports to the authority, detailing progress against prevention, protection and response objectives. These reports include key performance indicators, which help the fire and rescue authority to make informed decisions.

The service publishes an annual service plan that focuses on objectives it has set for the coming year. And it publishes a service review that looks back on its achievements in keeping communities safe from fire and other emergencies.

Preventing fires and other risks

Good

Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is good 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.

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 prevention strategy is aligned with its community risk management plan

The service prevention strategy is clearly aligned with the risks identified in its 2025–30 [community risk management plan](#). The strategy shows how the service will provide a range of preventative services to the most [vulnerable people](#) in its communities. This includes:

- home fire safety visits (HFSVs);
- road safety and water safety education; and
- a fire safety intervention scheme, working with [children](#) and young people who have displayed fire-setting behaviour.

Leaders responsible for prevention have clearly communicated the strategy and main prevention aims to the workforce. As a result, prevention staff understand how they contribute to the prevention aims of the service individually and 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. Prevention team co-ordinators process referrals that come into the service from partner agencies or from members of the public. They use effective methods to triage the risk and direct the work to appropriate service staff such as prevention technicians, [safeguarding](#) leads or operational firefighters.

The service has a targeted approach to carrying out prevention work

The service uses a risk-based approach to clearly prioritise its prevention activity towards people most at risk from fire and other emergencies. It uses data from the community risk management plan and partner agencies to identify vulnerable people, such as older adults, people with disabilities and those living in high-risk properties. Targeted initiatives include HFSVs, installation of smoke alarms and tailored advice for people with complex needs.

The service uses a range of information and data to target its prevention activity at vulnerable individuals and groups including those from [under-represented communities](#). In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service carried out 91.8 percent of its HFSVs (6,625 of 7,215) in households with at least one person with a vulnerability or risk factor. The England average for the same time frame was 85.6 percent.

The service carries out a range of interventions and campaigns, which it adapts to the level of risk in its communities. It has seasonal campaigns, such as fire safety in winter and water safety in summer, targeting areas with higher incident rates. For example, it has used education initiatives via YouTube and the service website to improve the awareness of risks from water after a loss of life.

Staff are skilled and confident in carrying out HFSVs

During [our 2023 inspection](#), we identified an [area for improvement](#) that the service should make sure staff carry out HFSVs competently. The service has made good progress in addressing this. Therefore, we have closed this area for improvement.

Staff told us they had the right skills and confidence to carry out HFSVs. These visits cover an appropriate range of hazards that can put vulnerable people at greater risk from fire and other emergencies. The service has introduced the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) person-centred framework for home safety visits. To support this, it has created hazard awareness and other digital prevention training for staff.

The service carries out proportionate quality assurance of its HFSV activity, including sampling HFSV records. There are also joint visits between prevention and operational staff. We reviewed a range of HFSVs completed by technicians and [wholetime](#) firefighters. We found that they were carried out effectively and completed within the timescales set out in the service policy.

The service evaluates prevention activity effectively

During our 2023 inspection, we issued an area for improvement that the service should evaluate its prevention activity so it understands what is most effective. The service has made good progress in addressing this. Therefore, we have closed this area for improvement.

The service has good evaluation tools in place to measure how effective its activity is and make sure all sections of its communities get appropriate access to the prevention services that meet their needs. For example, the service uses a scoring assessment to measure the behavioural change of people who have received an HFSV and evaluate the impact of the intervention.

Prevention activities take account of feedback from the public, other organisations and other parts of the service. Examples include:

- feedback forms to review the quality of HFSVs;
- evaluations to make sure that partnership working is effective and efficient;
- an annual HFSV survey for fire crews to improve prevention provision and support the service to feedback with a 'you said, we did' approach; and
- prevention training and safeguarding evaluation to make sure that learning and development arrangements are effective and staff understand what to do.

The service uses feedback to inform its planning assumptions and change future activity to make sure it focuses on what its communities need and what works. It makes effective use of digital communication and training platforms. And it efficiently informs, updates and educates staff on the outcomes of the evaluation and the ways the service can further improve its prevention work.

The service works with partner organisations to share information and refer vulnerable people

The service works with a range of other organisations to prevent fires and other emergencies. Service prevention engagement officers identify and work with partner agencies that provide referrals for vulnerable people or hard-to-reach communities. They attend partnership meetings to maintain regular contact and collaborate with partners, and provide awareness training to help them identify hazards in people's homes.

We found good evidence that the service routinely referred people at greatest risk to organisations that may better meet their needs. These organisations include health, housing and social care agencies. Arrangements are also in place to receive referrals from others. For example, the service attends [multi-agency risk assessment conference](#) meetings where agencies work together to support highly vulnerable people. The service acts appropriately on the multi-agency risk assessment conference and other referrals it receives.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service carried out 7,215 HFSVs. The service completed 3,514 HFSVs that were referrals from other agencies and 559 that led to the service making an onward referral to at least one other organisation.

Staff are well trained in how to respond to safeguarding concerns

The service provides safeguarding training for all staff appropriate for their roles. All staff must complete level 1 adult and children safeguarding training every two years. Content includes videos produced in the service about what to look out for with safeguarding. Station commanders receive level 2 safeguarding, group commanders receive level 3 training, and the signposting safeguarding leads receive level 4 training.

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

The service operates specialist programmes to tackle fire-setting behaviour

In the year ending 30 September 2025, the service attended 741 deliberate fire incidents, which has increased from 425 in the previous year. The rate of attendance at deliberate fire incidents was 91.2 per 100,000 population in the year ending 30 September 2025. This is lower than the England rate of 131.4.

The service carries out a range of suitable and effective interventions to target and educate people with different needs who show signs of fire-setting behaviour. This includes specialist programmes such as the fire safety intervention scheme. This is a fire education scheme for children and young people under 18. Specialist trained advisors provide one-to-one sessions tailored to the individual's age, circumstances and risk level. The service supports interventions with multi-agency referrals and through safeguarding processes. This makes sure those at risk receive appropriate guidance and support.

When appropriate, it routinely shares information with relevant organisations, such as West Mercia Police and West Mercia [Youth Justice Service](#), to support prosecution.

Protecting the public through fire regulation

Good

Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is good 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.

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

Main findings

The service's protection strategy is clearly aligned to the community risk management plan

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 protection aims to the workforce. As a result, protection staff understand how they contribute to the protection aims of the service individually and as a team.

Staff across the service are involved in this activity and effectively share information as needed. For example, firefighters visit premises and complete business fire safety inspections designed to protect businesses through the identification of hazards and risks. These supplement the wider risk-based inspection programme that protection staff complete.

The service then uses information to adjust planning assumptions and direct activity between its prevention, protection and response functions. This means it properly aligns its resources with risk.

Protection staff share risk information about premises with operational crews, prevention and [fire control](#). They add information to [intelligence](#) records and, if required, complete a temporary action notice. This provides risk information to operational crews when responding to emergency incidents and contributes to firefighter safety, community safety and effective emergency response.

The service's risk-based inspection programme focuses on the highest-risk premises

The service's risk-based inspection programme is focused on its highest-risk buildings. The service carries out fire safety audits to identify premises with the highest risk, such as high-rise residential blocks, care homes and other sleeping accommodation.

The service reviews fire safety inspection schedules regularly to make sure it keeps its focus on protection activity. The service reports its performance to senior leaders and the [fire and rescue authority](#) for oversight. In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service set itself a fire safety audit target of 1,350. It achieved this target as it carried out 1,362 audits. This means the service carried out 6.7 audits per 100 known premises, which is higher than the England rate of 2.0.

When we reviewed the service's audits of high-risk buildings, we found it had completed them in the time frames it had set itself. This demonstrates effective resource allocation and shows that staff are aware of how inspection activity is prioritised. Meeting these timelines is critical because delays in auditing high-risk buildings could expose occupants to significant safety risks.

The service's ability to adhere to its schedule suggests robust planning processes, adequate staffing and efficient co-ordination with building owners. And the timely completion of audits demonstrates the service's capacity to manage risk proactively and maintain regulatory compliance.

The service has enough resources to carry out audits and enforcement activity

The service has enough qualified protection staff to meet the requirements of its risk-based inspection programme.

At the time of our inspection, workforce planning data showed that the service employed 17 protection officers. Of these, 15 hold nationally recognised qualifications including the level 4 [diploma in fire safety](#). An additional two staff were in development.

Workforce reports show that since 2021/22, the service has increased protection resource levels. This helps it provide the range of audit and enforcement activity needed both now and in the future. This is reflected in the number of enforcement activities carried out following unsatisfactory audits. In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service completed 968 unsatisfactory fire safety audits, which led to 962 enforcement activities.

The service responds proactively to new fire safety legislation

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

This legislation has led to an increase in the time the service spends assuring the safety of tall buildings. It expects this demand to increase with the increased pace of [remediation work that is underway to replace flammable cladding](#).

The service is supporting the [Building Safety Regulator](#). It has allocated staff time to carry out training and work on reviewing safety case reports, contributing to building [risk assessments](#) and evacuation protocols. This shows the service's commitment to meeting statutory obligations and strengthening oversight of building safety. It expects these arrangements to have manageable impact on its other protection activity.

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

We found the service had good arrangements in place to receive this information. When it doesn't receive the right information, it acts, and updates accordingly the risk information it gives its operational staff.

Most fire safety audits are completed to a high standard

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

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

In our review, we found the service had completed most of the audits to a high standard, in a consistent, systematic way and in line with its policies. The service makes relevant information from its audits available to operational teams and [control room](#) operators.

For example, we reviewed the audit of a block of flats that had ongoing remediation works taking place. It had a prohibition notice restricting access to part of the premises and a waking watch in place. A waking watch is a temporary fire safety measure where trained people continuously patrol a building 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to detect fires and alert residents should there be an outbreak of fire.

Local fire stations had been informed of the risks and had carried out familiarisation visits. The wider workforce had been notified through a temporary action notice that holds the relevant information on file for the premises. If there was an emergency call to the building, fire control operators and responding firefighters would be alerted to the issues with the risk information.

In our review of post-fire inspections completed by the service, we found that the service didn't provide written information of the findings to the responsible person. The service accepts that a formal record of findings should be provided in writing and it has a plan to address this.

The service has clear quality assurance processes in place

The service carries out proportionate quality assurance of its protection activity.

It has developed a quality assurance framework that contains quality assurance processes for a range of protection activities such as fire safety inspections, post-inspection administration, building and licensing consultations, and serving enforcement notices.

It reviews the fire safety inspector's work annually through manager and [peer reviews](#). This is linked to the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) framework. The protection manager monitors themes, which are discussed at monthly protection management meetings.

It has good evaluation tools in place to measure how effective its activity is and to make sure all sections of its communities get appropriate access to the protection services that meet their needs. For example, the service maintains a central register that records all formal notices. This provides effective oversight and regular updates on each premises and the engagement activity that has taken place. The service also actively carries out surveys with people who have received fire safety audits to gather feedback on what it was like to be inspected. We reviewed service data from the survey responses in 2025/26 and found 74 quality assurance returns with 69 responses (93.2 percent) that stated they felt that, following the visit, their business was better protected from fire.

The service uses enforcement powers when necessary

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, the service issued 12 alteration notices, 878 informal notifications, 27 enforcement notices and 45 [prohibition notices](#). It carried out no prosecutions. It completed one prosecution in the five years from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2025. Staff told us that there were several cases that were being considered for prosecution at the service's enforcement board.

The service has the capacity and capability to respond to enforcement issues 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The service works closely with other enforcement authorities to make communities safer

The service works closely with other enforcement agencies to regulate fire safety, and it routinely exchanges risk information with them. In [our 2023 inspection](#), we identified [promising practice](#) in the service's work with partner agencies.

In this inspection, we found this work had continued to reduce risk effectively and make the communities of Herefordshire and Worcestershire safer. The service is a member of the multi-agency targeted enforcement (MATE) partnership. This is a collaboration between enforcement authorities such as West Mercia Police, local authority housing and trading standards to jointly target risk.

Since 2023, the number of MATE campaigns and enforcement outcomes have increased. Service performance reports show that between 1 April 2024 and 31 December 2025, the service carried out 212 MATE inspections. Of these, 122 were unsatisfactory and resulted in 19 prohibition notices and 10 enforcement notices being issued.

The service responds to consultations to make sure new and altered buildings comply with fire safety legislation

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service responded to 98.9 percent of building consultations (439 of 444) and 97.1 percent of licensing consultations (364 of 375) within the required time frame. This means it consistently meets its statutory responsibility to comment on fire safety arrangements at new and altered buildings.

The service works well with businesses

The service proactively works with local businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation.

The service has several [primary authority schemes](#) in place. It collaborates with chambers of commerce and business forums to share fire safety information and promote national campaigns. It also provides a wide range of business fire safety advice on its website.

Responding to fires and other emergencies

Good

Hereford and Worcester 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.

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 continues to align its resources to the risks identified in its 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 locates its fire engines and response staff, and designs its working patterns, to help it respond flexibly to fires and other emergencies with the appropriate resources. For example, the service's [wholetime](#) stations at Hereford, Worcester, Bromsgrove, Wyre Forest and Redditch are strategically located near high-risk areas, such as densely populated districts and industrial locations. The service's three boats are located at Hereford, Worcester and Evesham, and are distributed to cover the main rivers near urban areas. And flexible crewing arrangements incorporating wholetime, day crewing and [on-call](#) allow the service to maintain cover during peak demand periods.

Since [our last inspection](#), the service has reviewed its resource, developed a new response strategy and completed a comprehensive CRMP for 2025–30. This has resulted in new and redistributed resources throughout the service, including having water first responder capability at every fire station. The service has also invested in wildfire equipment.

The service is mostly meeting its response measures but it needs to improve monitoring and performance

The service has set out an attendance performance measure (APM) in its CRMP. It evaluates the time taken for the first fire engine to arrive at an incident compared to the expected travel time over three time zones (10, 15 and 20 minutes). The zones account for factors such as access routes, local geography and the expected turn-out times for both on-call (6 minutes) and wholetime firefighters (90 seconds).

The service continues to monitor its performance against the APM. Between 1 October and 31 December 2025, the service told us that of the 578 incident types that usually had an emergency response, 77.7 percent (449 of 578) met the APM. The service assessed the times that didn't meet the APM to understand and learn from these.

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 September 2025, the service's average response time to primary fires was 12 minutes and 47 seconds. This is slower than the average for services that are urban with significant rural communities, which have an average response time to primary fires of 10 minutes 37 seconds.

Using this measure, the service's average response time has increased from 11 minutes and 52 seconds in the year ending 30 September 2024. This decline is predominantly due to an increase in drive time, which has increased from 7 minutes and 48 seconds to 8 minutes and 36 seconds during the same period.

The service is reporting its attendance performance measure and examining reasons for not meeting the measure. We identified that the service wasn't effectively monitoring call handling and crew response times. Therefore, it is missing opportunities to improve its overall response time for the public.

Fire engine availability remains high, making sure resources are ready to respond to emergencies

In the year ending 31 March 2025, availability of wholetime fire engines was 100 percent. This is the same as the previous year. During the same period, availability of on-call fire engines was 74.0 percent. This is an increase from the previous 2 years when availability was 66.4 and 66.0 percent, respectively.

The service has invested in a range of measures to improve on-call availability, which are having a positive impact. These include using dashboards to provide enhanced monitoring of fire engine availability and the contractual hours provided by on-call firefighters. The service has also made several improvements in the recruitment and retention of on-call staff.

The service isn't complacent about the progress it has made and recognises that some fire stations have continued to face challenges with on-call availability. It is aware that further development is needed.

The service has improved how it gathers and maintains risk information

In our 2023 inspection, we highlighted an [area for improvement](#) that the service should make sure its firefighters have good access to relevant and up-to-date risk information. We found limited, inaccurate, out-of-date records and a build-up of temporary risk information with poor management arrangements in place.

During this inspection, we were pleased to find the service had carried out an extensive review of the temporary risk information that it held. And it has put in place processes to suitably control this using the Resilience, Organisational Intelligence and Learning (ROIL) system it has bought.

Most staff told us that the ROIL system had improved service procedures in managing premises risk information (known within the service as intel). They said that ROIL was a robust platform to share risk information between departments and there were monitoring arrangements in place to make sure that intel visits were carried out on time.

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

The service routinely collects and updates information about the highest-risk people, places and threats it has identified. This includes information gathered through intel inspections, fire safety audits of businesses and home fire safety visits.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service had identified 1,001 sites that posed more risk to firefighters if an incident took place. During the same period, the service visited 446 to update its records and familiarise itself with the firefighting risks at the sites.

This information is readily available for the service's prevention, protection and response staff. This means that these teams can identify and reduce risk effectively. For example, threats of arson are shared securely within the service. The service takes appropriate action to mitigate the risk, such as carrying out an urgent home fire safety visit at the property and increasing the number of fire engines to be dispatched if an incident occurs. Where appropriate, the service shares risk information with other organisations, such as West Mercia Police and West Midlands Ambulance Service.

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

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

Some staff we spoke to shared concerns about the limited resources in the team managing intel and we found some inconsistencies in the time taken to upload some intel records to the system. This meant temporary action notices were used as an interim measure. The service should review staff capacity to make sure risk information is managed effectively.

The service carries out proportionate quality assurance of its risk information and intel submissions. It could strengthen this by increasing capacity and the support provided to the operational policy department.

The service recognises that it can make investment in its approach to intel and has included this as a priority focus in its 2025–30 response strategy.

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

The service has incident commanders who are trained and regularly assessed. They complete internal training and exercising courses to develop competency. This is supplemented by nationally accredited command courses. These include multi-agency gold incident command for strategic level incident commanders. 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.

Additionally, the service sends active incident monitoring (AIM) officers to emergency incidents to observe the competence of incident commanders. However, as these assessments can't be pre-planned and the service covers a large geographical area, the service has had difficulty in keeping all incident commanders in date for an active AIM assessment.

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](#).

We reviewed several incident logs and debriefs and found that [M/ETHANE](#) messages weren't consistent. The service should take action to address this and monitor compliance.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service needed 233 accredited incident commanders to meet its demand and it had 231 who were accredited. There were no incident commanders who still carried out the same work after their accreditation had expired.

The service has improved the monitoring and sharing of operational learning

As part of our inspection, we reviewed a range of emergency incidents and training events. These included major incidents, fires in domestic and commercial properties, road traffic collisions, water rescues and other complex incidents and exercises.

During our 2023 inspection, we highlighted an area for improvement that the service should make sure it has an effective system to learn from operational incidents. The service didn't always act on learning it should have identified from incidents. This meant that it wasn't routinely improving its service to the public. During this inspection, we were pleased to find that the service consistently followed its policies to make sure that staff commanded incidents in line with operational guidance. As a result, we have closed this area for improvement.

The service's debrief policy clearly explains the different types of debriefs and when they should be carried out. These include:

- on scene (hot) debriefs – carried out as soon as possible following an incident;
- formal electronic debriefs – which record all operational debrief returns and are submitted within eight days of the incident/event;
- structured debriefs for large-scale incidents involving eight or more fire engines or fire-related fatalities – completed as soon as possible but ideally within 30 days; and
- multi-agency debriefs following a declared major incident or other complex multi-agency operation – these are usually led by a West Mercia [local resilience forum](#) facilitator.

The debriefs we sampled were carried out in line with the service's policy. We found that debrief feedback was shared with the service's operational learning, intelligence and assurance group. The group reviews identified themes to evaluate organisational and operational learning so that lessons are learned and action taken.

We found that the functionality of the ROIL system had improved the monitoring and accountability of debrief actions to make sure they were being progressed.

Staff we spoke with were positive about how debrief information was shared throughout the organisation through operational policy updates and the service electronic communications tool, known as Comms Hub.

Comms Hub is a weekly news bulletin that contains important updates and requires staff to confirm receipt of the information by a set date. This allows the service to track that staff have read key findings from debriefs that have happened in the service, and those shared from [national operational learning](#) and [joint organisational learning](#).

The service has responded to learning from incidents to improve its services to the public. For example, learning from a fire involving a thatched roof has led to improved information, instruction and training being provided to all operational staff.

Fire control staff are regularly involved in training, exercises and debriefs

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

Control staff are invited to contribute to incident debriefs following incidents and exercises. We saw examples of control staff involved in exercises involving marauding terrorist attack, incidents involving [fire survival guidance](#) and immediate building evacuation. Control staff also told us that they exercised and trained in [fall-back](#) arrangements and back-up procedures in the event of a system failure.

Service policies and training are aligned to national standards

The service is making sure that its policies are in line with [national operational guidance](#). It has used the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) gap analysis tool to identify gaps and record the rationale where policies aren't aligned to national operational guidance. Operational training is also aligned to national operational guidance.

The service has developed an impressive set of operational training packages based on national operational guidance. The content includes digital and practical learning and has an assessment for staff to confirm understanding. Staff we spoke with were very positive about the quality of the training material and how the service had made the learning interesting.

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents

Good

Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is good 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).

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 anticipates foreseeable risks and prepares for major and multi-agency incidents

The service has effectively anticipated and considered the reasonably foreseeable risks and threats it may face. It has listed these in both local and national risk registers as part of its [community risk management plan \(CRMP\)](#). These include new housing developments, flooding, waste fires (recycling), lithium-ion batteries, heritage, pandemic, high-rise buildings and cyber security.

It is also familiar with the significant risks that neighbouring fire and rescue services may face, which it might reasonably be asked to respond to in an emergency. These include wildfires, widespread flooding and hazardous materials incidents. Firefighters have access to risk information from neighbouring services through the [ResilienceDirect](#) platform. This includes locations that are within a 10 km boundary of the service area.

The service has effective arrangements in place to respond to major and multi-agency incidents

During this inspection, we considered how well prepared the service was to respond to foreseeable major incidents including flooding, wildfires and a marauding terrorist attack. We found that the service had well-developed policies and procedures in place for safely managing these incident types. Staff at all levels understand them, and robust training and exercises have taken place to test them.

Since [our 2023 inspection](#), the service has dealt with a significant fire in a 16th-century, Grade II-listed former hotel. It was also part of the multi-agency emergency response to a rail incident when a passenger train collided with a tractor and trailer in Herefordshire. And, in November 2025, it carried out exercise Articululus Grand, a marauding terrorist attack exercise, with West Mercia Police and West Midlands Ambulance Service.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service completed 27 multi-agency training exercises. The rate of multi-agency training exercises completed was 58.7 per 1,000 full-time-equivalent firefighters. This was higher than the England rate of 54.5.

The service is working with other emergency responders to make local communities more resilient. It works closely with partner agencies to improve community safety, through the West Mercia [local resilience forum \(LRF\)](#). For example, by preparing communities in known flood-risk areas to understand the risks and by planning response plans with other agencies.

We also reviewed the service's response to a major incident it declared. The incident, an 80-acre wildfire in Bromsgrove, involved the evacuation of around 50 homes with 12 fire engines attending to fight the fire. 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 that the plans it has in place to declare and respond to major incidents, co-locate with other emergency responders, exchange information and work with other emergency responders, and share learning and work with these partner organisations to support the community after an incident are fit for purpose.

The service has effective working arrangements with other fire and rescue services

The service supports other fire and rescue services when they are responding to emergency incidents. It has seven neighbouring fire and rescue services: Shropshire, Staffordshire, West Midlands, Warwickshire, Gloucestershire, Mid and West Wales, and South Wales. It is intraoperable with these services and can form part of a multi-agency response. It has [mutual aid](#) arrangements in place with all its neighbouring services. Several operational officers are [national inter-agency liaison officer](#) trained, allowing them to effectively liaise with other agencies including police, ambulance, coastguard and the military.

It has successfully deployed wildfire tactical advisors to support other services dealing with large-scale incidents. And it has requested [national resilience assets](#) such as high-volume pumps to assist in the resolution of incidents in Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

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

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

The service could give us strong evidence that it consistently followed these principles. This included sharing risk information through tactical and strategic co-ordination groups at larger, more complex incidents. This allowed responders to effectively communicate, co-ordinate activity, and ensure joint understanding of risk and situational awareness, in line with JESIP.

We sampled a range of debriefs the service had carried out after multi-agency incidents and exercises. We were pleased to find that the service received praise from the ambulance and police personnel attending exercise Artculus Grand, which highlighted good practice around the effective use of JESIP meetings to enable a robust shared situational awareness. And, where the service had identified any problems it had with applying JESIP, it took appropriate, prompt action with other emergency services. This included reminding crews and officers that terminology needed to be consistent, simplified and agreed between all services. For example, all agencies should know how floor levels are being referred to.

Cross-border exercising arrangements have improved in the service

During our 2023 inspection, we identified an [area for improvement](#) that the service should make sure it has an overarching cross-border exercise strategy. The strategy should assure the service that exercise objectives are in line with CRMPs and that learning is recorded, shared and actioned. The service has made sufficient progress in addressing this. Therefore, we have closed this area for improvement.

The service has published a 2025–30 cross-border exercise plan and developed the objectives with neighbouring fire and rescue services. This helps them work together effectively to keep the public safe. The plan includes the risks of foreseeable major incidents linked to the CRMP where the service could be required to give support or ask for help from neighbouring services. We were pleased to find that the service used learning from these exercises to inform risk information and service plans.

Cross-border exercising allows the services to understand any differences in procedures, policies and equipment. It also allows the service to understand where the joint risks are on its borders and exercise against the most likely situations where the two fire services are likely to respond together.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service completed 31 training exercises with neighbouring fire and rescue services. In the same year, the rate of training exercises with neighbouring fire and rescue services was 67.4 per 1,000 full-time-equivalent firefighters. This is higher than the England rate of 24.5.

We found there was an inconsistent approach to some of the exercises and some staff didn't understand planning arrangements. The service should make sure staff are aware of the exercising planning portal, the cross-border exercise plan and associated planning guidance.

The service is an active and valued member of the West Mercia LRF

The service has good arrangements in place to respond to emergencies with agencies that make up the West Mercia LRF. These arrangements include information sharing, and planning and preparing to respond to a range of emergencies through regular testing and exercising. The LRF is based at police and fire service headquarters, which provides good working arrangements.

The service is a valued member of the LRF and sits on the strategic board, the management group and various working subgroups such as [risk assessment](#) and emergency planning. It takes part in regular training events with other members of the forum and uses the learning to develop planning assumptions about responding to major and multi-agency incidents. These arrangements include multi-agency, site-specific response plans for several high-risk locations such as illegal waste sites.

The service continues to share national learning

The service makes sure it knows about [national operational learning](#) updates from other fire and rescue services and [joint organisational learning](#) from other organisations, such as the police and ambulance services. It uses this learning to inform the planning assumptions it makes with other organisations.

The service has a single point of contact with the operational policy department responsible for receiving and co-ordinating the service's response to national operational learning and joint organisational learning submissions. Following a recent submission on buildings with hangar-style doors, the service communicated the information to all operational staff through an urgent operational update and instructed stations to review premises in their areas and update intel information if necessary.

The service has introduced an effective electronic system to share fire survival guidance

In our 2023 inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should make sure it has an effective method to share [fire survival guidance](#) information with multiple callers and that it has a dedicated communication link in place.

During these incidents, a fire and rescue service would receive a high volume of simultaneous fire calls. We found that the service relied too heavily on paper-based systems.

In this inspection, we were pleased to find the service had introduced a suitable electronic system and provided staff training to those who might use it at an operational incident.

It has provided information about the new electronic system to the wider workforce through the Comms Hub. We found varying levels of awareness among staff we spoke with. The service should provide further information, instruction and training to improve this.

We found that in the provision of the new system, and the training it had provided for senior managers and incident command unit teams, there had been sufficient progress to close this area for improvement.

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

Good

Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is good 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.

Area for improvement

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 has effective governance and scrutiny arrangements in place

The Hereford and Worcester [Fire Authority](#) oversees the service. Its governance role includes setting the strategic direction of the service and providing scrutiny to monitor the service's performance and make sure its strategic aims are achieved.

The service has effective strategic oversight arrangements in place to manage financial and resourcing risks, performance and improvement plans. It has effective processes, controls and internal governance arrangements in place to manage strategic risks.

The service's operating model provides an efficient structure with clear lines of responsibility. As well as the strategic leadership board, there are four co-ordination boards for operational performance, service improvement, change and annual business planning.

The service reports accurate and suitably detailed financial, risk and performance information to the fire authority.

It carries out regular internal audits, including into its financial systems and processes. It reports findings to senior leaders and elected members in the fire authority, promoting transparency and accountability.

The [scheme of delegation](#) clearly sets out responsibilities for the service's senior leaders. There are effective internal governance arrangements in place to hold senior leaders to account for the corporate management of the service. This includes fortnightly strategic leadership board meetings and quarterly fire and rescue authority, audit, scrutiny and standards, and policy and resources committee meetings. Senior leaders present performance reports, financial updates and how they are managing risk at the meetings, and actions are tracked through formal decision logs.

The service allocates resources appropriately to the risk and priorities set out in its community risk management plan

We were pleased to find that the service had made improvements to its workforce planning since [our last inspection](#). Its financial and workforce plans, including allocating resources to prevention, protection and response, are consistent with the risks and priorities it has identified in its [community risk management plan \(CRMP\)](#).

The service is using its resources appropriately to mitigate issues identified in the corporate risk register that might affect implementation of the plan.

We found prevention and protection were adequately resourced. Since our last inspection, the service has published new prevention and protection strategies. It has updated its home fire safety visit (HFSV) programme and risk-based inspection programme. The service has also increased its output with staff completing more HFSVs and fire safety audits.

In the year ending 31 March 2022, the service completed 2,592 HFSVs and 840 fire safety audits. In the year ending 31 March 2025, this had increased to 7,215 HFSVs and 1,362 fire safety audits.

The service has sustainable plans in place to resource its protection function if protection grant funding is reduced or withdrawn. It has used the grant funding to upskill staff across the service with level 3 fire safety qualifications to support its protection work and therefore isn't reliant on future funding.

The service has evaluated its mix of crewing and duty systems. It has analysed its response cover and can show it deploys its fire engines and response staff to manage risk efficiently. The service has implemented day crewing duty systems at Droitwich, Evesham and Malvern. It also carried out a review of fire engine availability and use. Based on the analysis, it has removed several under-used [on-call](#) fire engines and reallocated the funding to busier frontline fire stations. The service has reported that the review of its resources has led to increased resilience, with fire engines on [wholetime](#) stations being crewed with five firefighters far more frequently.

The service also reported a reduction in overtime costs. Data provided by the service shows that in the year ending 31 March 2025, overtime spend per head of workforce was £731, compared to the England rate of £1,298. This had reduced from £1,461 per head of workforce in the year ending 31 March 2024.

The service is taking steps to maintain availability of its on-call crews. It commissioned an 'invest to improve' project using funding from reserves. This investment financed a dedicated project team to review on-call recruitment and retention.

It examined research across the fire and rescue service sector and carried out a range of activities. This included:

- detailed analysis of the local workforce profile to increase the number of applicants from diverse groups;
- making significant structural changes to recruitment processes such as enhanced digital marketing and a postcode checker to quickly assess the suitability of applicants;
- improving the efficiency of medical processes and reducing the recruitment timeline;
- personalising the onboarding process and keeping good contact with candidates; and
- improved data analysis and management of the on-call contracts of existing staff.

The project was successful in supporting the long-term sustainability of the on-call system. In 2024, the on-call project was formally closed and the outcomes were established as business as usual in the support of the service's on-call crewing model.

We did find continuing resourcing challenges in [fire control](#), which sometimes operates below ideal staffing levels. The service should consider how it can supplement staffing, particularly due to short-notice absence. The fire control project may alleviate some of these pressures when it is fully established, as other fire and rescue services will be able to take emergency calls and deploy Hereford and Worcester fire engines.

The service understands its future financial challenges

In 2025/26, the service's net revenue budget was £45 million. The net revenue budget for 2024/25 was adjusted for inflation from £44.8 million to £47.3 million. This means the budget decreased by 4.8 percent between 2024/25 and 2025/26 in real terms. The budget was funded by £30.3 million from council tax, £3.2 million from business rates and £11.3 million from revenue support and other grants. The service's total funding is £45.1 million, which is £55.53 per head of its population. This is within the typical range compared to all services in England.

During our 2023 inspection, we highlighted an area for improvement that the service needs to make sure it has adequate plans to close any identified budget gaps. The service has made sufficient progress in addressing this. Therefore, we have closed this area for improvement.

We were pleased to find that the service had a sound understanding of future financial challenges. The local government finance settlement 2026/27 to 2028/29 has improved the service's financial position. It has reduced the likelihood of the service needing to use its budget reduction reserve to close future budget gaps.

The service has savings plans to mitigate its main financial risks. It understands the impact making these savings will have, including increased workloads in some support functions. And the service told us it would develop further savings options to meet a forecast budget gap in later years of the medium-term financial plan.

The service doesn't carry out a sensitivity analysis. But it does consider what the implications would be if its planning assumptions were different to its forecast. For example, if pay awards were lower or higher than that for which it had budgeted.

The service's capital programme is set at £25.3 million, covering 2025/26 to 2027/28. This includes investment in major estates projects such as the Hereford Fire Station build, vehicles and a breathing apparatus replacement programme.

Capital financing costs are 6.7 percent of the net revenue budget. They are set to increase by 0.8 percent by 2027/28 under existing capital plans.

By 2027/28, the service has forecasted debt and reserves to be 17.8 percent and 10 percent, respectively, of the net revenue budget. This compares to forecasted levels of 18.9 percent and 16 percent, respectively, for 2025/26. This shows that the service expects both debt and reserve levels to decrease over the period of its medium-term financial plan.

The service has a sensible and sustainable plan for using its reserves. This plan includes an 'invest to improve' reserve. The service has used this reserve to help on-call recruitment and retention. It also has earmarked reserves for organisational development.

The service manages performance to improve productivity and achieve its strategic priorities

The service's arrangements for managing performance clearly link resource use to its CRMP and its strategic priorities. The quarterly performance reports provided to the fire authority and strategic leadership board allow leaders to scrutinise a range of prevention, protection, response and people metrics. This includes performance data about:

- numbers and types of fires attended;
- HFSVs and audits carried out;
- any enforcement activity carried out in protection;
- response times and on-call fire engine availability;
- workforce diversity; and
- staff absence levels.

Leaders across the service scrutinise performance. And it is benchmarked against the same quarter in the previous year to allow some limited comparisons to be made.

The service could improve this by reviewing performance projected over a longer timeframe and creating improved key performance indicators linked to the core (prevention, protection and response) strategies. In its response to the external auditor's report, the service has specified that measurement of key performance indicators relating to the three core strategies will be monitored and reported through its quarterly performance report. We look forward to reviewing this updated reporting in our next inspection.

The service is taking steps to make sure its workforce is productive. This includes putting in place new ways of working. For example, as part of their core duties, wholtime firefighters now contribute more to HFSV activity and support protection with business safety inspections.

The service uses data to improve staff productivity, make sure resources are used efficiently and effectively and provide value for money. It has developed several performance dashboards based on service user requirements. These use data from the service's different systems and provide a visual of live performance data. This gives managers better awareness of the performance of teams and individuals, and helps them make timely interventions where needed. The service is continuing to develop dashboards to meet its needs. The HFSV Microsoft Power BI dashboard features include:

- HFSVs completed by [watch](#) or technician, viewable monthly, quarterly or annually;
- open HFSVs with completion dates, priorities and assigned staff;
- completed jobs per watch, including performance against set targets; and
- equipment fitted and time spent per visit.

The service understands how it uses its wholetime firefighters. It collects data on how they spend their time across day and night shifts. It makes the most of its capacity. For example, the service has developed station work routines that define activities to be carried out on each shift. There are monthly targets for the number of HFSVs and business fire safety visits that operational firefighters complete. And monthly targets for the number of intel inspections. Station managers meet with watch managers monthly to review data and information on the Power BI operational assurance dashboard and discuss other areas of focus to support the safety of the community.

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 September 2025, 41.1 percent of incidents attended in Hereford and Worcester were fire false alarms. The rate of attendance at incidents that were fire false alarms was 4.3 per 1,000 population. This is the same as the England rate of incidents per 1,000 population.

The service has improved its approach to managing unwanted fire signals

In our 2023 inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should make sure it effectively addresses the burden of unwanted fire signals.

In this inspection, we found the service had an appropriate, risk-based system in place to manage its response to unwanted fire signals. Since September 2024, the service has call-filtering policies in place in fire control to deal with automatic fire alarms. After the policies had been live for 12 months, the service reported performance of 468 (22.1 percent) of unwanted fire signal incidents being successfully call-filtered by fire control. This means that fire engines have more availability to attend real emergencies. The service has made enough progress in this area and therefore we have closed the area for improvement. However, the service still has more work to do in dealing with unwanted fire signals. In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service didn't attend 20.9 percent of automatic fire alarms compared to an England average rate of 44.6 percent.

The service achieves its planned savings, but could do more to review and evaluate its collaboration

The service told us that it didn't receive a request to submit a finance data return to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. This means we were unable to benchmark its expenditure against other fire and rescue services.

There are regular reviews to consider all the service's expenditure, including its non-pay costs. This scrutiny makes sure the service gets value for money. For example, on estates projects, the service benchmarks costs and uses independent quantity surveyors to make sure it is achieving best value for money. For smaller works, the service makes use of Building Cost Information Service pricing data to validate costs. There are also controls in place for the approval of works over £500 to make sure that there is suitable oversight on pricing.

The service consistently achieves the savings identified in its financial and efficiency plans and more savings were made than planned between 2022/23 and 2024/25. The service is forecasting cashable savings of £273,000 in 2025/26. Examples of savings the service had identified for 2025/26 include savings from not filling some vacant posts and some departmental restructuring.

The service is taking steps to make sure it achieves efficiency gains through sound financial management and best working practices. It is doing this in important areas such as estate, fleet and procurement. The service uses well-established procurement frameworks to ensure value for money and purchases with partner agencies wherever possible to achieve cost advantages. This includes the procurement of breathing apparatus with regional partners and a replacement fire control system with Shropshire, Cleveland, and Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Services.

The service is leading on the fire control project. It has estimated in its efficiency and productivity plan that, through this collaborative project, the cost avoidance savings over the seven-year period from 2025/26 will total between £7 million and £9 million. This represents the difference between the cost of a solo project and adopting a joint procurement.

The service is making progress in how it records collaboration. We found that the service needed to do more to review and evaluate 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 that it consistently achieves its intended outcomes. The service's new collaborations register doesn't yet robustly identify cost and projected savings, or evaluate the return on investment or that it achieves the intended outcomes. We recognise that the register is relatively new and will take time to be consolidated.

In our 2023 inspection, we issued an area for improvement that the service should make sure it effectively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and outcomes of any collaboration activity. This remains open.

Through its approach to value for money, the service has identified and achieved efficiencies that have improved its services to the public. This includes effective partnership working with West Mercia Police, such as a shared headquarters and stations in Redditch and Bromsgrove. There is also an improved operational response such as working together on searching for [missing persons](#) and multi-agency safety visits to premises.

The service's estate and fleet strategies have clear links to the CRMP

The service's capital programme and estate and fleet strategies have clear links to its CRMP. For example, estate programmes have included the relocation of the service training centre to Wyre Forest and a review of working-at-height facilities. The service has also invested well in fire engines and equipment. It provides several different fire engines (full size, compact, Land Rover with wildfire capability), incident command units with drone capability, rescue boats and water first responder equipment for all stations.

Both strategies exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness. This includes continued investment in electric and hybrid vehicles and charging facilities. It is improving sustainability in its estate through better energy use, reducing its carbon footprint and using technology to provide more sustainable solutions, such as installing energy-efficient boilers and LED lighting.

The service regularly reviews these strategies so that it can properly assess the effect any changes in estate and fleet provision, or future innovation, have on risk.

It consistently carries out estate and fleet projects on time and within budget, and manages risks appropriately. Since our last inspection, it has carried out rebuilds at Broadway and Redditch Fire Stations. At the time of our inspection, Hereford Fire Station was also being rebuilt and Leintwardine Fire Station was undergoing an extension and full refurbishment. The service has paused its proposals to build a strategic training facility in north Herefordshire due to the scheme becoming financially unviable with costs exceeding available budgets. The service is reviewing more affordable arrangements to suit its needs.

The service uses technology and innovation to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the service it provides

The service actively considers how changes in technology and future innovation may affect risk. The service's digital and data strategy 2024–30 is aligned to its vision and CRMP. It is intended as a living plan that is agile and flexible to respond to the changing needs of the workforce and other circumstances. The strategy sets out the technological infrastructure, processes and tools needed to support the organisation.

It also aims to exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness presented by changes in technology. For example, through:

- modernising its IT infrastructure to enhanced arrangements with improved security;
- working with other fire and rescue services to develop an electronic fire standards app to assure service activity against compliance with the standards;
- ongoing development work to digitise various repetitive manual processes for departments; and
- improving productivity using equipment scanning to support testing and maintenance.

The service is using artificial intelligence (AI) in the form of Microsoft Copilot. The further potential expansion of AI, such as the use of AI-powered assistants, is contained in the principles set out in the service's digital and data strategy.

It consistently carries out IT projects on time and within budget, and manages risks appropriately. Since our last inspection, the service has:

- procured a Resilience, Organisational Intelligence and Learning system to store and maintain health and safety and risk information;
- developed a data warehouse to improve the effectiveness of the use of data and information;
- put in place measures, such as a fully functioning disaster recover site, to provide a reliable, secure and resilient IT infrastructure; and
- assisted in the development of the Comms Hub to communicate better with its workforce.

Work is ongoing on large IT projects including the new fire control system, [mobile data terminals](#), renewing legacy desktop computers and replacing the human resources system.

The service manages projects well

The service has put in place the capacity and capability it needs to achieve sustainable change. It has achieved several aims set out in its CRMP. These include developing new fire stations, sustaining on-call recruitment and retention, and implementing [national operational guidance](#). The service uses staff from within the organisation who have the appropriate skills, knowledge and understanding to achieve these changes. The service has sufficient resources to realise these changes without adversely affecting business-as-usual arrangements. For example, the fire control project is appropriately staffed and resourced to develop and progress this work.

Change is managed effectively through well-structured projects and programmes. The service has a clear internal structure with appropriate governance arrangements to make sure progress against projects and programmes is monitored, scrutinised and constructively challenged. Projects are reviewed at the service's change portfolio board and via the fire authority.

In November 2025, the Worcestershire internal auditors report stated that project management controls were robust, evidenced and operating effectively to mitigate risk. The review identified three potential improvements:

- adopting an established project management methodology, such as PRINCE2;
- revising its risk scoring; and
- enhancing its post-projects lessons-learned process.

We look forward to seeing how the service further improves at our next inspection.

Promoting, embedding and improving values and culture

Good

Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is good at promoting, embedding and improving values and culture.

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

Area for improvement

The service should monitor secondary contracts to make sure working hours aren't exceeded.

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

Main findings

The service's values are well defined and understood by staff

The service continues to have well-defined values, which staff understand. All staff we spoke to were welcoming and actively engaged with the inspection. We found that staff at all levels of the service showed behaviours that reflected service values.

The service has implemented the [Core Code of Ethics](#) well, staff understand it and it is integrated within policies and procedures. The service has also published a cultural statement of intent. This sets out the desired culture in the service and how it will be achieved through strategic goals and priorities.

Senior leaders demonstrate strong communication across the service with scheduled visits to workplaces, regular video updates and information provided weekly via the Comms Hub. We found that the communications team actively monitored and evaluated staff communications, making improvements where needed.

We were encouraged to find that, following an independent culture audit in 2023, the service provided face-to-face workshops on values and inclusion, which were mandatory for all staff. It has supplemented this with ethical dilemma workshops and several e-learning packages.

We were pleased to see that in our workforce survey, 97 percent of respondents (288 of 298) agreed that their colleagues consistently modelled and maintained the service values. We heard from some staff who felt senior leaders were approachable and receptive to feedback. Results from our workforce survey support this, with 71 percent of respondents (213 of 298) agreeing that senior leaders modelled and maintained the service's values. While these figures are encouraging, we spoke to some staff who said that not all leaders demonstrated the values of the organisation. We discuss this in more detail [in the 'Leading people effectively' section](#).

The service carries out appropriate background checks

The service isn't fully compliant with [safeguarding](#) legislation as it hasn't completed appropriate background checks for all existing members of staff. Most staff have completed Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) background checks, which they renew to maintain compliance. The service maintains a DBS tracker to review the completion of appropriate background checks for all existing members of staff and volunteers. We reviewed the service's tracker, which showed that as at 4 February 2026, 95.3 percent of the service's total employees (656 of 688) had fully completed their DBS check. The service has good oversight of the remaining checks outstanding, with many staff long-term absent from work. It has put in place actions for the remaining checks to be promptly completed.

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, every new recruit had had a background check.

The service has effective oversight and scrutiny arrangements in place

The service has robust systems in place to receive feedback from a range of activity, scrutinise it and understand the impact on staff and the public. Activity includes public complaints, staff grievances and disciplinary action. We found good examples of the service adjusting policies and procedures as a direct result of the scrutiny that had taken place. For example, the service has strengthened its processes to make sure it considers the welfare of everyone involved in disciplinary cases, and not just those being investigated.

The service has improved oversight of discipline and grievance cases through the establishment of a professional standards board, which meets every six weeks to make sure that cases are investigated in a fair, transparent and impartial manner. It monitors trends and confirms compliance with relevant employment law, the Core Code of Ethics and relevant internal policies.

Around every 18 months, the chief fire officer communicates anonymised service updates on disciplinary cases and staff [misconduct](#) via the Comms Hub. This informs staff and builds confidence that misconduct will be dealt with appropriately.

We found that scrutiny could be improved by providing updates on discipline and grievance cases to fire authority members. The fire authority doesn't always receive regular, meaningful updates on people issues. This makes it harder for 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 promotes open and transparent communication, but some staff lack confidence that feedback will be acted on

The service has effective arrangements in place to communicate with staff and representative bodies, such as trade unions, and to take account of their legitimate concerns. We found positive and constructive working relationships in place between representative bodies and service senior managers. And that there is appropriate dialogue on matters that affect the workforce. It has a range of formal and informal arrangements such as the joint consultative committee, the health and safety committee and station visits.

In our workforce survey, 69 percent of respondents (205 of 298) agreed that they felt confident in the processes for providing feedback to all levels of leadership. Most staff told us that they were confident to provide feedback to leaders verbally or through official feedback methods. However, some staff told us that senior leaders weren't visible, and they rarely saw them at fire stations.

The service asks for feedback through staff surveys and culture audits. It shares the results of staff surveys with staff through service updates.

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

In our workforce survey, only 55 percent of respondents (164 of 298) agreed that they were confident their feedback would be acted on. The service has put in place some ways to improve feedback and communication with staff. At the time of our inspection, the service introduced three new communications initiatives:

- a staff suggestion scheme;
- 'Ask SLB' (a way for staff to submit questions to senior leaders who will later respond via a video broadcast); and

- a refreshed area on its intranet for staff to complete and review staff surveys.

We look forward to reviewing the progress of these schemes.

The service promotes a respectful culture

There is a positive working culture throughout the service, and staff feel empowered and willing to challenge unacceptable behaviours when they come across them.

We were pleased to see that in our workforce survey, 78 percent of respondents (232 of 298) agreed that they felt safe to challenge unacceptable behaviour in their service. Staff told us they were actively encouraged to address issues early to prevent escalation. The service also provides a confidential reporting line for staff who don't feel comfortable challenging unacceptable behaviours directly. The service should continue to build on this approach, so more staff feel able to challenge and build trust in the process.

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

In our workforce survey, 8 percent of respondents (23 of 298) told us that they had felt bullied or harassed by members of their service in the past 12 months. And 9 percent of respondents (27 of 298) told us that they had felt discriminated against by members of their service during the same period.

We were encouraged to find that 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, the service told us that there were no live grievances and five disciplinary cases. Of these disciplinary cases, five were [gross misconduct](#) cases.

The service follows the policies and procedures that it has in place. 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 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 can show that it is adapting its processes and sharing with staff the learning it has gained from dealing with grievance and discipline cases.

The service has effective health and safety arrangements in place

The service continues to have effective and well-understood health and safety policies and procedures in place. These policies and procedures are readily available, and leaders at all levels promote them effectively to all staff.

In our workforce survey, 96 percent of respondents (286 of 298) agreed that they understood the policies and procedures the service had in place to make sure they could work safely.

The service maintains an up-to-date health and safety policy and publishes a statement of intent. It reinforces information, instruction and guidance through team briefings and regular audits and fire station inspections. The service monitors compliance with findings reported to the health and safety committee. The service also provides mandatory health and safety training, including [risk assessment](#) and manual handling, and tracks completion rates via Microsoft Power BI dashboards.

Senior leaders regularly communicate updates via briefing notes. Managers discuss important safety topics guidance, such as managing the harmful effects of exposure to products of combustion, during individual and team meetings. Senior leaders provide visible leadership through the demonstration of a safety-based culture. This includes the promotion of safe working practices during station visits and when attending operational incidents.

There are effective arrangements in place to support staff well-being

The service is committed to staff health and well-being. Almost everyone we spoke to in the service was complimentary about the service's well-being provision. And in our workforce survey, 97 percent of respondents (289 of 298) agreed that they knew how to access support for their mental health through the service.

The service has a comprehensive offering of welfare support. This includes:

- specialist counselling support for staff and their families;
- assessment and support for neurodivergence;
- [critical incident](#) stress teams to support staff following traumatic incidents;
- [occupational health](#) support such as access to physiotherapy and rehabilitation;
- fitness testing and health screening;
- a 'Backup Buddy' app and station buddies for each station that offer peer support to colleagues; and
- flexible working arrangements.

The service has received recognition for its health and well-being provision. It won the Health and Wellbeing in the Workplace award at the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce Business Awards 2025. And it was shortlisted for other awards alongside prestigious multi-national companies. We were also pleased to note that a member of staff fundamental to the service's welfare and counselling provision for over 20 years was recognised with a King's Fire Service Medal for distinguished service through their outstanding contribution to supporting staff in the service.

The service lacks effective oversight of secondary contract working arrangements

In [our 2023 inspection](#), we identified an [area for improvement](#) that the service should monitor secondary contracts to make sure working hours aren't exceeded.

We found that the service had improved the monitoring of working hours and secondary contracts. Managers are encouraged to have regular conversations with those who have secondary contracts through one-to-one meetings and annual appraisals. In December 2025, it published an amended secondary employment policy, making responsibilities clear to managers and firefighters. It has also produced a video to advise staff of the changes that have been made. And it has carried out an audit to check the accuracy of data held on HR systems.

As at 31 March 2025, the service had 48 [wholetime](#) firefighters on a dual contract within the same service. The service told us that it had put in place improved monitoring and reporting measures using a traffic light system to identify staff working excess hours. This allows managers to have discussions with staff and act where needed.

However, we found that processes weren't fully established. The monitoring of working hours happens after work has taken place rather than being identified in advance. And we found that the service didn't yet have a consolidated list of staff who had formally opted out of the working time directive.

Therefore, we are keeping this area for improvement open.

Training and developing the right people with the right skills

Good

Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is good 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 \(CRMP\)](#). 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.

Promising practice

The service has developed an effective set of operational training packages

Within its training and development processes the service provides a suite of effective operational training packages (OTPs). The OTPs actively support the operational competence of its firefighters and improve workforce capability.

OTPs have been developed based on [national operational guidance](#) and its associated scenarios. Staff have developed the content, including digital and video material, practical and simulated activities, and tests of understanding and assessments. OTPs are designed for the learning to be accessed in bite-sized amounts.

Most staff we spoke with were positive about the content, format and accessibility of the learning material. The service has incorporated features to support different learning styles as well as staff with neurodivergent conditions. Staff can provide feedback to further improve the package.

The service has created many OTP modules such as fires in tall buildings, aircraft and onboard vessels, animal rescues, hazardous materials, rescues from height, and high threats including terrorist attacks. The full suite of content is continuing to develop.

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

Main findings

The service's workforce plan aligns with the needs of its CRMP

The service has good workforce planning in place. This makes sure that skills and capabilities align with what it needs to effectively carry out its CRMP. This includes maintaining operational establishment and skills, developing water first responder capability at all stations to meet the risk of water incidents, and sustaining protection capability to meet its statutory responsibilities and the changes in fire safety law.

The service updated its strategic workforce plan to meet the requirements of the 2025–30 CRMP. The workforce plan sets out its predicted people and skills requirements for the next two years. It outlines the workforce position and identifies challenges and opportunities in fulfilling its staffing needs. The plan considers both operational and non-operational workforce requirements. It is linked closely to the ongoing improvement work for the recruitment and retention of [on-call](#) firefighters.

The plan contains a schedule of actions that contains objectives for recruitment, succession planning, supporting and delivering change, improving data analysis and applying [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) best practice. The service refreshes the schedule of actions annually.

Workforce and succession planning is subject to consistent scrutiny in the form of regular meetings to discuss requirements. The workforce planning group meets quarterly to monitor and oversee progress of the actions contained in the strategic workforce plan. The meeting also incorporates an establishment headcount across all levels in the service to make sure the right resources are in the right place to align to the CRMP.

Staff are appropriately trained for their roles

Most staff told us that they could access the training they needed to be effective in their roles. In our workforce survey, 87 percent of respondents (260 of 298) agreed that their service gave them the necessary training to carry out their roles.

The service provides mandatory refresher training in core operational skills and offers specialist courses. These include emergency response driving, incident command, advanced [safeguarding](#) and accredited fire safety courses. Staff feedback we received was very positive about the trauma training provided by paramedics employed by the service and the operational training programme the service has developed. We have recognised this as [promising practice](#).

Training records show high compliance rates, with most staff completing required modules on time. This makes sure that the service links staff development to operational needs and the CRMP.

Training isn't just focused on operational skills. It also includes management skills. The service's training plans make sure staff can maintain competence and capability effectively. For example, managers receive a range of management training including recruitment and selection, performance management, discipline and grievance, and equality, diversity and inclusion. However, some staff told us that there should be more managerial training to support them in their role.

In our workforce survey, 90 percent of respondents who had operational roles (193 of 215) agreed that they could access relevant learning and development opportunities.

The service monitors staff competence using a structured process that uses a range of assurance measures. This includes monitoring of performance dashboards, active monitoring at operational incidents and carrying out station and practical audits.

The service tracks competence through its learning management system, which highlights overdue training and generates compliance reports for managers. This helps the service to identify any gaps and address them promptly.

It regularly updates its understanding of staff skills and risk-critical safety capabilities through quarterly operational assurance performance reports provided to the strategic leadership board. This approach means that the service can identify gaps in workforce capabilities and resilience. It also means that it can make sound and financially sustainable decisions about current and future needs.

The service has a good range of learning and development resources

The service promotes a culture of continuous improvement throughout the organisation, and it encourages staff to learn and develop. It has issued tablet devices to all operational staff to provide greater access to learning and development material. It also offers staff the opportunity to develop skills which don't relate to their current role, such as preparing for future career opportunities or working towards higher-level qualifications.

We were pleased to find that the service had a range of easily accessible learning and development resources to allow staff to do their jobs effectively. These include topics such as safeguarding, equality, diversity and inclusion, and health and safety. The service was also developing a digital knowledge library of operational guidance and best practice information. The content included presentations and videos, covering topics such as casualty care, breathing apparatus and firefighting.

The service had identified that some staff had found it difficult to access parts of its training and development provision. We are pleased to find that the service had taken proactive steps to remove these barriers. For example, the service provides reasonable adjustments for staff with neurodivergent conditions and offers support passports to help document and communicate their needs.

Ensuring fairness and diversity

Good

Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is good 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.

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 processes are fair and transparent, but progress on improving workforce diversity remains limited

As part of this inspection, we reviewed a range of recent recruitment campaigns for firefighters and a support staff manager's post.

We found that 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 uses people impact assessments (PIAs) to eliminate disproportionality in its recruitment processes. It has objective sifting criteria, which are clearly set out for each role, and applications are sifted blind to remove any potential bias. Appropriately trained staff administer the standardised processes and use toolkits to maintain consistency. The service collects equality monitoring data at all stages of the recruitment process. The service carries out campaign debriefs and evaluations to make sure that learning is recorded for future recruitment processes.

Job adverts include job descriptions, people specifications and a guide to completing the application form. The service offers reasonable adjustments where needed. It has put considerable effort into developing its recruitment policies so that they are fair and applicants can understand them. For its [wholetime](#) firefighter recruitment in 2025, the service had a two-month build-up before the recruitment was opened. This allowed it to carry out [positive action](#) activities, and taster sessions for individuals to try out some of the work of a firefighter. It ran measurable social media campaigns to raise awareness. And it provided internal communication to make sure [on-call](#) staff were suitably notified and had time to prepare.

Its recruitment processes are comprehensive and cover opportunities in all roles. The service advertises recruitment opportunities internally and externally. It uses organisations such as Women in the Fire Service UK, the Asian Fire Service Association, [National Fire Chiefs Council](#), and a range of social media and job sites.

The service has tried to encourage applicants from diverse backgrounds. The service had identified that fitness tests were a barrier for female candidates. It has therefore provided fitness sessions for applicants to its wholetime recruitment. It also used an experienced external agency to try and boost applications from women and people from ethnic minority backgrounds. Unfortunately, this investment didn't attract the diverse range of applicants the service had hoped for.

The service is trying to increase staff diversity. However, there has been only limited progress to improve ethnic and gender diversity.

In 2024/25, 3 out of 82 new joiners (where ethnicity is known) were from an ethnic minority background.

As at 31 March 2025, 2.9 percent (21 people) of the service's staff were from an ethnic minority background compared to 5.4 percent in the local population and 6.4 percent throughout all fire and rescue services in England. However, 2.7 percent of staff hadn't stated their ethnicity.

For the same period, 20.7 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 the same with 2.4 percent (14 people) as at 31 March 2023 and 2.5 percent (14 people) as at 31 March 2025.

The proportion of women firefighters increased slightly from 9.2 percent (55 women) to 10.1 percent (58 women) over the same period.

The service creates opportunities for staff to develop and progress

We found positive examples of where the service had identified and addressed barriers that disproportionately prevented individuals from particular groups from progressing.

The service records equality data from job applicants to identify at which stage individuals were unsuccessful. It also has good processes in place for collecting and monitoring staff equality data. It reviews the information at quarterly performance and workforce planning meetings and agrees action to be taken. And it uses the information to produce its annual equality and gender pay gap report. This provides a detailed analysis of the profile of the workforce and future work to close the gap on disproportionality.

Most staff members have individual goals and objectives, and regular performance assessments. In the year ending 31 March 2025, 83.2 percent of wholetime firefighters, 71.1 percent of support staff, 87.4 percent of on-call firefighters and 59.3 percent of [fire control](#) staff completed an appraisal. Staff appraisals include objectives that are clearly linked to the service's [community risk management plan](#). Staff feel confident in the performance and development arrangements in place. The service encourages all staff to have regular one-to-one meetings with their line manager, an annual appraisal and a six-monthly interim review. These meetings provide an opportunity to discuss development needs and identify courses, support or learning that could help them progress.

The service's promotion and progression processes are comprehensive and cover opportunities in most roles. These allow it to effectively manage the career pathways of its staff and succession plan for roles, including those that need specialist skills. However, several staff in support functions told us that the flat structure of some departments could limit progression opportunities.

EDI is a service priority

The service continues to prioritise EDI. It makes sure it can offer the right services to its communities and support staff with [protected characteristics](#).

Following our 2023 inspection, the service published a cultural statement of intent. It created this using feedback from staff gathered in an independent cultural survey. The document sets out the desired culture in the service in four statements of intent:

- service leadership is visible, inclusive and diverse;
- people feel safe, respected and included;
- people feel that their well-being at work is supported; and
- people feel that they have the right skills and knowledge to succeed.

The statement of intent explains that while the ultimate duty for shaping and upholding the culture lies with service leaders, it is a shared responsibility for all staff.

We found that the service had demonstrated strategic commitment to its cultural statement of intent. It has developed a culture board and professional standards board for senior leaders to monitor and evaluate its culture. At the time of our inspection, it published a diversity framework. This sets out strategic EDI priorities and objectives for the service over the next four years.

Staff we spoke with had good awareness of EDI. They were positive about the face-to-face training they had received from specialists, including the practical and helpful ethical dilemmas training that incorporated a toolkit based on the [Core Code of Ethics](#).

During this inspection, we reviewed a range of policies that affected different parts of the service. These included its adult [safeguarding](#) policy, fire safety intervention scheme policy and fire station modernisation projects. We found that robust PIAs had been completed on every occasion.

The service has an effective process in place to assess [equality impact](#). It provides staff with PIA templates, video guides, toolkits and support from its EDI team to make sure that PIAs are completed consistently. It uses the National Fire Chiefs Council equality impact assessment template. The service has robust governance in place to make sure all new policies, procedures, projects and service changes have a PIA completed before they can proceed to approval.

We spoke with several staff who were concerned about the limited resourcing of specialist EDI staff and that this could lead to reduced performance and increased workloads for others in the organisation. The service should carefully monitor this to continue the progress it has been making on EDI.

The service has developed several ways to work with staff on issues relating to EDI that affect them. These include methods to build all-staff awareness of fairness and diversity and targeted initiatives to identify matters that affect different staff groups. The two staff networks in the service (Women@HWFire and the neurodiverse network) are well established and work effectively. Each group has a senior leadership sponsor. We heard lots of examples of how the groups were having a positive impact on people in the service and the wider community, including raising awareness about the menopause through workshops, and working with autistic young adults as part of Neurodiversity Celebration Week.

The service told us that it was open to establishing additional network groups. It is also working with the Armed Forces Network and has been awarded the Armed Forces Silver Employer Recognition Award for its commitment to veterans.

In our workforce survey, 86 percent of respondents (256 of 298) agreed that they felt comfortable being themselves at work. The service's culture and values mean staff can contribute fully without fear of judgment. Leaders and teams actively promote openness and diversity.

Staff confidence in the service's feedback processes is improving, and the service is working to make sure the processes are effective. The service has acted to address matters staff have raised. We saw that the service had appropriately dealt with staff concerns that had been submitted through its confidential reporting line. Representative bodies and staff associations reported that the service usually worked with them well on EDI issues.

Leading people effectively

Adequate

Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at leading its people.

To be effective, fire and rescue services should identify and develop leaders throughout the organisation. Leaders should be able to translate and communicate the objectives of the service's [community risk management plan \(CRMP\)](#) 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.

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.

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 communicate strategic aims clearly

Senior leaders are effectively communicating the aims and objectives in the CRMP to staff at all levels. They are doing this in a variety of ways, which promotes open, two-way communication. Leaders and managers meet with their teams regularly in face-to-face and virtual meetings and informal conversations to ask their views and ideas. This encourages an inclusive work environment. The service also uses Comms Hub and video screens in fire stations and workplaces to share information with its workforce.

We found that this approach was supported by leaders at all levels who made sure staff understood the aims and objectives.

As a result, staff have a high level of trust in their leaders. In our workforce survey, 73 percent of respondents (218 of 298) agreed that senior leaders clearly communicated the service's objectives.

The service uses department plans and fire station plans to improve staff awareness of how their respective roles contribute. It supplements them with the formal appraisal process and team briefings from senior leaders.

The staff we spoke to understood how they contributed to the aims of the CRMP individually and as a team.

The service has a range of leadership development programmes in place

In [our last inspection](#), we highlighted an [area for improvement](#) that the service should make sure it has mechanisms in place to manage and develop talent within the organisation. In this inspection, we were pleased to find that the service had put in place a range of measures to address this. Therefore, we have closed the area for improvement.

The service has introduced a suite of leadership programmes aligned with [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) products, aimed at improving and nurturing existing talent.

In September 2025, the service introduced the Step Framework. This is a three-year plan that incorporates professional and personal development for staff throughout their career journey. It contains three steps:

- step in – focused on recruitment, onboarding and new starters;
- step forward – aimed at empowering individuals to take responsibility for their development; and
- step up – designed to nurture ambition and prepare future leaders.

The service also offers leadership development for staff across the organisation, including:

- supervisory leadership programme (for current and aspiring managers);
- middle leadership programme (for current and aspiring managers);
- Chartered Management Institute Level 5 in Management and Leadership (for station commanders and equivalent support staff);
- level 7 leadership qualification (for group commanders and equivalent support staff); and
- executive leadership programme (for aspiring strategic managers).

The service can do more to identify leaders and build trust in its promotion processes

We were disappointed to find that the service had limited arrangements in place to identify talented leaders. It isn't effectively identifying future leadership needs through succession planning. And it isn't identifying individuals who have the talent to meet the challenges that leaders will experience in the future.

At the time of our inspection, the service had recently introduced its career development pathways. These weren't fully established and staff didn't clearly understand or trust them yet.

The service should consider putting in place more formal arrangements to identify talented leaders and support them to become senior leaders.

The service needs to do more to make sure its promotion and progression processes are fair. In our workforce survey, 58 percent of respondents (172 of 298) agreed that the promotion process in the service was fair. We reviewed the service's promotion processes and found that the scrutiny arrangements it had in place could be strengthened. Staff also gave us several examples of inconsistencies in promotion processes. This included inconsistencies in scoring candidates, using selection criteria that weren't in line with the campaign communications and changing criteria after the process has ended.

The service doesn't manage temporary promotions well. Staff told us the way temporary promotions were assigned varied. And we found evidence of them being in place for longer than they should be. As at 31 March 2025, 5.9 percent of the workforce were on temporary promotion. The average length of temporary promotions was 426 days, which is higher than the England average of 295 days.

Considering these findings, we have identified an area for improvement that the service should put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders.

Leaders receive appropriate training and support to manage teams effectively

We found that the service had leaders in place who are well equipped to lead.

The service has a good process in place for leaders to manage performance and development. Staff have specific and individual objectives or have had their performance assessed in the past year. In our workforce survey, 74 percent of respondents (222 of 298) agreed that the service's performance management systems allowed them to achieve their potential.

Leaders at all levels have received appropriate training, which helps them to confidently manage a range of challenges. The service has provided first line managers with information and practical support relevant to their leadership role. This included people management essentials training with an employment law

specialist covering topics such as managing attendance, performance, behaviour and basic principles of employment law. More senior managers have had training on how to investigate and hear formal [misconduct](#) cases. At the time of our inspection, the service was holding development of leaders with practical workshops about challenging inappropriate behaviour.

The service has coaching and mentoring programmes in place, which are developing leaders. Leaders are exposed to different management scenarios that match and stretch their skills. This means the service has leaders who are confident to step up to the next level of management when opportunities arise. Staff also told us that they were making good use of the National Fire Chiefs Council coaching and mentoring portal.

Leaders must do more to consistently promote a positive culture

We were disappointed to find that leaders didn't always act as role models. This is despite the work the service has done to demonstrate its commitment to creating a positive culture, including promoting the [Core Code of Ethics](#) and providing a range of training to staff.

In our workforce survey, 61 percent of respondents (183 of 298) agreed that leaders at all levels promoted a positive culture.

Several staff provided us with examples of leaders clearly not displaying service values. For example, leaders demonstrating inappropriate behaviours in meetings and this going unchallenged. And staff working at full capacity didn't feel that their contribution was recognised or valued by leaders.

As a result, leaders aren't always proactively developing or supporting a positive workplace environment.

The service has effective arrangements in place to manage staff performance

Leaders are equipped to confidently manage staff performance and deal with any poor performance or behavioural issues.

There is a good performance management system in place, which allows leaders to effectively develop and assess the individual performance of all staff members. For example, managers set individual performance objectives as part of the appraisal process. Objectives are clearly linked to the CRMP. Team performance is monitored against key performance indicators and discussed during regular team meetings. An increased use of performance dashboards has helped improve the active monitoring of team and individual performance.

Staff feel confident in the performance and development arrangements in place.

