

Fire and rescue services 2025–27

Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Surrey Fire and Rescue Service

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Overall summary

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

Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate
	Understanding fire and risk	Preventing fire and risk		
	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	Ensuring fairness and diversity		
	Right people, right skills			
	Leading people effectively			

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

Changes to this round of inspection

We last inspected Surrey Fire and Rescue Service between March and April 2023. And in September 2023, we published [our inspection report](#) with our findings on the service’s effectiveness and efficiency and how well it looks after its people. We followed this up with a re-inspection in February 2024 to specifically consider the [cause of concern](#) that was previously issued for protection. And we [published our findings in April 2024](#).

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

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

This report sets out our inspection findings for Surrey 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 Surrey Fire and Rescue Service, and I am grateful for the positive and constructive way in which the service worked with our inspection staff.

The service is predominantly urban and covers an area of 642 square miles. It has a population of 1.2 million.

Governance for this service is the responsibility of Surrey County Council.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service cost £44.45 per head of population, which is less than the England average of £51.71.

The service is currently planning for local government reorganisation. This may involve a change in its governance model, such as becoming a combined [fire and rescue authority](#) or forming part of a foundation strategic authority. At the time of our inspection, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government had not yet decided on the area's new local government structures. As a result, the service is

currently operating within a limited budget time frame. This is affecting its ability to plan effectively for the medium and long term.

I am pleased with the performance of Surrey Fire and Rescue Service in keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks. For example, through a thorough understanding of risks across the county, it can carry out appropriate activity across its prevention, protection and response functions to mitigate these.

We were pleased to find that the service had made progress since our 2023 inspection. For example, it has improved the way it identifies, assesses and addresses risk through protection activity, and continues to improve the culture across the service.

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

- The service has a new, comprehensive [community risk management plan](#) informed by an annually reviewed community risk profile.
- It has increased the amount of prevention work it carries out in the community.
- It works effectively with other services and agencies to make sure it is ready to respond to major and multi-agency incidents.
- It allocates resources appropriately across its functions and continues to use a dynamic cover tool to make sure it can respond in the most effective way.
- It is planning well for local government reorganisation, including the appointment of a transition manager.
- Staff are trained well, showing high levels of competence.
- The service could monitor staff working hours more proactively.
- It could better support improvement in staff diversity.

The chief fire officer and other senior leaders are visible and approachable, and staff told us they are driving cultural improvements. The service manages staff performance and development through an improved performance conversation process. This also reinforces expected values and behaviours.

Overall, I commend the service on the changes it has made and expect it to continue working to further improve in the areas we have identified.



Roy Wilsher OBE QFSM

His Majesty's Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies

Good

Surrey 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 uses information from a wide range of sources to build a comprehensive risk profile

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. This includes current and historical incident data from the last five years and the Surrey local resilience community risk register.

The service considers risk and demand data through its community risk profile, which it reviews annually. And it commissioned Nottingham Trent University to analyse relevant data as part of the process of developing its community risk management plan (CRMP).

The service consulted with staff and members of the public ahead of implementing the CRMP, to give them an opportunity to help shape the plan. It did this through staff surveys, focus groups with residents, sessions with other interested parties such as trade unions, and over 30 consultation and roadshow events. It then worked with Nottingham Trent University and the Consultation Institute to make sure the consultation process was robust.

The service has an effective CRMP

Once it has assessed risks, the service records its findings in an easily understood plan called the community risk management plan 2025–2030. This plan describes how the service intends to use its prevention, protection and response activities to mitigate or reduce the risks and threats its communities face both now and in the future. The strategic aims detailed in the plan include the service's commitment to supporting communities to be safe, thriving and resilient through prevention and protection activities. Another strategic aim is the service's commitment to respond to emergencies swiftly. Through the plan, the service manages risk in several ways, including:

- engagement with the community to understand protection risks and manage them through a risk-based inspection programme;
- the adoption of a person-centred approach, which identifies [vulnerability](#) through prevention activity, alongside working with health partners and an extensive [safe and well visit](#) programme;
- a response model that considers seasonal demand and changing risk; and
- relocating resources and carrying out a specialist capability review to support its response model.

The arrangements described in the plan also take account of the issues identified in the service's corporate risk register that could compromise the implementation of these activities. The service has identified risk relating to local government reorganisation and devolution, which are due to take effect from 1 April 2027. This change could affect the service's ability to achieve its strategy and objectives, presenting both opportunities and threats. To mitigate this, it has appointed a transition manager and is liaising with other services which have gone through this process.

The CRMP covers a five-year period (2025–2030). It is informed by a comprehensive community risk profile which the service reviews annually, to make sure it remains effective.

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. It achieves this through a combination of arrangements with external parties and using some internal staff.

The service effectively monitors how it implements its main objectives

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 the performance outcome group, which is comprised of members of the service's leadership team. At quarterly meetings, this group uses data dashboards to monitor key performance indicators, which are informed by departmental and station targets.

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. Surrey County Council is the fire and rescue authority for the service, and provides assurance on financial, governance and operational matters. The CRMP is aligned to the objectives of the Surrey Way (Surrey County Council's overarching plan). The service's performance outcome group meets quarterly and provides updates to the performance outcome board, which is the council's corporate leadership team. Alignment is further supported by weekly meetings between the service's chief fire officer and the council's cabinet member for fire and rescue. The performance outcome group includes this cabinet member, and the performance outcome board shares updates with the council cabinet for scrutiny.

The service also has an assurance and governance framework to support effective decision-making processes. Surrey County Council's select committee structure provides further scrutiny.

Preventing fires and other risks

Adequate

Surrey Fire and Rescue Service is adequate 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.

Area for improvement

The service should evaluate its [safe and well visit](#) activity, so it understands its effectiveness and how to improve the visits.

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

Main findings

The service's prevention strategy effectively identifies vulnerability and risk

The service's prevention strategy is clearly aligned with the risks identified in its [community risk management plan](#). It identifies eight main areas to focus on in its prevention activity:

- fire prevention in the home;
- road safety;
- working with [children](#) and young people;
- health and well-being in the community;
- sharing learning from fire investigations;
- volunteers;
- [safeguarding](#); and
- wildfire prevention, water safety and seasonal safety.

The service uses a variety of methods to identify and assess risk to inform prevention activity in these areas. It regularly works with external organisations and individuals, including:

- a warm hub initiative that identifies vulnerable residents;
- the Surrey Road Safety Partnership (Surrey RoadSafe);
- The King's Trust (children and young people);
- health and well-being partners such as One You Surrey (stop smoking support);
- the police and coroner to maximise learning from fire investigation;
- volunteers to help provide safe and well visits; and
- the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#), in relation to safeguarding standards.

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, through departmental and team plans aligned to the overall strategy.

The service's teams work well together and with other relevant organisations on prevention. They share relevant information when needed. The service works closely with local adult social care and substance misuse teams, as well as housing officers and care agencies, to focus on vulnerable people. It also has a home safety advisor who works with GP surgeries and hospital discharge teams to make sure residents return home safely. In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service received 2,603 referrals from other agencies, and made 1,390 referrals to other agencies, for extra support for a household or individual.

The service uses information to adjust its planning assumptions and direct activity between its prevention, protection and response functions. For example, it has several ways to record and share information across the organisation, such as electronic forms, Microsoft SharePoint and Prevent and Protect software. Operational crews can access this information on fire engine [mobile data terminals](#) to stay up to date.

The service targets its activity to those most at risk

The service uses a risk-based approach to clearly prioritise its prevention activity towards people most at risk from fire and other emergencies. For example, it prioritises safe and well visits based on risk. The prevention team assesses referrals, classifies them by risk and sets a target time frame for contact. Cases colour-coded black (very high risk) should be contacted within 72 hours, red (high risk) within 7 days and amber (medium risk) within 14 days. If the referral comes from other agencies (for example through a person at risk form), the prevention team also carries out additional background checks to consider additional safeguarding and risk information.

We found some inconsistencies in the service's management of certain safe and well visit information. This related to how it records contact attempts, which can be overwritten. The service acknowledged this issue. It told us it would introduce an updated recording system in 2026, which it expects to improve the way it records and manages information. We look forward to seeing the results of this.

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](#). It does this by encouraging referrals in different ways, such as from individuals, from families and GP surgeries, through events, and when staff visit houses in an area following an incident. The council also provides information about people receiving pension credits to help target activity. Prevention staff told us they work closely with crews due to their local knowledge, and that crews support prevention teams as required.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service carried out 94.9 percent (6,388 out of 6,733) of its prevention visits at households where at least one person had a vulnerability or risk factor.

The service uses a range of initiatives to support prevention activity, such as the Warm Welcome scheme. And it works with the county council and General Electric Trust to provide funding for oil-filled radiators, electric blankets and extension leads.

The service worked with under-represented communities for its community risk management plan consultation, holding 38 internal and external events, including virtual sessions. The organisations and individuals involved included Age UK, LGBTQ+ groups, faith leaders and community representatives. The service holds dedicated sessions for some groups, such as the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

The service has invested in accessible formats for communication. It works with interpreters to provide communications in alternative languages. It communicates with older people through community talks and letters, and prevention team members are trained in British Sign Language.

It carries out a range of interventions and campaigns, which it adapts to the level of risk in its communities. These include banners and posters outside stations and at events, and magnetic panels on the side of service vehicles, which are changed throughout the year to promote different messages. The service also uses event trailers to help reassure communities, such as after an incident involving 16 properties with solar panels. Other properties in the affected area also had solar panels, so staff were present in the area for seven days and spoke with people in the community.

The service recognises the road risk within the county, given its extensive and busy road network, which includes the M25 motorway. The chief fire officer is the National Fire Chiefs Council lead for road safety and road rescue, and there is an internal dedicated road safety lead. It is part of the Surrey Road Safety Partnership and works with the Surrey County Council safer transport group. The service also led the fire and rescue sector's input for DriveFit 2.0, a road safety education course for pre-drivers. It helps provide the course to 16 to 17-year-olds in Surrey schools and colleges.

Staff are trained to carry out safe and well visits

Staff told us they had the right skills and confidence to carry out safe and well visits. These visits cover an appropriate range of hazards that can put vulnerable people at greater risk from fire and other emergencies. The service's person-centred approach to visits considers and assesses risk in three categories. These are person factors (such as age and mobility), behaviour factors (such as smoking or substance misuse), and home factors (such as layout or contents).

The service carries out proportionate quality assurance of its safe and well visit activity. It does this through direct observation, with prevention team members quality assuring station commanders, who then quality assure their teams. This process is supported by a quality assurance hub, which includes a safe and well visit section.

The service could better evaluate the effectiveness of its prevention activity

The service has evaluation tools in place. But there is limited evidence of it using these to measure how effective its activity is or make sure all sections of its communities get appropriate access to the prevention services that meet their needs. For example, the service has an evaluation framework and standard operating procedure in place for prevention, but staff couldn't specify when processes from these documents had been put into practice. The systems for recording prevention activity require staff to navigate between multiple platforms and sometimes hold incomplete records. Effective evaluation processes should identify and address issues such as this, but the service didn't provide evidence of these.

The service has channels for receiving feedback, but there was limited evidence of these being used. For example, it provides contact details on its website, QR codes, and tick-boxes for residents to consent to follow-up contact. It also asks partners to provide feedback via the website. However, we didn't see evidence of these channels being used, or of the service gathering meaningful data to support effective evaluation.

The service works effectively with other organisations to prevent fires and other emergencies

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

- the Royal National Lifeboat Institution and Royal Life Saving Society UK – on water safety education;
- Thames Basin Heaths and Surrey County Council's Greener Futures programme – on wildfire and outdoor safety education;
- Big Leaf Foundation – providing educational fire and water safety sessions to the refugees the foundation works with; and
- Attention Autism Ltd and Autism Friendly Surrey – delivering fire safety sessions in schools for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service carried out 6,733 safe and well visits. The service completed 2,603 safe and well visits that were referrals from other agencies and 1,390 that led to the service making an onward referral to at least one other organisation.

We found good evidence that it routinely referred people at greatest risk to organisations that may better meet their needs. These organisations include GP surgeries across the county, adult social care teams, occupational therapy teams, and community matrons and district nurses. Arrangements are also in place to receive referrals from others. The service acts appropriately on the referrals it receives. For example, it triages referrals based on risk, giving them a black (very high), red (high) or amber (medium) risk status to determine the time frame for making contact.

The service routinely exchanges information with other public sector organisations about people and groups at greatest risk. It uses this information to challenge planning assumptions and target prevention activity. For example, it is part of the Surrey County Council safer communities partnership and works closely with the police to deliver the safer communities programme. And it worked with council libraries to produce a summer water safety pack. The service also works with Girlguiding Surrey West, producing a safety pack and badge to educate 4 to 18-year-old girls in essential safety skills.

The service is effective at responding to safeguarding concerns

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. All operational staff complete e-learning and are Level 1 safeguarding trained, with specialist staff across prevention trained to higher levels.

The files that we viewed indicated good safeguarding awareness and action, supported by an effective safeguarding duty rota.

The service has arrangements in place to tackle fire-setting behaviour

In the year ending 30 September 2025, the service attended 572 deliberate fire incidents, which has increased from 392 in the previous year. The rate of attendance at deliberate fire incidents was 45.8 per 1,000 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 the Firewise scheme, an educational scheme run by the service to address fire-setting behaviour in children and young people under the age of 18. The aim is to reduce the likelihood of children misusing fire in the future. Referrals to the scheme are welcomed from parents, carers, schools, the police, social services, youth support services and other professionals.

It works closely with several organisations to reduce arson risk. These include Raven Housing Trust (providing advice, reassurance, and safety interventions where residents feel vulnerable to arson threats), and Woking Ladies Refuge (fitting door braces and door jammers where arson threats may be linked to [domestic abuse](#)).

The service's fire investigation team supports this work. It provides an out-of-hours arson response and carries door braces and letter box locks to secure properties at immediate risk.

Protecting the public through fire regulation

Good

Surrey 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 has an effective protection strategy aligned to its 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 carry out business [safe and well visits](#), providing fire safety advice to local businesses. If they come across issues, or they think more specialist advice and intervention is needed, they can scan a QR code to access the protection portal. This allows them to notify specialist officers about the need for further action. The service then uses this information to adjust planning assumptions and direct activity between its prevention, protection and response functions. This means it properly aligns its resources with risk.

The service aligns activity to risk

The service's risk-based intervention programme (RBIP) is focused on its highest-risk buildings. The service reviewed it in 2024. It is in line with [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) methodology, using the relative risk rating (RRR) concept, and previous inspection and incident data.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service had 1,654 high-risk premises and set itself a high-risk building audit target of 1,600. It carried out 1,768 fire safety audits. Of these, 838 were high-risk premises audits. The service told us that in January 2025, it started using the RRR concept to determine which properties to visit. Buildings are prioritised according to their risk category, as defined in the latest RBIP (very high, high, medium, low, or very low). Targets are based on the number of audits required working to the RRR, and the capacity of competent staff.

Protection has enough resources to meet its objectives

The service has enough qualified protection staff to meet the requirements of its RBIP. In the year ending 31 March 2025 there were 19 protection staff with a Level 4 fire safety diploma, compared with 16 in the previous 12 months. The service had a further 7 protection staff in development; this is also an increase on the previous 12 months, when there were 6. This helps the service provide the range of audit and enforcement activity needed both now and in the future.

Staff get the right training and work to appropriate accreditation. There is a competency framework for protection staff. All staff work towards the level above the requirement for their role and participate in scheduled [continuing professional development](#) days (one every quarter, with a minimum requirement of 25 hours annually).

During [our last inspection](#), we identified an [area for improvement](#) that the service should make sure it has effective arrangements to provide specialist protection advice out of hours. We were pleased to see it has addressed this. It now has specialist officers attached to duty groups, and arrangements to recall officers to duty, including with neighbouring services, if needed.

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 has secured funding through the new burdens doctrine to create a team dedicated to clad buildings.

The service is supporting the [Building Safety Regulator](#). Its strategy states how it will work with other organisations to continue to make sure there is greater consistency, and where appropriate a shared resource, to keep the built environment safe from fire. As part of the regional 4F partnership (which also includes East Sussex, West Sussex and Kent Fire and Rescue Services), the service will work towards these objectives with regional authorities, fire and rescue services and national bodies. It expects these arrangements to have limited 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. Its website clearly states what information is required, and how to share it with the service. When it doesn't receive the right information, it takes action. And it updates accordingly the risk information it gives its operational staff.

The service completes audits 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 RBIP;
- after fires at premises where fire safety legislation applies;
- after enforcement action had been taken; or
- at high-rise, high-risk buildings.

In our review, we found the service had completed 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 found evidence of departments sharing information. And we found that the service took appropriate action when it identified issues during an audit of local hospital zones. Local crews were made aware of all actions taken, [mobile data terminals](#) on fire engines were updated appropriately, and operational staff carried out joint visits with inspection staff.

The service carries out quality assurance of its protection activity

The service carries out proportionate quality assurance of its protection activity. Audits are reported on every quarter, and the protection team leader monitors performance. Regular peer-to-peer quality assurance also takes place. This process is supported by protection staff being skilled to the level above what is required for their role.

The service's protection strategy demonstrates a commitment to community and stakeholder engagement to evaluate the effectiveness of protection activity. However, we saw limited evidence of this taking place.

The service is carrying out enforcement activity

The service consistently uses its full range of enforcement powers and, when appropriate, it prosecutes those who don't comply with fire safety regulations. The service has a robust and effective standard operating procedure for enforcement. There is a clear procedure for prosecutions, with initial, primary and secondary reviews taking place, and decisions recorded. Files we saw documented the service taking enforcement action and uploading enforcement notices to the National Fire Chiefs Council register.

Figures provided to us by the service show that in the year ending 31 March 2025, it issued 2 alteration notices, 297 informal notifications, and 31 enforcement notices. There are no records of the service carrying out any prosecutions in the five years to 31 March 2025. But during our inspection, it did tell us about a more recent prosecution it had successfully completed. This is encouraging, particularly given the relationship with the Surrey County Council legal team that we noted in our last inspection. However, the service may benefit from understanding why there has been a steady decline in its enforcement activity, according to figures supplied by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, for the three previous years.

The service works effectively with other agencies

The service works closely with other enforcement agencies to regulate fire safety, and it routinely exchanges risk information with them. It is part of the regional fire and rescue service protection group and attends [safety advisory groups](#) relating to local events, such as the Epsom Derby.

It also works with other organisations to carry out enforcement activity. For example, information received from joint [fire control](#) led to the service serving a prohibition notice on a pizza takeaway in Woking. And a joint inspection with trading standards led to a prohibition notice being served on a car wash.

The service responds to building and licensing consultations in a timely way

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service responded to 94.1 percent of building consultations (901 of 958) within the required time frame. This means it consistently meets its statutory responsibility to comment on fire safety arrangements at new and altered buildings.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service also responded to 96 percent of licensing consultations (476 out of 496) on time. It comments on the fire safety provisions of premises and notifies the licensing authority of their suitability.

The service works effectively with local businesses and organisations

The service proactively works with local businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation. It does this through three dedicated business education officers, and business safe and well visits carried out by operational and protection staff.

Protection staff work with Surrey Chambers of Commerce and business forums to share fire safety information, promote national campaigns and run events at local businesses. These include Booker, a food wholesaler, where the service sets up a fire safety stall at points throughout the year.

The service also provides extensive information and guidance on its website on legislation, regulations and compliance. And it offers free templates and tools for use by business owners and managers.

Responding to fires and other emergencies

Adequate

Surrey Fire and Rescue Service is adequate 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.

Area for improvement

The service should make sure it has the appropriate resources in place to fully deliver its plan for adopting and implementing [national operational guidance](#) in a timely manner.

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

Main findings

The service's response strategy is flexible and aligned to risk

The service has linked its response strategy to the risks identified in its [community risk management plan \(CRMP\)](#). This is supported by the community risk profile, which it reviews annually.

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, it uses a dynamic cover tool to help it move available engines to provide better response times and mitigate risk in areas where this is greatest.

Through the joint [fire control](#) function, the service considers predetermined attendances to incidents as part of a working group with East and West Sussex Fire and Rescue Services. These are based on likely requirements of likely incidents at premises depending on risk and can be amended locally based on knowledge and [intelligence](#) or temporary risks.

As of 1 January 2026, the service moved several [wholetime](#) stations onto a 12-hour working pattern, running from 7am to 7pm. This brings them in line with the rest of the service, to support operational effectiveness while maintaining flexibility. It helps ensure consistency in fire engine crewing and the management of resources across the service.

The service consistently meets its own response standards

The service has set out response standards in its CRMP. These are:

- First fire engine to [critical incidents](#) in less than 10 minutes.
- Second fire engine to critical incidents in less than 15 minutes.
- First fire engine to other emergencies in less than 16 minutes.

The service consistently meets its standards. Figures it supplied show that in the 12 months to 31 March 2025, it achieved:

- an average first fire engine response time to critical incidents of 7 minutes 55 seconds;
- an average second fire engine response time to critical incidents of 12 minutes 49 seconds; and
- an average response time to other emergencies of 7 minutes 39 seconds.

However, the service could be clearer about what constitutes a critical incident.

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 10 minutes and 14 seconds. This is slower than the average for services that are predominantly urban, which is 8 minutes.

Using this measure, the service's average response time has increased from 9 minutes and 52 seconds in the year to 30 September 2024. This decline is predominantly due to an increase in drive time, which has increased from 7 minutes and 23 seconds to 7 minutes and 43 seconds during the same period.

Overall, the service achieves the availability targets set in the CRMP

In the year ending 31 March 2025, availability of [wholetime](#) fire engines was 72 percent. This is an increase from the previous year when availability was 69.7 percent. During the same period, availability of [on-call](#) fire engines was 43 percent. This is a decrease from the previous year when availability was 44.7 percent.

The service has 25 fire stations and 30 frontline fire engines. Its strategy makes a commitment to have 20 of these fire engines available during the day and 16 available at night.

The service effectively uses its dynamic cover tool to maintain fire engine availability and cover across its area. The location and deployment of fire engines is subject to planned changes outlined in the CRMP, supported by an annual review of the community risk profile. The service is also carrying out a specialist capability review. But we note that it hasn't carried out a full fire cover review, to make sure plans remain at their most effective, for several years.

Risk information is up to date and readily available to staff

The service routinely collects and updates information about the highest-risk people, places and threats it has identified. It uses the Provision of Operational Risk Information System, a nationally recognised framework for managing strategic and tactical risk information. This includes information about short-term risks (such as oxygen users and event risks), as well as longer-term site-specific risks.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service had identified 31,560 sites that pose more risk to firefighters if an incident took place. During the same period, the service visited 828 to update its records and familiarise itself with the firefighting risks at the sites. This is an increase from the previous year when the service completed 768 visits.

This information is readily available for the service's prevention, protection and response staff. This means that these teams can identify and reduce risk effectively. Staff we spoke to described a clear and timely flow of information between operational crews, control, and prevention and protection staff. Information gathered at operational risk site visits, or prevention or protection visits, is uploaded electronically onto the Prevent and Protect system. The updated risk information appears on [mobile data terminals](#) within an hour.

Other examples of the effective sharing of risk information include:

- automated processing of [prohibition notices](#);
- regular communication and information exchange between the service and oxygen companies; and
- the operational assurance team sharing operational risk information with operational teams and training and policy leads.

Where appropriate, the service shares risk information with other organisations, such as through [safety advisory groups](#), referrals to other organisations and as part of the [local resilience forum](#).

We sampled a range of risk information covering long and short-term risks, 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.

The service carries out proportionate quality assurance of its risk information. This is now completed by the data insights team. All files that we viewed had been quality assured, although completion times for this varied. Once the service has quality assured risks that are categorised as medium or higher, it uploads the information to the [ResilienceDirect](#) platform, so it is accessible to other responders and agencies.

The service has effective incident commanders

The service has incident commanders who are trained and regularly and properly assessed. It monitors incident command competence through centrally delivered training, monthly reporting and the recording of incident command hours. Incident commanders also carry out [continuing professional development](#) training. This helps the service to safely, assertively and effectively manage the whole range of incidents it could face, from those that are small and routine to major and multi-agency incidents.

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](#). Commanders also had knowledge and understanding of [national resilience assets](#), what assets are available, and how and when they can be requested.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service needed 206 accredited incident commanders to meet its demand. It had 201 (97.6 percent) accredited and no incident commanders who were no longer accredited but still carried out the same work.

The service shares learning from operational performance

As part of our inspection, we reviewed a range of emergency incidents and training events. These included domestic incidents, incidents at commercial premises, large multi-agency incidents and exercises involving other agencies.

The service has a clear, tiered, and structured debriefing system. It includes [hot debriefs](#), post-incident QR code returns, escalated reviews and service-level debriefing. The operational assurance team receives the QR code returns. Based on these, it can disseminate immediate learning points while considering potential escalation, which would involve deeper analysis and scrutiny. Service-level debriefs take place for larger incidents, and have more structure.

We were pleased to find that the service consistently followed its policies to make sure that staff commanded incidents in line with operational guidance. It updates internal risk information with the information it receives. Staff told us this happens through processes such as procedural alerts, and a newsletter. And it exchanges this information with appropriate organisations – for example, through the local resilience debriefing process, which the service has taken the lead on.

The service has responded to learning from incidents to improve its services to the public. For example, learning from incidents involving bariatric patients, and aerial ladder platform operations, has influenced its practice in relation to scene management and the safe use of equipment. And it has amended its airbag policy based on learning from an incident where crews used airbags stacked one on another to lift a vehicle. The service includes learning such as this in relevant training packages.

Fire control is integrated into the service

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

Control staff have the opportunity to contribute to incident debriefs following incidents and exercises. We saw examples of control staff involved in marauding terrorist attack exercises, and exercises involving [fire survival guidance](#). Staff told us learning is shared through their station commanders and via the learning pool.

We also found business continuity plans in place, which the service tests routinely. These include the service degradation plan, to maintain fire cover if resources are depleted.

Progress on implementing national operational guidance is slow

We were disappointed to find that the service's strategic gap analysis, used to record that its policies are in line with national operational guidance, was not fully complete. Reflection of national operational guidance in service policies was an [area for improvement](#) identified during the last inspection, and there isn't the progression we would have expected on recording compliance. The service told us that its policies were compliant with national operational guidance, and that it was using the strategic gap analysis as a tool for collating evidence rather than monitoring compliance. This meant that the service hadn't yet recorded its compliance or non-compliance for all elements of national operational guidance within its strategic gap analysis.

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents

Good

Surrey 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 is prepared for major and multi-agency incidents

The service has effectively anticipated and considered the reasonably foreseeable risks and threats it may face. It has listed these in both local and national risk registers as part of its [community risk management planning](#). For example, it commissioned an external company, Risktec, to identify and assess marauding terrorist attack risk in the county. And it has two members of staff seconded to the county council's emergency planning team, who help develop risk response plans.

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. It maintains this understanding through the joint [fire control](#) function (including the service and West Sussex and East Sussex FRSs) and joint exercising. Firefighters have access to risk information from neighbouring services for risks within 10km of the service's borders.

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

During this inspection, we considered how well prepared the service is to respond to foreseeable major incidents including fires in high-rise, high-risk buildings, severe weather events and marauding terror attacks.

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. These include an exercise at a care home, several high-rise [fire survival guidance](#) exercises, a wide area flooding exercise, and a fire and marauding terrorist attack exercise.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service completed 24 multi-agency training exercises. The number of multi-agency training exercises per 1,000 full-time equivalent firefighters is 46.8, which is lower than the England rate of 54.5.

The service is working with other emergency responders to make local communities more resilient – including the police and ambulance services, the [hazardous area response team \(HART\)](#), other FRSs, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI), and the Environment Agency. This includes involvement in:

- a marauding terrorist attack exercise at Thorpe Park, involving police, South East Coast Ambulance Service, HART and London Fire Brigade;
- Exercise Ember, a [Control of Major Accident Hazards \(COMAH\)](#) exercise with HART;
- a water rescue exercise with Kent Fire and Rescue Service and South East Coast Ambulance Service; and
- strategic exercises, such as Exercise Heron (on the River Thames with the RNLI and London Fire Brigade), and a cyberattack exercise in Hampshire.

The service hasn't declared a major incident in the last two years. We reviewed the service's involvement in Exercise Comet, a wide area flooding exercise carried out by the [local resilience forum \(LRF\)](#).

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

- respond to a major incident, co-locate, share information and work with other emergency responders; and
- to record and share learning, help move to a recovery phase and support a return to normal for the community.

Examples of this include setting up co-ordination groups to form a joint understanding of risk and shared situational awareness, and frontline crews accessing flood plans and mapping from laptops on fire engines.

The service led the multi-agency debrief following this exercise and implemented learning from it, which will strengthen its future ability to respond. For example, it introduced water incident supervisor roles. It also made sure staff were trained for water incident manager roles, and that more station-based staff received water training.

The service works effectively with other FRSs

The service supports other FRSs when they are responding to emergency incidents. For example, it has a joint fire control function that also covers East Sussex and West Sussex FRSs, and it is part of the 3F and 4F partnerships (3F includes the service alongside East and West Sussex FRSs, with 4F also including Kent FRS). It is intraoperable with these services and can form part of a multi-agency response. Through the 3F and 4F partnerships, it procures equipment (such as breathing apparatus equipment and an incident command unit) which further improves the effectiveness of joint working. The service's [national inter-agency liaison officers](#) train as part of a south-east group. The service has been involved in exercises with London Fire Brigade and this year will take part in an exercise with Hampshire & Isle of Wight FRS.

Under Sections 13 and 16 of the [Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#), FRSs are required to establish [mutual assistance](#) agreements with neighbouring services. These agreements enable cross-border support during incidents and allow services to operate beyond their geographical boundaries when necessary. The service has these arrangements with London Fire Brigade, Royal Berkshire FRS, Hampshire & Isle of Wight FRS and Buckinghamshire FRS.

The service also hosts several [national resilience assets](#) such as a high-volume pump unit, a detection, identification and monitoring unit, a mass decontamination support unit, and tactical advisors for floods and wildfires. And it carries out exercises in accordance with the [national co-ordination and advisory framework](#) requirements for responding to major incidents – for example, a wide area flooding exercise with East Sussex.

Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles are embedded in the service

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 follows these principles. This included providing online JESIP training for all staff and reinforcing the principles through the major incident policy. Crew commanders and more senior operational staff all receive face-to-face training every two to three years, and group commanders and above receive multi-agency gold incident command training. JESIP is embedded through the messaging procedure used by joint fire control. We also found evidence of strategic and tactical co-ordination groups being established, and use of the Everbridge system, to allow joint fire control to communicate with other responders during major incidents. The service had a JESIP national assurance team visit in 2025 that highlighted good practice among the relevant organisations.

We sampled debriefs the service had carried out after multi-agency exercises, and noted actions and recommendations recorded on the debrief action tracker.

The service carries out exercises with neighbouring services

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service completed 14 training exercises with neighbouring FRSs. The number of training exercises with neighbouring FRSs per 1,000 full-time equivalent firefighters is 27.3, which is higher than the England rate of 24.5.

These cross-border exercises support working together effectively to keep the public safe. They help mitigate the risks of foreseeable major incidents where the service could be required to give support to, or ask for help from, neighbouring services. Staff we spoke to told us about learning taken from exercises – such as a greater understanding of procedural differences between Surrey FRS, Hampshire & Isle of Wight FRS and LFB.

We noted limited evidence of assurance around exercises, and no key performance indicators. The service may benefit from a greater understanding of the quality of exercises, and from ensuring outcomes are used to drive future improvement.

The service is a valued member of the Surrey LRF

The service has good arrangements in place to respond to emergencies with agencies that make up the Surrey LRF. These arrangements include joint understanding of risk, sharing of information, plans and preparations around differing risks and incidents, and training and exercising in line with these.

The service is a valued member of the LRF. Its chief fire officer is chair of the LRF, and several officers hold important roles in its subgroups, including:

- chair of the training and exercising group;
- chair of the risk (assessment of risk) group;
- chair of the wildfire group; and
- chair of the communications group.

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. The service worked with the forum to improve future capability and performance after wildfires in 2022. Following this, the LRF's wildfire group was set up. This supported improvements to the service's work, including improved off-road capability, the introduction of tactical advisors, increased water capacity on fire engines, and the creation of wildfire plans.

The service has awareness and understanding of national operational learning

The service makes sure it knows about [national operational learning](#) updates from other FRSs and [joint organisational learning](#) from other organisations, such as the police and ambulance services.

The service doesn't appear to have a single point of contact for national operational learning and joint organisational learning. But we saw evidence of awareness and understanding of these – such as learning being disseminated within joint fire control, and the sharing of learning around wooden ladders following a rail exercise.

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

In our 2023–25 inspection, we issued an [area for improvement](#) relating to sharing fire survival information with multiple callers. This is essential when responding to a major incident at a tall building, such as the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017. During these incidents, an FRS is likely to receive a high volume of simultaneous fire calls. The service has robust systems in place to receive and manage this volume of calls.

But during [our last inspection](#), we found that it relied too heavily on paper-based systems to share fire survival guidance information. The service recognised this and told us that it was finalising a new electronic system.

During our inspection, we were pleased to find that the service had introduced a suitable electronic system, provided staff training and carried out testing. Staff told us that they felt confident using the system. As a result, we have closed this area for improvement.

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

Adequate

Surrey Fire and Rescue Service is adequate 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 must ensure scenario plans for future spending reductions are subject to rigorous analysis and challenge, including the impact on services to the public.

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

Main findings

The service has effective governance and scrutiny in place

Since the service is part of Surrey County Council, the council is the [fire and rescue authority](#) and 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. However, due to local government reorganisation, the service's governance arrangements will change from 1 April 2027.

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. It operates under an assurance and governance framework that considers internal and external issues. Five working groups report to the service leadership team each quarter. The leadership team structure includes an assurance board and a change board, which are supported by these working groups (which cover workforce, operational policy and assurance, resources, resilience, and [occupational health](#), safety and well-being). Performance dashboards provide visibility of operational key performance indicators, prevention outcomes and response standards – supporting informed challenge and assurance.

The service reports accurate and suitably detailed financial, risk and performance information to the fire and rescue authority. For example, it presents regular, structured performance and assurance reports covering operational efficiency, prevention, protection, workforce, culture and inspection improvement.

The [scheme of delegation](#) clearly sets out responsibilities for the service's senior leaders. It provides a clear, comprehensive and well-structured framework defining decision-making authority, accountability and financial control across the authority. It does, however, place significant reliance on officer decision-making within delegated powers. There are effective internal governance arrangements in place to hold senior leaders to account for the corporate management of the service. Senior officers, including the chief fire officer, have quarterly performance conversations. The chief fire officer meets weekly with representatives of the fire and rescue authority, in contexts ranging from full cabinet meetings and scrutiny committees to weekly conversations with the relevant cabinet member. This keeps the authority well informed while the chief fire officer maintains operational responsibility and oversight.

The service has improved how it allocates its resources

During [our last inspection](#) we identified an [area for improvement](#) relating to the allocation of resources between prevention, protection and response activities. We were pleased to find that the service had made improvements. The service's 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 \(CRMP\)](#). As a result, we have closed this area for improvement.

Following the service's review of its protection work and restructure of its prevention function, we found both areas were sufficiently resourced to meet the needs of the CRMP. The service has increased resources within prevention and protection. It has increased the number of prevention administrators, which has allowed operational crews to spend more time carrying out prevention activities. And it has increased the number of competent fire safety inspectors within protection. It has secured external funding to further support its resources. For example, the service told us it has secured £90,000 funding from the integrated care board for hospital discharge work. And it has secured new burdens funding to establish a clad buildings team.

The service has sustainable plans in place to resource its protection function if protection grant funding is reduced or withdrawn. It has used uplift grant funding to train staff and introduce business safety officers. But we were told that the loss of this funding would not have a significant impact on the service's protection activity.

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. It hasn't carried out a recent full fire cover review. But it uses an annual review of its community risk profile, and continued effective use of a dynamic cover tool, to make sure its resources are in the most appropriate place. Its CRMP includes proposals for fire engine relocation and changes to shift patterns, alongside a review of its specialist vehicle capability. The service has also standardised its shift patterns for all [wholetime](#) firefighters working at fire stations that are staffed 24 hours. They work two shifts in a 24-hour period (a day and a night shift), and these used to have varying start and finish times. From 1 January 2026, all wholetime firefighters work to a 12-hour shift pattern, with the day shift starting at 7am and the night shift starting at 7pm. This provides consistency in managing resources and supporting operational effectiveness.

Effective financial planning is hindered by impending local government reorganisation

In 2025/26, the service's net revenue budget was £41.8 million. The net revenue budget for 2024/25 has been adjusted for inflation from £40.5 million to £42.8 million. This means the budget decreased by 2.2 percent between 2024/25 and 2025/26 in real terms.

Local government reorganisation means new local governance arrangements will come into force on 1 April 2027. Surrey County Council and 11 district and borough councils will cease to exist. They will be replaced by two new unitary authorities called East Surrey Council and West Surrey Council. At the time of our inspection, the service was planning for its governance arrangements changing, either to a combined fire and rescue authority, or forming part of a foundation strategic authority. The details of reorganisation hadn't yet been confirmed by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Either option will involve elected members from the two unitary authorities. This change of governance is hindering the service's financial planning.

The service is acutely aware of the financial risk it faces, and the amount of work required to make sure the transfer to new governance arrangements goes smoothly. Due to the upcoming governance changes, the service has a one-year financial plan for 2026/27 only, rather than a medium-term financial plan covering up to five years. This is because disaggregation of the Surrey County Council budget hasn't taken place yet. And this means the service will have to go through a process to identify its share of assets and liabilities, future funding and spending plans for revenue and capital, and alternative arrangements for support functions currently provided by the county council.

Under these circumstances, the service is doing its best to mitigate its financial risk. It is fully involved in the relevant programme of work led by Surrey County Council. And it has set up its own internal governance structure to oversee its transitional plan. It is also proactively planning for the complexities of the disaggregation process. For example, it asked a fire and rescue service that had previously disaggregated from a county council to share lessons it learned with the service leadership team. And it is working with an external subject matter expert to support financial analytical work as early preparation for disaggregation. The service's main financial risks are recorded and monitored through its corporate risk register.

In [our 2021 inspection](#), we identified an area for improvement that the service must ensure scenario plans for future spending reductions are subject to rigorous analysis and challenge, including the impact on services to the public. While we realise that local government reorganisation has affected the service's financial planning, we look forward to seeing progress on this area for improvement in our next inspection. The service's capital programme is currently part of Surrey County Council's wider capital plans. The county council manages capital financing costs. Surrey County Council currently holds the service's reserves. There is a robust process in place for the service to access them.

The service has effective performance management arrangements

The service's arrangements for managing performance clearly link the use of resources to its CRMP and its strategic priorities. The service has 32 key performance indicators across its activities. It rates performance against each one on a red, amber, green basis and indicates a direction of travel. This is reviewed at quarterly meetings of the performance outcome group, which then reports to Surrey County Council's corporate leadership team. The reports are based on priority objectives, including:

- [safe and well visits](#);
- business safety audits;
- average time of first engine to [critical incidents](#);
- average time of second engine to critical incidents; and
- average response time to other incidents.

An additional highlight report includes data relating to high-risk premises, freedom of information responses, performance conversations completed, and equality, diversity and inclusion data.

We also found evidence of effective performance management across the service. This was particularly evident during our visit to joint [fire control](#), where structured quarterly performance conversations and monthly one-to-one line management meetings take place. The service also reviews key performance indicators at monthly operational governance meetings, with performance clearly linked to priority objectives.

The service uses data to improve staff productivity, make sure resources are used effectively and efficiently and provide value for money. It sets performance targets following a full assessment of data, such as activity levels. It has communicated openly about this process, so staff understand how and why it sets the targets.

In our last inspection, we identified an area for improvement relating to staff productivity. The service now better 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. During this inspection we found that, alongside shift time changes across wholetime stations, it has introduced status codes to monitor and improve productivity. As a result, we have closed this area for improvement.

The service is taking steps to make sure its workforce is as productive as possible. This includes putting in place new ways of working. For example, it has introduced new Prevent and Protect software that supports faster uploading and sharing of risk information and data. During our inspection, the service was rolling out new tablets to fire engines to further support this. And crews were using QR codes during business safe and well visits to more effectively and efficiently refer issues to protection specialists, so they could be addressed more quickly.

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, 39.4 percent of incidents attended in Surrey were fire false alarms. The rate of attendance at incidents that were fire false alarms was 3.2 per 1,000 population. This is lower than the England rate of 4.3.

The service has an effective, risk-based system in place to manage its response to unwanted fire signals. In the year ending 31 March 2025, 29.9 percent (5,011 of 16,744) of emergency calls to the service were automatic fire alarms. Of these, 60.4 percent weren't attended, which is higher than the England average of 44.6 percent. The service achieves this through a robust call challenging process.

The service has improved how it evaluates its collaborations, but there is scope to improve its monitoring of project outcomes

In 2024/25, the service's expenditure was £55.51 million, which is £44.45 per head of its population. This is within the typical range compared to all services in England.

There are regular reviews to consider all the service's expenditure, including its non-pay costs. This scrutiny makes sure the service gets value for money. For example, there are monthly meetings to review expenditure.

It doesn't achieve the savings identified in its financial and efficiency plans. It made only £1.4 million of its planned £1.7 million savings between 2022/23 and 2024/25.

In our last inspection, we found the service monitored, reviewed and evaluated the benefits and results of its collaborations in some areas. But this was limited in scope, and the service didn't use the findings to learn from or to change decisions.

In this inspection, we found the service had considered recruiting an evaluation officer and assessed how other services evaluated their collaborations. The service has built the evaluation of collaborations into its processes and can show how it is using this to support its decision-making. For example, following a review of the fire cadets programme, the service paused the scheme as the anticipated benefits weren't being achieved. Considering this evidence, we have closed the area for improvement relating to evaluating collaboration activity. The service has a benefits register and can demonstrate a systematic approach to recording anticipated benefits from its improvement projects. However, we found that the benefits register included mainly planned benefits rather than validated outcomes. The service would benefit from adapting its processes to improve assurance that expected outcomes are being achieved.

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. It continues to work as part of the 3F and 4F collaborations with East Sussex, West Sussex and Kent Fire and Rescue Services. Through these arrangements, it has procured breathing apparatus equipment and an incident command unit.

Through its approach to value for money, the service has identified and achieved efficiencies that have improved its services to the public. One example of this is the joint fire control facility which it shares with East Sussex and West Sussex Fire and Rescue Services. Without this joint facility, the recent introduction of the electronic [fire survival guidance](#) system would have required more investment from the service.

Asset management supports service improvement

The service's capital programme and estate and fleet strategies have clear links to its CRMP. They consider important challenges and opportunities, linking asset management to improving services. Specific elements include relocating resources, upgrading stations, building new stations, and reviewing specialist fleet. Both strategies look to exploit opportunities to improve effectiveness and efficiency. For example, the service is considering how it can use the new training facility being built at Wray Park to generate income, through external use of its facilities. And it is looking to install electric fire pumps within the facility to reduce operational emissions and remove the need to take an engine out of service on training days. We look forward to seeing the outcomes of this.

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 does this through the regular resources working group. One risk identified is certain fire engines reaching the end of their supported life. The service is sourcing parts for these to help keep them functioning. This could include purchasing engines from other services to use the parts.

The service has made progress in this area, and we are therefore closing the area for improvement that we identified during our last inspection.

Local government reorganisation is creating uncertainty in relation to future IT provision

The service's digital and IT strategy is well aligned with Surrey County Council's wider strategy. It supports transformation, interoperability and improved use of data.

There is uncertainty relating to future IT provision due to impending local government reorganisation. One of the biggest challenges the service faces is having to split the server network.

The service aims to exploit opportunities to improve effectiveness and efficiency presented by changes in technology. At the time of our inspection, it was rolling out tablets for all fire engines that will support the new fire survival guidance system and help operational crews to carry out prevention and protection activity more effectively. The service plans to use artificial intelligence. It has access to Microsoft Copilot, which it has trialled and is now rolling out across the service. And it is upgrading Firewatch, its HR system, to incorporate artificial intelligence.

The service effectively manages change

The service has put in place the capacity and capability it needs to achieve sustainable change. There is an appropriate governance structure to monitor and manage impending local government reorganisation, including a recently appointed transition manager.

The service manages change through effective projects and programmes. It has a clear internal structure with appropriate governance arrangements to make sure progress against projects and programmes is monitored, scrutinised and challenged. The service is involved in all projects that affect it, even if overall responsibility sits with other teams at Surrey County Council. For example, it is involved in corporate property panel governance meetings. It uses a project and programme management tool to collate all project information, such as challenges, impacts and considerations, in one place. And it works effectively with its workforce and representative bodies to facilitate a smoother process.

Promoting, embedding and improving values and culture

Good

Surrey 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 proactively monitor working hours (including overtime) to ensure staff well-being.

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

Main findings

The service displays a positive culture, supported by behaviours and values

The service continues to have well-defined values, which staff understand. We found that staff at all levels of the service showed behaviours that reflect service values. Staff we spoke to were positive about the culture, and we were told senior leaders have created an inclusive and supportive culture. It has implemented the [Core Code of Ethics](#). Staff, who have undergone training on this, understand it and it is integrated within policies and procedures. We found the code was embedded into service processes and policies, and forms part of recruitment campaigns and performance conversations.

In our workforce survey, which had an overall response rate of 36 percent, 91 percent of respondents (241 of 265) agreed that their colleagues consistently modelled and

maintained the service's values. And 89 percent of respondents (237 of 265) agreed that their manager consistently modelled and maintained the service's values.

The service continues to be compliant with [safeguarding](#) legislation by completing appropriate background checks for all existing members of staff. All staff undergo a standard check, with enhanced checks for staff who have contact with more [vulnerable](#) individuals. A safeguarding manager oversees the process of re-checking staff as checks expire. In the year ending 31 March 2025, 92.9 percent of existing employees who needed a background check had one.

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

The service has effective engagement and feedback processes

The service has robust systems in place to take 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 examples of the service adjusting policies and procedures as a direct result of the scrutiny that had taken place. The monthly workforce working group meeting considers feedback and learning and recommends amendments to procedures accordingly. For example, following feedback from representative bodies, the service made changes to its disciplinary and grievance procedures, putting more emphasis on informal resolution and providing clearer guidance for managers, with more explicit timescales.

The fire and rescue authority receives regular, meaningful updates about people-related issues. The chief fire officer is part of Surrey County Council's corporate leadership team and has regular meetings with the relevant council cabinet member. This helps the council hold him to account, set priorities for the service, reduce risk for the public and protect the health and safety of staff. The council provides oversight through an employee relations tracker and acts in an advisory capacity on any emerging themes.

The service displays open and transparent communication

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

- a clear communications strategy;
- mandatory corporate updates;
- visits by leadership team members to stations;
- blogs and vlogs for all staff from the chief fire officer; and
- a fortnightly internal newsletter.

The service's adoption of the Communication and Engagement Fire Standard helps make sure its communications and engagement remain relevant, accessible and aligned to staff needs.

In our workforce survey, 61 percent of respondents (161 of 265) agreed that they felt confident in the processes for providing feedback to all levels of leadership.

Individual members of staff, representative bodies and staff network groups that we spoke to provided examples of where they had raised legitimate concerns with leaders. The service had been active in resolving them. For example, [on-call](#) staff told us that after they raised concerns about standby arrangements, the service created a standby review working group which included on-call staff members. We also heard from managers who had changed their behaviours due to 360-degree feedback (feedback from multiple sources) received.

Only 49 percent of respondents (131 of 265) agreed that they were confident their feedback would be acted on. We heard from some staff that communication and implementation around recent shift changes could have been more effective and inclusive. And a few felt that members of the leadership team could be more visible at stations.

The service effectively addresses unacceptable behaviour

There is a positive working culture throughout the service, and staff feel empowered and willing to challenge unacceptable behaviours when they come across them. The service intranet gives staff information on how to raise complaints and whistleblowing concerns, and information on bullying, harassment and initiating grievances.

In our workforce survey, 70 percent of respondents (185 of 265) agreed that they felt safe to challenge unacceptable behaviour in their service. Staff we spoke to described a culture where they were confident to raise concerns, and that those concerns would be dealt with appropriately.

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, 16 percent of respondents (42 of 265) told us that they had felt bullied or harassed by members of their service in the past 12 months. And 15 percent (39 of 265) told us that they had felt discriminated against by members of their service during the same period. This was not, however, a view we found supported among the staff we spoke to.

We were pleased 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. The files we reviewed contained sufficient detail, with appropriate outcomes and a clear rationale.

As at 31 March 2025, there were 6 live grievances and 27 disciplinary cases. Of these disciplinary cases, 10 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. Investigation training is provided in the service. The employee relations team oversees cases, with legal advice available through Surrey County Council and an external provider.

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.

Physical and mental well-being is supported

The service continues to have effective and well-understood health and safety policies and procedures in place. Its policy sits within Surrey County Council's policy. It has a lead health and safety advisor, and it is represented on the council's central joint health, safety and well-being committee alongside trade unions.

These policies and procedures are readily available, and leaders at all levels promote them effectively to all staff. Safety reporting continues to be carried out effectively through QR codes at stations. And the service makes sure its firefighters are fit enough to safely carry out their duties through annual fitness testing. This is supported by fitness instructors across the service and a service fitness co-ordinator.

The service manages contamination risk through well-understood procedures and processes. Measures include specific station areas for contaminated items, clean cabs in newer fire engines, and the introduction of towels and decontamination shampoo and body wash. It monitors workplaces with contaminant measuring tools and is also trialling these in officers' cars.

In our workforce survey, 86 percent of respondents (227 of 265) agreed that they knew how to access support for their mental health through their service. This support includes [critical incident](#) stress debriefing. Staff we spoke to were positive about this and the other support they have.

The service also continues to have well-understood and effective well-being policies in place, which are available to staff. A significant range of well-being support is available to support both physical and mental health. This includes:

- a well-being hub on Microsoft SharePoint with multiple resources and signposting;
- welfare dogs;
- well-being champions who have had specialist training;
- additional healthcare for operational staff through a private scheme;
- an employee assistance programme for all staff; and
- ongoing work with the Fire Fighters Charity to make sure staff understand how to access its resources.

The service is proactive in building resilience among staff, and we found examples of where it had intervened to support an individual's needs. Performance conversations start with a welfare check, and stress [risk assessments](#) are carried out in line with Health and Safety Executive guidance.

There are good provisions in place to promote staff well-being. These include dedicated gym time and the SharePoint hub, which links to pages dedicated to mental health and emotional well-being, physical health and well-being, self-care and personal resilience, financial well-being, and workplace well-being. In our workforce survey, 63 percent of respondents (167 of 265) agreed that service leaders treated their well-being as a priority. Staff reported that they understood and had confidence in the well-being support processes available.

The service could monitor working hours and rest periods more proactively

As at 31 March 2025, 23.2 percent (104 people) of [wholetime](#) firefighters had a dual contract within the service, and 4.7 percent (21 people) of wholetime firefighters had a dual contract with another fire and rescue service. The service has policies in place that put responsibility on individuals and line managers to monitor working hours and rest periods. But it could do more to proactively monitor whether staff work excessive hours and take adequate rest periods. It currently monitors hours through a manual process, which relies on individuals and line managers keeping records and spot checking by the people and organisational development team. The next iteration of Firewatch, the service's HR software, will support the proactive monitoring of hours worked. We look forward to seeing the benefits of this.

Training and developing the right people with the right skills

Good

Surrey 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.

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

Main findings

Workforce planning is effective

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. It uses data to inform its planning, with a range of relevant metrics it reviews every month. Its recruitment campaigns are aligned to the workforce plan and have enough flexibility to respond to operational gaps. For example, after recognising a gap in [on-call](#) firefighter recruitment, the service changed a [wholetime](#) firefighter recruitment campaign to an on-call one. In addition, a planned wholetime training course will become an on-call course.

The service carries out succession planning to make sure it can fill future gaps appropriately. We saw examples of this happening in protection teams and the leadership team. Performance conversations contribute to this process, through discussing individual development opportunities.

Workforce and succession planning is subject to consistent scrutiny in the form of regular meetings to discuss requirements. The service's workforce plan is closely aligned to its CRMP and overseen by the workforce planning sub-group. This group is in turn overseen by the workforce working group, which monitors issues on an action tracker and reports to the assurance board. The activity of the workforce planning sub-group includes reviewing staff numbers, leaver profiles, and succession plans, and identifying future opportunities and threats. This group meets monthly. It is made up of middle managers and employee representatives from across the service.

The service monitors its workforce's skills and capabilities regularly and effectively

Most staff told us that they could access the training they needed to be effective in their roles. In our workforce survey, 80 percent of respondents (211 of 265) agreed that the service gave them the necessary training to carry out their roles. It does this through a comprehensive e-learning facility and centrally delivered practical training on core skills, including breathing apparatus, road traffic collision, incident command, hazardous materials, working at height and water rescue.

Training isn't just focused on operational skills. It also includes people skills. The service's training plans make sure staff can maintain competence and capability effectively. For example, staff receive training in equality, diversity and inclusion and banter, cultural competency, and scenario-based decision-making. Managers within the service also receive training in other areas of management, such as investigation and hearings, and welfare officer responsibilities. The service is planning to further enhance this provision through the GROW programme – a series of management modules that use personality profiling. We look forward to seeing the results of this.

In our workforce survey, 86 percent of respondents (228 of 265) agreed that they could access relevant learning and development opportunities. The performance conversation process can help facilitate this. Staff undergo [continuing professional development](#), particularly in relation to incident command and command specialisms. The service currently records this separately to core skills training and mandatory e-learning. But a project is underway to link continuing professional development to other recording systems. We look forward to seeing the results of this.

The service monitors staff competence through the Firewatch platform, which effectively records and displays competence. The records we viewed during our inspection indicated high levels of competence, and managers adequately trained to assess. It regularly updates its understanding of staff skills and risk-critical safety capabilities through monthly reporting. The service reviews data on competency through assurance groups and the operational board. It has a key performance indicator that 95 percent of its staff should be competent. It told us it regularly exceeds this target, with an average level of 97 to 99 percent. It also uses regular refresher training to support its approach. For example, it provides this annually for breathing apparatus, exceeding the national requirement to do it every two years. 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 positive learning and development culture

The service promotes a culture of continuous improvement throughout the organisation, and it encourages staff to learn and develop. For example, there is structured development for new firefighters through apprenticeships. Supervisory and middle manager development programmes are also available to staff.

We were pleased to find that the service had a range of easily accessible learning and development resources. These included the use of a competency framework in the protection department, and the effective use of performance conversations in joint [fire control](#). These measures support individuals' development, allowing staff to do their jobs effectively.

The service has identified parts of its training and development provision that some staff have found difficult to access or use. We were pleased to find that the service had taken proactive steps to remove these barriers. Development programmes are available to all staff, with participation encouraged through internal newsletters, targeted emails and conversations at stations. Current participation includes both operational and non-operational staff. Staff we spoke to from both these groups told us about opportunities for secondments to other areas of the service that are supported and encouraged.

Ensuring fairness and diversity

Adequate

Surrey Fire and Rescue Service is adequate 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.

Area for improvement

The service should identify and overcome barriers to equal opportunity so that its workforce better represents its community. This should include making sure staff understand the value of positive action and having a diverse workforce. The service should also improve the way it collects equality data to better understand its workforce's composition and needs.

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 is open and fair

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

We found that the service had an open, fair and honest recruitment process for existing staff or those wishing to work for it. There is an effective system to understand and remove the risk of [disproportionality](#) in recruitment processes. For example, there is a workforce working group that oversees operational recruitment, comprising staff from across the service. For non-operational recruitment, applications are reviewed by principal officers and then liaison with the council takes place. And recruitment panel members undergo [unconscious bias](#) training.

The service has put considerable effort into developing its recruitment policies so that they are fair, and applicants can understand them. We found that communication with applicants is good, with all steps of the process, and requirements of the role, made clear. The service is a Disability Confident employer and offers reasonable adjustments, such as giving applicants interview questions in advance. The service also delivers the Fire Fit scheme, which runs at fire stations and is designed to help potential applicants understand and train towards the fitness elements of the recruitment process.

Its recruitment processes are comprehensive and cover opportunities in all roles. The service advertises recruitment opportunities internally and externally. It does this using platforms such as the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) website, Indeed, Instagram and YouTube. The service has also made changes to elements within processes that may negatively affect certain groups. For example, it has modified the grip test in the initial round of its recruitment process and plans to remove the ladder lock and dummy drag elements from the next round. This has encouraged applicants from diverse backgrounds, including those applying for middle and senior leadership roles (where the service has seen staff from non-operational backgrounds moving into operational roles).

We found the service could do more to monitor at what point in recruitment processes applicants are unsuccessful, and identify trends. This would help it understand where it can make improvements.

While there is a good level of diversity in certain areas of the service, such as the leadership team, it could do more to increase diversity at all levels.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, 4 out of 55 new joiners (where ethnicity is known) were from an ethnic minority background.

As at 31 March 2025, 3.8 percent (26 people) of the service's staff were from an ethnic minority background compared to 14.5 percent in the local population and 6.4 percent throughout all fire and rescue services in England. However, 6.1 percent of staff hadn't stated their ethnicity.

For the same period, 18.9 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 stayed the same from 2.6 percent (14 people) as at 31 March 2024 and to 2.7 percent (14 people) as at 31 March 2025.

The proportion of women firefighters also stayed broadly the same from 5.5 percent (31 women) to 5.8 percent (32 women) over the same period.

The service is working to improve staff development and retention

We found positive examples of where the service had identified and addressed barriers that disproportionately prevented individuals from particular groups from progressing. The HR team is working closely with the neuro-inclusion network group (and other network groups) to explore and address issues that affect certain groups. And the service proactively encourages staff on maternity leave to use 'keep in touch days' to access development opportunities and explore career options to make sure maternity provision does not limit progression.

The service also looks to identify and address wider issues that may affect its staff, and to share learning through links with several external organisations. These include Surrey County Council, Surrey Police, the National Fire Chiefs Council, the Asian Fire Service Association and Women in the Fire Service UK. It is also part of a 4F EDI leads network with East Sussex, West Sussex and Kent Fire and Rescue Services. Through meetings every two months, this network supports consistency and promotes shared learning and problem solving.

Each staff member has individual goals and objectives and regular performance assessments. Performance conversations contain objectives linked to the [community risk management plan](#) and contribute to the service's succession planning through the discussion of development opportunities. Staff feel confident in the performance and development arrangements in place.

The service's promotion and progression processes are comprehensive and cover opportunities in all roles.

Equal, diverse and inclusive practice is evident across the service

The service prioritises EDI. It makes sure it can offer the right services to its communities and support staff with [protected characteristics](#). For example, the service has a comprehensive culture and ethics strategy, which clearly acknowledges its obligations under the [Equality Act 2010](#), and specifically the [Public Sector Equality Duty](#). It has dedicated EDI pages on the staff intranet. Staff we spoke to told us that the service has improved its support and awareness of EDI.

The service has an effective process in place to assess [equality impact](#). Guidance, templates and a screening tool are available on the intranet. An external provider currently provides training on equality impact. The service is using content from this to develop its own in-house solution. It acts as needed to improve equality.

During this inspection, we reviewed a range of policies that affect different parts of the service including the secondary employment policy, the fairness and respect policy and the communications and social media policy. The service has completed people impact assessments (PIAs) for these policies. The PIAs all contained risk rating analysis and considered all protected characteristics. Consultation with relevant working groups and staff networks was also evident. But while there is a central tracker for PIAs, we found monitoring could be more robust, as there was no evidence of scrutiny, challenge or quality assurance for any of the assessments we reviewed. We were told this is carried out by the culture and ethics team, working groups or the 4F EDI leads network. But this wasn't recorded or evidenced on the PIAs.

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. EDI and banter training is mandatory for all staff, and an external company has delivered scenario-based training encouraging people to speak up. Staff indicated that the service has implemented a good level of support via staff network groups – for example, the neuro-inclusion network, gender network, ethnicity and faith network, and the LGBTQ+ network. And the service is consulting staff on developing policies on issues such as menopause.

In our workforce survey, 83 percent of respondents (220 of 265) agreed that they felt comfortable being themselves at work. And 95 percent of respondents (252 of 265) agreed they had access to gender-appropriate workplace facilities.

EDI understanding, awareness and provision has improved since [our last inspection](#). We saw positive work taking place, and it was pleasing to see the service gaining external recognition for this. It received the Neurodiversity Champion of the Year Award and Most Influential LGBTQIA+ Individual in Fire Award at the 2024 Excellence in Fire and Emergency Awards, and Partnership of the Year Award at the 2024 Asian Fire Service Association Awards.

The service could still do more to make sure that all staff understand and support a more diverse workforce

We would encourage the service to maintain its momentum in this area and build on its current work to increase staff understanding and support a more diverse workforce. For example, it has created a comprehensive EDI training package. But at the time of our inspection, the number of staff who had received this training remained low, and staff we spoke to had little awareness about the planning or delivery of positive action activities. And while we noted positive work going on to improve the collection of diversity data, we saw limited evidence of how the service is using this to support improvements. We saw no evidence of the service gathering diversity data at initiatives or events to better understand any barriers that may hinder improvement in diversity.

Leading people effectively

Good

Surrey Fire and Rescue Service is good 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.

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

Main findings

Leaders work and communicate well with staff

Senior leaders effectively communicate the aims and objectives in the CRMP to staff at all levels. They do this in a variety of ways, which promotes open, two-way communication. These include leadership team engagement visits (to [wholetime](#) and [on-call](#) stations, and departments), fortnightly newsletters, all-staff emails and staff surveys. We found that this approach was supported by leaders at all levels who make sure staff understand the aims and objectives. The service dedicated a senior manager to engage and consult with staff in relation to the new CRMP. This activity included discussions with representative bodies and station-level briefings.

As a result, staff have a high level of trust in their leaders. In our workforce survey, 71 percent of respondents (187 of 265) agreed that senior leaders clearly communicated the service's objectives. Our conversations with staff backed up this finding. They told us how the service conveys consistent, clear messages through monthly video updates from the chief fire officer and staff attendance at leaders' forums, where senior leaders discuss priorities and risk.

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

The service develops and identifies leaders fairly

We found that the service had well-understood arrangements in place to identify talented leaders. The service has effective succession-planning processes in place. These allow it to effectively manage the career pathways of its staff, including roles that need specialist skills.

Staff clearly understand and trust career development pathways. And the service proactively removes any barriers and supports all staff in accessing leadership development opportunities. Development pathways are aligned to the [National Fire Chiefs Council \(NFCC\)](#) leadership framework and are accessible to all staff.

There are talent management schemes in place to develop leaders and high-potential staff. The service promotes the NFCC supervisory leadership programme, middle leadership development programme, and executive leadership programme. It advertises all talent and leadership opportunities fairly, through internal newsletters, emails to managers and station visits, for all staff to consider.

The service has put considerable effort into developing its promotion and progression processes so that they are fair and all staff can understand them. Recruitment processes include operational and non-operational staff and are advertised internally and externally. We saw examples of non-operational staff moving into operational roles, and a person with a background in [fire control](#) moving into an operational group commander role. In our workforce survey, 57 percent of respondents (150 of 265) agreed that the promotion process in the service was fair. This finding was supported by our conversations with staff during the inspection. The majority of those we spoke to told us they thought promotion processes were fair.

The service manages selection processes consistently. These assess leadership as well as operational capability. Suitable candidates are identified through performance conversations, 360-degree feedback (feedback from multiple sources) and line manager endorsements. And it uses temporary promotions appropriately to fill short-term resourcing gaps. As at 31 March 2025, 2 percent of the workforce were on temporary promotion. The average length of temporary promotions was 116 days, which is lower than the England average of 295 days. As at 31 March 2025, the longest temporary position was 387 days, which is lower than the England average of 1,256 days.

The service equips leaders to lead effectively

We found that the service had leaders in place who were well equipped to lead. It supports competency-based progression aligned to the NFCC leadership framework.

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, 65 percent of respondents (172 of 265) 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. Training is provided to leaders in relation to people policies, such as discipline, grievance and attendance management. Further training concentrates on carrying out investigations and hearings, and the role of a welfare officer in supporting people through discipline and grievance processes.

The service has coaching and mentoring programmes in place, which are developing leaders. There are coaching initiatives within the service and within the council that staff can access via the service's intranet. Leaders are exposed to different management scenarios that match and stretch their skills. Leaders told us they receive 'bite-size' training sessions on topics such as having difficult conversations. This means the service has leaders who are confident to step up to the next level of management when opportunities arise.

Leaders have completed 360-degree feedback to support their development. This process allows leaders to adapt their behaviours and leadership style based on constructive feedback. Leaders we spoke to indicated that this approach is useful and that they have changed behaviours following it. The service has now made the process available to all staff.

The service manages staff performance effectively

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, the service has an improved, comprehensive and robust performance conversation process involving quarterly progress meetings and an annual review. This process is aligned to the NFCC leadership framework and supports ongoing development.

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

Leaders continue to promote a positive culture

Leaders at all levels act as role models. Leaders we spoke to gave examples of when they had challenged inappropriate behaviour, and other staff told us that the environment created by senior leaders enabled them to challenge and feel supported in their actions.

In our workforce survey, 54 percent of respondents (143 of 265) agreed that leaders at all levels promoted a positive culture. However, staff we spoke to during our inspection indicated an even more positive picture than this, especially about senior leaders. The chief fire officer and assistant chief fire officers were praised for their visibility, openness and positive engagement.

As a result, leaders are maintaining and constantly developing the positive culture we found throughout the organisation. Regular leaders' forums take place, where positive cultures and leadership are discussed.

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

