

Fire & Rescue Service 2021/22

Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Kent Fire and Rescue Service



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About this inspection

This inspection is from our third round of inspections of fire and rescue services in England. We first inspected Kent Fire and Rescue Service in January 2019. We published a report with our findings in June 2019 on the service's effectiveness and efficiency and how it looks after its people. Our second inspection, in autumn 2020, considered how the service was responding to the pandemic. This inspection considers for a second time the service's effectiveness, efficiency and people.

In this round of inspections of all 44 fire and rescue services in England, we answer three main questions:

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

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

What inspection judgments mean

Our categories of graded judgment are:

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








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


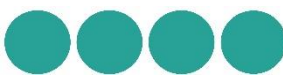


If the service exceeds what we expect for good, we will judge it as outstanding.


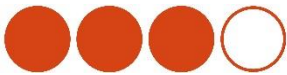




If we find shortcomings in the service, we will judge it as requires improvement.

If there are serious, critical or systemic failings of policy, practice or performance of the fire and rescue service, then consideration will be given to a graded judgment of inadequate.

Overview

Question	This inspection	2018/19
 Effectiveness	 Good	Good
Understanding fires and other risks	 Outstanding	Good
Preventing fires and other risks	 Good	Good
Protecting the public through fire regulation	 Good	Requires improvement
Responding to fires and other emergencies	 Good	Good
Responding to major and multi-agency incidents	 Good	Good

Question	This inspection	2018/19
 Efficiency	 Outstanding	Good
Making best use of resources	 Outstanding	Good
Future affordability	 Outstanding	Good

Question	This inspection	2018/19
 People	 Good	Good
Promoting the right values and culture	 Outstanding	Good
Getting the right people with the right skills	 Good	Requires improvement
Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity	 Good	Good
Managing performance and developing leaders	 Good	Good

HM Inspector's summary

It was a pleasure to revisit Kent Fire and Rescue Service, and I am grateful for the positive and constructive way that the service engaged with our inspection.

I congratulate Kent Fire and Rescue Service on its excellent performance in keeping people safe and secure from fires and other risks. We have judged the service to be outstanding in four areas and good in all the others. There are many positives to report.

I am pleased how the service has progressed since our last inspection, including addressing seven of the eight areas for improvement that we had identified.

My principal findings from our assessments of the service in the last year are as follows:

- The service has a thorough understanding of the risks it faces.
- It has set clear priorities for the use of its resources, and it has well-structured risk-based plans.
- The service has introduced a range of measures to ensure that its workforce is productive.
- Senior leaders have a clear vision for the service's culture, and lead by example.

Also of note are the [innovative practices](#) that we have found:

- The service has developed a process to gather and use risk information in a timely and effective way.
- The presentation, clarity, and purpose of the service's plans is excellent.

And the [promising practices](#) we have identified:

- The service makes excellent use of its procurement arrangements.
- The national [Core Code of Ethics](#) has been used to support a positive culture.
- The service has introduced a neurodiversity passport to reduce the burden on individuals who need reasonable adjustments.

The service has assessed an appropriate range of risks and threats after a thorough risk management planning process. When assessing risk, it has considered relevant information collected from a broad range of internal and external sources.

It has set clear priorities for the use of its resources, and it has well-structured plans.

It knows what it wants to achieve based on a thorough understanding of risk.

The service has explained its objectives and priorities clearly in a set of well-presented strategies which are fully aligned with its customer safety plan.

We are pleased to see that the service's arrangements for managing performance clearly link resource use to its customer safety plan and strategic priorities.

The service continues to take steps to make sure the workforce is as productive as possible. This includes implementing new ways of working.

Senior leaders have a clear vision for the culture of the service, and staff described a working environment with positive behaviours firmly in place, that are accepted, demonstrated and understood throughout the organisation.



Roy Wilsher

HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Service in numbers



Response

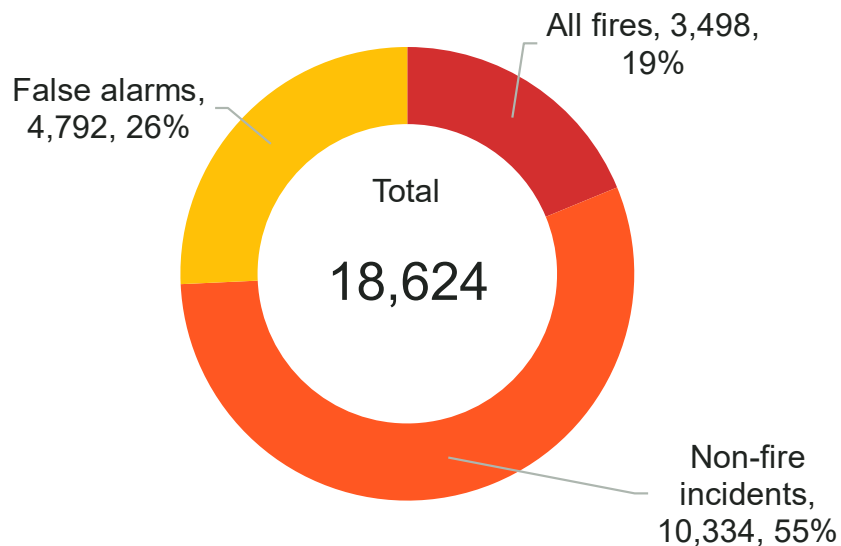
	Kent	England
Incidents attended per 1,000 population Year ending 31 December 2021	9.97	9.82
Home fire safety checks carried out by fire and rescue service per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	5.45	4.47
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises Year ending 31 March 2021	4.76	1.70
Average availability of pumps Year ending 31 March 2021	65.1%	86.4%



Cost

Firefighter cost per person Year ending 31 March 2021	£18.23	£25.02
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Incidents attended in the year to 31 December 2021

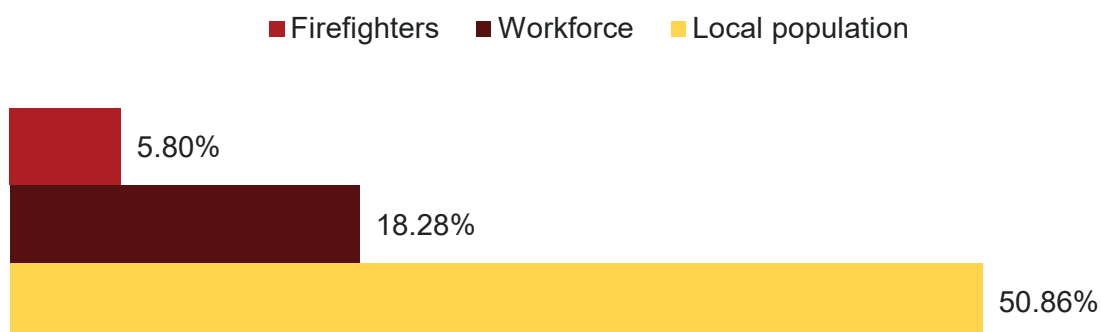




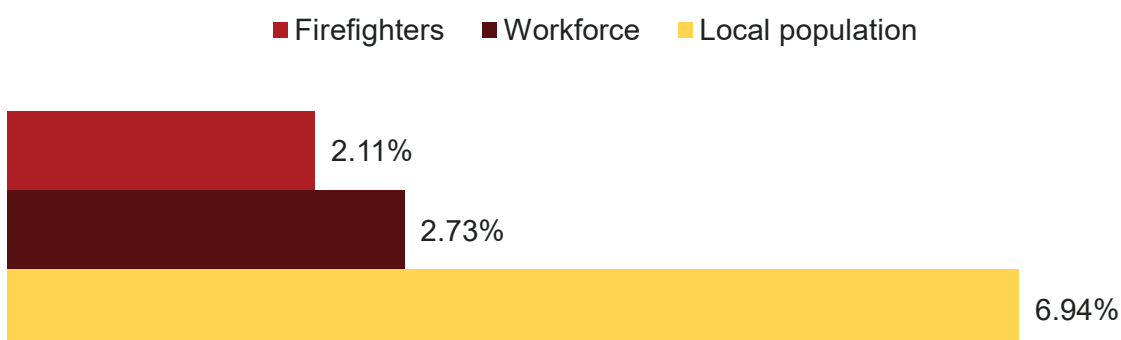
Workforce

	Kent	England
Five-year change in total workforce 2016 to 2021	5.88%	-1.60%
Number of firefighters per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	0.63	0.62
Percentage of firefighters who are wholetime Year ending 31 March 2021	57.5%	64.4%

Percentage of population, firefighters and workforce who are female as at 31 March 2021



Percentage of population, firefighters and workforce who are from ethnic minority backgrounds as at 31 March 2021



For more information on data and analysis throughout this report, please view the [‘About the data’ section of our website](#).

Effectiveness



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



Good

Summary

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

We are pleased to see the progress the service has made in being effective at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks.

We found that the service has a thorough understanding of the risks it faces. It has assessed an appropriate range of risks and threats after a thorough risk management planning process. This is presented in a ten-year customer safety plan. There is a clear risk profile, and the data is reviewed and evaluated annually. When assessing risk, it has considered relevant information collected from a broad range of internal and external sources and data sets. The service has been innovative by developing a process to gather and use risk information in a timely and effective way.

The service's prevention and protection strategies are clearly linked to the risks identified in its risk management process. Prevention activity is clearly prioritised using a risk-based approach towards people most at risk from fire and other emergencies.

The service works well with a wide range of other organisations such as other emergency services, road safety partnerships and various community groups to prevent fires and other emergencies. We found good evidence that it routinely refers people at greatest risk to other organisations which may be better able to meet their needs.

The service's response strategy is linked to the risks identified in its [integrated risk management plan \(IRMP\)](#). It consistently meets its own response standards.

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies



Outstanding (2019: Good)

Kent Fire and Rescue Service is outstanding at understanding risk.

Each fire and rescue service should identify and assess all foreseeable fire and rescue-related risks that could affect its communities. Arrangements should be put in place through the service's prevention, protection and response capabilities to prevent or mitigate these risks for the public.

Innovative practice: The service has developed a process to gather and use risk information in a timely and effective way

The service has been innovative in developing a process to improve the gathering and communication of risk information called 'Response Assessment Visits – Intelligence'. It makes sure that relevant risk information can be gathered and shared with those who need it in all functions of the service. Firefighters can visit premises and upload risk information on portable devices that are carried on fire engines (companion devices). They can make immediate referrals for building safety matters, risk intelligence and [safeguarding](#) and vulnerability issues. Information is efficiently managed and shared throughout the organisation by a central risk information team.

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

The service has a thorough understanding of the risks it faces

The service has assessed an appropriate range of risks and threats after a thorough risk management planning process. This is presented in a ten-year customer safety plan. There is a clear risk profile, and the data is reviewed and evaluated annually.

When assessing risk, it has considered relevant information collected from a broad range of internal and external sources and data sets. The service has a collaboration team that works with diverse communities to determine risk. There is also a business intelligence team which analyses risks using a variety of different sources.

The service regularly consults and undertakes constructive dialogue with communities and others such as local businesses and organisations, elected members and staff to both understand the risk and explain how it intends to mitigate it. This is managed through its safety and well-being plan.

The communications team is actively involved in consulting and working with the public, using a variety of different methods. The service has successfully reached wider communities through relevant social media platforms. It is continually working to improve its methods of establishing, understanding and responding to changing risks.

There is an effective risk management plan

After assessing relevant risks, the service has recorded its findings in an easily understood and well-presented customer safety plan. The plan clearly explains current risk, and future anticipated changes in risk. It describes how prevention, protection and response activity is to be effectively resourced to mitigate or reduce the risks and threats the community faces, both now and in the future. There are six corporate strategies and supporting action plans which clearly direct activity.

Since our last inspection the service has reviewed the number of fire appliances it needs to meet anticipated operational need and has satisfied the previous area for improvement.

The service gathers, maintains and shares a wide range of risk information

The service routinely collects and updates the information it has about the people, places and threats it has identified as being at greatest risk. This includes through a data sharing agreement with members of Kent Integrated Dataset and the Kent Public Service Network.

This information is readily available for the service's prevention, protection and response staff, which helps it to identify, reduce and mitigate risk effectively. For example, the service's risk information can be accessed by operational staff and is routinely shared between teams. Where appropriate, risk information is passed on to other organisations such as neighbouring fire and rescue services. Access to operational risk information through [mobile data terminals](#) has improved since our last inspection and the previous area of improvement has been satisfied.

The service has been innovative in developing a process to improve the gathering and use of risk information called 'Response Assessment Visits – Intelligence'. It makes sure that relevant risk information can be gathered and shared with those who need it in all functions of the service. Firefighters can visit premises and upload risk information on companion devices that are carried on fire engines. They can make immediate referrals for building safety matters, risk intelligence and safeguarding and vulnerability issues. Information is efficiently managed and shared throughout the organisation by a central risk information team.

The service told us it plans to expand the process to include more prevention activity.

The service builds its understanding of risk from operational activity well

The service records and communicates risk information effectively. It also routinely updates risk assessments and uses feedback from local and national operational activity to inform its planning assumptions. For example, during the prevention desktop review that we carried out we found that the service applied learning from its operational activities and from sharing information with response and protection colleagues. A similar review of protection files revealed that risk summaries are created for the benefit of firefighters following fire safety audits.

The service has used learning from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry to reduce risk

During this round of inspections, we sampled how each fire and rescue service has responded to the recommendations and learning from Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.

Kent Fire and Rescue Service has responded positively and proactively to learning from this tragedy. The service had assessed the risk of every high-rise building in its service area by the end of 2021.

It has carried out a fire safety audit and collected and passed relevant risk information to its prevention, protection and response teams about buildings identified as high risk and all high-rise buildings that have cladding similar to the cladding installed on Grenfell Tower.

Preventing fires and other risks



Good (2019: Good)

Kent Fire and Rescue Service is good at preventing fires and other risks.

Fire and rescue services must promote fire safety, including giving fire safety advice. To identify people at greatest risk from fire, services should work closely with other organisations in the public and voluntary sector, and with the police and ambulance services. They should provide [intelligence](#) and risk information with these other organisations when they identify vulnerability or exploitation.

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

The prevention strategy is clearly linked to the service's customer safety plan

The service's prevention strategy is clearly linked to the risks identified in its risk management process.

The service's teams work well together and with other relevant organisations on prevention, and it shares relevant information when needed. Information is used to adjust planning assumptions and direct activity between the service's prevention, protection and response functions. For example, the service works to identify and engage with groups and individuals at higher risk who may not have equitable access to the available services. It makes good use of people impact assessments (PIAs) for this purpose. The service has trained staff to develop an awareness of these issues so they can identify and engage with these groups more effectively.

The service has developed its prevention work well since the pandemic

We considered how the service had adapted its prevention work during our COVID-19 specific inspection in 2020. At that time, we found it had adapted its public prevention work appropriately. Since then, we are encouraged to find that the service has continued to develop its online presence to raise awareness of prevention matters, and benefits from improved working relationships with other organisations, including various charities.

There is a risk-based approach to prevention activity

Prevention activity is clearly prioritised using a risk-based approach towards people most at risk from fire and other emergencies. For example, risk profiles are regularly updated based on relevant information and aligned to the customer service plan. The service takes a person-centred approach and uses evaluation techniques well, including understanding how its work brings about behavioural changes among the public.

The service takes account of a broad range of information and data to target its prevention activity at vulnerable individuals and groups. It holds events to target activity in higher-risk communities using different staff groups effectively. In the year to 31 March 2021, 80 percent of [home fire safety visits \(HFSVs\)](#) were conducted for vulnerable groups of people – higher than the England average of 57 percent. Eighty-three percent of [safe and well visits](#) were carried out for vulnerable groups of people. This is higher than the England average of 58 percent.

It provides a range of interventions that it adapts to the level of risk in its communities. We were told by the service how it actively identifies new and transient communities.

The prevention strategy is well supported by the central communications team and they are involved in many of the service's activities. The service considers the issues that customers face in accessing services and actively works to ensure equality of access, including for online content and recruitment purposes.

Staff are competent to carry out home fire safety visits and safe and well checks

Staff told us they have the right skills and confidence to carry out home fire safety and safe and well visits. The work is allocated as appropriate between operational firefighters, an HFSV task force and the safe and well team. These checks cover an appropriate range of hazards that can put [vulnerable people](#) at greater risk from fire and other emergencies. The service has response standards for its prevention activity based on risk, with timings for making first contact and visiting.

The service responds well to safeguarding concerns

Staff we interviewed told us about occasions when they had identified safeguarding problems and gave us specific examples. They told us they feel confident and trained to act appropriately and promptly.

There is a safeguarding competency framework in place for all staff, who complete mandatory training. The service's e-learning package has also been adopted by two other services.

The service continues to learn from events, such as domestic homicide reviews, safeguarding adult reviews and serious case reviews. These are actioned and monitored through the service's operational learning processes. Since our last inspection the service has also introduced a dedicated safeguarding team.

The service collaborates well with others

The service works well with a wide range of other organisations such as other emergency services, road safety partnership and various community groups to prevent fires and other emergencies.

We found good evidence that it routinely refers people at greatest risk to other organisations which may be better able to meet their needs. These organisations include other members of the community safety partnership. Arrangements are in place to receive referrals from others, including multi-disciplinary health teams who have fire safety criteria in their own assessments. The service acts appropriately on the referrals it receives and prioritises its response based on risk.

The service routinely exchanges information with other public sector organisations about people and groups at greatest risk. It uses the information to challenge planning assumptions and target prevention activity.

Fire-setting behaviour is tackled

The service has a range of suitable and effective interventions to target and educate people of different ages who show signs of fire-setting behaviour. This includes setting up arson task forces to target specific problem areas. The service told us that this had led to a significant reduction in deliberate fire setting.

When appropriate, it routinely shares information with other relevant organisations such as the police and social services to support the prosecution of arsonists. Data is also shared with other organisations to help reduce deliberate fire setting and other [anti-social behaviour](#).

Good evaluation is used to improve services

The service has some good evaluation tools in place. These tools measure how effective its work is so that it knows what works, and its communities get prevention activity that meets their needs. For example, the service has evaluated the effectiveness of its education programmes and adjusted the way it delivers them.

Prevention activities take account of feedback from the public, other organisations, and other parts of the service. Work is routinely quality assured and peer reviewed. The service has used evaluation to provide evidence of behavioural change. It has used the learning well and it has run further campaigns to address specific risks such as kitchen safety and smoking.

Feedback is used by the service to inform its planning assumptions and amend future activity, so it is focused on what the community needs and what works.

Protecting the public through fire regulation



Good (2019: Requires improvement)

Kent Fire and Rescue Service is good at protecting the public through fire regulation.

All 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 it must have a locally determined, risk-based inspection programme (RBIP) 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.

The service has a protection strategy linked to the risk it has identified

We are pleased to see the progress that the service has made with its protection work since our last inspection.

The service's protection strategy is clearly linked to the risk it has identified from its risk management process.

Staff across the service are involved in this activity, with information effectively exchanged as needed. For example, a new database has been set up to share information effectively. Information is then used to adjust planning assumptions and

direct activity between the service's protection, prevention and response functions. This means resources are properly aligned to risk.

Protection work is back on track since the pandemic

We considered how the service had adapted its protection activity during our COVID-19 specific inspection in 2020. At that time, we found it had chosen to adapt its protection work outside national guidance. Since then, we are encouraged to find that the service has reassessed its protection work; it is well planned and resourced, and scheduled audits are on track.

Activity is aligned to risk

The service's RBIP is focused on the service's highest risk buildings. It has been re-written since our last inspection using data from a wide range of internal and external sources. The programme defines high-risk buildings.

The audits we reviewed were completed in the timescales the service has set itself, and in line with its own policies.

The service has carried out fire safety audits at high-rise buildings

The service has carried out audits at all high-rise buildings, including those it has identified as having cladding similar to the type installed on Grenfell Tower. It makes information gathered during these audits available to response teams and control operators, so they can respond more effectively in an emergency. We also found evidence that the service works well and communicates effectively with other agencies and organisations, and responsible persons.

By the end of 2021 it had visited all the high-rise and high-risk buildings identified in its service area.

Fire safety audits are completed to a high standard

We reviewed a range of audits of different types of premises. This included audits:

- which were part of the service's RBIP;
- which were carried out after fires at premises where fire safety legislation applies;
- where enforcement action was taken; and
- at high-rise, high-risk buildings.

The audits we reviewed were mainly completed to a high standard, in a consistent, systematic way. They were in line with the service's policies. But the service should make sure that information from post-incident inspection activity is recorded consistently and is sufficiently detailed.

Protection activity is quality assured

Quality assurance of protection activity takes place in a proportionate way. There are robust processes in place; protection activity is well embedded within the service's systems and is recorded.

The service has good evaluation tools in place to measure the effectiveness of its activity and to make sure all sections of its communities get appropriate access to the protection services that meet their needs.

Enforcement powers are used consistently and appropriately

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

In the year to 31 March 2021, the service issued:

- 3 alteration notices;
- 535 informal notifications;
- 26 enforcement notices;
- 10 prohibition notices; and
- undertook 1 prosecution.

It completed 4 prosecutions in the 5 years from 2016/17 to 2020/21.

Protection work is well resourced

The service has enough qualified protection staff to meet the requirements of its RBIP. The service told us it has increased the number of protection staff from 44 to 73 since 2019. This helps the service to provide the range of audit and enforcement activity needed, both now and in the future.

Staff get the right training and work to appropriate accreditation.

The service works well with other enforcement agencies

The service works closely with other enforcement agencies to regulate fire safety and routinely exchanges risk information with them. It belongs to multiple partnerships, for example with private sector housing groups. The service also works closely with the Environment Agency.

There is a memorandum of understanding in place with local government throughout the county setting out enforcement responsibilities. There is also an agreement in place with the Health and Safety Executive.

Building consultation responses are timely

The service responds to building consultations on time, so consistently meets its statutory responsibility to comment on fire safety arrangements at new and altered buildings. Therefore, the area for improvement from our last inspection has been satisfied.

In 2020/21 the service responded to 97.6 percent of consultations in the required time frame but fell to 85.8 percent during 2021/22 whilst changing to a new system. Since then, the service has reported a response rate of 99.1 percent for January to March 2022, and 99.5 percent for April to June 2022.

The service works well with businesses and other organisations

The service proactively engages with local businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation and it has dedicated business support officers. There is a self-service feature for businesses on its website, where a range of products and guides about fire safety are available. There are also regular webinars which can be viewed live or later.

The service has reduced the number of unwanted fire signals

An effective risk-based approach is in place to manage the number of unwanted fire signals. There are effective response procedures in place and the service actively monitors and supports businesses and responsible persons to manage their premises. It gets fewer calls because of this work. In the year to 31 December 2021, 25.7 percent of incidents in Kent were fire false alarms. This is considerably lower than the national rate of 40.5 percent. Fewer unwanted calls means that fire engines are available to respond to a genuine incident rather than responding to a false one. It also reduces the risk to the public if fewer fire engines travel at high speed on the roads.

Responding to fires and other emergencies



Good (2019: Good)

Kent Fire and Rescue Service is good at responding to fires and other emergencies.

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

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

The service's response is aligned to risk

The service's response strategy is linked to the risks identified in its IRMP. Its fire engines and response staff, as well as its working patterns, are designed and located to help the service to respond flexibly to fires and other emergencies with the appropriate resources. The resourcing model is based on a clear methodology and makes sure the service meets the standards it has set itself.

The service meets its own response standards

There are no national response standards of performance for the public. But the service has set out its own response standards in its customer safety plan. It has set out that it will attend 71 percent of life-threatening calls within 10 minutes.

The service consistently meets its standards. Home Office data shows that in the year to 31 December 2021, the service's response time to [primary fires](#) was 10 minutes and 11 seconds. This is in line with the average for significantly rural services.

The availability of fire engines is closely managed

Since the last inspection the service has reviewed its risk profiles and the number of fire engines it needs. To support its response strategy, the service has a flexible approach to the number of fire engines that it has available at any time. The normal operating range is 32 to 44 engines, and the availability of fire engines is closely managed by a resourcing team. At the time of the inspection, we saw good evidence of the service making additional resources available to match demand during extremely hot weather.

Most staff understand how to command incidents safely

The service has trained incident commanders who are assessed regularly and properly, aligned to [national operational guidance](#). This helps the service to safely, assertively and effectively manage the whole range of incidents that it could face, from small and routine ones to complex multi-agency incidents.

As part of our inspection, we interviewed incident commanders from across the service. Most incident commanders we interviewed are 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 \(JESIP\)](#). During our last inspection we found that some incident commanders did not understand [operational discretion](#). We were pleased to find that this area for improvement has now been addressed. All incident commanders who we asked had a good understanding of operational discretion and felt that they would be supported by the service in using it.

However, we were disappointed to find that some level one incident commanders lacked a good understanding of decision-making models, and how to apply them. The service should make sure this is addressed.

Control is involved in wider service activities

We are pleased to see the service's control staff integrated into the service's command, training, exercise, debrief and assurance activity. Staff told us that they are included in service-wide debriefing. We also found evidence of some control staff attending exercises with firefighters.

The service should make sure it can handle multiple fire survival guidance calls

Not all control room staff we interviewed were confident they could provide fire survival guidance to many callers simultaneously. This was identified as learning for fire services after the Grenfell Tower fire. Staff told us that they had received some training but the service plans to do more.

Control has systems in place, including a 'persons at risk' spreadsheet, to exchange real-time risk information with incident commanders, other responding partners and other supporting fire and rescue services. Maintaining good situational awareness helps the service to communicate effectively with the public, providing them with accurate and tailored advice. The service doesn't currently have a 'control buddy' (another fire and rescue service that can support it with its control function) and it should assure itself that it can handle a high number of multiple simultaneous calls effectively.

The service is good at managing risk information

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

The information we reviewed was up to date and detailed. It could be easily accessed and understood by staff, including in control. Encouragingly, it had been completed with input from the service's prevention, protection and response functions when appropriate. The service has improved access to risk information for firefighters since our last inspection, with more reliable mobile data terminals and newer companion devices on fire engines.

The service is good at evaluating operational performance

As part of the inspection, we reviewed a range of emergency incidents and training events.

We are pleased to see the service routinely follows its policies to assure itself that staff command incidents in line with operational guidance. Internal risk information is updated with the information received. 'Hot' debriefs are carried out routinely after incidents and the service carries out formal structured debriefs later. There was good evidence of operational learning being used to make changes, including the use of an action tracker. Where relevant, this information is exchanged with interested partners such as other fire and rescue services.

The service has responded to learning from incidents to improve its service for the public. It uses learning from incidents to evaluate customer outcomes as part of the customer safety plan. Operational assurance processes have been identified as good practice by the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#).

We are encouraged to see the service is contributing towards, and acting on, learning from other fire and rescue services or operational learning gathered from other emergency service partners. This includes chairing the regional fire and rescue service group meetings where learning is shared, and recent examples were given by staff including [near misses](#) involving hydrants.

The service is good at communicating information about incidents to the public

The service has good systems in place to inform the public about ongoing incidents and to help keep them safe during and after incidents. It uses a range of social media platforms, as well as traditional press releases. The intranet and internet sites are both accessible and use accessibility tools to good effect.

Kent Fire and Rescue Service has good communication arrangements with other organisations throughout the county. For example, working with and hosting on its estate the [local resilience forum](#) on warning and informing the public.

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents



Good (2019: Good)

Kent Fire and Rescue Service is good at responding to major and multi-agency incidents.

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

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

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. These risks are listed in both local and national risk registers as part of its integrated risk management planning. We found evidence that it works with other members of the Kent Resilience Forum to establish and assess local risks and produce multi-agency response plans.

It is also familiar with the significant risks that could be faced by neighbouring fire and rescue services that it might reasonably be asked to respond to in an emergency. There are memorandums of understanding in place with these. Firefighters have access to risk information from neighbouring services through mobile data terminals and companion devices.

We reviewed the arrangements the service has in place to respond to different major incidents, including for high-rise, wide-area flooding and marauding terrorist attack incidents.

The service has good arrangements in place, which are well understood by staff. In addition to the specialist response team, all firefighters are trained to respond to marauding terrorist attack-type incidents. However, some staff felt they would benefit from more practical training and the opportunity to be involved in the service's major incident exercises.

The service works well with other fire and rescue services

The service supports other fire and rescue services responding to emergency incidents. It is intraoperable with these services and can form part of a multi-agency response. This includes having emergency plans in place with fire service counterparts in France for the Channel Tunnel, and maritime response plans in place with France, Holland and Belgium.

The service understands how to deploy to other services and use national assets itself.

Cross-border and multi-agency exercising isn't consistent

We found evidence during the inspection that opportunities for staff to take part in cross-border exercising could be improved. Sixty-seven percent (227 out of 341) of respondents to our staff survey told us they have not participated in training with other neighbouring services in the past 12 months.

The service acknowledges this and has recently reviewed and is strengthening its arrangements with neighbouring services. Similarly, 53 percent (180 out of 341) of respondents to our staff survey told us they have not participated in training with other agencies in the past 12 months, and this too should be addressed. It should also continue to make sure that learning from exercising is used to inform risk information and service plans.

Incident commanders have been trained in JESIP

The incident commanders we interviewed had been trained in and were familiar with JESIP. We found that most incident commanders were confident in their knowledge of JESIP, although some staff told us that they hadn't done practical training or exercising.

The service could provide us with strong evidence that it consistently follows these principles.

It also showed it had participated effectively in the local resilience forum during the pandemic.

The service works well with partners

The service has good arrangements in place to respond to emergencies with other partners that make up the Kent Resilience Forum. The service has two emergency planners on the forum, which creates multi-agency response plans for different risks.

The service is a valued partner in the forum and is integral to the different groups within it. It takes part in regular training events with other members of the local resilience forum and uses the learning to develop planning assumptions about responding to major and multi-agency incidents. This includes at multiple sites in Kent.

The service uses national learning

The service keeps itself up to date with [national operational learning](#) updates from other fire services and [joint organisational learning](#) from other emergency organisations, such as the police service and ambulance trusts. This learning is used to inform planning assumptions that have been made with other partners.

Efficiency



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



Outstanding

Summary

An efficient fire and rescue service will manage its budget and use its resources properly and appropriately. It will align its resources to the risks and priorities identified in its [integrated risk management plan \(IRMP\)](#). It should try to achieve value for money and keep costs down without compromising public safety. It should make the best possible use of its resources to achieve better results for the public. Plans should be based on robust and realistic assumptions about income and costs. Kent Fire and Rescue Service's overall efficiency is outstanding.

We are pleased to find that the service is outstanding in the way that it uses its resources and manages its budgets to provide an efficient fire and rescue service for the public.

The service has set clear priorities for the use of its resources, and it has well-structured risk-based plans. It knows what it wants to achieve based on a thorough understanding of risk. The service has explained its objectives and priorities very clearly in a set of well-presented strategies which are fully aligned with its customer safety plan. The service adapts well to change and has a range of measures to make sure that its workforce is productive.

The service has robust plans to address financial challenges. It has used a wide range of information to develop a sound understanding of future financial challenges, including for funding, cost pressures and budget management. It has detailed plans to mitigate its major financial risks.

Since our last inspection in 2019 the service has improved how it monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and outcomes of its collaborations. We were particularly pleased to see the efforts that the service has made to make savings, collaborating

well with others, and how it contributes nationally through its lead role with the National Procurement Hub.

Making best use of resources



Outstanding (2019: Good)

Kent Fire and Rescue Service is outstanding at making best use of its resources.

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

The service's net revenue budget requirement for 2022/23 is £77.429m. This is an increase from £71.573m in the previous financial year.

Promising practice: The service has excellent procurement arrangements

We found that the service has a deep understanding of procurement arrangements and makes excellent use of them, all underpinned by strong leadership.

It has a detailed and well-presented Commercial and Procurement Strategy 2021–25, aligned to the customer safety plan. The strategy gives direction for procurement and commercial matters. This includes access to market intelligence for supporting business cases and decision-making. The service takes a category management approach to purchasing (grouping related products) to improve supplier performance, reduce risk and promote innovation and continuous improvement.

Procurement performance is monitored and measured to promote continuous improvement. There are clear, logical and measurable objectives to assess against, including for wider impacts such as inclusion, social value, and modern slavery.

The service has played a lead role supporting and developing the National Procurement Hub framework, making very effective use of its resources. The hub tracks savings nationally. The service itself has saved £4.7m since 2017.

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

The service has set clear priorities for the use of its resources, and it has well-structured risk-based plans

The service knows what it wants to achieve based on a thorough understanding of risk. It is explained very clearly in a set of well-presented strategies which are fully aligned with its customer safety plan. It has developed four areas which support all its strategies. These are:

- operational excellence;
- inclusion;
- well-being; and
- efficiency and value for money

It regularly reviews how it provides services and makes changes when needed. Successful changes since our last inspection include:

- a wide-ranging restructure including creating a new customer safety and building safety teams supported by a reallocation of resources;
- the creation of a collaboration team, ensuring activities are carried out efficiently, with benefits tracked and monitored;
- the creation of a customer experience and behaviour change team to support the development of safety programmes by using customer insight and research;
- a reorganisation of operational groups to improve efficiency and productivity;
- establishing a risk information team to improve the accuracy, consistency and availability of risk information throughout the service;
- fleet – the introduction of 11 hybrid vehicles, and a further commitment that by 2030, 75 percent of pool cars, vans and maintenance vehicles will be ultra-low emission or hybrid; the introduction of telemetry to manage mileage and engine idling for efficiency; and the purchase of new response cars in collaboration with the police; and
- full alignment of all operational policies to [national operational guidance](#).

We found strong evidence that it is providing the services it has promised it will. The service makes excellent use of its resources to achieve this. Its financial and workforce plans, including allocating staff to prevention, protection and response, continue to reflect and are consistent with the risks and priorities it has identified. For example, the service has increased the number of protection staff to make sure that audits are completed, and it is able to cope with an increased workload from changes in legislation. The overarching capital strategy supports the service in achieving its objectives through investment and development in areas such as estates, fleet and IT.

Plans are built on sound scenarios. They help make sure the service is sustainable and are underpinned by financial controls that reduce the risk of misusing public

money. For example, uncertainties with the capital programme caused by external factors such as supply chain issues are managed and mitigated by close working between the finance team and budget holders. The corporate management board provides effective strategic oversight. And the fire authority, which has a separate audit and governance committee for more detailed focus, also provides oversight.

The service has introduced a range of measures to make sure its workforce is productive

We are pleased to see that the service's arrangements for managing performance clearly link resource use to the customer safety plan and service's strategic priorities. The service continues to take steps to make sure the workforce's time is as productive as possible. This includes implementing new ways of working.

The service has policies in place to allow staff to work more flexibly and continues to operate a flexi-rostering system. This helps control and station staff to manage their own working patterns. Control and each station have a station leader, at [watch](#) manager level, who is responsible for planning work routines. More flexible arrangements for [on-call](#) staff have also been introduced. Firefighters understand risk in their local areas, and the service provides good access to information. This helps with station planning and the allocation of activities. Training is also well planned and organised through an online platform.

Since the last inspection the service has reviewed its risk profiles and the number of fire engines it needs. The availability of fire engines is actively managed. It has a flexible approach to the number of fire engines it has available at any time, with a normal operating range of 32–44. It can stand resources up or down to match demand by making use of a strategic reserve. It uses on-call firefighters flexibly, including at times [mobilising](#) some fire engines with a crew of three.

Capacity can be maximised because of the low number of fire false alarms that the service attends. In the year to 31 December 2021, 25.7 percent of incidents in Kent were fire false alarms. This is much lower than the national rate of 40.5 percent. The service uses its capacity productively to co-respond with the ambulance service. During our inspection, we learnt that 55.5 percent (10,334 out of 18,624) of incidents the service attends are to non-fire incidents. Across England, 33.0 percent of all incidents attended are to non-fire incidents. The service told us that over 30 percent of its total calls are co-responding with the ambulance service, and that around 52 percent of its operational workforce are contracted to do co-responding.

The service hasn't yet identified the contribution it will make towards the national productivity target (using an extra 3 percent of national [wholetime firefighter](#) capacity to carry out additional prevention and protection work). However, the service understands and makes good use of the capacity it currently has available, directing resources to risk-based priorities. And it carries out [HFSVs](#) and [safe and well visits](#) above the England average rate per 1,000 population. The service makes good use of

key performance indicators and other data to evaluate and monitor the success of its objectives, and the data is passed to the corporate management board and the fire authority for scrutiny.

Since our last inspection there has been a restructuring of the service's operational response and resilience teams to a functional leadership model. Under this system middle managers are responsible for specific functions throughout the service, such as leadership, operational performance and professional standards, rather than managing by geographical areas. Staff, including station leaders, feel better supported and empowered to be more productive within their roles.

Technology is also used to increase productivity. For example, technology is being used to track vehicles and reduce the number of movements around the county.

The service had to adapt its working practices because of the pandemic, and these are still part of its day-to-day activity. It continues to support office-based staff to do hybrid working. It also has objectives in its Business Change, Information and Technology Strategy to allow mobile working through improving IT capabilities.

The service works well with others and has made savings

We are encouraged to see the improvements the service has made since the last inspection, making good progress against the previous area for improvement regarding monitoring, reviewing and evaluating the benefits and outcomes of collaboration.

The service meets its statutory duty to collaborate, and routinely considers opportunities to collaborate with other emergency responders. This includes in areas such as estates, joint operational working and procurement. Examples of collaboration include purchasing response cars and sharing premises with other services such as the police and a local voluntary organisation, and sharing a data centre with other local services. The service has regular regional meetings with other organisations to explore other collaborations and joint working opportunities. Recent areas identified for consideration include IT and better use of office space, as well as achieving its social value objectives through a range of initiatives.

Collaborative work is aligned to the priorities in the service's customer safety plan. For example, there is a commitment to continue to work with other organisations to carry out joint procurement. The service comprehensively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and results of its collaborations. This includes a benefits tracker for partnership working to evaluate if it is providing value for money and is aligned to the service's strategies.

Collaborative procurement projects are assessed and [benchmarked](#) against existing arrangements to ensure best value. Since 2017, the service has made collaborative savings of £4.7m.

The service has excellent procurement arrangements and leads the national framework arrangements

We found that the service has a deep understanding of procurement arrangements and makes excellent use of them, all underpinned by strong leadership.

It has a detailed and well-presented Commercial and Procurement Strategy 2021–25, aligned to the customer safety plan. The strategy gives direction for procurement and commercial matters. This includes using market intelligence to support business cases and decision-making. The service takes a category management approach to purchasing (grouping related products) to improve supplier performance, reduce risk and drive innovation and continuous improvement.

Procurement performance is monitored and measured to ensure continuous improvement. There are clear, logical, and measurable objectives to assess against, including for wider impacts such as inclusion, social value, and modern slavery.

The service has played a lead role supporting and developing the National Procurement Hub framework. It makes very effective use of its resources to get value for money nationally through economies of scale. There is a national cross-service annual spend with third party suppliers of over £500m, and savings of £53.6m have been made since 2016.

The service has good continuity arrangements in place

The service has good continuity arrangements in place for areas where threats and risks are considered high. These threats and risks are regularly reviewed and tested so that staff are aware of the arrangements and their associated responsibilities. This includes testing control systems, cybersecurity and the potential for industrial action by staff.

The service shows sound financial management and value for money

There are regular reviews to consider all the service's expenditure, including its non-pay costs. And this scrutiny makes sure the service gets value for money. For example, the Environment and Assets Strategy 2021–25 has made managing contracts and suppliers a priority with clear measurable objectives. There are key performance indicators linked to estates contracts. This is managed by the estates team and reported monthly to the corporate management board.

The service has made savings and efficiencies, which haven't affected its operational performance and the service it provides to the public. For example, it has made savings by reducing the number of posts in the central training team and it is using station-based staff as trainers.

The service is taking steps to make sure important areas, including estates, fleet and procurement, are well placed to achieve efficiency gains through sound financial management and best working practices. This includes the savings that the service

has made using national framework contracts, such as for smoke alarms and personal protective equipment. The telematics in all vehicles and CCTV installed on fire engines has resulted in a base saving of £60,000 from insurance costs and better information to manage the fleet. The service uses the information well to improve driving styles, reduce fuel consumption and support overall decision-making.

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



Outstanding (2019: Good)

Kent Fire and Rescue Service is outstanding at making the service affordable now and in the future.

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

Innovative practice: The presentation, clarity, and purpose of the service's plans is excellent

The service knows what it wants to achieve based upon a thorough understanding of risk. It is explained very clearly in a set of well-presented strategies which are fully aligned with its customer safety plan.

The service's plans are built on sound planning assumptions. They are subject to informed challenge and meet financial requirements. It understands the likely financial challenges it will face in the future. The service also has a plan for using [reserves](#) effectively, in a sensible and sustainable way.

The strategies relating to estates, IT, fleet and procurement all clearly underpin the customer safety plan. Staff with responsibilities for strategies understand the priorities and objectives of their own areas of work and understand the interdependencies with others. There is a clear corporate approach with an appreciation that the strategies can't be carried out in isolation from one another.

Objectives are underpinned by performance measures and the service understands the need to evaluate.

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

The service has robust plans to address financial challenges

The service has used a wide range of information to develop a sound understanding of future financial challenges, including for funding, cost pressures and budget management. It has detailed plans to mitigate its main or significant financial risks. The financial plan sets out those risks and actions to mitigate them. It includes moving to a longer ten-year capital programme to minimise the revenue budget impact and provide longer-term stability.

The underpinning assumptions are relatively robust, realistic and prudent, and take account of the wider external environment and some scenario planning for future spending reductions. These include for inflation, pay awards and pension arrangements.

Reserves are well managed and support financial security and future ambition. The service reviews and updates its reserves strategy annually. Its budget strategy details the use of reserves, including those earmarked for specific expenditure or liabilities.

Earmarked revenue reserves include funding allocated for transformation and productivity improvements. They are set aside as one-off funding for transformation initiatives, service improvements and collaboration opportunities that may arise during the year. Previous uses of these reserves have been to buy in project managers, commissioning work with a university, and funding a risk data project. Other earmarked reserves include those for holding government grant funding, infrastructure, insurance and contingencies, and a rolling budget to carry over funds for committed expenditure to the next year.

We are pleased to see that the service has identified savings and investment opportunities to improve the service to the public or generate further savings. This includes allocating £1.77m for the restructuring and the generation of additional posts in several teams, including operational response, building safety, customer safety, people and learning, finance and procurement. The service is also planning to invest heavily in IT systems and infrastructure, with a combined capital and revenue spend of £3.724m in 2022/23. Plans include improving the joint control facility with the police as part of the revenue programme, and future station developments in the capital programme of £4.66m in 2022/23 and total of £15.74m up to 2026.

A recent external audit highlighted the service's strong financial planning and budget management, and its history of making savings. The service has taken a lead role supporting and developing the National Procurement Hub framework, with national cross-service savings of £53.6m since 2016. Since 2017 the service has made its own savings of £4.7m through effective and efficient procurement practice. Annual savings are well managed. Pay savings of £667,000 and non-pay savings of £1.102m have been identified for 2022/23. Non-pay savings include £241,000 identified from a review of existing revenue budgets with managers.

Fleet and estates strategies clearly support the customer safety plan

The service's estate and fleet strategies have clear links to the customer safety plan. Interdependencies are understood throughout the organisation and there is a common strategic approach, with teams working closely together rather than in silos. For example, this was apparent with the carbon neutrality commitment which requires co-ordination between different departments.

Strategies exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness. Key objectives for estates include a programme of refurbishment, minimising contaminants and supporting equality, diversity and inclusion by improving facilities on fire stations. A venue at Ashford is being redeveloped to improve live fire facilities there. And the service has plans for the new shared control facility with the police. Fleet plans include a more efficient system for servicing vehicles. The service is working well and sharing information with other organisations to achieve this, including the ambulance service and county council.

Strategies are regularly reviewed so the service can properly assess the effect any changes in estate and fleet provision or future innovation have on risk. We were pleased to find that objectives are supported by performance measures and the service recognises the importance of evaluation. For example, it is evaluating the fleet technology it has used to make savings and increase productivity. It intends to find further efficiencies and create more savings.

The service invests in technology and transforms to improve efficiency

The service actively considers how changes in technology and future innovation may affect risk. Its Business Change, Information and Technology Strategy 2021–25 sets out a programme of work. It has a planned combined capital and revenue spend for IT systems and infrastructure of £3.724m in 2022/23. It seeks to exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness presented by changes in technology. There are detailed objectives underpinned by performance measures. The service has plans to simplify its processes and make sure staff have the right devices and secure systems to do their work. For example, planned investment in better systems for workforce planning and asset management will improve efficiency and productivity.

The service collaborates with others to improve efficiency, including supporting the re-procurement of the wide area network in conjunction with the county council and other relevant organisations.

The service has put in place the capacity and capability needed to achieve sustainable transformation, and it routinely seeks opportunities to work with others to improve efficiency and provide better services in the future. Transformational projects are well managed and resourced, with strategies supported by action plans.

The service explores income-generating activities

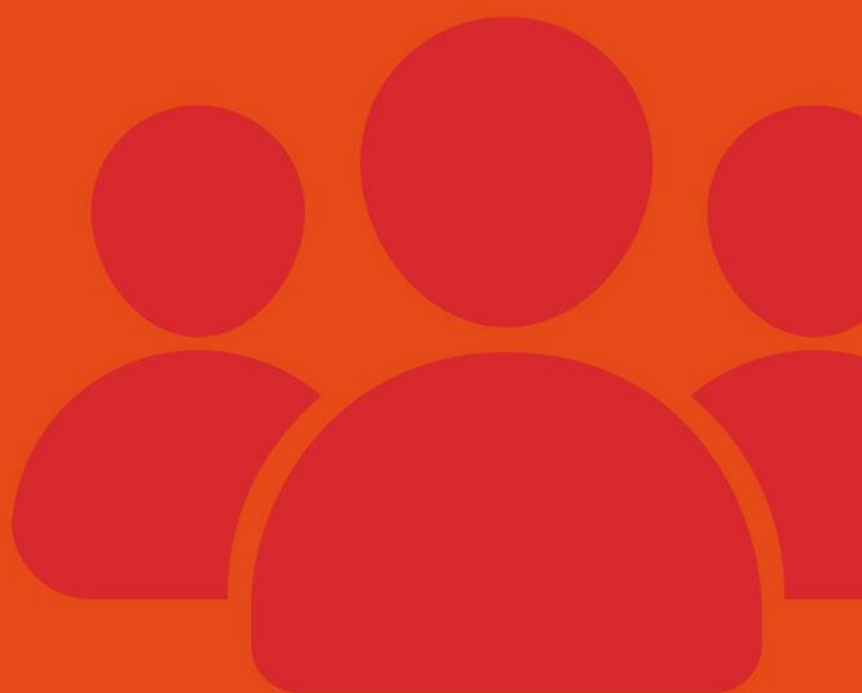
The service actively considers and exploits opportunities for generating extra income.

Where appropriate, it has secured external funding to invest in improvements to the service provided to the public. These include using the uplift grant to build resilience for protection work. And it has sought government grant aid to help with the ongoing commitment towards carbon neutrality by 2030.

The service has a paid arrangement to provide a dedicated response to the Channel Tunnel for an agreed level of service with the company.

The service has considered options for generating income through commercial trading but has decided not to take them further.

People



How well does the service look after its people?



Good

Summary

A well-led fire and rescue service develops and maintains a workforce that is supported, professional, resilient, skilled, flexible and diverse. The service's leaders should be positive role models, and this should be reflected in the behaviour of staff at all levels. All staff should feel supported and be given opportunities to develop. Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) is part of everything the service does and its staff understand their role in promoting it. Overall, Kent Fire and Rescue Service is good at looking after its people.

We are pleased to see the improvements the service has continued to make in looking after its people.

We found that the service is outstanding at promoting the right values and culture. Senior leaders embody a positive vision for the culture of the service, and staff described a working environment with positive behaviours firmly in place, that are accepted, demonstrated and understood throughout the organisation. We found good practice in how it has used and incorporated the national [Core Code of Ethics](#).

Mental and physical health and well-being is a priority. The service has a range of measures to support staff. It makes good use of a defusing tracker as a tool to determine where additional support might be needed.

The service now has a system to record and monitor operational staff competence which is accurate and accessible. And all staff have access to a range of learning and development opportunities.

The service has put considerable effort into developing its recruitment processes so that they are fair and understood by potential applicants. It makes good use of PIAs to understand equality issues and take appropriate actions to address them.

Promoting the right values and culture



Outstanding (2019: Good)

Kent Fire and Rescue Service is outstanding at promoting the right values and culture.

Fire and rescue services should have positive and inclusive cultures, modelled by the behaviours of their senior leaders. Health and safety should be promoted effectively, and staff should have access to a range of well-being support that can be tailored to their individual needs.

Promising practice: The national Core Code of Ethics has been added to support the positive culture

The new national Core Code of Ethics has been incorporated into the service's 'Code of Ethical Conduct' which has been signed by all staff, and a 'Senior Code' which members of the senior leadership team have signed up to. A set of behavioural expectations are laid out in a 'Customer Promise' and 'Promise to Each Other'. The cohesion was apparent during our inspection and staff gave positive accounts, such as people being respectful of each other and feeling looked after by the service.

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

Senior leaders have a clear vision for the service's culture

Senior leaders act as role models and are visible. They have a clear vision for the service's culture, and lead by example. Staff described a working environment with positive behaviours firmly in place that are accepted, demonstrated and understood throughout the organisation.

The service goes beyond having well-defined values and focuses further on understanding the lived experience of the staff. Of staff who responded to our survey, 94 percent (524 out of 560) stated they were aware of the service's statement of values. Behaviours that reflect service expectations are shown at all levels of the service.

We are pleased with other cultural improvements the service has made, including a restructure of managerial responsibilities. The new national Core Code of Ethics has been incorporated into the service's 'Code of Ethical Conduct' which has been signed by all staff, and a 'Senior Code' which members of the senior leadership team have signed up to. A set of behavioural expectations are laid out in documents called a

'Customer Promise' and 'Promise to Each Other'. The cohesion was apparent during our inspection and staff gave positive accounts of people being respectful of each other and feeling looked after by the service.

There is a positive working culture throughout the service, with staff empowered and willing to challenge poor behaviours when they encounter them. We were told of people treating each other well.

Mental and physical health and well-being is a priority

Well-being is a service priority and is well managed. The service continues to have well-understood and effective well-being policies in place that are available to staff. A significant range of well-being support is available for both physical and mental health. For example, the service has an employee assistance programme which is accessible 24 hours a day. It also gives support to staff who attend traumatic incidents, and exposure is closely monitored by the service. It makes good use of a defusing tracker to determine where additional support might be needed.

There are many good provisions in place to promote staff well-being. This includes mental health first aiders, an intranet well-being zone and well-being officers. Ninety-one percent (511 out of 560) of respondents to our staff survey told us they have had a conversation about their health and well-being with their manager, and 96 percent (538 out of 560) of respondents told us they feel able to access services to support their mental well-being. Most staff reported they understand and have confidence in the well-being support processes available.

The service has a strong health and safety culture

The service continues to have effective and well understood health and safety policies and procedures in place. This includes a robust system of reporting and monitoring. [Near misses](#) can be recorded through the accident reporting process or anonymously with the operational learning tracker. Qualified staff in a central team lead the function.

Policies and procedures are readily available and effectively promoted to all staff. These include guidance on working alone (both lone working and at home) and fitness testing. Ninety-five percent (532 out of 560) of staff survey respondents told us they have the appropriate and properly fitting personal protective equipment they need to do their job safely. The service should make sure that all female firefighters have appropriately fitting personal protective equipment, including firefighting gloves. Both staff and representative bodies have confidence in the health and safety approach taken by the service.

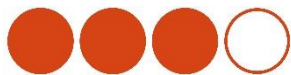
The service monitors staff who have secondary employment or dual contracts to make sure they comply with the secondary employment policy and don't work excessive hours. This is managed using a Working Time policy both centrally and by individuals.

Absence is well managed

As part of our inspection, we reviewed some case files to consider how the service manages and supports staff through absence including sickness, parental and special leave.

The latest Supporting Attendance at Work policy was implemented in January 2022, having been reviewed after an internal audit. We found there are clear processes in place to manage absences for all staff. There is clear guidance and support for managers, who are confident in the process. Absences are managed well and in accordance with policy. Trends are monitored and reported, and there is corporate oversight. We were told how the service has taken action to improve specific issues, including stress and mental health. It reports a reduction in the percentage of occupational health referrals for mental health issues from 24 percent of the total number in 2019 to 14 percent in 2021.

Getting the right people with the right skills



Good (2019: Requires improvement)

Kent Fire and Rescue Service is good at getting the right people with the right skills.

Fire and rescue services should have a workforce plan in place that is linked to their [integrated risk management plans \(IRMPs\)](#), sets out their current and future skills requirements and addresses capability gaps. They should supplement this with a culture of continuous improvement that includes appropriate learning and development throughout the service.

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

The service understands what skills and capabilities are needed

The service has good workforce planning in place. This makes sure skills and capabilities align with what is needed to effectively deliver the priorities set out in the customer safety plan. Training is aligned to [national operational guidance](#) and syllabuses of the Institution of Fire Engineers for professional accreditation of skills. Protection staff competence aligns to the national framework.

Workforce and succession planning is subject to consistent scrutiny in the form of regular meetings to discuss requirements. This is led by a workforce planning group who review current skills and capabilities against anticipated vacancies.

Most staff told us that they could access the training they need to be effective in their role. The service's training plans make sure they can maintain competence and capability effectively. The service has addressed the area for improvement in the last inspection and has a system to record and monitor operational staff competence which is accurate and accessible.

The service monitors staff competence by monthly assessments and reviewing risk-critical skills on a central recording system. It regularly updates its understanding of staff's skills and risk-critical safety capabilities through a response assurance framework and regular review of records. This approach means the service can identify gaps in workforce capabilities and resilience and can make sound and financially sustainable decisions about current and future needs.

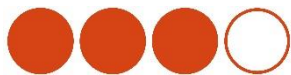
There is a culture of learning and development

A culture of continuous improvements is promoted throughout the service and staff are encouraged to learn and develop. This includes learning from operational activity through its debriefing and assurance processes. All staff have access to a range of learning and development opportunities including courses on an external online platform. There is a bursary scheme which staff can apply for funding for additional qualifications.

We are pleased to see that the service has a range of resources in place. These include mobile trainers who can help with station-based training sessions. The service has worked hard to raise awareness of issues such as well-being, mental health and inclusion. For example, it runs ethical dilemma workshops. The training and support in place for staff who need to carry out PIAs is thorough.

Staff told us that they can access a range of learning and development resources. This includes online modules on the service's own training platform. Non-operational staff are supported in [continuing professional development](#). This allows them to do their job effectively.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity



Good (2019: Good)

Kent Fire and Rescue Service is good at ensuring fairness and promoting diversity.

Creating a more representative workforce will provide huge benefits for fire and rescue services. This includes greater access to talent and different ways of thinking, and improved understanding of and engagement with their local communities. Each service should make sure that EDI is firmly understood and demonstrated throughout the organisation. This includes successfully taking steps to remove inequality and making progress to improve fairness, diversity and inclusion at all levels

of the service. It should proactively seek and respond to feedback from staff and make sure any action taken is meaningful.

Promising practice: The service has introduced a neurodiversity passport to reduce the burden on individuals who need reasonable adjustments

The service applies reasonable adjustments to all pre-planned learning and assessment processes using a neurodiversity passport. This means staff can access support without the need for the individual to make multiple requests. Staff feel more included now because of the adaptations the service has made.

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

The service continues to seek and act on staff feedback and challenge

Since our last inspection the service has reviewed all internal communications. It has developed several ways to engage with staff on issues and decisions that affect them. This includes methods to build all-staff awareness of fairness and diversity, as well as targeted engagement to identify matters that affect different staff groups. Senior leaders regularly visit fire stations and staff told us leaders are open and inclusive.

The actions being taken to address matters raised have been positively received by staff. There is an action tracker so staff can see progress on issues they have raised and the changes that are made. Representative bodies and staff associations reported that the service engages with them well. Staff also told us they feel a sense of inclusion and belonging.

There are processes in place to tackle bullying, harassment and discrimination

Staff have a good understanding of what bullying, harassment and discrimination are and their negative effect on colleagues and the organisation. This has been reinforced by visits to all stations and teams by senior management to raise awareness of the authority's public sector equality duty and EDI issues more generally. All new staff have induction training on the service's approach to bullying and harassment, and EDI.

In this inspection, 7 percent (41 out of 560) of respondents to our survey told us they felt bullied or harassed at work in the last 12 months, and 11 percent (62 out of 560) of respondents told us they felt discriminated against at work in the last 12 months.

Most staff are confident in the service's approach to tackling bullying, harassment and discrimination, grievances and disciplinary matters. Policies and procedures are available on the intranet and the service has made sure all staff are trained and clear about what to do if they encounter inappropriate behaviour.

The service is working to address disproportionality in recruitment and retention

There is an open, fair and honest recruitment process for staff or those wishing to work for the fire and rescue service. The service has an effective system to understand and remove the risk of disproportionality in recruitment processes. For example, staff support groups and firefighters are involved in raising awareness about the service in the community. The service collects and monitors an array of recruitment data so it can understand and manage any disproportionality in its processes, including those that relate to [protected characteristics](#).

The service has put considerable effort into developing its recruitment processes so that they are fair and understood by potential applicants. It makes good use of PIAs to understand equality issues and create appropriate actions to address them. The recruitment policies are comprehensive and cover opportunities in all roles. Recruitment opportunities are advertised both internally and externally, which has encouraged applicants from diverse backgrounds, including into middle and senior management roles.

The service has made some improvements in increasing staff diversity at all levels of the organisation. The proportion of firefighters from an ethnic minority group has increased from 1.3 percent in 2017/18 to 2.1 percent in 2020/21. This is due to a small increase in the number of firefighters from an ethnic minority background following recent recruitment activity. Similarly, the proportion of female firefighters has increased from 4.9 percent to 5.8 percent over the same time, due to a small increase in the number of female firefighters.

For the whole workforce, as of 31 March 2021, 2.7 percent were from an ethnic minority background and 18.3 percent were women. Across England, 5.3 percent of FRS staff are from an ethnic minority background and 17.9 percent are women. A high proportion (19.4 percent) of the workforce chose not to state their ethnicity, compared to 8.9 percent across England. The service acknowledges this and has made efforts to encourage those staff to declare the information.

The service has acted positively to improve diversity. For example, it carries out positive action such as holding information events for specific groups and targets people from more diverse areas through research-based marketing. It uses inclusive literature and imagery. The service knows it needs to go further to increase workforce diversity. Plans to address this are in place. These include, using its collaboration team to create opportunities to engage with community groups, targeted social media and increasing the involvement of station-based staff in positive action.

Equality, diversity and inclusion are strategic priorities

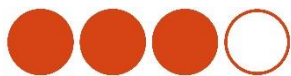
The service continues to improve its approach to EDI and is making sure it can offer the right services to its communities and support staff with protected characteristics. We found this to be a strategic priority and staff are supported to take a 'customer centric' approach. The service engages well with external and internal networks.

The service is good at understanding the diverse needs of its workforce and provides reasonable adjustments when necessary. This is supported by robust policies. For example, it has created a specific focus on and awareness of issues faced by staff, including those who identify as neurodiverse and LGBTQ+.

The service has developed good practice to reduce the burden on staff who require reasonable adjustments. It has recently introduced a neurodiversity passport so reasonable adjustments are applied to all pre-planned learning and assessment processes without the need for the individual to make multiple requests.

It has an effective process in place to assess equality impact and acts as needed to improve equality. PIAs are consistently completed and staff have training and support in this area. Actions from PIAs are centrally monitored.

Managing performance and developing leaders



Good (2019: Good)

Kent Fire and Rescue Service is good at managing performance and developing leaders.

Fire and rescue services should have robust and meaningful performance management arrangements in place for their staff. All staff should be supported to meet their potential, and there should be a focus on developing staff and improving diversity into leadership roles.

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

Individual performance is effectively managed and developed

There is a good performance management system in place which allows the service to effectively develop and assess and the individual performance of all staff. It has introduced a talent bench review to establish readiness and potential for promotion.

All staff are expected to have open dialogue with line managers through ongoing conversations, moving away from the previous appraisal process. Through our staff survey, most staff reported that they have received regular discussions with their manager and that they were meaningful. Two percent (10 out of 560) of respondents

told us that they have never had a conversation about their performance with their manager and 20 percent (110 out of 560) have not had a personal development review or appraisal in the last 12 months. Of these 110, 20 percent (22 out of 110) were [wholetime](#), 14 percent (15 out of 110) were [on-call](#), 60 percent (66 out of 110) were support staff and 6 percent (7 out of 110) were other members of staff.

Promotion and progression processes are fair and transparent

The service has put considerable effort into developing its promotion and progression processes so that they are fair and understood by staff. Staff who are involved in interview panels during promotion processes receive training for this. The promotion and progression policies are comprehensive and cover opportunities in all roles.

The service has effective succession planning processes in place that allow it to effectively manage the career pathways of its staff, including roles requiring specialist skills. This is managed through the workforce planning board, which meets regularly.

Selection processes are managed consistently in line with policy. Temporary promotions are used appropriately to fill short-term resourcing gaps.

The service develops leadership and high-potential staff at all levels

The service has effective succession planning processes in place that allow it to manage high-potential staff into leadership roles. Leadership development is apparent at all levels in the service, from foundation sessions through core and advanced programmes.

There are talent management schemes to develop specific staff. The service recently held a middle management assessment centre where managers carried out role-specific tasks and were given development guidance and feedback on their performance. All posts above group manager level are advertised externally.

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