

Fire & Rescue Service 2021/22

Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service



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About this inspection

This is our third inspection of fire and rescue services in England. We first inspected Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service in January 2019, publishing 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 Norfolk 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	 Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Understanding fires and other risks	 Good	Requires improvement
Preventing fires and other risks	 Inadequate	Requires improvement
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	 Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Making best use of resources	 Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Future affordability	 Requires improvement	Good

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

HM Inspector's summary

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

Norfolk FRS requires improvement at providing an effective and efficient service, and in how it looks after its people.

I have concerns about the performance of Norfolk FRS in keeping people safe and secure from fires and other risks. In particular, I have serious concerns about how it keeps the public safe through its prevention activity. In view of these findings, I have been in contact with the chief fire officer, as I do not underestimate how much improvement is needed.

We were disappointed to see that the service hasn't made the progress we expected since our 2019 inspection. For example:

- There are 15 of areas of improvement outstanding from our previous inspection.
- The service is missing opportunities to refer [vulnerable people](#) to other organisations if it can't meet their needs.
- The evaluation of operational performance is inconsistent, and opportunities to collect and share risk information and operational learning are being missed.
- More work is needed to improve culture and behaviours, and to improve staff confidence in the service's feedback mechanisms.

But it is good at responding to fires and other emergencies, and at responding to national risks.

These are the findings I consider most important from our assessments of the service over the last year:

The service isn't targeting its prevention activities effectively. Firefighters don't carry out [safe and well visits](#) or person-centred [home fire risk checks \(HFRCs\)](#) and haven't carried out any face-to-face activity through the pandemic. It is missing the opportunity to check a range of hazards that can put vulnerable people at greater risk from fire and other emergencies.

We were concerned to find the service doesn't always carry out serious incident reviews following fatal fires. This means the service hasn't learned from these experiences, missing the opportunity to prevent similar incidents from happening again.

The service doesn't have written workforce plans linked or aligned to medium-term financial plans or risk analysis, nor does it take full account of the skills and capabilities and succession planning needed to carry out the [integrated risk management plan](#) or adapt to changing future risk.

The service has improved its approach to equality, diversity and inclusion. It has a good equality, diversity and inclusion action plan with clear objectives, which is open to scrutiny.

Overall, we were concerned that prevention activity isn't a high enough priority for the service. We would like to see improvements in the year ahead.

I have asked the inspection team to revisit the service to review the progress being made against the action plan, and to monitor progress through continuous engagement.



Roy Wilsher

HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Service in numbers



Response

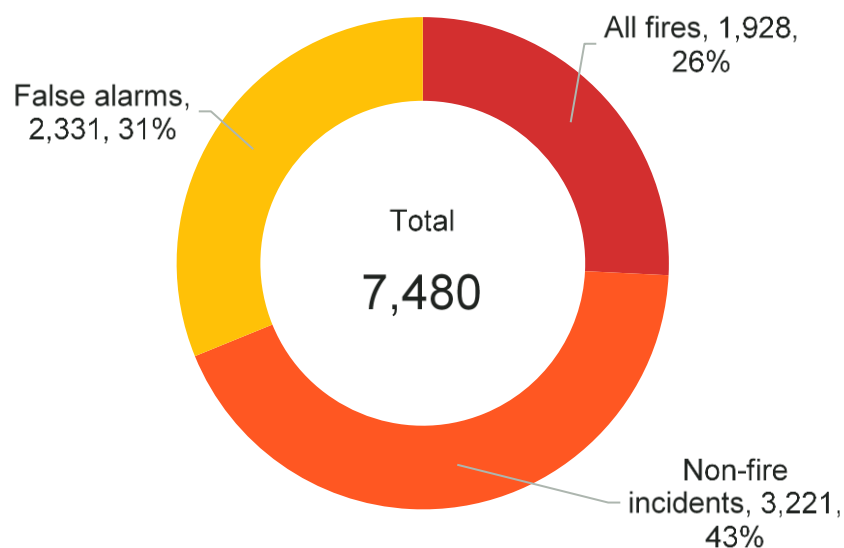
	Norfolk	England
Incidents attended per 1,000 population Year ending 30 June 2021	8.18	9.36
Home fire safety checks carried out by fire and rescue service per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	0.81	4.47
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises Year ending 31 March 2021	1.54	1.70
Average availability of pumps Year ending 31 March 2021	92.1%	86.4%



Cost

Firefighter cost per person Year ending 31 st March 2021	£23.43	£23.73
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Incidents attended in the year to 30 June 2021

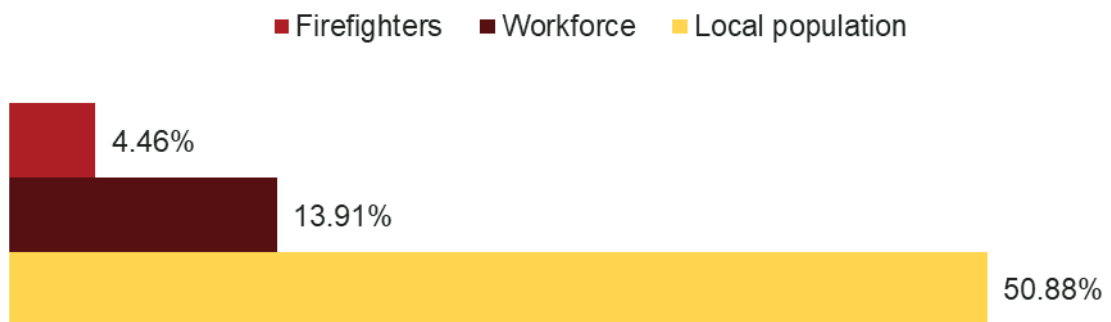




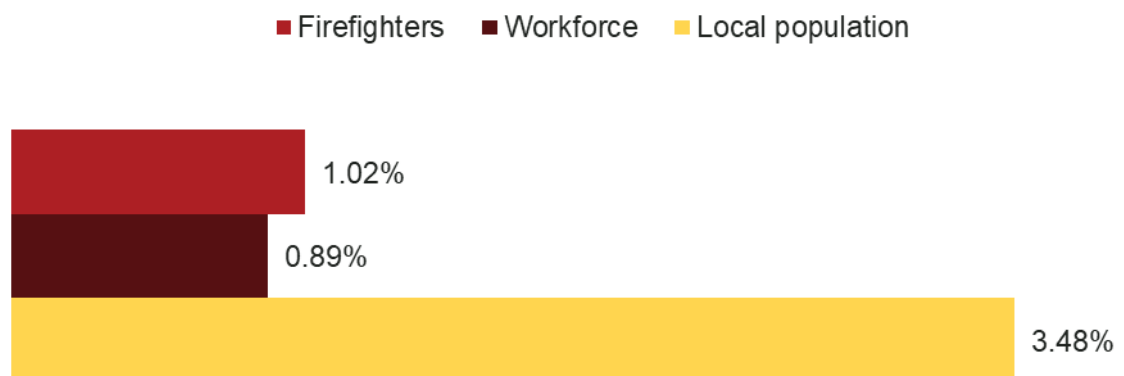
Workforce

	Norfolk	England
Five-year change in total workforce 2016 to 2021	9.84%	-1.60%
Number of firefighters per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	0.86	0.62
Percentage of firefighters who are wholetime Year ending 31 March 2021	35.8%	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?



Requires improvement

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. Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service's overall effectiveness requires improvement.

In our last inspection, Norfolk FRS's effectiveness at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other emergencies required improvement. The service hasn't made enough progress in this area.

The service has improved the way it understands the risk of fire and other emergencies. It works well with the public to improve understanding of risk. Crews visit high-risk sites and collect data that they can use if there are incidents there.

The service requires improvement to the way it prevents fires and other risks. [Safeguarding](#) needs to be improved. Staff knowledge of safeguarding continues to be patchy, and opportunities to refer [vulnerable people](#) to other organisations are being missed. The service also isn't targeting its prevention activities effectively; during the pandemic it only responded to [home fire risk check \(HFRC\)](#) referrals. It doesn't always carry out serious incident reviews after fatal fires.

The service is good at protecting the public through fire regulation. It is targeting its fire safety audits effectively, but it does fewer than the national average. It isn't responding quickly enough to requests for building control consultations, nor is it working with businesses effectively. This is because the service's protection department doesn't have enough capacity. The service approaches enforcement in a supportive way. The number of unwanted fire signals that the service is attending has been effectively reduced.

Norfolk FRS is good in the way it responds to fires and other emergencies. It has improved its on-call availability, but it isn't always achieving its response targets. [Fire control](#) staff give fire survival guidance to callers effectively, but resourcing has affected call handling and fire appliance turnout times. The service's debriefing of operational incidents to gather and share learning is inconsistent.

The service is good at responding to national risks and is well prepared for terrorist incidents. It has good exercise plans with other organisations and cross-border services to test different scenarios, but staff find it hard to access cross-border risk information.

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies



Good (2019: Requires improvement)

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service is good 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.

Area for improvement

The service should ensure the risk information it gathers and records is made readily available to all staff.

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 improved how it uses information to identify risk

In our previous inspection, we said that the service should improve how it uses information gathered from its work with the public to build up a comprehensive risk profile of the service area. The service has done this.

The service had constructive discussions with the public, including communities of older residents and people with disabilities. Where people were unable to attend public consultations at venues, and if reading and accessing the consultation independently online wasn't possible, they were given tablets so that they could watch digital content.

The service also held sessions in local libraries. The service's sessions were timed to coincide with library sessions being held for vulnerable people, including seldom-heard communities (often referred to as hard-to-reach or under-represented people).

The service has assessed an appropriate range of risks and threats after a thorough IRMP planning process. When assessing risk, it has considered relevant information collected from a broad range of internal and external sources and data sets. This includes incident data from its [mobilising](#) system, the national incident reporting system, ward profiling, and socio-demographic data from third-party sources.

The service uses modelling software to help it understand risks. It plans to use this data to target its future prevention activities at the most vulnerable people.

The service gathers a good range of information to manage risk

In our previous inspection, one area for improvement was that the service should make sure its IRMP is informed by a comprehensive understanding of current and future risk. There has been progress in this area, but more could be done.

We are pleased to see the service has gathered a range of information about the risk through the IRMP equality impact assessment process. It is good at identifying and assessing the effect of equality on its services. After assessing relevant risks, the service has recorded its findings in an easily understood IRMP.

However, the plan doesn't fully identify how the service will mitigate the risks. It contains limited information on what steps the service might take in response to any anticipated change to risk levels. For example, it isn't clear how the service plans to target those most at risk from fire, or how it will reduce the volume of, effects of, and harm from, emergency incidents.

The service isn't effectively sharing the risk information it gathers

The service is gathering a broad range of information about the people, places and threats it has identified as being at greatest risk.

This information is readily available for use by the service's prevention, protection and response staff, so that it can identify, reduce and mitigate risk effectively. For example, the service frequently sends out [safety flashes](#) to fire stations to update them on risk information.

However, some of the temporary events files we reviewed had limited content. We also found that not all staff knew where to find the risk information, and that it wasn't available on the fire appliance [mobile data terminals](#).

Additionally, we found the two risk information systems used by the service weren't linked, and operational staff had received little training in hazard spotting. Therefore, the service can't be sure that staff are being made aware of significant changes to risk information.

The service is good at learning from national incidents

The service has good processes in place to share lessons from [national operational](#) and joint organisational learning. The operational assurance team distributes any good ways of working or operational and organisational learning. It does this via health and safety bulletins, risk critical information, or safety critical changes to operational procedures. Information is available on the intranet as safety flashes and various bulletins, including operational bulletins and email.

The service has responded well to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry

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

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service has responded to learning from this tragedy. At the time of our inspection, the service was on track to having assessed the risk of each high-rise building in its service area by the end of 2021.

The service has good systems in place to respond to high-rise fires. It has tested the management of a large number of simultaneous fire survival guidance calls in real time, successfully communicating them to the incident commander on the incident ground.

It has produced an action plan that details how it intends to implement the recommendations from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.

Preventing fires and other risks



Inadequate (2019: Requires improvement)

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service is inadequate 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.

Cause of concern

The service hasn't made prevention activity a high enough priority and it isn't adequately identifying those most at risk from fire.

Recommendations

By 28 February 2022, the service should put in place plans that are designed to:

- ensure that joint agency reviews take place after significant or fatal fires (reviews should take place at an appropriate strategic level in the service and with relevant organisations);
- target the most vulnerable, who are at greatest risk from fire; and
- ensure that all staff have a good understanding of how to identify vulnerability and safeguard vulnerable people.

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure it targets its prevention work at people most at risk. This should include proportionate and timely activity to reduce risk.
- The service should better evaluate its prevention work, so it understands all the benefits more clearly.
- The service should ensure that staff have a good understanding of how to identify vulnerability and safeguard vulnerable people.
- The service should make sure it allocates enough resources to meet its prevention strategy.

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

The service prevention plan isn't leading to good end results

The service has good fire prevention plans in place, but they aren't leading to effective results for the public.

The service is clear about where the greatest risks are. It plans to use the [English indices of deprivation](#) to target future prevention activities towards the most vulnerable people. But this approach is in its early stages. We are interested to see how it develops.

Its prevention work generally happens in isolation, and we found little evidence of relevant information being provided across the service's prevention, protection and response functions. As a result, vulnerable people and others may not be getting the support they need. The service is aware of this and has plans to improve shared learning through prevention and protection steering boards.

The service isn't effectively targeting its prevention activity

In our previous inspection, one area for improvement was that the service should make sure it targets its prevention work at people most at risk. This should include proportionate and timely activity to reduce risk. There hasn't been enough progress in this area.

The prevention plan states that the service should use early prevention to help those most at risk by:

- identifying vulnerable people in the community;
- reviewing call trends;
- using relevant information collected from a range of internal and external sources, data sets and information shared between organisations;
- building up a community risk profile; and
- making sure resources target those most at risk.

But we found little evidence that the service was targeting those it had identified most at risk from fire. The service has identified those at most risk of fire as being 'dependent greys', 'pocket pensioners' and 'streetwise singles', as defined by the [Mosaic](#) consumer classification system.

During this inspection we reviewed prevention files and found cases that didn't align to the service's new triage information and risk flow chart. We also found that [on-call](#) firefighters didn't carry out HFRCs or [safe and well visits](#).

Firefighters often don't have the right skills to make safe and well visits (which include Stop Smoking, Falls Prevention, Wellbeing, Crime/Scamming Prevention and Security, and Those Who Hoard). At the time of the inspection, the service told us it is adopting the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#)'s person-centred HFRCs, but we found no evidence that firefighters were recording personal, behaviour or home factors that would increase risk of fire.

The service is missing the opportunity to check a range of hazards that can put vulnerable people at greater risk from fire and other emergencies.

We also believe the service could have done more to undertake face-to-face activity through the pandemic. Although telephone checks were made, we are concerned that firefighters haven't carried out an in-person HFRC since the beginning of the pandemic, and that the service has completed the least number of HFRCs nationally. In 2020/21, it had recorded only 743 checks, which is fewer than 1 per 1,000 people.

The service doesn't routinely carry out joint reviews after significant or fatal fire incidents

We were concerned to find the service didn't always carry out serious incident reviews following fatal fires.

During this inspection, we reviewed two fatal fires and found that no formal reviews had taken place. This means the service doesn't always learn from these experiences to prevent similar incidents from happening again.

The service is missing opportunities for safeguarding

In our previous inspection, one area for improvement was that the service should make sure staff have a good understanding of how to identify vulnerability and safeguard vulnerable people. There hasn't been enough progress in this area.

It is disappointing to find that not all firefighters have a good understanding of how to identify vulnerability and how to safeguard vulnerable people. Safeguarding training is mandatory although some staff told us they thought safeguarding training online was optional.

We reviewed a range of HFRCs and safe and well visits. We were disappointed to find limited evidence of the service referring vulnerable people to other organisations if it couldn't meet their needs. There were inconsistencies in the way firefighters had recorded information, and there were missed opportunities for safeguarding after service staff had identified vulnerabilities.

The service doesn't routinely evaluate its prevention activity

In our previous inspection, one area for improvement was that the service should more consistently evaluate its prevention work, so that it can understand the benefits of it more clearly. There hasn't been enough progress in this area.

It is disappointing to find that there is still little evidence that the service evaluates the effectiveness of its prevention activity, or that it makes sure all its communities have equal access to prevention activity that meets their needs.

The service collaborates with others

The service works with its communities and with a range of organisations locally and nationally to prevent fires and keep people safe.

The service chairs the Norfolk Drowning Prevention Forum and is a partner in the Norfolk Road Safety Partnership. It has made joint inspections of poorly performing licensed waste and recycling sites with the Environment Agency, and has taken joint action against modern slavery with Norfolk Constabulary.

The service's collaboration with Norfolk Constabulary also includes:

- shared emergency control;
- a joint approach to dealing with missing persons; and
- jointly run public events to connect with local communities.

The service could do more to tackle fire-setting behaviour

The service has limited involvement in targeting and educating people who show signs of fire-setting behaviour. It works with other organisations to address fire-setting behaviour in children only. The service isn't identifying and targeting adult individuals who display signs of fire-setting behaviour, and we found no evidence of firefighters working to reduce fire-setting and arson in their area.

The service has committed to recruiting and training four new staff as fire investigation protection officers. We are interested to see how this develops.

Protecting the public through fire regulation



Good (2019: Requires improvement)

Norfolk 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 for enforcing the legislation.

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure it allocates enough resources to a prioritised and risk-based inspection programme.
- The service should ensure that staff work with local businesses and large organisations to share information and expectations on compliance with fire safety regulations.

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

The service aligns protection activity to risk

The service's protection plan is linked to the risk it has identified in its IRMP.

The service's risk-based inspection programme focuses on the service's highest-risk buildings. The audits we reviewed were completed in the timescales the service had set itself.

The number of unsatisfactory fire safety audits completed by the service is high. This suggests that it is targeting high-risk buildings effectively. Unsatisfactory audits are those where the service finds premises need intervention to improve fire safety compliance. The completion of these audits and the subsequent changes that need to be made to the premises should make the buildings safer for the people who use them.

The service doesn't have enough resources allocated to protection

In our previous inspection, one area for improvement was that the service should make sure it allocates enough resources to a prioritised and risk-based inspection programme (RBIP). More progress in this area is required.

The service has experienced a high level of staff turnover in the protection department. In the financial year to 31 March 2017/18, the service had ten competent protection staff. This has dropped to eight, with no protection staff in development (in training) as of 31 March 2020/21.

This means the service doesn't always have enough qualified protection staff to support all of its fire safety activities. This lack of capacity and capability is having a detrimental effect on its protection activities. Staff told us that in their opinion the service wouldn't audit all the buildings it had targeted within the timescales it had set itself.

However, the service is changing its community fire protection provision. It has plans to recruit and train additional protection staff and firefighters in line with National Fire Chief Council's Framework for Fire Safety Regulators. We are interested to see how this develops.

The service has audited all of its high-risk, high-rise buildings

The service has carried out audits of every high-rise building that it has identified as using cladding similar to the cladding installed on Grenfell Tower. Information gathered during these audits is available to response teams and control operators, so that they can respond more effectively in an emergency.

At the time of our inspection, the service was on track to have visited every high-rise, high-risk building it had identified in its service area by the end of 2021.

The quality of fire safety audits is good

We reviewed a range of audits of different premises across the service. This included audits that took place:

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

The audits we reviewed were completed to a good standard, in a consistent, systematic way, and in line with the service's policies. Relevant information from the audits is made available to operational teams and control room operators.

There is limited quality assurance of fire safety audits

The service has a formal process in place to quality check the work done by protection staff. However, staff told us formal quality assurance used to take place twice a year, but that this had been reduced to once a year.

We found limited and inconsistent quality assurance of compliance with the National Fire Chiefs Council's protection activity framework.

The service doesn't have good evaluation tools in place to measure its effectiveness, or to make sure all sections of its communities have equal access to protection services that meet their needs.

The service uses its full range of enforcement powers

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

The community fire protection department plan is clearly linked to the IRMP and Norfolk County Council Enforcement Policy. The plan details how the service's statutory duty is used to enforce fire safety law and to promote fire safety. The service targets premises where it believes, or has received information to suggest, that there is poor compliance with fire safety laws. For serious fire safety failings, the service takes enforcement action, including informal sanctions or formal court proceedings.

The service proactively works with other enforcement agencies to share information and take enforcement action.

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

- no alteration notices;
- 18 informal notifications;
- 5 enforcement notices;
- 2 prohibition notices; and
- undertook no prosecutions.

Between 2016/17 and 2020/21 inclusive, it completed three prosecutions.

The service has plans to improve the resilience of its 24/7 fire safety cover

In our previous inspection, one area for improvement was that the service should improve its arrangements for providing specialist protection advice out of hours.

It is encouraging to see the service now has processes in place to give technical support to staff at all times of the day and night, and that it always responds.

The service should make sure these arrangements are resilient.

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. For instance, the service:

- is an active and valued member of the Norfolk safety advisory groups, working to make sure members of the public are safe at sporting and community events;
- carries out joint fire safety inspection and enforcement activity with local authority property enforcement officers; and
- works as a main partner with a wide range of different enforcement agencies such as Norfolk Council Trading Standards and the Environment Agency, and has taken joint action against modern slavery with Norfolk Police.

The service should review arrangements to respond to building consultations

While the service is responding to all requests for statutory building consultations, we have concerns that it isn't always doing this in a timely manner. The service should make every effort to meet the timescales in which feedback should be given to the local authority building control, to make sure it can be acted upon.

The service doesn't do enough work with businesses

In our previous inspection, one area for improvement was that the service should make sure that staff work with local businesses and large organisations to share information and expectations on compliance with fire safety regulations. There hasn't been enough progress in this area.

The service has had limited contact with local businesses and large organisations as it doesn't have the staff capacity or capability to do this work. It relies on social media and online content to connect with businesses.

Although the service is recruiting a business engagement officer to prioritise this work and give support, it could do more to work with local businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation.

The service is effective at reducing unwanted fire signals

In our previous inspection, one area for improvement was that the service should tackle the problem of false alarms. It is pleasing to see the service is effectively reducing unwanted fire signals. It has made good progress in this area.

The service has a good unwanted fire signal policy that mirrors the [National Fire Chiefs Council's guidance](#) on call filtering. It gets fewer calls because of this work, and the number of attendances to Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs) has reduced significantly compared to the 2017/18 financial year. In the year ending 31 March 2021, the service only responded to 52 percent of AFAs. This is lower than the national rate of 63 percent. This is reflected in the overall number of false alarms the service attends falling steadily over the past three years.

Fewer unwanted calls mean 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)

Norfolk 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.

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure it has an effective system for staff to use learning and debriefs to improve operational response and incident command.
- The service should make sure its mobile data terminals are reliable so that firefighters can readily access up-to-date risk information.

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

The service could do more to align resources to identified risks

The service's response plan isn't clearly linked to the risks identified in its IRMP. It lacks information on crewing models, degradation of fire appliances, protracted incidents, over-the-border working, and the management of the effects of a major or national incident.

Because the plans aren't linked, it is unclear whether the service will be able to direct resources to all the areas of high risk identified within the IRMP.

More could be done to improve 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 IRMP.

The service's response standard is for the first fire engine to arrive within 10 minutes at fires where life may be at risk, and for the second fire engine to arrive within 13 minutes, 80 percent of the time. The service doesn't meet this first standard. It told us that it only achieved this standard 73 percent and 69 percent of the time in the financial years 2020/21 and 2019/20 respectively.

Home Office data shows that in the year to 31 March 2021, the service's response time to [primary fires](#) was 10 minutes and 30 seconds, which is only marginally slower than the average for predominantly rural services.

We were also concerned to find during this inspection that the low staffing levels in the control room were negatively affecting call handling and appliance turnout times. The service has plans to address this. We are interested to see how it develops.

The service is good at maintaining availability

To support its response plan, the service aims to have all of its wholetime fire engines available on all occasions, and all of its on-call fire engines available on 90 percent of occasions. The service consistently meets this standard by using a range of shift systems and on-call contracts.

Staff have a good understanding of how to command incidents safely

The service has trained incident commanders who are assessed regularly and properly. 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. The incident commanders we interviewed were familiar with risk assessment, decision-making and recording information at incidents in line with National Fire Chiefs Council's [national operational guidance](#), and with the [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles \(JESIP\)](#).

The service should make sure fire control staff are involved in command, training, exercise, debrief and assurance activity

We are disappointed to find that the service's control staff aren't always included in the service's command, training, exercise, debrief and assurance activity. Fire control staff gave examples of times they had been involved in debriefs following significant incidents, but they weren't always involved in the major incident training exercises that were arranged by the service. This means that fire control staff don't have the opportunity to learn from other departments and organisations, or to contribute to these major incident exercises.

The service's call-handling software also has problems, which sometimes results in the system dropping emergency calls. There are plans to improve the call-handling systems. We are interested to see how this develops.

The service has good fire survival guidance call systems

Control has good fire survival call systems in place to exchange real-time risk information with incident commanders, other responding organisations, and other supporting fire and rescue services. Maintaining good situational awareness helps the service to communicate well with the public, providing them with accurate and tailored advice.

The service should make sure that its systems give staff access to risk information all of the time

In our previous inspection, one area for improvement was that the service should make sure its mobile data terminals are reliable so that firefighters can readily access up-to-date risk information. There hasn't been enough progress in this area.

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

However, firefighters told us the service's mobile data terminals are unreliable. Sometimes they freeze, preventing operational staff from accessing site-specific risk information. The service has plans to address this problem. We are interested to see how this develops.

Evaluation of operational performance is inconsistent

In our previous inspection, one area for improvement was that the service should make sure it has an effective learning and debriefing system for staff to use to improve operational response and incident command. There hasn't been enough progress in this area.

As part of the inspection, we reviewed a range of emergency incidents and training events. We found that the service had an excellent, detailed and clear organisational assurance governance policy, but the application of the policy was inconsistent. Most staff were unable to recall participating in a formal debrief, and opportunities to collect and share risk information and operational learning are being missed.

The service is good at communicating incident-related information to the public

The service has good systems in place to inform the public about continuing incidents and help keep them safe during and after incidents. They include:

- proactive use of social media, particularly Twitter and Facebook;
- the incident tab on the service's website; and
- media-trained incident commanders.

We saw evidence that the service gave incident updates using these systems.

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents



Good (2019: Good)

Norfolk 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).

Area for improvement

The service should ensure its firefighters have good access to relevant and up-to-date risk information. This should include cross-border risk information.

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 IRMP. The service works well with other organisations on multi-agency response plans. The plans are tested regularly. For example, at the time of inspection the service was testing high-risk site plans, such as Norwich Football Club.

The service is an active member of the Norfolk Strategic Flood Alliance. It recently tested the capability and capacity of the participating organisations dealing with differing flooding scenarios. This includes identifying high-risk areas and planning how to respond to an emerging risk of widespread inland flooding, including tidal surges, through warning and informing volunteers, and identifying safe sites for evacuation.

The service has effective plans in place if a major incident is declared. These include sharing warnings and information through the East Coast and Hertfordshire Control Room Consortium, and through neighbouring fire and rescue services.

However, Norfolk's control staff aren't always included in major incident training with the other organisations.

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

We reviewed the arrangements the service had in place to respond to different major incidents such as wide area flooding and marauding terrorist attacks (MTA).

It is pleasing to see, following our last inspection, that the service is well prepared to form part of a multi-agency response to a terrorist-related incident, and that its procedures for responding are understood by all staff and are well tested.

The service has specialist resources to respond to an MTA incident, including [national inter-agency liaison officers](#), and specialist rescue teams (Lite) who give 24/7 cover to support its MTA response. It maintains and staffs a high-volume water pump that is also available to the [National Resilience programme](#).

The service works with other fire services

The service supports other fire and rescue services responding to emergency incidents. For example, the service has national deployable resources:

- [urban search and rescue](#) teams;
- specialist rescue teams (Lite); and
- a high-volume water pump and hose layer.

It is intraoperable with these services and can form part of a multi-agency response.

The service has cross-border exercise plans

In our previous inspection, one area for improvement was that the service should arrange a programme of over-the-border exercises, sharing the learning from these exercises. It has made good progress in this area.

The service has a cross-border exercise plan with neighbouring fire and rescue services so that they can work together effectively to keep the public safe.

The plan includes supporting the exercises for major events at which the service could foreseeably respond to requests for help from neighbouring services.

The plan also includes regular participation in [local resilience forum](#) desktop exercises.

The sharing of cross-border risk information is ineffective

In our previous inspection, one area for improvement was that the service should make sure its firefighters have good access to relevant and up-to-date risk information. This should include cross-border risk information. It hasn't made enough progress in this area.

The service has shared some risk information with Suffolk FRS, but this is limited, and not a regular occurrence. Firefighters were unable to show us over-the-border risk information, and the service mobile data terminals, which give access to site-specific risk information, are unreliable. Firefighters told us that sometimes the terminals froze, preventing operational staff from accessing information.

Firefighters have a good understanding of JESIP

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

The service gave us strong evidence that it consistently followed these principles. This includes:

- staff knowledge and use of the joint decision-making model; and
- the use of the nationally recognised messaging (that is, messages that all emergency services and related organisations understand).

The service is an active member, and lead partner, of the Norfolk Resilience Forum

The service has good arrangements in place to respond to emergencies with other organisations that make up the Norfolk Resilience Forum (NRF). These arrangements include having staff available to respond to requests from organisations during the pandemic. Staff:

- support East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust with ambulance driving;
- help fit face masks for frontline NHS and clinical staff;
- support the national mass vaccination programme with marshalling and logistics; and
- chair the tactical co-ordinating groups.

The service is a valued NRF partner. The chief fire officer is the chair of the NRF. The service takes part in regular training events with other members and uses the learning to improve responses to major and multi-agency incidents.

The service keeps up to date with national learning

The service keeps itself up to date with joint operational learning updates from other fire services and national operational learning from other blue-light organisations, such as the police service and ambulance trusts. The service has effective processes for sharing the learning through operational safety flashes, case studies and the What's Hot news page via the intranet. It uses this learning to inform planning assumptions that have been made with other partners.

Efficiency



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



Requires improvement

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. Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service's overall efficiency requires improvement.

In our last inspection, Norfolk FRS required improvement at how it uses resources to manage risk. It also required improvement at how well it is securing an affordable way of managing risks including fire, now and in the future. It hasn't made enough progress in this area.

The service continues to base its annual financial planning on its previous budget, with changes for inflation. There are no clear plans to address the medium-term financial challenges beyond 2024. These plans are needed to secure an affordable way of managing the risk of fire and other risks.

The service doesn't have workforce plans linked to or aligned with medium-term financial plans or risk analysis, nor does it take full account of the skills and capabilities and succession planning needed to carry out the IRMP or adapt to changing future risk.

The service scenario plans for future spending reductions don't do enough to recognise the wider external environment and risk, including how the reductions would affect services to the public.

More positively:

- The service uses various contractual arrangements effectively, which has improved [on-call](#) availability.
- Its continuity arrangements are effective.
- The service collaborates well with other organisations.

Making best use of resources



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement 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 budget for 2019/20 is £27.4m. This is a 3 percent decrease from the previous financial year.

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure that resources are appropriately allocated to support the activity set out in its integrated risk management plan.
- The service should ensure that it makes best use of the resources available to it, including from elsewhere within Norfolk County Council, to increase resilience and capacity.

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

The service needs to make sure it has resource plans to support its objectives

In our previous inspection, one area for improvement was that the service should make sure that resources are appropriately allocated to support the activity set out in its IRMP. It hasn't made enough progress in this area.

The service sometimes uses its resources well to manage risk, but there are still weaknesses that need addressing. For example, its financial forecasting and planning is done on a short-term basis. The service allocates resources to activities annually, after it has reviewed the previous year's base budget and adjusted for inflation and savings. The service doesn't plan far enough in advance for its fleet requirements. This is adversely affecting the fire engine replacement programme.

The service doesn't have workforce plans linked or aligned to the IRMP, medium-term financial plans or risk analysis. Staffing levels in the control room are regularly below minimum staffing levels, with call handling and crew turnout times increasing.

The service has plans to address this. The protection team is also under-resourced, which is affecting work with local businesses and large organisations. Limited prevention activities are taking place.

The service's delivery plan lacks detail. The service has listed its strategic aims under the headings Prevent and Protect, Response, People, Logistics, and Planning, but it is unclear how it will achieve them.

The service should make sure that resources are appropriately allocated to support the activity set out in its IRMP.

The service must do more to make sure it fulfils its main functions effectively and efficiently

We are encouraged to see the service adapt its working practices as a result of the pandemic, and these adaptations are still part of its day-to-day activity. For example, the service gave support staff personal financial packages to help them to work from home.

The service has varying types of contracts available for staff ([wholetime](#), on-call, etc), and the service makes good use of them. It supplies additional contracts for all firefighters, so that, for example, wholetime firefighters may take on on-call duties. The service also makes varying-hour contracts available to on-call staff, in order to maintain operational availability. It is using central government uplift grant money to recruit and train protection staff.

However, the service's arrangements for managing performance are weak and don't clearly link resource use to the IRMP and the service's strategic priorities. We found a lack of effective prevention and protection performance management. Staff are unaware of performance targets, and there is little corporate oversight. On-call staff don't undertake prevention and protection activity, and wholetime staff do minimal prevention activity in comparison to others, and don't do protection audits.

The service could do more to make sure the workforce's time is as productive as possible, to carry out prevention, protection and response functions effectively and efficiently.

The service would benefit from monitoring and evaluating its non-pay costs

In our previous inspection, one area for improvement was that the service should make sure that it makes the best use of the resources available to it, including from elsewhere within Norfolk County Council, to increase resilience and capacity. It could do more to improve in this area.

We are encouraged to see that the service has taken steps to make sure important areas, including estates, fleet, information and technology, and procurement, are well placed to achieve efficiency gains through sound financial management and best working practices. Savings and efficiencies made have had no disproportionate effect on operational performance and the service to the public.

However, we found limited monitoring and evaluation of the effect of these savings, and there is a lack of scrutiny of the fleet management to make sure that it is gaining efficiencies and getting value for money.

The service collaborates with other emergency services

We are pleased to see the service meets its statutory duty to collaborate, and considers opportunities to collaborate with other emergency responders, most notably the shared premises with the police.

Collaborative work is aligned to the priorities in the service's IRMP. Activities included:

- recovering and protecting vehicles in dangerous positions;
- supporting pedestrian safety on highways; and
- gaining entry to private properties to get access for the ambulance service.

But the service could do more to monitor, review and evaluate the benefits and results of its collaborations.

The service has good business continuity plans 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. For example, during our recent COVID-19 inspection, we found that the service had a pandemic flu plan and business continuity plans that were in place and in date. It also has plans for industrial action and [fall-back](#) control, which it reviews and tests regularly.

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



Requires improvement (2019: Good)

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement 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.

Areas for improvement

- The service must make sure scenario plans for future spending reductions are subject to rigorous analysis and challenge, including the impact on services to the public.
- The service should assure itself it has effective budget management planning in place, with appropriate levels of financial management capability and capacity. The service should make sure it has sufficiently robust plans in place which address the medium-term financial challenges beyond 2024 and secure an affordable way of managing the risk of fire and other risks.

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

The service should make sure it has robust plans in place to address the medium-term financial challenges and secure an affordable way of managing risks including fire

The service understands its financial challenges. We are pleased to see that it has undertaken a spending review scenario planning for future spending reductions.

However, it hasn't linked the scenario planning to its medium-term financial plan (MTFP) or IRMP. Its planning assumptions don't do enough to recognise the wider external environment and risk, which limits its ability to make sure it will be able to allocate resources to areas of risk. It also means that savings will have minimal impact beyond 2024.

The service could do more to align the scenario planning to the MTFP and IRMP in order to:

- identify changes in demand and risk;
- understand costs;
- [benchmark](#) against other fire and rescue services; and
- identify areas where the service has performed well or was comparatively expensive.

There is scope for the service to consider more sophisticated budget allocation models that would help it to do this.

It doesn't have clear scenario plans for reducing future spending, for example, in three to five years, to anticipate where it might need to make significant changes in the way it spends, operates, or saves. Appropriate action also needs to be taken to lessen the main financial risks linked to staff turnover, in particular at senior manager level.

The service has identified ways to make savings or generate further income, but these opportunities are limited. In 2021/22, these include back-office savings made by reducing fuel costs, printing, photocopying and advertising expenses (amounting to £101,000), and equipment purchases and the staff training budget (amounting to £261,000).

Clear arrangements for use of reserves

Norfolk Council holds the service's [reserves](#). There is a robust process in place for the service to access them. Current reserves are approximately £300,000, of which £150,000 will be used to cover 2020/21 overspend.

The service could do more to consider changes in estate and fleet strategies for future service provision

The service has fleet and estates strategies, but it doesn't exploit the opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness presented by changes in fleet and estate provision.

The strategies aren't clearly linked to the IRMP or to future changes in the service's premises.

The service doesn't plan far enough in advance for its fleet requirements, and the fleet replacement programme is adversely affected by this.

We found significant problems with vehicles, equipment repairs and delays in returning operational equipment. More needs to be done to monitor, review and evaluate the benefits and results of its service provisions. This scrutiny will make sure the service gets value for money.

The service is replacing its petrol and diesel vehicles with electric and hybrid vehicles, with 14 vehicles on order for early 2022.

The service is investing in future innovation and technology

In our previous inspection, one area for improvement was that the service should make sure it makes the best use of the available technology to improve operational effectiveness and efficiency. It has made good progress in this area.

We are encouraged to see the improvements the service has made since the last inspection. The service actively considers how changes in technology and future innovation may affect risk. It has plans and is preparing for the new Emergency Services Network.

It also seeks to exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness presented by changes in technology. The service is updating the computer systems in fire stations, and the communications and [mobile data terminals](#) on the fire engines.

The service, in collaboration with the East Coast and Hertfordshire Control Room Consortium, also has plans to improve call handling and fire appliance [mobilising](#) systems.

The service is taking action to reduce its carbon footprint by replacing its diesel and petrol vehicles with electric and hybrid versions.

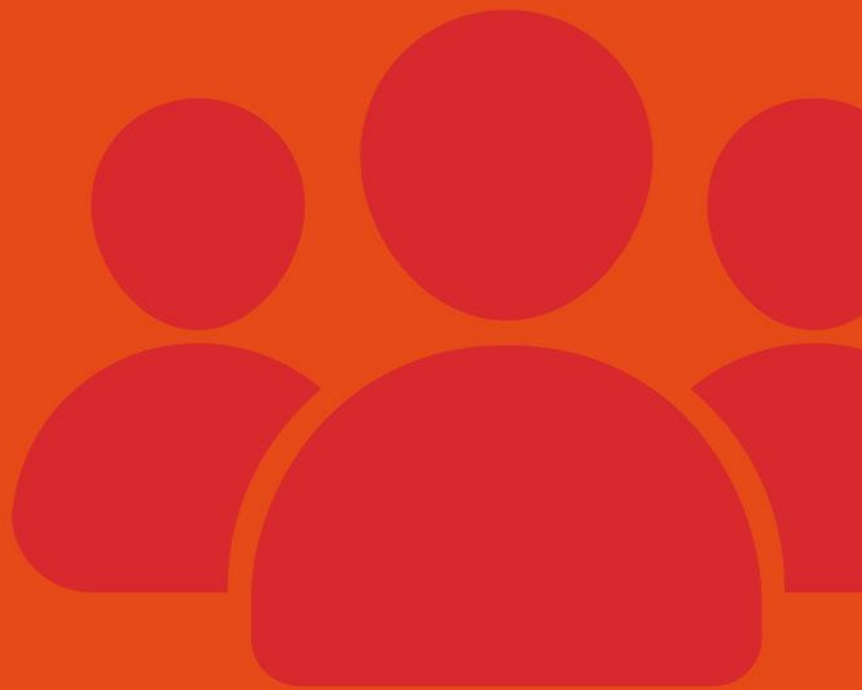
The service has secured £250,000 and established a significant change programme known as 'concept of operations'. This is designed to review its operating model, (shifts systems, appliances and stations) and its organisational structure (teams, functions and departments) to support the implementation of its IRMP. But it could do

more to communicate the project's objectives to staff and the community, and to make sure public money is spent efficiently.

The service's income generation is limited

The service considers options for generating extra income internally, but it isn't actively considering and exploiting external funding opportunities or options for generating income. Income generation is limited to cost recovery from non-emergency incidents and petroleum licences.

People



How well does the service look after its people?



Requires improvement

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 are part of everything the service does and its staff understand their role in promoting it. Overall, Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at looking after its people.

In our last inspection, Norfolk FRS required improvement in how it looks after its people. It hasn't made enough progress in this area.

The service needs to do more to improve how it treats its staff at all levels. Senior leaders need to be more visible and make sure staff feel appreciated and listened to.

The service now has a new cultural framework, but it hasn't been well implemented. The framework should implement or align with the Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services England.

Norfolk FRS doesn't monitor secondary contracts to make sure staff working hours aren't exceeded.

Some training courses are optional. There is confusion over some mandatory courses, including [safeguarding](#), and equality, diversity and inclusion (ED&I). Leadership development isn't available to all staff, and personal development reviews are carried out inconsistently. This means that the service can't assure itself that all staff have the capability and competence needed to achieve its IRMP's objectives.

In our last inspection we found the service didn't have a talent management programme to help it discover potential leaders. This continues to be the case.

More positively:

- The service prioritises workforce wellbeing and supports staff wellbeing in various ways.
- Its absence management is good.
- It has improved its approach to ED&I.
- It is effectively addressing disproportionality in recruitment and retention.

Promoting the right values and culture



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement 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 wellbeing support that can be tailored to their individual needs.

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure its values and behaviours are understood and demonstrated at all levels of the organisation.
- The service should assure itself that senior managers are visible and demonstrate service values through their behaviours.
- The service should monitor secondary contracts to make sure working hours are not exceeded.

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

The service needs to do more to improve its culture, behaviours, values and staff interaction with senior leaders

In our previous inspection, an area for improvement was that the service should make sure its values and behaviours are understood and demonstrated at all levels of the organisation. There hasn't been enough progress in this area.

The service has a cultural framework with well-defined values and behaviours. It developed this with some staff involvement.

It was introduced in 2020, but its implementation was ineffective. At the time of this inspection the service had held 11 out of a planned 30 cultural framework question-and-answer sessions with staff teams and plans to visit all teams during 2022. We found a lack of understanding of the cultural framework. We also heard that not all staff were consulted in developing the framework, and most of the staff who

were consulted told us that the values defined in it didn't reflect their suggestions but were Norfolk County Council's (NCC's) values.

Additionally, the culture of the organisation doesn't always align with its values. We were told about some behaviours that didn't meet the standards expected. We were also told that staff concerns weren't always listened to, leaving some staff members feeling under-appreciated.

Our staff survey shows that 39 percent of responded (66 out of 171) feel that senior leaders don't consistently model and maintain the service's values. We were told senior leaders didn't always engage with staff on decisions that affected them, and they didn't act as positive role models. Staff feel there is a lack of visible senior leadership, and that communication is one way.

More is needed to make sure the newly created [national code of ethics](#) is implemented effectively in the service.

The service has improved staff understanding and confidence in the purpose and integrity of health, safety and wellbeing policies

In our previous inspection, one area for improvement was that the service should increase staff understanding of and confidence in the purpose and integrity of its health, safety and wellbeing policies. We are pleased to see there has been progress in this area.

The service signed up to the Blue Light Time to Change Pledge, and there are good provisions in place to promote staff wellbeing.

The range of wellbeing support available for both physical and mental health includes:

- an effective trauma-focused peer support system ([Trauma Risk Management](#)), with trained staff to support colleagues who have experienced a traumatic or potentially traumatic event;
- a 24/7 counselling service;
- physiotherapy;
- debt management advice;
- access to The Fire Fighters Charity; and
- help for those with protected characteristics, through peer support (support from a colleague) or equal support (support from a person with the same characteristics).

The service takes a good approach to health and safety. There are clear policies for lone workers, risk assessments and fitness testing. The service gives health and safety training to all its staff as part of their induction.

Staff have confidence in the health and safety approach taken by the service.

Our staff survey shows that 92 percent of respondents (176 out of 192) feel their personal safety and welfare is treated seriously at work, while 97 percent (187 out of 192) said the service has clear procedures to report all accidents, [near misses](#) and dangerous occurrences. The service also has effective processes for investigating and sharing the learning of accidents and near misses.

The service should monitor secondary contracts

The service has a high proportion of firefighters undertaking secondary employment. As of 31 March 2021, records show the service has the second highest proportion of firefighters nationally on dual contracts within the same fire and rescue service, which is typical of previous years.

The service has a policy enabling firefighters to undertake secondary employment with permission of the chief fire officer (CFO), but we do have concerns. The service doesn't have a formal process to manage and monitor the hours, health and wellbeing of staff who take on additional hours and secondary employment, and we found members of staff with up to four contracts.

The service absence management is good

As part of our inspection, we reviewed some case files where staff were absent for more than 28 days. We considered how the service manages and supports staff through absence, including sickness and parental and special leave. We found these cases were managed well – centrally and in accordance with policy.

We found there were clear processes in place to manage absences for all staff. Previously this was managed by HR, but it is now the responsibility of service managers. There is clear guidance for the managers, who are generally confident in the process. Absences are managed well and in accordance with policy.

Prior to the pandemic, the service ran one pilot training course on soft skills for managers, which included absence management, but we found inconsistencies in the levels of training in absence management and decision-making. Most managers have the knowledge and skills to conduct absence management, but some feel they haven't had enough training. For example, they aren't confident that they could recognise symptoms of poor mental health and wellbeing.

The service records the reasons for all absences, which helps it to monitor any trends. Overall, the service saw a nearly 7 percent increase in overall staff absences for [wholetime firefighters](#), [fire control](#) and non-operational staff over the 12 months between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020 compared to the previous year.

Getting the right people with the right skills



Requires improvement (2019: Good)

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement 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.

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure its workforce plan takes full account of the necessary skills and capabilities to carry out the integrated risk management plan.
- The service should assure itself that all staff are appropriately trained for their role.

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

The service doesn't effectively plan its workforce

In our previous inspection, one area for improvement we identified was that the service should put in place a workforce plan that takes full account of the necessary skills and capabilities needed to carry out the integrated risk management or to adapt to changing future risk. There hasn't been enough progress in this area.

We found limited evidence that the service's planning allows it to fully consider workforce skills or overcome any gaps in capability. It hasn't developed its workforce plan or workforce management scheme as detailed in its HMICFRS Improvement Plan.

At a local level, the service understands the skills and risk-critical safety capabilities of the workforce necessary to meet current and future organisational needs. There is a system in place to review workforce capabilities, and skills are mapped on an Excel spreadsheet updated by respective supervisors, but this is inconsistently managed and there is limited corporate monitoring.

Most staff told us that they could access the training they needed to be effective in their role. The service's training plans make sure they can maintain competence and capability. However, the training plans aren't linked to, or aligned with, workforce plans, financial planning or the IRMP.

The service needs to improve how it considers future needs and succession planning.

The service needs to better understand its workforce's training needs

The service carries out most of its risk-critical training for operational staff well. We found good systems in place to make sure managers took responsibility for maintaining their team's critical competencies.

But we were disappointed to find that some staff hadn't received the appropriate training for their roles. For example, ED&I, leadership and management, and absence management learning are all optional. Some operational staff hadn't received training in safeguarding or in how to gather risk information. Most managers that we spoke to said they hadn't received the appropriate training in how to spot workplace stress or how to manage absence. The service rightly recognises this, and some managers are now receiving absence management training

The service must make sure that everyone in the service completes the available training, and help staff maximise the learning and development opportunities. If not, there is a risk staff will lack important skills for the future. This will affect what the service can offer the public.

There are inconsistencies in the way staff undertake learning and development

The service training for the wholetime and [on-call](#) staff is the same. However, we found that some support staff felt that the learning and development they were offered wasn't equal to operational staff opportunities. Operational staff can participate in a wide range of learning and development, but this isn't always available to support staff. In the staff survey, 35 percent of respondents (67 out of 192) told us they weren't satisfied with the learning and development available to them.

We found there were no formal development programmes for station managers or above, nor was development needed for promotion. Staff told us there were plans for all managers to take part in formal development programmes in the future. We are interested to see how this develops.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement 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 equality, diversity and inclusion are 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.

Areas for improvement

- The service should assure itself that staff are confident using its feedback mechanisms.
- The service should assure itself that it has effective grievance procedures.

Innovative practice

The service has a comprehensive and measurable equality, diversity and inclusion action plan that links to its strategy that is open to public scrutiny.

The service actively promotes equality and diversity in its strategies. It has a good ED&I action plan and clear objectives of:

- developing strong, inclusive cultures;
- understanding the common barriers when accessing fire and rescue services and information; and
- being an employer of choice.

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

Staff continue not to have confidence in the service's feedback systems, or to challenge senior leaders

In our previous inspection, an area for improvement was that the service should make sure that staff are confident using its feedback systems. There hasn't been enough progress in this area.

Our staff survey shows that 55 percent of respondents (106 out of 192) said they weren't confident in the ways for providing feedback at all levels and 45 percent (86 of 192) didn't think they would be listened to. Staff told us there was a lack of follow up on the service's own staff survey, and that communication with senior managers was often one way.

We found staff generally no longer used the service's dedicated 'ask the CFO' email address and were being told to approach their direct managers to resolve any problems.

The service needs to do more to tackle bullying, harassment and discrimination

In our previous inspection, an area for improvement was that the service should assure itself that it has effective grievance procedures. There hasn't been enough progress in this area.

Staff told us they weren't confident in the service's grievance procedure. Through our staff survey, 16 percent of respondents (31 out of 192) told us they had been subject to harassment, and 15 percent (28 out of 192) had been subject to discrimination over the past 12 months. The main reasons for staff not raising grievances were concern about being labelled as a troublemaker and feeling as though nothing would happen.

Staff told us some senior leaders didn't try to identify and resolve workforce concerns. They detailed examples of raising concerns with senior managers, with no positive results for staff.

Staff have a good understanding of what bullying, harassment and discrimination are, and the negative effect they have on both colleagues and the organisation.

However, they have limited confidence in the service's ability to deal with cases of bullying, harassment and discrimination.

The service has a whistle blowing process available through NCC, but not all staff are aware of this.

The service is effectively addressing disproportionality in recruitment and retention

The service advertises job opportunities externally. It has taken positive action which has resulted in the number of female applicants doubling, and has encouraged applicants from diverse backgrounds, including for middle and senior management roles.

The service has made some improvements in increasing staff diversity at all levels of the organisation. In 2017/18, 0.7 percent of the workforce self-declared as being from ethnic minority backgrounds and 9 percent of the workforce were women. By 2020/2021, 0.9 percent of the workforce self-declared as being from ethnic minority backgrounds, and 14 percent were women.

Firefighter-specific recruitment has also improved in this regard, with the proportion of all firefighters identifying as being from ethnic minority backgrounds having risen from 0.6 percent in 2017/18 to 1 percent in 2020/21, while the proportion of all firefighters who were women rose from 3 percent in 2017/18 to 4.5 percent in 2020/21.

The service has good plans that identify the positive benefits of a more diverse workforce, and it is reviewing the disproportionate selection rates it is experiencing with women and applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds.

For example, it actively tries to recruit more on-call female firefighters. The communication team used a female serving member of staff for a social media campaign, with live question-and-answer sessions and interviews on ITV Anglia to promote job opportunities.

The service has consulted with 35 seldom-heard communities to identify what the barriers are to services and recruitment. It heard from over 200 people and is collecting more research that will be used to reduce barriers to recruitment.

We are pleased to hear that the service recognises it needs to go even further to increase workforce diversity, especially in middle and senior management.

The data shows the Norfolk FRS staff's non-reporting of ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation is higher than average. In 2020/21, 17 percent of staff were of unknown ethnicity compared to 9 percent nationally, 47 percent of staff were of unknown religion compared to 32 percent nationally, and 48 percent of staff didn't state their sexual orientation compared to 35 percent nationally.

The service is aware of the high numbers of non-reporting of sexual orientation and ethnicity. It has asked the BBC for advice, as 100 percent of the workforce there report this information.

The service has improved its approach to equality, diversity and inclusion

In our previous inspection, an area for improvement was that the service should identify and tackle barriers to equality of opportunity to make its workforce more representative of the local community. The service should make sure diversity and inclusion are well understood, and that they are important values of the service. It has made good progress in this area.

The service actively promotes equality and diversity in its strategies. It has a good ED&I action plan, with clear objectives. These include:

- developing strong, inclusive cultures;
- understanding the common barriers when accessing fire and rescue services and information;
- being an employer of choice; and
- fostering good community relations.

Senior management is committed to improving diversity within the workplace. The service has a joint commitment to dignity in the workplace, treating people with respect, courtesy and consideration. It is signed by the CFO and staff representation, including the Fire Brigades Union, the Fire and Rescue Services Association, the Fire Officers' Association and Unison.

It also has a good People Strategic Framework that sets out its commitment to eliminating discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other prohibited conduct; advancing equal opportunities; and fostering good community relations. It has trained more than 60 managers in Public Sector Equality Duty and has carried out 850 equality impact assessments.

The CFO leads the eastern region's ED&I forum, which is exploring how to bring shared learning and good ways of working to the service and the fire sector. For example, a literature review into the 'rescue personality' has been commissioned via the University of East Anglia. This will examine whether a particular personality type (female and male) is drawn to firefighting roles.

The service has an effective process in place for carrying out equality impact assessments and acting based on the results. The ED&I team has carried out over 850 equality impact assessments of policies and procedures to identify the implications for people with protected characteristics. The service reviews this data on a quarterly basis, and a private sector expert audits a sample of it periodically. Senior leaders and Norfolk [Fire Authority](#) give good governance and scrutiny of how well the action plan is progressing.

The service has reviewed its fire stations to make sure they have appropriate facilities for all staff. As a result, the service created new changing facilities at Wells Fire Station. Some stations have been prioritised for refurbishment. In our staff survey, 93 percent of respondents (178 out of 192) told us they had access to gender-appropriate workplace facilities.

Managing performance and developing leaders



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement 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.

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure its selection, development and promotion of staff are open, transparent and fair.
- The service should put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders.
- The service should assure itself it has an effective mechanism in place for succession planning including senior leadership roles.

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

The management of individuals' performance is inconsistent

There is a good performance management system in place that allows the service to effectively record personal development discussions (PDD) and personal development plans (PDP). The service told us the rates of personal development reviews are improving and good: over 90 percent of wholetime, on-call and fire control staff completed personal development reviews in the years 2017/18 to 2020/21 inclusive. The rate of completion for support staff rose from 54 percent in 2017/18 to 94 percent in 2020/21.

Through our staff survey, most respondents reported that they had regular discussions with their manager, and that these discussions were meaningful.

Most staff we spoke to had also received an annual PDD, but not all of them found it meaningful.

We found inconsistencies in the way managers carried out PDDs. Each staff member should have individual goals and objectives, and a regular assessment of their performance, but not all staff have individual goals and organisational objectives set. In the staff survey, 37 percent of respondents (64 out of 192) said they didn't find the conversation with their manager about their performance useful.

We found some managers hadn't received the appropriate training in how to conduct the PDD. This may prevent it from being useful.

Not all staff feel the promotion and progression processes is fair

In our previous inspection, an area for improvement was that the service should make sure its selection, development and promotion of staff are open, clear and fair.

The service has changed its promotions process; promotion now requires an application, an interview and selection following a Potential For Development assessment process – but it hasn't updated its policy to reflect these changes.

Staff told us they felt the changes were unfair. The staff survey results reflect this feedback: 61 percent of respondents (117 out of 192) said they felt the promotional process was unfair.

The service needs to do more to make sure staff view its promotion and progression processes as fair.

The service isn't succession planning or developing leadership and high-potential staff effectively

In our previous inspection, an area for improvement was that the service should have an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders. There hasn't been enough progress in this area.

The service doesn't have an effective succession planning process in place to allow it to manage its staffs' career pathways. It hasn't developed the workforce succession planning system detailed within its HMICFRS Improvement Plan.

We also found no clear talent pathway for high-potential staff. The service hasn't developed the talent management system, or the talent management scheme detailed within its HMICFRS Improvement Plan.

As previously identified in this report, there are no formal development programmes for station managers and above, nor is development needed for promotion.

The service needs to improve how it actively manages the career pathways of staff, including those with specialist skills and for leadership roles. It should consider putting in place more formal arrangements to identify and support members of staff to become senior leaders. There is a significant gap in its succession planning at present.

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