

# Fire & Rescue Service 2021/22

## Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service



# Contents

About this inspection	1
Overview	2
Service in numbers	5
<b>Effectiveness</b>	<b>7</b>
<hr/>	
How effective is the service at keeping people safe and secure?	8
Summary	8
Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies	9
Preventing fires and other risks	11
Protecting the public through fire regulation	14
Responding to fires and other emergencies	17
Responding to major and multi-agency incidents	20
<b>Efficiency</b>	<b>23</b>
<hr/>	
How efficient is the service at keeping people safe and secure?	24
Summary	24
Making best use of resources	25
Making the fire and rescue service affordable now and in the future	28
<b>People</b>	<b>31</b>
<hr/>	
How well does the service look after its people?	32
Summary	32
Promoting the right values and culture	33
Getting the right people with the right skills	35
Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity	37
Managing performance and developing leaders	40

# About this inspection

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This inspection is from our third round of inspections of fire and rescue services in England. We first inspected Royal Berkshire 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.

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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 Royal Berkshire 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.


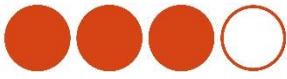
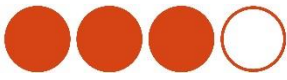



If the service exceeds what we expect for good, we will judge it as outstanding.

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
 <b>Effectiveness</b>	 <b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b>
Understanding fires and other risks	 Good	Good
Preventing fires and other risks	 Good	Good
Protecting the public through fire regulation	 Good	Good
Responding to fires and other emergencies	 Good	Good
Responding to major and multi-agency incidents	 Good	Good
Question	This inspection	2018/19
 <b>Efficiency</b>	 <b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b>
Making best use of resources	 Good	Good
Future affordability	 Good	Good

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

### HM Inspector's summary

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

I am pleased with the performance of Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service in keeping people safe and secure from fires and other risks. For example, it continues to make effective use of its resources and responds quickly to fires and other emergencies.

We were pleased to see that the service has made progress since our first inspection in 2019, working effectively to address areas for improvement in quality-assuring its prevention and protection activity. It has made sure that learning from incidents is shared across the service and the public is public informed of ongoing incidents. It has made sure that its staff record their maintenance of competency consistently. The service has also made sure positive values and behaviours are accepted by everyone across the service. It has developed a positive feedback culture and effective grievance procedures.

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

- The service understands the risk and demand in its area. It has evaluated the way it mitigates risk using its prevention, protection and response teams. It has revised its risk-based inspection programme (RBIP) and is now more focused on the highest risk. This makes sure it can keep the communities of Royal Berkshire safe from fire and other risks.
- The service is facing challenges in recruiting and retaining a skilled workforce. The cost-of-living crisis and pressures raised through pension changes make workforce planning difficult for the service. It should continue to assess innovative ways to mitigate this risk.
- The service has improved its work in equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and its workforce demonstrates positive values and behaviours. The service seeks feedback and challenge from its workforce and the community. This supports it to make decisions based on the needs of both.

Overall, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service is providing a good service to the public. It is effective in preventing fires and protecting the public through enforcement and fire safety audits. It has good response standards and knows the areas in which it can make improvements. We look forward to returning to the service for its future inspection.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MP', followed by a long, sweeping horizontal stroke.

**Matt Parr**

HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

# Service in numbers



## Response

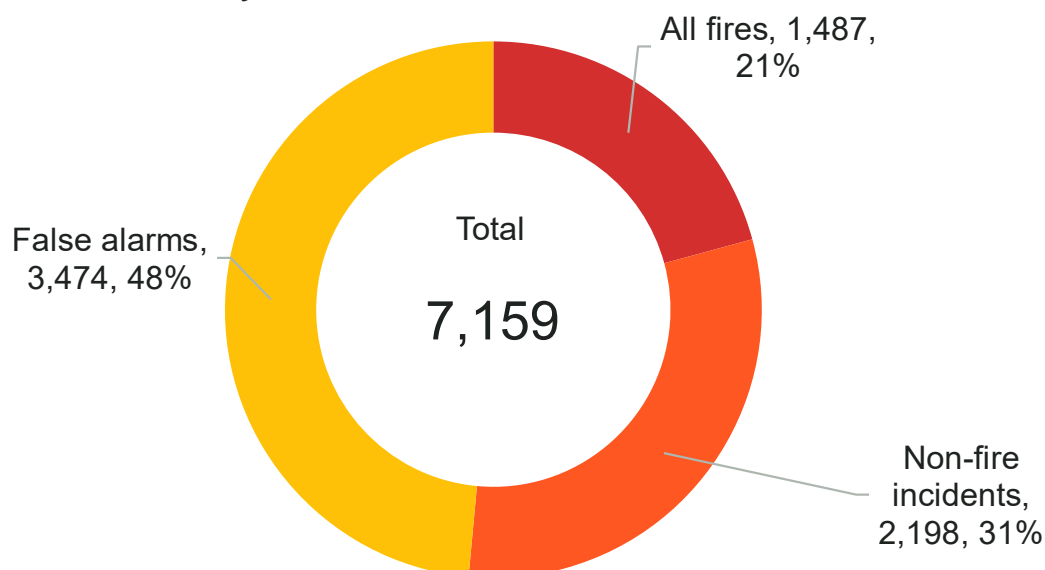
	Berkshire	England
Incidents attended per 1,000 population Year ending 31 December 2021	7.80	9.82
Home fire safety checks carried out by fire and rescue service per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	2.20	4.47
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises Year ending 31 March 2021	0.95	1.70
Average availability of wholetime pumps Year ending 31 March 2021	96.8%	86.4%



## Cost

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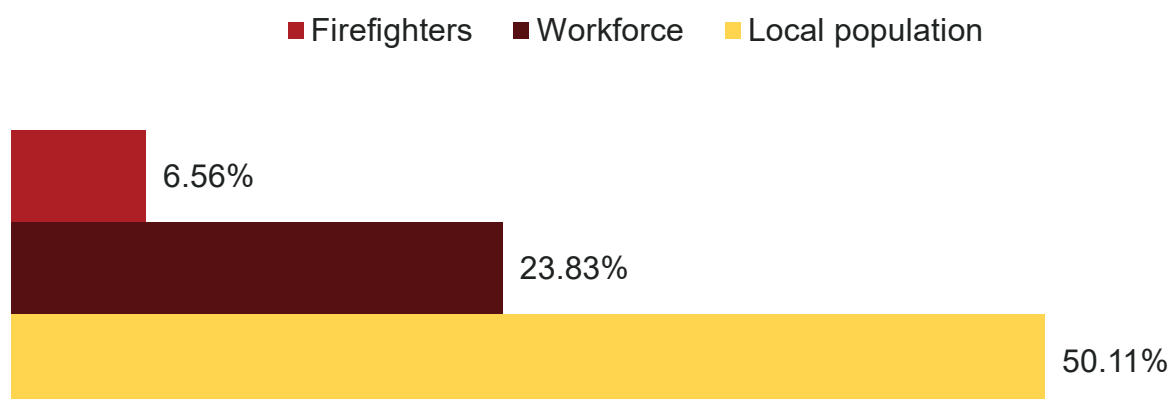
Incidents attended in the year to 31 December 2021





	Berkshire	England
Five-year change in total workforce 2016 to 2021	4.05%	-1.60%
Number of firefighters per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	0.47	0.62
Percentage of firefighters who are wholetime Year ending 31 March 2021	82.9%	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

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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. Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service's overall effectiveness is good.

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The service has identified and assessed a range of fire and rescue-related risks to its communities. It has used a range of information and consulted widely, to produce a comprehensive community risk management plan (CRMP), formerly known as its [integrated risk management plan \(IRMP\)](#). The consultation is well planned and supports the service to include the public in its decision-making.

The service continues to be good at preventing fires and providing the public with advice and guidance about fire safety. It also protects the public by ensuring it enforces fire safety regulation proportionately.

The service responds well to fires and other emergencies despite a reduction in its fire engine availability. Its incident commanders are well trained and prepared for major and multi-agency incidents, working well with other fire and emergency services.

Since our previous inspection in 2019, the service has addressed several of the areas for improvement that we highlighted. These include improving its operational debrief process, introducing quality assurance in its prevention and protection work and improving information provided to the public about incidents.

But there is still some work to do. The service should continue to evaluate its prevention and protection work to make sure it meets the needs of the community. And it should monitor its response standards and fire engine availability to make sure it continues to resource to risk.

## Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies



**Good (2019: Good)**

Royal Berkshire 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 make sure it gathers and records relevant and up-to-date site-specific risk information, to clear its backlog and help protect firefighters, the public and property during an emergency.

### Innovative practice: The service undertakes constructive and continuous public consultation

The service has consulted with communities and its own staff, the six local authorities, third-sector organisations and other emergency services to both understand local risks and explain how it intends to mitigate them.

The service gives information and a range of change options for the public to choose from. This has supported the service to adapt its approach to unwanted fire signals. It has also helped the service to have constructive conversations with the public about the decision to close a station.

The service has also collated the data from all its public consultations and uses this to inform decision-making.

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 the risks it faces**

The service has assessed an appropriate range of risks and threats after a thorough CRMP process. When assessing risk, it has considered relevant information collected from a broad range of internal and external sources and data sets. This includes analysis and validation of the last six years of its own, regional, and national incident data, flooding incident data, NHS Safer data, ONS data and Experian Mosaic data.

When appropriate, the service has consulted and had constructive dialogue with communities, its own staff, the six local authorities, third-sector organisations and other emergency services to both understand the risks and explain how it intends to mitigate them.

The service gives information and a range of change options for the public to choose from. This has supported the service to adapt its approach to unwanted fire signals. This has also helped the service to have meaningful conversations with the public about the decision to close a station.

The service has also collated the data from all its public consultations and uses this to inform decision-making.

## **The service is good at planning its resources to reduce risk**

After assessing relevant risks, the service has recorded its findings in a CRMP that is easy to use. This plan 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. For example, the service has identified areas that sit outside its planned ten-minute response time and is targeting prevention and protection activity in these areas to reduce the likelihood and impact of an incident.

## **The service gathers, maintains and shares a good 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 the reinspection of high-risk sites every two years at premises including high-rise residential buildings, commercial buildings and hospitals.

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 recently minimised the risk in a hotel that provided temporary support for Afghan refugees. The service gave advice about physical fire safety measures and checked that their use was understood by both the hotel staff and residents. The service's hub model promotes monthly risk analysis between prevention, protection and response teams. Where appropriate, risk information is passed on to other organisations, such as the local authority private-rented sector and housing teams.

## **The service builds its understanding of risk from operational activity**

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, learnings identified in a recent incident on the new all-lane running motorway have resulted in a change to operational procedure and a quicker response for the public.

## **The service is improving risk information following 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 1 of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service has responded positively and proactively to learnings from this tragedy. The service assessed the risk of each 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)**

Royal Berkshire 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.

#### **Area for improvement**

The service should evaluate its prevention work, so it understands the benefits of its safe and well targeting approach better.

#### **Area for improvement**

The service should develop a clear process for post incident prevention activity.

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 prevention strategy is reducing risk**

The service's prevention strategy is clearly linked to the risks identified in its CRMP. The key aim for the service is to reduce the number of people injured or killed by fires occurring in the home. In the year ending March 2021, over 80 percent of its completed [safe and well visits](#) were carried out for those identified as being more vulnerable to fire and other risks.

The service's teams work well together and with other relevant organisations on prevention. It also 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, staff moved between hubs to reduce a backlog of safe and well visits. Local station plans align to hub plans and the service's CRMP.

### **The service adapted its prevention activity during the pandemic**

We considered how the service had adapted its prevention work during our COVID-19 specific inspection in October 2020. At that time, we found it had adapted its public prevention work appropriately. Since then, we are encouraged to find that the service continues to triage its referrals over the phone and has resumed face-to-face safe and well visits. The service gives training and education both in person and virtually.

### **The service has changed its approach to targeting activity**

Prevention activity is clearly prioritised using a risk-based approach towards people most at risk from fire and other emergencies. For example, all referrals received by the service are triaged and those of highest risk are visited promptly.

Following feedback from its staff, the service has recently changed its approach to targeting its safe and well visits. The previous approach took account of a broad range of information and data to identify households that could be at risk. As we established in our previous inspection, this meant that the service conducted a higher number of visits overall, but they knew some were lower risk.

The service has decided to focus on increasing the number of referrals for safe and well visits it receives from partner organisations such as community mental health teams and local authorities. It is training professionals in these organisations to support this focus. The service needs to make sure it is also taking a balanced approach and visiting people most at risk from fire based on local needs and intelligence, which might not be known to other organisations.

The service should also review its process for giving post-incident prevention activity. We reviewed several incidents where we would have expected a safe and well visit to have been carried out but there were no records of a visit.

### **Staff are well trained to provide safe and well checks**

Staff told us that they have the right skills and confidence to make safe and well visits. These checks cover an appropriate range of hazards that can put [vulnerable people](#) at greater risk from fire and other emergencies. This includes things like mobility, smoking and other health-related concerns. The service also signposts people to other organisations that may be better able to meet their needs.

We were pleased to see that the service has developed an approach to quality-assuring its safe and well visits. This was an area for improvement identified in 2019. The service has identified both individual and [organisational learning](#) through this process and we look forward to seeing further progress in this area.

### **The service is good at responding to safeguarding concerns**

Staff we interviewed told us about occasions when they identified [safeguarding](#) problems. They told us they feel confident and trained to act appropriately and promptly. When staff raise a concern, they are given feedback on the progress, when appropriate. The service has made an increasing number of safeguarding referrals through its strong partnership with local safeguarding boards.

### **The service collaborates well with others to prevent fires and other emergencies**

The service works with a wide range of other organisations, such as the local authorities, Thames Valley Police, South Central Ambulance Service and the Canal & River Trust to prevent fires and other emergencies.

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. For example, a co-ordinated approach to campaigns raises awareness for water or road safety.

### **The service is good at tackling fire-setting behaviour**

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 training staff in providing FireSafe, an intervention to educate children and young people. Crews will also conduct local visits to areas in the community when intelligence suggests there could be increased [anti-social behaviour](#).

Where appropriate, the service routinely shares information with other relevant organisations, including Thames Valley Police, to support the prosecution of arsonists. A joint approach between the emergency services is increasing the number of accredited and trained staff in fire investigation.

## The service has developed its approach to evaluation

While the service has made some progress in developing evaluation tools, the following area for improvement identified in 2019 remains. The service should continue to evaluate its prevention work, so it better understands the benefits of its safe and well targeting approach.

These tools measure how effective the service's work is. This helps it to know what works and make sure that its communities get prevention activity that meets their needs. For example, the service has decided to carry out ongoing, follow-up safe and well visits for those they identified as very vulnerable within the last year.

## Protecting the public through fire regulation



### Good (2019: Good)

Royal Berkshire 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.

#### Area for improvement

The service should ensure it monitors and evaluates its revised approach to the burden of false alarms (termed 'unwanted fire signals').

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 protection strategy is aligned to its risk management plan

The service's protection strategy is clearly linked to the risk it has identified in its CRMP. Staff across the service are involved in this activity, with information effectively exchanged as needed. For example, crews and protection staff complete joint visits to improve staff awareness of building construction and safety measures. 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. For example, as well as staff based in its local delivery hubs, the service has a dedicated built environment project team to review the Grenfell Tower Inquiry recommendations. It also has a separate enforcement hub to keep people safe and secure from the risk of fire.



## **The service adapted its protection activity during the pandemic**

We considered how the service had adapted its protection activity during our COVID-19 specific inspection in October 2020. At that time, we found it had adapted its protection work well. Since then, we are encouraged to find that the service has resumed face-to-face audits. It has also digitised some of its processes and revised its RBIP.

## **The service has improved its approach to identifying risk**

The service's risk-based inspection programme is focused on the service's highest-risk buildings. It has recently reviewed its methodology for identifying risk and explained that it has reduced the number of very high and high-risk premises from over 12,000 to 5,616. The service aims to have visited all its 518 very high-risk premises by March 2023. We look forward to seeing the progress the service makes with this target.

## **Audits of high-rise buildings with interim measures continue**

Audits have been carried out at all high-rise buildings the service has identified as using similar cladding to that installed on Grenfell Tower. Information gathered during these audits is made available to response teams and control operators, enabling them to respond more effectively in an emergency. The service continues to monitor and advise on buildings with interim measures.

## **The service has developed a quality-assurance process for fire safety audits**

We reviewed a range of audits of different premises across the service. This included audits as part of the service's RBIP; after fires at premises where fire safety legislation applies where [enforcement action](#) had been taken; and at high-rise, high-risk buildings. Not all the audits we reviewed were completed in a consistent and systematic way, or in line with the service's policies.

Following the area for improvement identified in 2019, the service has very recently introduced a quality-assurance approach for protection audits. The service identified that it isn't consistently recording and completing audits in the buildings it has targeted in the timescales it has set. Individual and organisational learning from the new quality-assurance approach has been included in an improvement plan. We look forward to the progress the service makes with this approach.

## **The service evaluates its revised RBIP**

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. We look forward to the service completing further evaluation of its revised RBIP.

### **The service takes appropriate enforcement action**

The service consistently uses its full range of enforcement powers and, when appropriate, prosecutes those who don't comply with fire safety regulations. The service was pursuing a prosecution at the time of inspection. Operational crews are notified of enforcement activity in their station area to maintain a good understanding of risk.

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

- 4 alteration notices;
- 158 informal notifications;
- 30 enforcement notices;
- 4 prohibition notices; and
- undertook 2 prosecutions.

It completed 8 prosecutions of offences in the 5 years from 2016 to 2021.

### **The service has well-trained staff in protection**

The service has enough qualified protection staff to meet the requirements of the service's revised RBIP. It has secured funding for an additional 10 protection staff and has plans to help its built environment audit work to become business as usual from 2023. 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. For example, the service has invested in staff completing master's qualifications in fire engineering.

### **The service works well with others to share information**

The service works closely with other enforcement agencies to regulate fire safety and routinely exchanges risk information with them. This includes organisations such as the Office of Rail and Road, Trading Standards, Ofsted, Care Quality Commission and local councils. The service is also agreeing a memorandum of understanding with local authorities to share information and conduct joint enforcement activity in houses of multiple occupation.

### **The service has improved its response to building and licencing consultations**

The service responds to most building consultations on time. As such, it meets its statutory responsibility to comment on fire safety arrangements at new and altered buildings. The response rate has improved since 2019, but we found that staff were having to extend the time frames due to high workloads.

## The service provides useful information to businesses

The service proactively engages with local businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation. The service's web pages hold information about compliance and fire safety, which staff can direct responsible people and business owners to via a QR code.

## The service has made some progress to reduce unwanted fire signals

The service has made some progress to reduce the burden of unwanted fire signals. However, the following area for improvement identified in 2019 remains: The service should make sure it monitors and evaluates its revised approach to the burden of false alarms (termed 'unwanted fire signals').

To March 2021, 48 percent of incidents attended (3,243) were false alarms. This is higher than the national rate of 42 percent. In addition, 63 percent of the false alarm attendances were due to faulty apparatus. This means that engines may be unavailable to respond to genuine incidents because they are attending false alarms. It also creates a risk to the public if more fire engines travel at high speed on roads to respond to these incidents.

## Responding to fires and other emergencies



### Good (2019: Good)

Royal Berkshire 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.

#### Area for improvement

The service should make sure its [mobile data terminals](#) are reliable so that firefighters can readily access up-to-date risk information.

#### Area for improvement

The service should monitor and review its response model with reduced availability of its fire engines and in line with its community risk management plan.

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

## **The service response strategy is based on an understanding of risk**

The service's response strategy is linked to the risks identified in its CRMP. 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. For example, its new station at Theale has been located to provide a better response for communities in the west of the county.

## **The service consistently meets its response standards**

There are no national response standards of performance for the public. The service has set out its own response standards in its CRMP. The service aims to respond to incidents within 10 minutes on 75 percent of occasions.

The service consistently meets its standards. Home Office data shows that in the year to 31 March 2021, the service's response time to [primary fires](#) was 7 minutes and 41 seconds. This is in line with the average for predominantly urban services. The service responded to incidents within 10 minutes on 78.2 percent of occasions. It has a low response time compared to other services, of 7 minutes and 3 seconds, to dwelling fires.

We are pleased that the service continues to meet its standards and provides a good response to incidents. However, it does this with reduced availability of its fire engines. The service should continue to monitor and review its response to efficiently meet the aims of its CRMP.

## **Fire engine availability isn't in line with the service's targets**

To support its response strategy, the service aims to have:

- 100 percent of wholetime fire engines available on 100 percent of occasions; and
- on-call fire engines available on 60 percent of occasions.

The service doesn't always meet this standard. In the year to 31 March 2021, data shows that wholetime fire engine availability was 96.8 percent. On-call fire engine availability was 54.5 percent.

## **The service has well-trained incident commanders**

The service has trained incident commanders who are assessed properly at the relevant level every two years. An online system has recently been introduced for staff to log their ongoing learning in the command of incidents and at exercises. This helps the service to safely and effectively manage the full range of incidents that it could face; from small and routine incidents to complex multi-agency incidents.

As part of our inspection, we interviewed incident commanders from across the service. The incident commanders we interviewed are familiar with assessing risk, decision-making and recording information at incidents in line with national best practice and the [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles \(JESIP\)](#).

### **Control is included in all aspects of the service**

Thames Valley Fire Control is a joint [control room](#) for Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Services. This means control operators can deploy resources promptly and effectively across the three services' borders.

We are pleased to see the service's control staff are integrated into Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service's command, training, exercise, debrief and assurance activity. Staff described taking part in recent high-rise exercises. Their feedback has supported the development of new processes.

### **The service is developing the way it handles multiple fire survival guidance calls**

The control room staff we interviewed are confident they could give fire survival guidance to many callers simultaneously. This was identified as learning for fire services after the Grenfell Tower fire. Staff interviewed described recent training exercises and the use of back-up control systems to support multiple fire survival guidance calls should this type of incident occur.

Control has good systems in place to exchange real-time risk information with incident commanders, other responding partners, such as ambulance and police services, 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.

### **Risk information is easily understood, but not always quickly available**

We sampled a range of risk information on the service's mobile data terminals, 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 on the mobile data terminals. The introduction of an electronic quick reference sheet to view information briefly has been well received by staff.

However, we found that there are problems with the slow functioning speed of the mobile data terminals that provide firefighters with the information needed.

## **The service has improved the way it evaluates operational performance**

As part of the inspection, we reviewed a range of emergency incidents and training events. These include the service's structured incident debriefs. We are pleased to see that the service routinely follows its policies to assure itself that staff command incidents in line with operational guidance. This was an area for improvement identified in our previous inspection in 2019.

Internal risk information is updated with the information received from site visits, protection audits and structured debriefs. Staff can give immediate risk updates by email and contribute to the assurance process through an electronic feedback form. The service's dedicated operational assurance team monitors all incident feedback and the structured debrief process. Staff are well trained in facilitating debriefs and can identify relevant learning. This information is exchanged with other interested partners such as other fire and rescue services, Thames Valley Police and the [local resilience forum \(LRF\)](#) partners.

## **The service learns from local and national incidents**

The service has responded to learning from incidents to improve its service for the public. For example, the service completes joint operational information notes to align policies and procedures across the Thames Valley fire and rescue services.

We are encouraged to see that 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 giving feedback about a fault on a fire engine that is widely used in the United Kingdom.

## **The service is good at keeping the public informed about incidents**

The service has made improvements in the way it informs the public about ongoing incidents following the area of improvement identified in 2019. The service now has good systems in place to help keep the public safe during and after incidents. This includes having an arrangement in place with the LRF's warn and inform group, which helped prompt messages to be sent during the period of hot weather in July 2022. The service has trained staff in social media use and can provide an out-of-hours response.

## **Responding to major and multi-agency incidents**



**Good (2019: Good)**

Royal Berkshire 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 well 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 CRMP. For example, the service has highlighted the potential impact of seasonal disruption. Risks include hot weather resulting in increased wildfires or water-related incidents, or high rainfall resulting in wide-area flooding.

The service 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. Firefighters have access to risk information from neighbouring services within 10 km of the border via their mobile data terminals.

### **The service can respond to major and multi-agency incidents**

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

The service has good arrangements in place, which are well understood by staff. For example, an e-learning package has been completed by operational staff about the response expected should a marauding terrorist attack occur.

### **The service works well with other fire services**

The service supports other fire and rescue services responding to emergency incidents. It shares a control room with the other Thames Valley fire services. This means that the nearest fire engine to an incident is [mobilised](#) independent of which service it comes from. The three Thames Valley services often jointly respond to incidents across their borders, using their aligned equipment and fire engines. It is intraoperable with these services and can form part of a multi-agency response.

### **Staff take part in cross-border exercising**

The service has a cross-border exercise plan with neighbouring fire and rescue services so they can work together effectively to keep the public safe. The plan includes the risks of major events at which the service could foreseeably provide support or request help from neighbouring services. We were encouraged to see that feedback from these exercises is used to inform risk information and service plans. Staff described being part of recent high-rise exercises with surrounding fire and rescue services.



### **Incident command training is aligned to JESIP**

The incident commanders we interviewed had been trained in and were familiar with JESIP. The service gave us strong evidence that it consistently follows these principles. This includes the regular use of the JESIP mobile application by incident commanders. The service also suggested and volunteered to chair a new strategic JESIP subgroup in the LRF.

### **The service is actively working with other partners**

The service has good arrangements in place to respond to emergencies with other partners that make up the Thames Valley LRF. These arrangements include preparing multi-agency response plans for high-risk sites, short-term events and major incidents. A critical event management team and operational support room are actioned at short notice. These were enacted to plan for and respond well to the demands placed on the service by the hot weather in July 2022.

The service is a valued partner and attends most of the 13 subgroups of the LRF, including the executive board; the training, learning and exercise group; and a newly established wildfire group. The service takes part in regular training events with other members of the LRF. It uses the learning to develop planning assumptions about responding to major and multi-agency incidents.

### **The service uses national and joint organisational learning to plan for incidents**

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



# Efficiency



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



## Good

### Summary

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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 CRMP. 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. Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service's overall efficiency is good.

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The service has good financial management arrangements in place and a range of assurance measures to keep control of its spending. Scenario planning is used effectively so that strategic plans are robust.

The service is making effective use of [benchmarking](#) opportunities to improve its value for money. It knows it still has buildings within its estate that need to be improved.

The service is collaborating well with other organisations to increase efficiency. Where possible, the service continues to work with other organisations to procure equipment to make sure the Thames Valley's response to emergency incidents is consistent.

The service has made better use of technology to assist its operational effectiveness, an area of improvement identified in our previous inspection. It could improve further by assuring its workforce's time is spent productively and through better integration of its systems.

## Making best use of resources



### Good (2019: Good)

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service is good 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 2022/23 was £38.5m. This is a 7.5 percent increase from the previous financial year.

#### Area for improvement

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

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 plans support its objectives

The service's financial and workforce plans, including allocating staff to prevention, protection and response, continue to reflect and are consistent with the risks and priorities identified in the CRMP. It divides its service area into three hubs, which are resourced according to local risk and demand. Station plans reflect the hub plans and both align activity with the service's CRMP. Every three months, each hub reports progress against the service's objectives to the strategic performance board. Through this regular review of performance, the service adjusts its resource allocation to meet changes in demand, risk or priorities.

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. The strategic performance board and the [fire authority](#) provide overview and scrutiny of the service's budget performance both quarterly and annually. This regular review means the service can act when it risks not meeting its financial targets. This is supported by both internal and external audits, which haven't found any areas of concern with the service's financial management.

## **The service could increase staff productivity**

We are pleased to see that the service's arrangements for managing performance clearly link resource use to the CRMP and strategic priorities. For example, the service identified the need to focus more prevention resources in the west of the county in response to a backlog of [safe and well visits](#) following the pandemic.

Firefighters carry out some prevention and protection activity, including safe and well visits, safety education events and joint fire safety audits. 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).

The service should do more to make sure its workforce is as productive as possible. This includes considering new ways of working. Some staff told us that they had unmanageable workloads, while others felt they had spare capacity when compared to others. Staff have completed building improvement work while on shift as opposed to activity that would support prevention or protection work. Some systems and processes can be complex, which makes it harder for the service to ensure that staff are being as productive as they can be at work.

The service hasn't reviewed its shift patterns since 2018. It has evaluated its current operational model and understands that current patterns support staff with their cost of living through overtime opportunities. The service is considering ways it could further improve its operational model and technology systems to balance workloads. The service should assure itself that its workforce is productive and that their time is used as efficiently and effectively as possible to meet the priorities in the CRMP.

The service relies too much on overtime and still has a significant number of vacancies. It has a high number of staff in development and must use more short-term contracts than it would like to manage areas of its work.

The service had to adapt its working practices because of the pandemic, which are still part of its day-to-day activity. These include some staff working flexibly from home or the office and using virtual meeting options to reduce unnecessary travel.

## **The service collaborates to achieve efficiencies**

We are pleased to see the service meets its statutory duty to collaborate and routinely considers opportunities to collaborate with other emergency responders. The service has a maintenance of fleet arrangement with the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service. It also formally shares several of its facilities with South Central Ambulance Service and Thames Valley Police.

Collaborative work is aligned to the priorities in the service's CRMP. For example, the service has bought new fire engines through the joint Thames Valley procurement contract, which supports the services when responding across the borders. It recently obtained a new aerial ladder platform in collaboration with the Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service to make sure the services can respond to an increasing number of high-rise developments in the area.

The service comprehensively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and results of its collaborations. Notable results include using learnings from creating shared estates with Thames Valley Police and South Central Ambulance Service at Hungerford and Crowthorne to improve the new shared site at Theale. This ensured reduced costs for all involved.

### **The service has robust continuity arrangements**

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. During our inspection, the service put a critical event management process in place to prepare for the heat wave of July 2022. This supported the service to respond effectively during a period of increased demand.

Thames Valley Control has robust and regularly tested operational continuity arrangements in place in case of disruption, cyber-attack or a major incident requiring multiple fire survival guidance calls or a national response.

### **The service has sound financial management**

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, an external consultant has supported the service to benchmark itself against other services. The benchmarking report identifies that the service manages costs well and has the scope to improve its efficiency through its staff, technology and estate.

The service has made savings and efficiencies, which haven't affected its operational performance or the service for the public. These include:

- restructuring its senior and middle leadership teams and reducing the number of department heads and flexi duty officers;
- managing some of its stations in pairs with the reduced leadership teams;
- sharing fleet maintenance with Hampshire and the Isle of Wight; and
- rationalising the service's estate, saving on maintenance costs of older properties.

This has helped it to save £2.4m in the last 5 years, as required by its efficiency plan. A thorough evaluation of the approach shows overall improvement in service provision and some opportunities for further improvements.

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. The service is due to buy breathing apparatus jointly with the Thames Valley services in 2022/23. It continues to review its equipment and purchase needs through a joint Thames Valley procurement contract. This contract supports the service's work with other Thames Valley fire services when responding across its borders.

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



### Good (2019: Good)

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service is good 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.

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 its future financial challenges

The service has a sound understanding of future financial challenges. It plans to mitigate its main or significant financial risks. For example, the service recognises that the property element of its capital programme isn't fully funded from 2024/25. It submitted two previous bids to the [Salix Finance Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme](#), which were unsuccessful. The outcome of a third bid hasn't been decided. The service intends to review its future plans in 2022/23, considering the condition of its estate, to make best use of its available resources.

The underpinning assumptions are relatively robust, realistic and sensible. They take account of the wider external environment and some scenario planning for future spending reductions. This includes council tax precept flexibility, which has enabled an increase of £5 (7.2 percent) for a Band D property in 2022/23.

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. It has benefited from using an external company to benchmark itself against other fire and rescue services and determine where it can improve value for money. The service met its previous efficiency plan and saved £2.4m by 2022.

In the service's medium-term financial plan, it has identified savings of £345,000 that it can make in 2022/23. This includes its successful appeal of business rate charges worth £77,000 per year. It has also identified £120,000 of the £325,000 savings it needs to make in 2023/24. The service has transferred £332,000 from its budget carry-forward reserve to its transition fund reserve. This will support invest-to-save IT projects from 2023/24.

### **The service maintains and makes good use of its reserves**

The service has a sensible and sustainable plan for using its [reserves](#). This plan includes holding a general reserve of £2.2m, which is 6.8 percent of its revenue budget and will mitigate against the risk of unexpected events, such as unfunded pay awards.

### **Fleet and estate plans are improving the service's efficiency and effectiveness**

The service's estate and fleet strategies have clear links to the CRMP. The development of the new station at Theale was as a direct result of needing to improve the service's response in the west of the county. Both strategies exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness. For example, the service's arrangement with Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service for fleet maintenance saves the service approximately £69,000 per annum.

The strategies are regularly reviewed so that the service can accurately assess the impact that any changes in estate and fleet provision, or future innovation, would have on risk. The service knows that some of its estate needs improvement and it may not be able to fund all the projects. It is considering how to make best use of future available resources. At times, the service has used a self-improvement approach. This has meant station-based staff have used some of their time to improve their working environment.

### **The service has made improvements to its IT systems**

We are encouraged to see the improvements the service has made since the previous inspection in 2019, where we identified this as an area for improvement. Some of the service's prevention and protection activities have moved from paper-based recording to digital systems. Further improvements could still be made to better integrate the service's systems and make sure workforce time is used as efficiently as possible.

The service actively considers how changes in technology and future innovation may affect risk. It adapted its IT strategy to meet service needs during the pandemic. It also seeks to exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness presented by changes in technology. For example, it is using a QR code system to promote fire safety advice for residents and owners of high-rise buildings.

The service has put in place some of the capacity and capability needed to achieve sustainable transformation. It routinely seeks opportunities to work with others to improve efficiency and provide better services in the future. It should continue to consider how it can be competitive and attract those with the right skills to implement its IT strategy.

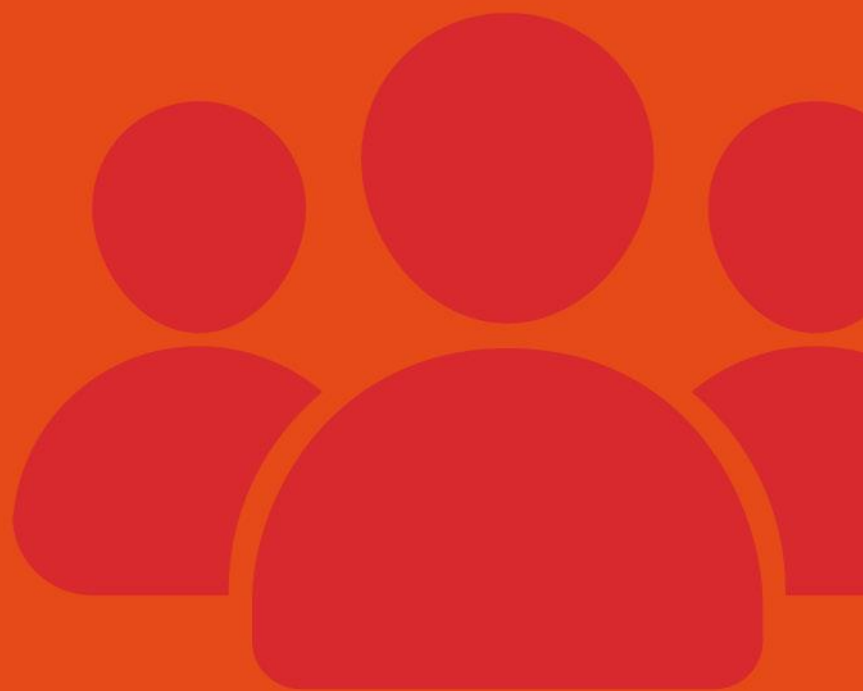
**The service generates some of its income from external sources**

The service actively considers and exploits opportunities for generating extra income. It continues to rent out some of its office spaces and has agreed lease terms with Thames Valley Police.

Where appropriate, it has applied for external funding to invest in improvements to the service given to the public. These include a recent application to the community infrastructure levy. The service is a member of the Fire and Rescue Indemnity Company and received a proportion of the accumulated surplus due to a lower-than-expected level of claims.



# People



# How well does the service look after its people?



## Good

### Summary

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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, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service is good at looking after its people.

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The service has made good progress against the areas for improvement identified in our previous inspection. The behaviours it expects and the values it promotes are now well understood and displayed by all staff. Staff are confident to use the feedback systems in place and feel valued and listened to. Grievance procedures have been reviewed and are effective.

The service promotes a positive learning culture. The service has made sure that the competency recording process is consistently applied and staff are well trained for their roles.

The service has effective and well-understood health and safety policies and procedures in place and promotes them to all staff. The service could improve its absence procedure to ensure a consistent approach is applied by managers.

The service is facing challenges in recruiting and retaining a skilled workforce. The cost-of-living crisis and pressures raised through pension changes make workforce planning difficult for the service. It should continue to assess innovative ways to mitigate and manage this risk.

The service has high personal development review completion rates but should make sure that all staff use the process to support development. The service has improved its promotion process and is developing its leaders. It could do more to identify high potential in its workforce to support succession planning.

## Promoting the right values and culture



### Good (2019: Good)

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service is good 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.

#### Area for improvement

The service should make sure that it has effective absence/attendance procedures in place.

#### Innovative practice: The service has a culture that promotes positive behaviours and values

We are encouraged by the cultural improvements the service has made since our previous inspection in 2019. The service now has well-defined values that are understood by staff. Staff talked positively about the service's approach to values and the introduction of the behavioural competency framework. The main staff communications, including the intranet, staff magazine and manager information sheet, are based on the service values. The service sent the new behavioural competency framework and employee code of conduct to every employee. We saw behaviours that reflected the service's values at all levels of 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 has a culture that promotes positive behaviours and values**

We are encouraged by the cultural improvements the service has made since our previous inspection in 2019. The service now has well-defined values that are understood by staff. In our staff survey, conducted between 7 June 2022 and 11 July 2022, 88.9 percent of respondents (200 of 225) said they were aware of the service's values. This was an area for improvement in our previous inspection.

We saw behaviours that reflected the service's values at all levels of the service. Staff talked positively about the service's approach to values and the introduction of the behavioural competency framework. The main staff communications, including the intranet, staff magazine and manager information sheet, are based on the service's values. The service sent the new behavioural competency framework and employee code of conduct to every employee. Work has also been carried out to show how the service's values align to the new national [Core Code of Ethics](#).

Senior leaders act as role models. For example, most staff described the senior leadership team as visible and approachable, providing opportunities for feedback. In our staff survey, 76.9 percent of respondents (173 of 225) said that senior leaders consistently model the service's values.

There is a positive working culture throughout the service, with most staff empowered and willing to challenge poor behaviours when they encounter them. Staff described situations when they had challenged inappropriate language or behaviours and felt well supported by the service. However, we heard that some staff would be reluctant to challenge some behaviours and may still need support to confidently and consistently do so.

## **Staff have good access to services that support their mental and physical health**

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 to support both physical and mental health. For example, the service has an occupational health team, employee assistance programme, links to private healthcare options and promotes the use of the [Fire Fighters Charity](#). Staff spoke positively about the trauma support given automatically following difficult incidents.

There are good provisions in place to promote staff well-being. This includes a well-being working group to monitor trends and establish opportunities to give sessions on issues such as financial well-being or one-to-one health checks for staff. In our staff survey, 96.4 percent of respondents (217 of 225) said they feel able to access services to support their mental well-being. Some staff still reported delays in accessing health services, but most understand the well-being support processes available and have confidence in them.

## **The service has a positive health and safety culture**

The service continues to have effective and well-understood health and safety policies and procedures in place. The service's health, safety and well-being strategy focuses on three areas:

- safe and healthy people;
- safe and healthy places; and
- safe and healthy processes.

These policies and procedures are readily available and effectively promoted to all staff. Health and safety or operational bulletins give information and learning for staff, while critical detail is sent by email. In our staff survey, 97.3 percent of respondents (219 of 225) said they feel their personal safety and welfare is treated seriously by the service. 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. The service sets out its expectations in its policy. Managers described monitoring the hours worked by staff, while considering their health and well-being.

## **Absence isn't consistently managed within the service**

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

The service has an absence policy, but it isn't widely understood by staff or managers. From the files we reviewed, we saw several inconsistent decisions made as a result of a lack of guidance and managerial discretion being applied. Policy wasn't always followed and we saw examples of triggers being missed for repeat periods of short-term absence. In addition, some formal review meetings weren't held.

Overall, the service has seen an increase in staff absences over the last 12 months. Some of these were related to COVID-19. The service identifies that staff absences are having an impact on daily staffing arrangements and fire engine availability.

## **Getting the right people with the right skills**



**Good (2019: Good)**

Royal Berkshire 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 CRMPs, 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.

### **Area for improvement**

The service should review its workforce planning to make sure that it has effective arrangements in place to manage staff turnover while continuing to provide its core service to the public.

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

### **The service has a good process to plan its workforce requirements**

The service has good workforce planning in place. This makes sure skills and capabilities align with what is needed to effectively action the CRMP. However, the service is facing difficulties in recruiting staff promptly to fill current skills gaps. These gaps have been created by external factors, including additional unexpected leavers following changes to the pension scheme, the cost-of-living crisis and competitive external recruitment opportunities. The service needs to do more to improve how it considers its future needs and succession planning.

The service knows it needs a minimum number of operational firefighters to maintain fire engine availability and a good response standard. [As described earlier](#), the service has maintained a good response standard even with recent reduced availability.

Workforce and succession planning is subject to consistent scrutiny in the form of regular meetings to discuss requirements. The workforce planning group meets quarterly to review the skills and profile of the workforce expected in the year ahead. To support managers in daily staffing needs, a response resourcing group has been developed. This approach means the service can identify gaps in workforce capabilities and resilience.

### **The service has a good process to monitor operational skills and capabilities**

Operational 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. We reviewed the service's training records and found that staff were qualified in the core skills needed for their role, such as water safety, breathing apparatus and incident command.

The service monitors staff competence on an electronic operational training package. This provides managers with a dashboard and colour coded system to review staff compliance. We are pleased with progress the service has made in ensuring that all staff use the system consistently. This was an area for improvement identified in our previous inspection in 2019. The service also regularly updates its understanding of staff's skills and risk-critical safety capabilities in line with [national operational guidance](#).

### **The service promotes a positive learning and improvement culture**

A culture of continuous improvement is promoted throughout the service and staff are encouraged to learn and develop. For example, the service has adopted the apprentice firefighter route for new recruits and introduced development assessment pathways for all operational staff. The development assessment pathways determine the training courses needed to be competent in current and future roles. They have been extended to roles in the protection team. The service plans to include other roles in future.

We are pleased to see that the service has a range of resources in place. This includes a new online learning system that all staff can easily access, including [on-call](#) staff. All staff have regular refresher training in topics including [safeguarding](#), media, health and safety, and EDI. The service has also invested in leadership development courses from an external specialist for its managers. The service continues to develop staff through its annual training bursary scheme.

Most staff told us that they can access a range of learning and development resources. In response to our staff survey, 87.6 percent of respondents (197 of 225) said they had received sufficient training to do their job effectively. In addition, 87.1 percent (196 of 225) agreed that they were satisfied with the level of learning and development available to them.

## **Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity**



### **Good (2019: Requires improvement)**

Royal Berkshire 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.

### **Area for improvement**

The service should improve its use of positive action tools and opportunities to increase diversity in 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 is good at encouraging and acting on staff feedback**

The service 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. It also includes targeted work with people to determine matters that affect different staff groups. Feedback and challenge are encouraged by senior leaders visiting stations, through a private, confidential reporting line or annual staff surveys.

The actions being taken to address matters raised are communicated and have been positively received by staff. This was an area for improvement in our previous inspection of the service in 2019. The service has published the results and agreed action plans following annual staff surveys. In our staff survey, 71.1 percent of respondents (160 of 225) said they were confident in the system for providing feedback to all levels. In addition, 77.3 percent of respondents (174 of 225) said they would be able to challenge ideas without any detriment. Representative bodies and staff associations reported that the service engages with them well.

### **The service is good at tackling bullying, harassment and discrimination**

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

In response to our staff survey, 4.4 percent of respondents (10 of 225) told us they had been subject to harassment and 6.7 percent (15 of 225) to discrimination over the past 12 months. Of these staff, most did not think that their concerns had been dealt with appropriately.

Most staff are confident in the service's approach to tackling bullying, harassment, discrimination, grievances and disciplinary matters. The service has updated its grievance procedures, which we identified as an area for improvement in our previous inspection. The service has made sure all staff are trained and clear about what to do if they encounter inappropriate behaviour.



## **The service could do more to improve its operational workforce diversity**

The service knows it needs to go further to increase its operational workforce diversity. Limited development of its recruitment campaigns in 2021 meant [wholetime firefighter](#) recruitment rounds haven't been directed at or accessible to under-represented groups. The service told us it had to rush these recruitment rounds due to a delay during the pandemic.

The service needs to encourage applicants from diverse backgrounds into operational roles. There has been slow progress to improve both the diversity of ethnic backgrounds and genders for operational staff in the service. None of the new wholetime firefighter recruits were women or from an ethnic minority background. Some success has been seen in on-call station areas due to localised promotional activities leading more women to join the service recently.

## **The service has improved its recruitment and retention processes**

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. Staff on interview panels receive [unconscious bias](#) and behavioural interview training.

The service has put a lot of effort into developing its wholetime recruitment processes so that they are fair and understood by potential applicants. Following its recruitment campaigns in 2021, the service evaluated its processes to understand where and why applicants might have dropped out. Additional support opportunities are being trialled by the service and include ongoing fitness sessions and interview skills and preparation support. We look forward to seeing the impact of this work.

The recruitment policies for all service roles are comprehensive. Recruitment opportunities are advertised both internally and externally.

The service has made some improvements in increasing staff diversity at all levels of the organisation. Of the whole workforce, 4.4 percent are from an ethnic minority background and 23.8 percent are women. This is higher than the proportion of women in the workforce across all fire and rescue services in England, which is 18 percent, and an improvement on HMICFRS data from 2017.

The service has acted positively to improve diversity. For example, it has expanded its internship opportunities to attract young people from more diverse backgrounds and provided permanent full-time employment to some of its previous [Leonard Cheshire](#) interns. This has been supported by the workforce.

## The service promotes equality, diversity and inclusion with its workforce

The service has improved its approach to EDI. Staff spoke positively about the service's focus and direction in understanding what more it could do. The service is making sure that it can offer the right services to its communities and support staff with [protected characteristics](#).

Staff receive regular training in EDI. The EDI forum, disability network and separate steering group meet regularly to ensure progress against the service's objectives. Police and other staff networks have been consulted to widen their understanding of supportive action. The service is good at providing reasonable adjustments and supporting staff with a disability.

In our staff survey, 91.6 percent of respondents (206 of 225) said they were treated fairly at work. In addition, 79.6 percent (179 of 225) agreed that they are given the same opportunity to develop as others.

The service has an effective process in place to assess and improve equality as needed. A comprehensive guidance document supports staff to consider the impact that a change in policy, practice or procedure might have on any of the protected characteristics. All completed equality impact assessments are stored and made available on the service's intranet.

## Managing performance and developing leaders



### Good (2019: Good)

Royal Berkshire 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.

### Area for improvement

The service should improve all staff understanding and application of the performance development review process.

### **Area for improvement**

The service should put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders.

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

### **The service has a good performance management process and should ensure consistency in its use**

There is a good performance management system in place, which allows the service to develop and assess the individual performance of all staff. Each staff member has individual goals and objectives that reflect the service's behavioural competency framework. There are regular performance assessments and completion rates are high. Data from the service shows that in the year ending 31 March 2021, almost 100 percent of staff had completed a performance development review.

Staff don't always think the system is fair or meaningful. For example, some staff felt that their manager hadn't given the same level of thought to the process that they had themselves. In our staff survey, 16.7 percent of respondents (37 of 221) reported that they don't find performance reviews useful.

### **The service has improved its promotion and progression processes**

The service has put considerable effort into developing its promotion and progression processes so that they are fair and understood by staff. Most staff said they were happy with the changes and that they felt the new process was and would be fair. The promotion and progression policies are comprehensive and cover opportunities in all roles.

The service has some effective succession planning processes in place. These processes allow it to effectively manage the career pathways of its staff, including some roles requiring specialist skills. The processes include development assessment pathways that have been clearly communicated. Staff are supported to access the process. At the time of inspection, the pathways didn't cover all roles in the service and there were initial problems adapting the process to roles in control.

Selection processes are managed consistently using an initial blind sift. This is followed by interviews based on the behavioural competency framework and according to the level of leadership needed. Temporary promotions are used appropriately to fill short-term resourcing gaps.

**The service is developing leaders and could do more to identify high-potential staff at all levels**

The service has some talent management schemes in place to develop leaders and high-potential staff. A middle and senior-leadership development course has been well received by staff.

The service should consider putting in place more formal arrangements to identify and support members of staff to become senior leaders. There are clear gaps in its succession planning. As such, the area for improvement identified in our previous inspection in 2019 remains. The service should put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders.

