

# Fire & Rescue Service 2021/22

## Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service



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# About this inspection

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This is our third inspection of fire and rescue services in England. We first inspected Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service in November 2018, 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.

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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 Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service.

## What inspection judgments mean

Our categories of graded judgment are:

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










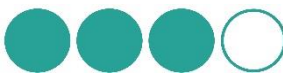

Good is our expected graded judgment for all fire and rescue services. It is based on policy, practice or performance that meet pre-defined grading criteria, which are informed by any relevant [national operational guidance](#) or standards.







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	Requires improvement
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	Good
Managing performance and developing leaders	 Good	Requires improvement

## HM Inspector's summary

It was a pleasure to revisit Shropshire 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 Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service in keeping people safe and secure from fires and other risks. For example, the service is effective in preventing fires and is well prepared to respond to major and multi-agency incidents.

It is pleasing to see that the service has made progress since our 2018 inspection. The service has further improved the good levels of performance found last time. It has enhanced its arrangements for protecting the public through fire safety regulation. It has also improved how well it develops leaders and capability within the service.

These are the findings I consider most important from our assessments of the service over the past year.

The service has identified risk effectively through its community risk management plan. It has strategies in place to direct its prevention, protection and response activities to the identified risks.

Encouragingly, the service has a clear set of values and a positive culture throughout the organisation. Inspection teams found that staff enjoyed working for the service and that workplaces were positive, supportive environments.

The service is good at managing its finances and collaborating with other organisations to give the public an efficient and effective service.

But there are still some areas the service needs to improve. It needs to have robust measures in place to communicate effectively lessons learned from operational incidents. Its fire safety inspection programme needs to target risk more effectively. And the service should use the full range of its fire safety enforcement powers.

Overall, Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service provides a good service to the public and is financially sustainable. It continues to respond well to the pandemic and supports other organisations in local testing and vaccination.

The service has identified future challenges, such as sustaining its high levels of fire engine availability by using [on-call](#) staff. It has embarked on a project to address these challenges.

I look forward to assessing progress on this and the other areas identified for improvement at our next inspection.



**Wendy Williams**

HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

# Service in numbers



## Response

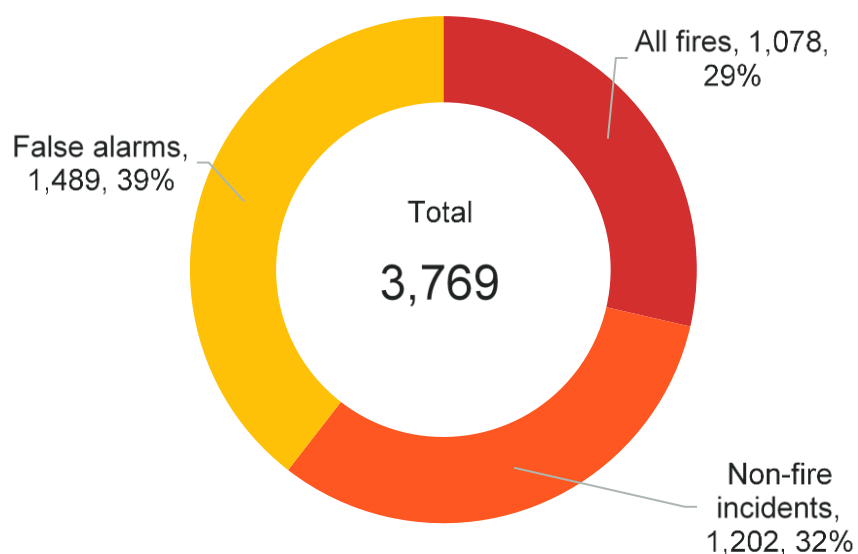
	Shropshire	England
Incidents attended per 1,000 population Year ending 30 June 2021	7.44	9.36
Home fire safety checks carried out by fire and rescue service per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	2.95	4.47
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises Year ending 31 March 2021	1.25	1.70
Average availability of pumps Year ending 31 March 2021	97.5%	86.4%



## Cost

Firefighter cost per person Year ending 31 March 2021	£26.80	£23.73
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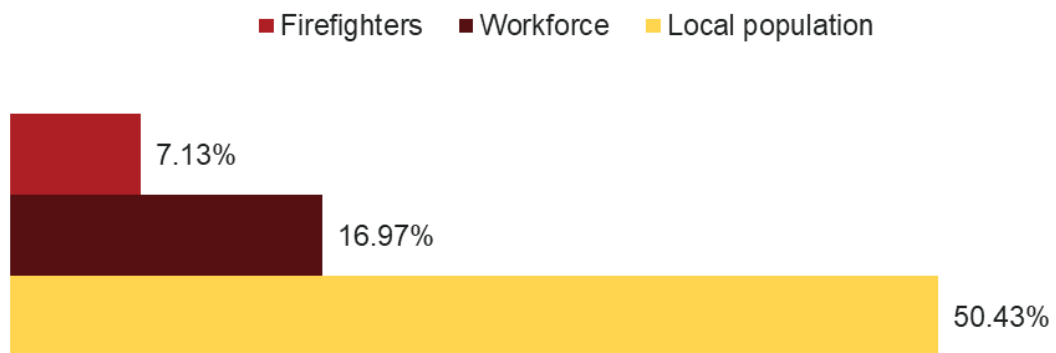
### Incidents attended in the year to 30 June 2021



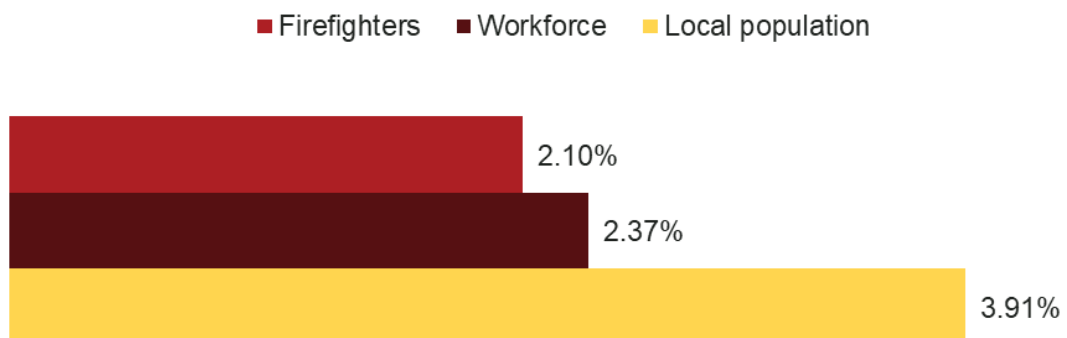


Five-year change in total workforce 2016 to 2021	4.66%	-1.60%
Number of firefighters per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	1.00	0.62
Percentage of firefighters who are wholetime Year ending 31 March 2021	37.4%	64.4%

**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. Shropshire 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). The information in the plan has helped the service to review its response standards to better serve its communities.

The service continues to be good at preventing fires and other risks. It has improved its use of social media to help promote campaigns and communicate safety messages.

We are pleased that the service has provided more qualified protection staff to target risk more effectively. But the service should assure itself that its use of enforcement powers prioritises the highest risks and includes proportionate activity to reduce risk.

The service has improved its operational response since our inspection in 2018. It still has good plans in place to deal with major incidents and work with neighbouring fire and rescue services.

## Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies



### Good (2019: Good)

Shropshire 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 its firefighters and [fire control](#) staff have good access to relevant and 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.

### Engagement with the community to build a comprehensive risk profile is good

The service rigorously assessed an appropriate range of risks and threats to complete its CRMP. When assessing risk, it considers relevant information collected from a broad range of internal and external sources and data sets, including incident and societal data. For example, it exchanges data with healthcare partners to better understand risk and improve risk profiles.

The service has made suitable progress in engaging with the local community to build up a comprehensive profile of risk, which was an area for improvement at our 2018 inspection. In developing its CRMP, published 1 April 2021, the service has consulted its communities constructively. It held focus groups across Shropshire and engaged with a range of community groups, voluntary sector organisations and multi-faith forums.

### The service has an effective CRMP

After assessing relevant risks, the service has recorded its findings in an easily understood CRMP. 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, it sets out how it will increase resources in the protection team and implement a new emergency response standard based on incident data analysis. The CRMP informs departmental strategies and plans, and there is an annual action plan that includes performance indicators to measure progress. The methodology for developing the CRMP has been externally validated and there is an annual review to make sure it stays up to date.

### **The service could improve the way it manages risk information**

The service collects some information about the people, places and threats it has identified as being at greatest risk, but some of the information we reviewed was limited, inaccurate or not up to date. For example, there were inconsistencies in how premises risk levels were categorised, and some risk revisits were overdue. But we were encouraged that the service had a plan to complete this backlog.

There are robust systems in place to make staff aware of any significant changes to risk information. The service uses electronic safety bulletins that must be read and understood by staff. This means that staff get urgent risk information related to their role.

But the service uses a manual system to collect and update temporary risk information (such as information about occupiers in premises or sporting events and festivals). This system needs better control and scrutiny. Some risk information is missing, outdated or very limited, which won't help fire crews responding to an incident at these locations.

### **Good operational feedback is used to inform understanding of risk**

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.

### **The service has responded positively to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry**

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service has responded positively and proactively to learning from this tragedy. The service has assessed the risk of each high-rise building in its service area. It has carried out a fire safety audit and collected and passed relevant risk information to its prevention and response teams about buildings identified as high risk.

## **Preventing fires and other risks**



### **Good (2019: Good)**

Shropshire 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.

### **Areas for improvement**

- The service should evaluate its prevention activity, so it understands what works.
- The service should make sure its quality assures its prevention activity, so staff carry out safe and well visits to an appropriate standard.

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 prevention strategy that targets its highest risks**

The service's prevention strategy 2021–23 is clearly linked to the risks identified in its CRMP. The strategy focuses on these risks:

- areas in the county at greatest risk from fire;
- people at risk;
- travel distances in remote rural areas;
- changes in age demographics;
- the economy;
- housing and people living in poverty; and
- migration of new communities.

To supplement the prevention strategy 2021–23, the service has implemented four community safety tactical plans:

- safe and well;
- arson and fire;
- children and young people; and
- road and water safety.

The service works well with other organisations on prevention and it passes on 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, it uses incident data to review its prevention strategy. It works with a wide range of organisations to identify [vulnerable people](#), for example oxygen users, hoarders and troubled families. It relays relevant information about vulnerable people internally and externally to the organisations it works with. We also saw good examples of the service communicating effectively after safe and well checks.

### **The service responded proactively to the pandemic**

We considered how the service had adapted its prevention work during our COVID-19-specific inspection in October 2020. It had adapted its public prevention work appropriately. Since then, we are encouraged that the service continues to work with other organisations, and that operational staff have restarted prevention activity and are contributing to service targets.

## **The service is effective at targeting its prevention activity**

Prevention activity is clearly prioritised using a risk-based approach towards people most at risk from fire and other emergencies. The service has identified a range of vulnerabilities, such as long-term illness, addictions or lifestyle choices.

The service takes account of a broad range of information and data to target its prevention activity at vulnerable individuals and groups. This includes health and social data, and referrals from the organisations it works with. It has produced community risk profiles for station staff to better target activity. We look forward to seeing how they are used to enhance prevention activity in the future.

It provides a range of interventions that it adapts to the level of risk in its communities. The service provides [safe and well visits](#) face to face, online and by phone questionnaire. The safe and well programme is provided by dedicated prevention team specialists, [wholetime](#) operational firefighters and prevention advocates based at [on-call](#) stations.

## **Staff get the right training to competently carry out safe and well checks**

Staff told us they had 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.

Dedicated prevention specialists complete the highest-risk visits. They receive enhanced training on topics such as hoarding, mental health and dementia. The prevention team trains wholetime operational staff in making safe and well visits. Training covers why the service makes safe and well visits, and how to record them and carry them out.

But there is limited quality assurance of prevention activity, so the service doesn't know whether staff consistently work in line with service standards.

## **Staff understand how to identify vulnerability and take action to safeguard vulnerable people**

Staff we interviewed told us about occasions when they had identified [safeguarding](#) problems, such as hoarding and people who seemed to be vulnerable. They told us they felt confident and trained to act appropriately and promptly. The service trains staff in adult and child safeguarding protocols. The records we reviewed showed that the service had effective measures in place to make sure staff were appropriately trained in safeguarding.

## **The service has good partnership arrangements**

The service works with a wide range of other organisations such as West Mercia Police, Wrekin Housing Trust and the Shrewsbury partnership to prevent fires and other emergencies.

We found good evidence that it routinely referred people at greatest risk to other organisations that may be better able to meet their needs. These organisations include adult social care. Arrangements are in place to receive referrals from others,

including West Mercia Police and housing associations. The service acts appropriately on the referrals it receives.

The service routinely exchanges information with other public and private sector organisations about people and groups at greatest risk. It uses the information to challenge planning assumptions and target prevention activity. For example, through the service working effectively with other organisations, people not on adult social care registers are now identified through effective data sharing. Different organisations now use the same grading methodology for hoarding so there is a more consistent approach.

### **The service has effective processes to tackle 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 an extensive educational programme with schools and community groups and a team of specially trained staff to deal with young firesetters.

The service routinely shares information with other organisations. Its fire investigation officers support the police in the prosecution of arsonists. This work has contributed to declining numbers of deliberate fires for around a decade and the service had its lowest level in 2020/21 of 315, which is well below the English average.

### **The service doesn't do enough evaluation of its prevention activities**

The service had made some progress with the area for improvement identified in the inspection in 2018 (to evaluate its prevention work so it understands the benefits better). The service now uses a good evaluation tool to measure the effectiveness of the communication methods it uses for fire safety campaigns.

But we found limited evidence that the service evaluated how effective its activity was or made sure all its communities got equal access to prevention activity that met their needs.

### **The service makes good use of external communication to promote prevention campaigns and activities**

We were pleased to see the service had addressed the area for improvement identified in our previous inspection, that the service wasn't using external communication mechanisms and social media to full advantage.

The prevention department has established an effective relationship with the corporate communications team and there have been several significant improvements. These include better information on the website and an effective service presence on major social media platforms.

## Protecting the public through fire regulation



### Good (2019: Requires improvement)

Shropshire 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 assure itself that its use of enforcement powers prioritises the highest risks and includes proportionate activity to reduce risk.
- The service should make sure it effectively addresses the burden of false alarms.
- The service should make sure it has an effective quality assurance process, so staff carry out audits to an appropriate standard.

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

### There are good links between the protection strategy and the CRMP

The service's protection strategy is clearly linked to the risk it has identified in its CRMP. The service has identified premises where people sleep and deliberate fires as some of its main risks.

Staff throughout the service are involved in this activity, with information effectively exchanged as needed. The service is increasing specialist knowledge by training some operational staff to the level 3 standard for fire safety. Information is in turn 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.

### The service has effectively resourced its protection function

The service has enough qualified protection staff to meet the requirements of the service's risk-based inspection programme. Most are working towards or have achieved their level 4 [diploma in fire safety](#) and the service is supporting a member of staff to obtain a fire engineering degree qualification. Since we identified the area for improvement in 2018, the service has increased competent staff members in protection from 7 in 2017/18 to 11 in 2020/21. The service should ensure that it maintains sufficient resources to provide the range of audit and enforcement activity needed, both now and in the future.



## **The service has amended its risk-based inspection programme to improve its targeting of high-risk premises**

The amount of unsatisfactory fire safety audits completed by the service (24 percent in 2019/20, and 16 percent in 2020/21) suggests it hasn't been targeting high-risk premises effectively. The England average for unsatisfactory audits was 34 percent in 2019/20 and 25 percent in 2020/21. Unsatisfactory audits are those requiring some form of intervention to improve fire safety compliance in premises.

We are encouraged to see that the service has recognised this. To improve the effectiveness of its targeting, the service is using more societal data sources and has updated its risk-based inspection programme. It is too early to tell whether these changes have improved targeting and reduced risk. We look forward to reviewing this in the future.

## **Audits of high-rise buildings have been completed**

Audits have been carried out at the five high-rise residential buildings the service has in its service area. 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 has made joint familiarisation visits to the premises with protection staff and operational firefighters.

## **Fire safety audits are completed to a good standard**

We reviewed a range of audits of different premises across the service. This included audits 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 high 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.

Many of the audits we reviewed were completed on time according to the service's own timeframe for audits. But the service doesn't always complete audits after a fire. This means it misses opportunities to fully review the fire safety arrangements of premises that may have underlying deficiencies leading to outbreaks of fire.

## **Limited quality assurance takes place**

The service doesn't do enough quality assurance of its protection activity. Managers don't routinely quality assure audits and may only review work when enforcement action is proposed or if inspectors are in development. There is little quality assurance to ensure inspecting officers are carrying out consistent inspections.

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

### **The service isn't using the full range of its enforcement powers**

The service doesn't consistently use its full range of enforcement powers. The service does less enforcement work than other similar fire and rescue services, and it hasn't prosecuted anyone since 1 April 2017.

From 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021, the service issued no alteration notices, 13 informal notifications, 1 enforcement notice and 2 prohibition notices, and undertook no prosecutions.

### **The service has improved the resilience of its 24/7 fire safety cover**

In our previous inspection, one area for improvement was the service's arrangements for providing specialist protection advice out of hours, which needed to improve.

We are encouraged to see the service now has robust arrangements in place to provide technical support at all times of day (24/7). Five specialist protection [watch](#) managers provide this support.

### **The service works well with others to take joint action**

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 Shropshire [safety advisory group](#), working together 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 housing and building control officers; and
- works as a main partner with a wide range of enforcement agencies such as the Care Quality Commission and the Environment Agency, as well as on multi-agency action against modern-day slavery with West Mercia Police.

### **The service responds to building and licensing consultations on time**

The service responds to all building and licensing consultations on time, so consistently meets its statutory responsibility to comment on fire safety arrangements at new and altered buildings. In 2020/21 the service responded to 100 percent of building consultations on time, which is to be commended.

### **The service works well with businesses to support them to comply with fire safety regulation**

The service proactively engages with local businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation. The service provides fire safety seminars for business owners and responsible persons. During the pandemic, the service provided online virtual sessions. There is also clear information on the service's website to assist businesses to comply with fire safety.

## The service hasn't done enough to reduce unwanted fire signals

The service has made only limited progress in reducing the number of fire false alarms (unwanted fire signals), which we identified as an area for improvement in 2018. There have been some improvements, but they were due mainly to changes in response procedures since the pandemic.

The number of unwanted fire signals (automatic fire false alarms, due to apparatus) has remained consistently high for more than five years. In 2020/21, 1,145 such incidents were responded to. This is 30 percent of all incidents attended. This means that fire engines may be responding to false alarms instead of genuine calls. And more fire engines on the roads means a greater risk to the public.

## Responding to fires and other emergencies



**Good (2019: Good)**

Shropshire 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 it has an effective system for learning from operational incidents.

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 resources to the risks identified in its CRMP

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, the service has 28 fire engines and a range of specialist vehicles strategically situated around Shropshire. The service has effective measures in place to maintain cover. The service uses a cohort of watch managers and firefighters (known as the Group Support Team) to fill gaps at stations where there are shortages of staff.

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

There are no national response standards of performance for the public. But the service has set out its own response standards in its CRMP. In the latest CRMP, published 1 April 2021, the service revised its response standard. This amended the standard from a 15-minute approach across the entire county to one that takes account of the population spread across Shropshire. There are now response standards for the first fire engine to arrive for urban (10 minutes), town and fringe (15 minutes) and rural (20 minutes). The service has set itself a target to achieve this standard 85 percent of the time.

The service consistently meets its standards. It met its response standard on 89 percent of occasions in 2020/21. Home Office data shows that in the year to 31 March 2021, the service's response time to [primary fires](#) was 10 minutes and 9 seconds. This is faster than the average response time (10 minutes and 28 seconds) for predominantly rural services like Shropshire.

## **On-call and wholetime availability is excellent**

To support its response strategy, the service aims to have all its fire engines available 100 percent of the time. This is an extremely challenging target to achieve, particularly as 20 of the service's 23 fire stations are exclusively on-call stations, which are often more difficult to staff.

The service consistently provides outstanding levels of availability. In 2020/21 the overall fire engine availability was 97.5 percent, with actual availability for on-call and wholetime being 97.2 percent and 98.8 percent, respectively.

## **Staff have a good understanding of how to command incidents safely**

The service has appropriately trained its incident commanders and assesses them every two years. The incident commanders must meet appropriate standards in these assessments.

In 2020/21, 100 percent of incident commanders were accredited on time. In the same year, every incident was attended by an incident commander who had the right accreditation. This helps the service to safely, confidently and effectively manage the whole range of incidents it could face, from small and routine ones to complex multi-agency incidents.

## **Control staff aren't always involved in debriefing and operational learning**

We are pleased that control staff are sometimes involved in the service's command, training, exercise, debrief and assurance activity. Fire control staff gave examples of being involved in a debrief after a significant waste site fire and a multi-agency exercise incorporating a marauding terrorist attack.

But control staff aren't always involved in debriefs. This means they don't always have opportunities to learn from others or contribute to shared learning. It was also evident that lessons learned from incidents and exercises weren't always effectively communicated to control staff not involved at the time.

## **The service should test its ability to provide fire survival guidance to many callers simultaneously**

The service uses the same [mobilising](#) system as Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service, and Cleveland Fire and Rescue Service. Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service can take emergency calls for the other two services and mobilise resources. But the facility is only in place for Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service to take overflow calls from Shropshire, which limits the service's resilience arrangements for taking simultaneous calls through the tri-service partnership.

The service has provided training to control staff on fire survival guidance. But it hasn't tested its ability to provide fire survival guidance to many callers simultaneously, as we would have expected it to. This was identified as learning for fire services after the Grenfell Tower fire.

Control has some good systems in place, for example airwave radio to exchange real-time risk information with incident commanders, other responding partners and other supporting fire and rescue services. Maintaining good situational awareness helps the service to communicate effectively with the public, providing them with accurate and tailored advice. The service has invested in some new technology to improve the speed and accuracy of the flow of information from control to the incident commander. Training was underway at the time of our inspection and we look forward to reviewing its effectiveness in the future.

## **Risk information is easily accessible to staff**

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

The information we reviewed was up to date and detailed. It could be easily accessed and understood by staff. Encouragingly, it had been completed with input from the service's prevention, protection and response functions when appropriate. But fire control can't directly access risk information such as plan layouts for high-rise premises. The service should make sure that control staff can access this information quickly.

The service can access risk information from neighbouring fire and rescue service areas, which it might reasonably be asked to respond to in an emergency.

## **Evaluating operational performance is inconsistent**

As part of the inspection, we reviewed a range of emergency incidents and training events. These included significant domestic and commercial fires, and road traffic collisions.

Of these incidents, we were disappointed that debriefs weren't routinely held. This shows that the service doesn't have a consistent approach for recording and passing on lessons learned from operational activity.

The service doesn't always act on learning it has, or should have, identified from incidents. This means it isn't routinely improving its service to the public. Staff we

spoke to were very familiar with carrying out [hot debriefs](#) soon after an incident. But very few could recall participating in a formal debrief or learning from a debrief report that had been circulated in the service. Formal learning from the significant fire at a waste recycling site has yet to be passed on in the organisation.

We are encouraged, however, to see the service is contributing towards, and acting on, learning from other fire and rescue services or operational learning gathered from other emergency service partners. This includes national learning about fires in timber-framed buildings. The service has raised awareness of this risk and has purchased equipment to help in dealing with this potential threat.

### **The service is better at adopting national operational guidance**

The following area for improvement was identified at the last inspection in 2018: “The service should ensure it understands what it needs to do to adopt [national operational guidance](#), including joint and national learning. It should then put in place a clear plan to do so.”

We are pleased that the service has appropriately resourced this work and has made good progress in this area. National operational guidance products and information have been released, and there is a plan in place for full implementation. But some staff are confused about this new way of working. The service should make sure it effectively communicates news about the national operational guidance roll out throughout the organisation.

### **There are good arrangements for keeping the public informed about incidents**

The service has good systems in place to inform the public about continuing incidents and help keep them safe during and after incidents. The service makes good use of its website and social media platforms to provide updates and safety advice for the community.

The communications team works well with the [local resilience forum \(LRF\)](#) to provide consistent messages to warn and inform the public. The service provides media training for its incident commanders, which it plans to incorporate into future command exercises.

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



### **Good (2019: Good)**

Shropshire 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 make sure it is well-prepared to form part of a multi-agency response to a terrorist incident, and its procedures for responding are understood by all staff and are well tested.

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 community risk management planning. The service has developed plans with other organisations to deal with specific risks, such as military sites. It has also created generic plans for incidents such as floods, pipelines and animal health emergencies. Plans are stored on a safe and secure system called [Resilience Direct](#) that can be accessed by all multi-agency responders.

It is also familiar with the significant risks in neighbouring fire and rescue services that it might reasonably be asked to respond to in an emergency. These include wide area flooding or high-rise residential buildings. Firefighters have access to risk information from neighbouring services. Operational staff now have access to risk information up to 10 kilometres into neighbouring service areas. This was found to be inconsistent in our inspection in 2018 and has now been improved.

### **The service needs to improve understanding of marauding terrorist attacks**

We reviewed the arrangements the service had in place to respond to different major incidents, including flooding and terrorist incidents.

There are some good arrangements in place, which are well understood by staff. For example, fire control staff know what to do when a major incident is declared and how to request [national resilience assets](#). The incident commanders we spoke to were confident in their ability to manage multi-agency incidents and work with partner organisations. Significant long-lasting incidents the service has dealt with in the past year, such as the Greenway waste fire and the COVID-19 response, have given staff good experience in dealing with multi-agency incidents.

But it was also evident that many firefighters and incident commanders haven't been trained in marauding terrorist attacks (MTA) procedures and know little about them.

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

The service supports other fire and rescue services responding to emergency incidents. For example, it regularly attends incidents in bordering services. It is intraoperable with these services and can form part of a multi-agency response.

The service has successfully deployed to other services and has used national assets such as the boat to assist in flooding incidents and searching for missing people.

## **Effective cross-border exercising takes place**

In our last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should arrange a programme of over-the-border exercises, sharing the learning from these exercises. The service has since developed and effectively implemented a service exercise strategy that includes cross-border exercises. It sets out a range of organised opportunities for staff in different roles to support and maintain their operational readiness.

The schedule of exercises for 2020/21 was cancelled because of the pandemic. We are pleased that exercising plans have restarted. The service should make sure that lessons from these exercises are used to inform risk information and service plans.

## **Staff understand and apply Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles**

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

The service could provide us with strong evidence that it consistently followed these principles. This includes online training packages and a JESIP app for mobile phones.

But when we reviewed the communication at several operational incidents, we found that nationally recognised messaging (messages that all emergency services and related agencies understand) wasn't frequently used.

## **The service works well with its partner organisations**

The service has good arrangements in place to respond to emergencies with other organisations that make up the West Mercia LRF. These arrangements include working with the service's partner organisations to prepare multi-agency response plans for high-risk sites.

The service is a valued partner and, during the joint LRF response to the 2020 floods, it chaired strategic meetings and played an important part. After the floods, the LRF moved to dealing with the pandemic. The service takes part in regular training events with other members of the LRF and uses the learning to develop planning assumptions about responding to major and multi-agency incidents. In 2021, the service took part in a large-scale exercise at RAF Cosford involving many partner agencies and over 500 participants.

## **The service monitors and responds to national learning**

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

The service uses the learning obtained from national incidents to carry out a gap analysis of its policies and procedures. The operational performance group uses recommendations from the analysis to decide on appropriate further action.



The service has changed how it uses its flood rescue boat and has a continuing Grenfell Tower action plan.

# 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 [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. Shropshire 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.

Staff productivity continues to improve, and the service is collaborating well with other organisations to increase capacity and capability. But it could improve further with better use of technology and enhanced evaluation of its partnerships.

The service has a sound understanding of future financial challenges and has a good track record of effective financial management. But the future opportunities the service has identified to make savings or generate further income are limited in scope.

## Making best use of resources



**Good (2019: Good)**

Shropshire 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 2020/21 is £23.221m. This is a 4.2 percent increase on the previous financial year.

### **Area for improvement**

The service should make sure it has appropriate business continuity arrangements in place, which are regularly reviewed and tested, and that take account of all foreseeable threats and 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's financial plans support its objectives**

We are encouraged to see the improvements the service has made since the last inspection. The service's financial and workforce plans, including allocating staff to prevention, protection and response, are consistent with the risks and priorities identified in the CRMP. For example, the service has increased resources in protection to make sure it has enough capacity to fulfil its risk-based inspection programme and to give specialist protection advice out of hours. The service has also maintained good fire engine availability while reducing overtime costs. From 2018/19 to 2020/21 the service reduced annual overtime by 36.5 percent, so it is one of the services in England with the lowest overtime spend.

Strategic 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 corporate planning process clearly links together the CRMP, [medium-term financial plan](#), service strategies and departmental plans. The service gives appropriate assurance through a range of controls, such as internal audit and performance monitoring. The CRMP action plan is updated annually.

### **Productivity of staff continues to improve**

We are pleased to see that the service's arrangements for managing performance clearly link resource use to the CRMP and the service's most important and long-term aims. The service uses [wholetime](#) and [on-call](#) staff to make [safe and well visits](#), and it sets targets as part of its prevention strategy.

The service is taking some steps to make sure the workforce's time is as productive as possible. This includes implementing new ways of working. For example, the service uses flexible working arrangements. Its second Telford fire engine moves to Tweeddale overnight to cover the changing community risk profiles. But its inefficient information and communication technology (ICT) systems and paper-based processes affect productivity.

Since our last inspection in 2018, the service has maintained exceptionally high levels of on-call availability. In November 2021, the service implemented a new research

project to better understand and mitigate the challenges of on-call availability and to sustain good availability.

The service had to adapt its working practices because of the pandemic, and these are still part of its day-to-day activity. These include some staff being able to work in a hybrid way, both remotely and in the office.

### **The service explores opportunities to collaborate with others**

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 supports the police by searching for missing people and helps the ambulance service gain entry to properties for emergency medical treatment.

During the pandemic, the service:

- had over 220 staff working with other organisations;
- had 69 trained COVID-19 vaccinators; and,
- administered over 20,000 vaccinations to the local community.

Collaborative work is aligned to the priorities in the service's CRMP. For example, the service has developed a strategic alliance with Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service to enhance capacity and resilience. The alliance has made some progress in jointly procuring vehicles and equipment. The services worked together closely to formulate their new CRMPs, published on 1 April 2021.

We are satisfied that the service monitors, reviews and evaluates some of the benefits and results of its collaborations. But we found limited evaluation of the financial benefits of collaboration.

### **The service hasn't fully tested its continuity arrangements**

In our last inspection in 2018 we identified an area for improvement that the service should make sure it has good business continuity arrangements in place that take account of all foreseeable threats and risks.

The service has gaps in its continuity arrangements for areas where threats and risks are considered high. For example, we found that ICT business continuity arrangements hadn't been regularly reviewed and tested. This means that staff aren't fully aware of the arrangements and their associated responsibilities.

### **The service shows 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, the service has internal and external audit processes in place that involve Shropshire [Fire and Rescue Authority](#) in review and scrutiny every quarter. It also produces annual governance statements.

The service has made savings and efficiencies that haven't affected its operational performance or the service it provides to the public. 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. For example, the service uses national and local [benchmarking](#) (comparing its spending in particular areas to that of other fire and rescue services) to show value for money.

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



### Good (2019: Good)

Shropshire 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.

#### Area for improvement

The service needs to assure itself that it is maximising opportunities to improve workforce productivity and develop future capacity through use of innovation, including the use of technology.

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

### The service considers and plans for 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 has considered the medium-term uncertainty of the one-year government funding settlement for 2021/22. It has made reasonable funding assumptions and can show a balanced budget over the medium term.

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

The service has a good track record for achieving savings and avoiding residual budget gaps. But the future opportunities the service has identified to make savings or generate further income are limited. The service has, however, prepared extra plans to provide flexible working opportunities for staff, which aim to reduce overtime and increase productivity. We look forward to reviewing the impact of these proposals.

### **The service has plans for using reserves**

The service has a sensible and long-term plan for using its [reserves](#). Most of the reserves have been earmarked for major capital investment in redeveloping the Telford fire station. The service acknowledges that its reserves will decline markedly over the next year. It is important that the level of reserves is kept under close review, so the service retains appropriate levels to deal with future risks.

### **Fleet and estates plans have strong links to strategic plans**

The service's estate and fleet strategies have clear links to the CRMP. The locations of the fire stations in Shropshire have been assessed and the service is satisfied that they are suitably positioned to meet its response standards. The service provides a specialist fire engine fleet to support the specific needs of a rural and sparsely populated county. This includes fire engines with more space, for up to nine firefighters, and greater capacity water tanks.

Both strategies exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness. The service has jointly procured incident command units with Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service. The service also collaborates with Shropshire Council to provide compliance testing and planned and reactive maintenance for its buildings.

The strategies are covered by an overarching asset management plan. This is regularly reviewed so that the service can properly assess changes in estate and fleet provision, and the impact future innovation may have on risk.

### **The service has invested in some technologies but needs to improve its capacity and capability**

The service actively considers how changes in technology and future innovation may affect risk. Staff can access service IT systems containing information like staffing rotas and risk updates remotely via their mobile phones.

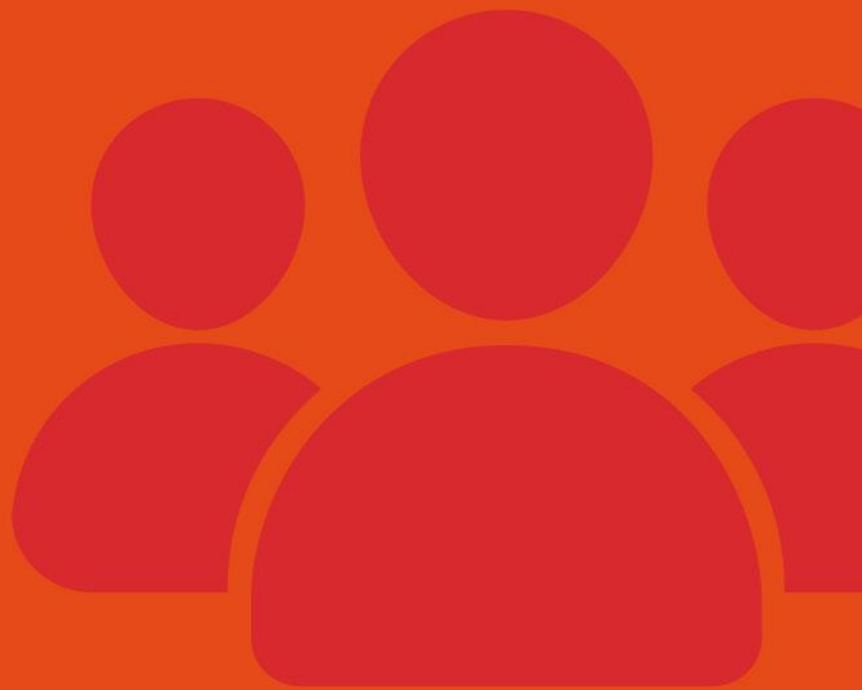
It also seeks to exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness presented by changes in technology. The service has introduced an IT platform to improve communication and give live updates from [fire control](#) to the incident ground. It lets real-time information, such as where people are trapped in buildings, to be automatically uploaded to the incident command vehicle at the scene. This can improve the situational awareness for incident commanders dealing with a dynamic and changing operational incident.

The service doesn't always have the capacity and capability it needs to change completely how it works. This is especially true for ICT. The service's ICT systems haven't improved as quickly as expected and the strategic alliance with Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service has provided limited ICT gains.

### **The service doesn't actively exploit opportunities to generate income**

The service has considered options for generating extra income. It used to rent out parts of its premises, but it plans to give up space for free in future. The service operated a trading company that was placed into hibernation in February 2018 and was wound up in October 2019.

# 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 are part of everything the service does and its staff understand their role in promoting it. Overall, Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service is good at looking after its people.

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The chief fire officer and other senior officers in the service have a strong purpose and have shown leadership in prioritising the values and culture in the organisation. This is evident from the effective measures the service has put in place to look after its people.

The service has created a positive working environment where staff feel valued and listened to. Standards of behaviour the service has set through the workplace charter are well understood and demonstrated.

The service seeks to establish a culture of learning and development. It makes courses and opportunities available to all staff, although training arrangements for control staff aren't robust.

Since our last inspection, positive action awareness and understanding has improved throughout the organisation. Further innovative practices have also been introduced to advance equality, diversity and inclusion, such as the Voices group.

[Performance development reviews](#) are now mandatory for staff. And the service has introduced the career progression gateway process to identify staff suitable for progression. The service should consider reviewing these processes as we received mixed feedback from staff about their efficiency and effectiveness.

## Promoting the right values and culture



### Good (2019: Good)

Shropshire 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 wellbeing support that can be tailored to their individual needs.

#### Areas for improvement

- The service should make sure that it has effective absence/attendance procedures in place.
- The service should take early action to monitor working hours (including overtime) to improve staff wellbeing.

#### Innovative practice

The service has a clear set of values that are supported throughout the organisation.

Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service has a workplace charter that incorporates the [Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services in England](#). It sets out the standards of behaviour expected in the service. It was evident right through our inspection that there was a positive culture in the organisation. Senior leaders have a clear vision for the service. All staff understand that this is a service priority. Positive behaviours are firmly in place, accepted, demonstrated and understood across the whole organisation.

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

#### Values are accepted throughout the organisation

The service continues to have well-defined values that are understood by staff. Behaviours that reflect service values are shown at all levels of the service. The service has a new workplace charter, which incorporates the new national Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services. The charter has been extensively communicated throughout the organisation. Of staff who completed our survey, 95 percent (145 of 153) said they were aware of service values. People at all levels of the organisation understand and display service values. Staff described a supportive, welcoming and communicative culture.

Senior leaders act as role models and consistently demonstrate the service values. We heard that leaders were even more visible and open to communication since our last inspection. A high proportion of respondents to the staff survey (125 of 145; 86 percent) said that senior leaders consistently modelled and maintained the service's values. An even higher proportion of respondents, 94 percent, said the same of line managers (136 of 145).

There is a positive working culture throughout the service, with staff empowered and willing to challenge poor behaviours when they encounter them. This is reinforced in our staff survey, with 94 percent of respondents stating they are treated with dignity and respect, and 95 percent stating that colleagues (138 of 145) model the services values.

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

The service continues to have well understood and effective wellbeing policies in place that are available to staff. A significant range of wellbeing support is available to support both physical and mental health. Staff told us that occupational health was accessible and provided a good service, acting as a gateway to specialist advice and support. Several positive and personal examples were shared with inspectors. We heard that suicide awareness training was provided for staff since incidents in their local communities had increased. Staff feel that the service responds to their needs by providing this training.

There are good provisions in place to promote staff wellbeing. These include:

- fitness equipment at fire stations;
- support for staff after potentially traumatic incidents;
- trained mental health first aiders; and
- guidance on matters such as debt management or menopause.

Most staff reported understanding and having a high level of confidence in the wellbeing support processes available. Of the staff who responded to the survey, 74 percent reported having at least one annual conversation with their line manager about wellbeing, and 93 percent of these staff agreed the conversation was useful to them.

### **Staff understand and have confidence in health and safety policies, but monitoring of secondary employment is ineffective**

The service has effective and well understood health and safety policies and procedures in place. There are robust arrangements in place for reporting and investigating accidents and [near misses](#). The service updates senior managers every month about health and safety, and shares statistics with other fire and rescue services in the region to identify accident trends. The service provides safety campaigns to target identified safety concerns.

Staff and representative bodies have confidence in how the service manages health and safety. In our survey, 94 percent of respondents state they feel safety at work is treated seriously. The three representative body surveys also agree that health and safety is well managed.

The service has robust arrangements in place using an external provider to carry out all fitness testing for operational staff. The service hasn't yet implemented the national [firefighter fitness](#) standards but has plans to do so in early 2022. All fire stations now have provisions for firefighters to maintain their fitness.

However, we found the service has made limited progress with an area for improvement identified in our last inspection. It doesn't effectively monitor staff who have secondary employment to make sure they don't work excessive hours. The service puts the onus on staff to manage their working time, with limited oversight to check whether staff with secondary employment are fit for duty.

### **Absence management procedures aren't effectively adhered to**

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

The service has an absence policy, but we found inconsistencies in the way staff absence was managed. Policy isn't always followed. For example, return-to-work interviews don't always happen on time and communications with absent staff aren't always recorded.

And the service doesn't monitor sickness trends and data effectively. It has a monthly meeting to review formal cases, but analysis of short-term sickness cases is limited.

From 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021, the service saw an increase in short-term staff absences for [wholetime firefighters](#) of 4 percent. But in the same period for control staff and non-operational staff there were 6 percent and 56 percent reductions, respectively.

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



### **Good (2019: Good)**

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

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

#### **Area for improvement**

The service should assure itself that control 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.

### **Workforce planning means the required skills and capabilities are available**

The service has good workforce planning in place. This makes sure skills and capabilities align with what is needed to effectively implement the CRMP. The service has a range of effective plans (People Strategy 2021–25, Workforce and Resourcing Plan 2021–25, and Organisational Development Plan 2021–25) that address current and future requirements.

Workforce and succession planning is subject to consistent scrutiny in the form of regular meetings to discuss requirements. This includes the people management meeting where heads of department review retirements and succession planning.

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 effectively. Of staff who responded to our survey, 92 percent stated they had enough training to effectively do their job.

The service monitors operational staff competence on an electronic training recording system. This provides managers with a dashboard and traffic light system to review staff compliance. During our inspection we found the training records for operational personnel were accurate and up to date, and staff were competent in their roles.

The service has effective arrangements for accrediting the competence of incident commanders. All 195 incident commanders in the service were accredited within the required timeframe in 2020/21.

But there has been limited progress in addressing the area for improvement we identified in 2018 about recording and monitoring control staff competence. The service has implemented a new recording system linked to national occupational standards. But the training plan for control staff is unclear and control staff competencies aren't consistently recorded.

### **The service promotes continuous learning and improvement**

A culture of continuous improvement is promoted throughout the service and staff are encouraged to learn and develop. For example, new wholetime and [on-call](#) firefighters have structured training and development programmes. Protection staff undertake continuous professional development and use the virtual learning environment provided by the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#).

We are pleased to see that the service has a range of resources in place. These include extensive training packages and videos available on the service's online learning system.

Most staff told us that they could access a range of learning and development resources. Of staff who responded to our survey, 87 percent stated they were satisfied with the learning and development available to them. This allows them to do their job effectively.

## Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity



### Good (2019: Good)

Shropshire 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 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.

#### Area for improvement

The service should make improvements to the way it collects equality data to better understand its workforce demographic and needs.

#### Innovative practice

The service has demonstrated clear commitment and put in place effective measures to improve fairness, diversity and inclusion across the organisation, which has resulted in high levels of awareness in its workforce.

This includes:

- developing an equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) steering group and an overarching Voices group, to provide robust strategic governance and support collaborative working across key teams;
- providing a wide range of training and information across multi-media highlighting key issues affecting different [protected characteristics](#) groups (such as mental health, neurodiversity and Black history month); and
- introducing a programme of work to address gender-related issues that raised awareness of menopause, updated female uniforms (maternity/menopause), and introduced free sanitary welfare packs across work areas.

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 effective at seeking and acting on staff feedback**

Since our last inspection the service has acted effectively to improve how it engages with staff on issues and decisions that affect them. This includes methods to build all-staff awareness of fairness and diversity, as well as targeted engagement to identify matters that affect different staff groups. The service uses an external company to carry out staff surveys. Staff are encouraged to submit feedback and ideas for improvement via a suggestions scheme. The service also provides 'open seat' opportunities at senior management meetings, which staff can attend to observe the discussions, ask questions, and provide their opinion.

The actions being taken to address matters raised are communicated effectively to staff. Measures include posters displayed in workplaces that highlight the service response to the staff surveys using a 'you said, we did' approach. Eighty-one percent of survey respondents (124 of 153) stated they had confidence in ways of providing feedback at all levels. Representative bodies and staff associations reported that the service engaged with them well.

## **Staff are confident in the service's approach to tackling bullying, harassment and discrimination**

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

In this inspection, less than 5 out of 153 respondents to the staff survey told us they had been subject to bullying or harassment, and 11 respondents told us they had been subject to discrimination over the past 12 months. Of those who experienced bullying and harassment, most didn't report it. The reasons cited include concerns about confidentiality or that nothing would happen.

Most staff who responded to the survey are confident in the service's approach to tackling bullying, harassment and discrimination, grievances and disciplinary matters. The service has made sure all staff are trained and clear about what to do if they encounter inappropriate behaviour. Service leaders have put in place several ways for staff to give feedback and have improved how they respond to feedback, so that staff, including those from diverse backgrounds and under-represented groups, have a better experience.

Survey respondents told us they would be confident reporting problems to their line managers and that they would take the right action. The service has made sure all staff are trained and clear about what to do if they encounter inappropriate behaviour. We also heard that staff would feel comfortable challenging colleagues if required.

## **The service is addressing disproportionality in recruitment but needs to improve workforce monitoring**

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 put considerable effort into developing its recruitment processes so that they are fair and understood by applicants. Comprehensive information is provided on the website and the service runs taster days for people interested in becoming a firefighter.

The recruitment policies are comprehensive and cover opportunities in all roles. Recruitment opportunities are advertised both internally and externally, which has encouraged applicants from diverse backgrounds, including into middle and senior management roles.

The service has acted positively to improve diversity. For recruitment campaigns, the service has instated positive action to encourage applicants from under-represented groups. The service engaged with staff about positive action, which we found was understood and supported by the workforce.

The service has made limited improvements in increasing staff diversity at all levels of the organisation. However, it knows it needs to go further to increase workforce diversity. Since 2017/18, the proportion of staff across the organisation from an ethnic minority background has increased from 1.5 percent to 2.4 percent in 2021, and for women it has increased from 12.2 percent to 17 percent in the same period. For firefighters, the percentage of women has increased from 6 percent in 2017/18 to 7.1 percent in 2020/21, and from 0.8 percent to 2.1 percent for staff from an ethnic minority background in the same timeframe. Of the whole workforce, as of 31 March 2021, 2.4 percent (11) are from an ethnic minority background and 17 percent (103) are women.

However, it is evident that the service has a low level of disclosure rates about the makeup of the service establishment. In 2020/21 the service held no ethnicity data for 23.6 percent of its staff. The rate for fire and rescue services in England is 9.1 percent. This limits the service's ability to effectively identify and address disproportionality.

### **The service has effective measures to improve EDI**

The service has improved its approach to EDI and is making sure it can offer the right services to its communities and support staff with protected characteristics. For example, the service introduced the Voices group in early 2021 to give under-represented employees the chance to actively contribute to the organisation. The group's members represent a range of experiences, including:

- Black, Asian and ethnic minorities;
- disability;
- mental health problems;
- dyslexia;
- LGBT+; and
- women and the menopause.

The representatives act as the main contacts for colleagues throughout the service. The Voices group works with the service's EDI team to further improve the EDI culture of the organisation. Staff we spoke to were very positive about the Voices group and we look forward to reviewing its future impact.



The service operates an EDI steering group, chaired by an assistant chief fire officer, which representative bodies and staff throughout the organisation support. The strategic intent to improve and embed EDI throughout the service is clear. The group has developed a robust EDI strategic improvement plan (2021–2025) with an associated set of actions, which is actively managed and monitored so that EDI improves.

The service has developed several effective ways to raise awareness and communicate with staff about EDI. This includes some notable work with staff members producing videos on dyslexia and mental health. The service has an informative EDI section on the staff intranet. It has awareness campaigns about, for example, Black history month and menopause.

The service also supplies sanitary welfare packs in fire engines and workplaces. It has provided operational fire kit and workwear for women. Maternity uniforms have been introduced and the service is trialling different workwear and materials for people with symptoms of the menopause.

Although the service has a process in place to assess equality impact, not all policies and procedures had been assessed at the time of inspection. More could be done to improve organisational learning and embed this in the service.

## Managing performance and developing leaders



### Good (2019: Requires improvement)

Shropshire 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.

#### Areas for improvement

- 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 improve all staff understanding and application of the performance development review process.

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

## **Completion rates have increased for individual performance reviews**

In 2020/21 the service updated its annual performance review process from a voluntary basis for staff. Completion rates have significantly increased now the process is no longer voluntary. The performance management system in place should help the service to develop and assess the individual performance of all staff more effectively. But many members of staff think the new process is too complex. The service should review the roll out of the revised process and ask staff how it could be improved.

Through our staff survey, most respondents reported that they had received regular performance discussions with their manager. Of these staff, 90 percent (132 of 146) stated that these discussions were meaningful.

Each staff member has individual goals and objectives, and regular assessments of performance. Staff feel confident in the performance and development arrangements that are in place. However, several members of staff told us the process was more relevant for wholetime staff seeking promotion.

## **Open and consistent processes are in place for promotion**

The service has put considerable effort into developing its promotion and progression processes so that they are fair and understood by staff. The promotion policies are comprehensive and cover opportunities in operational roles up to area manager level.

The service now uses the career progression gateway (CPG) process to evaluate an individual's performance and provide eligibility to apply for a promotional process. The CPG tests are conducted by external assessors that have no affiliation to the service. After a successful CPG, staff can apply for the promotions processes (interviews and command assessments) at the right level. Unsuccessful candidates are offered feedback on identified areas for development and must wait 12 months before reapplying.

Selection processes are managed consistently, with a member from the human resources team present on interview panels and [unconscious bias](#) training provided for interviewers.

The results from our staff survey show most respondents agree or tend to agree (106 of 153; 69 percent) that the service's promotion process is fair. But several staff members we spoke to didn't have confidence in the career progression gateway process. We were told that elements of the tests didn't reflect the skills or attributes of the role applied for.

The service has effective succession planning processes in place that allow it to effectively manage the career pathways of its staff, including roles requiring specialist skills. We found that temporary promotions were used appropriately to fill short-term resourcing gaps.

### **The service could do more to develop leadership and high-potential staff at all levels**

The service has updated its performance development review process and introduced the career progression gateway. But staff still feel there isn't a clear process for talent management or identifying high potential.

We were pleased to see that people who were successful at the CPG process got development advice before taking up the role. This helps people get relevant knowledge before appointment and is more efficient in easing their transition to the higher-level position.

However, the service should consider putting in place more formal arrangements to identify and support members of staff to become senior leaders and actively manage the career pathways of staff, including those with specialist skills and for leadership roles. This was highlighted as an area for improvement in our last inspection and limited progress has been made.

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