



Part 2: Our inspections

Our inspections

This report covers the first 13 inspections of our second full cycle of all 44 fire and rescue service (FRS) inspections in England, known as our Round 2 inspections. We have divided all 44 inspections into three phases of inspection, known as 'tranches'. Tranche 1 was carried out between February and August 2021, during which we inspected the 13 services in question. We will complete Tranches 2 and 3 in the remainder of 2021 and through 2022, when we will report our findings in full.

As part of our inspection programme, we assess and make graded judgments on three principal areas, known as 'pillars'. For each FRS, we assess:

- its effectiveness:
- its efficiency; and
- how well it looks after its people.

Our assessments are designed to enable the public to see each FRS's performance, as well as how this compares with the performance of other services. In future, the public will also be able to see changes over time.



Effectiveness

We assess how effectively each FRS operates. This includes how well the service: understands its current and future risks; works to prevent fires and other risks; protects the public through the regulation of fire safety; responds to fires and other emergencies; and responds to major incidents.

£ Efficiency

We assess whether the FRS is affordable and providing value for money. This includes: how well the service understands and matches its resources to the risks and demands it faces; the extent to which it collaborates with others; and the sustainability of its financial plans.

People

We assess how well the FRS looks after its people. This includes: the values and culture of the service; how it trains its staff and ensures that they have the necessary skills; how it promotes fairness and diversity for its workforce; and what it is doing to develop leadership.





The operating context

The difficulties each service continues to face vary considerably across England and can be affected by many things. These include the service's size and financial position, as well as local factors such as geography, road networks, levels of affluence and deprivation, industries and employment patterns, and – most importantly – the people who live, work and spend time there. The pandemic continues to create additional difficulties for services, their staff and communities.

We have explained the operating context of each service within its service report.

Few services have mostly full-time – known as 'wholetime' – firefighters. These are in metropolitan areas and have stations that are crewed on a continuous basis, allowing them to mobilise a fire engine immediately when a call is received. Most other services use both wholetime and 'on-call' firefighters. On-call firefighters are fully trained, part-time firefighters who may have other jobs but respond to calls when summoned. These firefighters mostly crew stations that have less demand and where having a full-time crew may not represent good value for money.

Each FRS is required by the *Fire and Rescue National Framework for England*¹ to produce an integrated risk management plan (IRMP).² This plan should:

- set out the main risks in the service's area;
- show how it will use prevention, protection and response activities to prevent fires and other incidents, and mitigate the effects of risks on its communities; and
- outline how resources will be allocated.

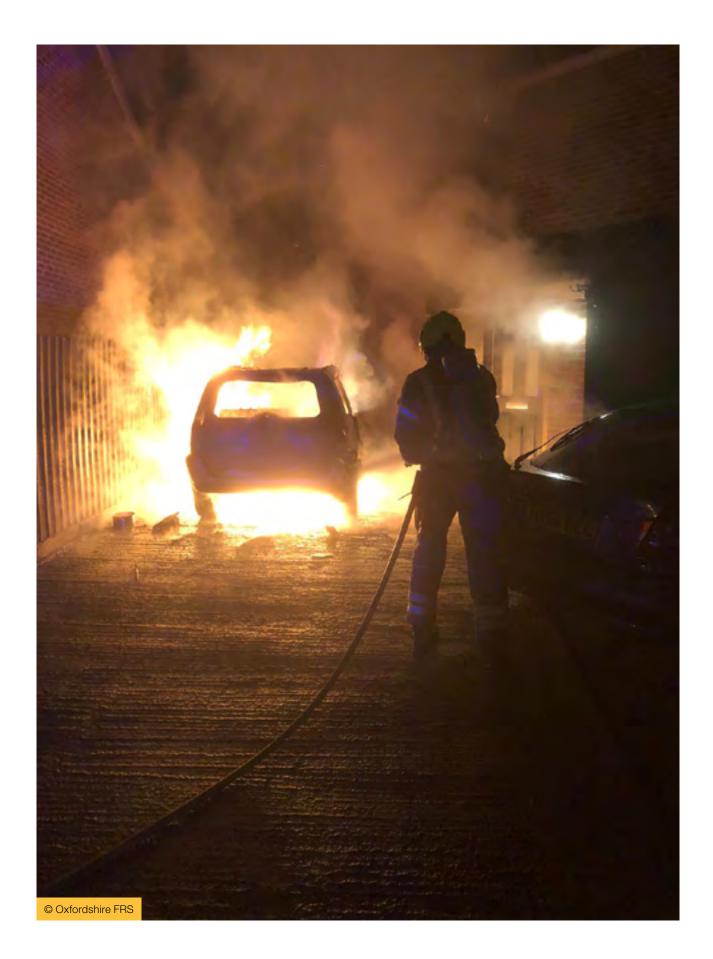
Taken together, these and other factors can be considered the operating context of the service. We take account of this context and recognise that differing operating contexts create different needs for, and demands of, services. We have explained the operating context of each service within its service report. Including our pandemic inspections, this is the third time we are inspecting services.

Understanding our graded judgments

It is important to emphasise that FRSs aren't in competition with each other. Inevitably, some people may want to compare gradings to form a league table. But considering the breadth and complexity of FRS performance, while taking account of each operating context, needs a more sophisticated approach. Similarly, it is important to read beyond the headlines and consider why some services have been graded higher than others. We take into account a range of factors when giving a grade, and there is no link between larger budgets and higher grades.

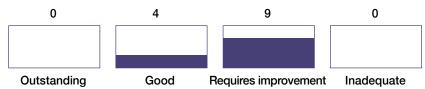
The nuances are in the individual service reports on our website. In each service report, we have identified 'areas for improvement' and, in some cases, 'causes of concern'. If we consider that an aspect of a service's practice, policy or performance falls short of the expected standard, we will report this as an area for improvement. If we identify a more serious, critical or systemic shortcoming in a service's practice, policy or performance, we will report it as a cause of concern. A cause of concern will always be accompanied by one or more recommendations. The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England requires the fire and rescue authority receiving a recommendation to prepare, update and regularly publish an action plan detailing how it will take action. If we identify a cause of concern relating to a potential risk to public safety, we will always revisit the service to assess whether the service is taking action to address the potential risk.

We have outlined the grades of each service against each question in the following pages. Including our pandemic inspections, this is the third time we are inspecting services. We now have a benchmark against which we can measure the 13 services inspected between February and August 2021. We don't, however, yet have the same benchmark for the remaining 31 services. As we continue to inspect the remaining services, we will be able to consider their progress and the extent to which they have made improvements.

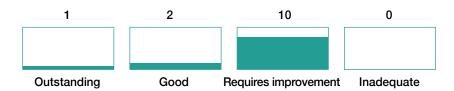


Summary of grades

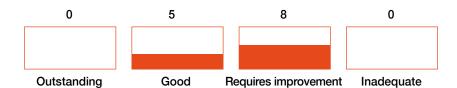
On **effectiveness**, we didn't grade any service as outstanding overall, or inadequate. We graded four as good and nine as requiring improvement.



On **efficiency**, we graded one service as outstanding, two as good and ten as requiring improvement. We didn't grade any as inadequate.



On **people**, we graded five services as good and eight as requiring improvement. We didn't grade any as outstanding or inadequate.



Our findings

The majority of the 13 services we inspected between February and August 2021 are continuing to discharge their primary obligations in respect of the safety of their communities. However, with seven causes of concern issued across our effectiveness pillar, some services need to do more in relation to prevention. Fewer than half of the services we inspected could confidently demonstrate that they are sufficiently aligning their plans and resources to mitigate risk. However, many have significantly improved how well they look after their people. We continued to find both excellent and worrying practices across services, and we hope the more positive examples provided in this report will inspire innovation and improvement throughout the sector.

We have summarised our findings from every inspection from February to August 2021 over the next few pages, divided into our three inspection pillars of effectiveness, efficiency and people.



Our judgments

Avon

Bedfordshire

Buckinghamshire

Cambridgeshire

Cheshire

Cornwall

Greater Manchester

Hereford & Worcester

Lincolnshire

Merseyside

Northumberland

Surrey

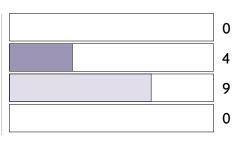
Warwickshire

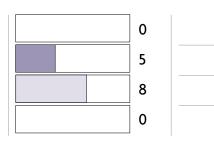


How well does the FRS understand the risk of fire and other emergencies? Judgment Requires improvement Good Requires improvement Good Good Requires improvement Good Requires improvement Requires improvement Good Requires improvement

Totals

Outstanding
Good
Requires improvement
Inadequate

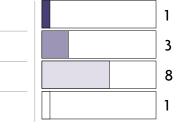


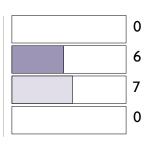


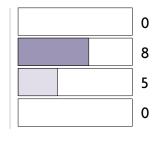
Requires improvement

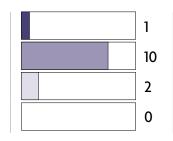
Requires improvement

How effective is the FRS at protecting How effective is the How well prepared is the public through How effective is the FRS at responding the FRS to respond FRS at preventing the regulation of fire to fires and other to major and multifires and other risks? safety? emergencies? agency incidents? Judgment Judgment Judgment Judgment Good Good Requires improvement Requires improvement Requires improvement Requires improvement Good Good Requires improvement Requires improvement Good Requires improvement Requires improvement Requires improvement Requires improvement Requires improvement Good Requires improvement Good Requires improvement Good Requires improvement Requires improvement Requires improvement Good Good Outstanding Outstanding Good Good Requires improvement Good Requires improvement Good Good Good Requires improvement Requires improvement Good Inadequate Requires improvement Requires improvement









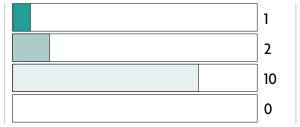
Our judgments

Service	
Avon	
Bedfordshire	
Buckinghamshire	
Cambridgeshire	
Cheshire	
Cornwall	
Greater Manchester	
Hereford & Worcester	
Lincolnshire	
Merseyside	
Northumberland	
Surrey	
Warwickshire	

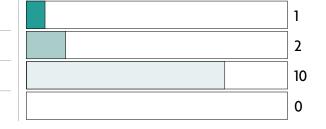


Totals

Outstanding
Good
Requires improvement
Inadequate



How well is the FRS securing an affordable How well does the FRS use resources way of managing the risk of fire and other risks now and in the future? to manage risk? Judgment Judgment Good Requires improvement Requires improvement Good Requires improvement Requires improvement Good Requires improvement Good Good Requires improvement Requires improvement Good Requires improvement Requires improvement Requires improvement Requires improvement Good Outstanding Good Requires improvement Requires improvement Requires improvement Good Requires improvement Requires improvement



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Our judgments

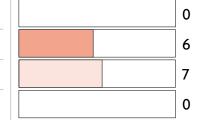
promote its values and **People** culture? Service Judgment Judgment **Requires improvement** Good Avon **Bedfordshire** Good Good **Requires improvement** Buckinghamshire Requires improvement Cambridgeshire Good Good Cheshire Good Good Cornwall **Requires improvement** Good **Greater Manchester** Good Good **Hereford & Worcester** Requires improvement Requires improvement Lincolnshire **Requires improvement** Good Good Merseyside Good Northumberland Requires improvement Requires improvement Requires improvement **Surrey** Good Warwickshire Requires improvement Requires improvement

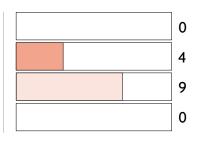
How well does the FRS

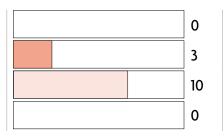
Totals

Outstanding		0		0	
Good		5		9	
Requires improvement		8		4	
Inadequate] o		0	

How well does the FRS How well does the FRS How well trained and skilled ensure fairness and develop leadership and are FRS staff? diversity? capability? Judgment Judgment Judgment Requires improvement Requires improvement Requires improvement Good Good Good Requires improvement Requires improvement Requires improvement Good Good Good Good Good Requires improvement Requires improvement Requires improvement Requires improvement Good Good Requires improvement Good Requires improvement Good Requires improvement Requires improvement Requires improvement Requires improvement Requires improvement Good Requires improvement Requires improvement Requires improvement







Effectiveness

In this pillar, we ask five questions:

- 1. How well does the FRS understand the risk of fire and other emergencies?
- 2. How effective is the FRS at preventing fire and other risks?
- 3. How effective is the FRS at protecting the public through the regulation of fire safety?
- 4. How effective is the FRS at responding to fires and other emergencies?
- 5. How well prepared is the FRS to respond to major and multi-agency incidents?



Our findings

Most services are prioritising protection work

When services carry out protection work, they comply with the provisions established in the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 which is concerned with the safety of premises from the risk of fire. This includes working with businesses to educate and support them in connection with the risks of fire in their buildings. If necessary, they use enforcement powers to require that premises are made compliant with fire safety legislation.

This is different from prevention work, which services must also carry out. This type of work focuses on the people most at risk of fire. Preventing incidents occurring in the first place is the best and most cost-effective outcome. Services carry out a range of prevention activities, such as safe-and-well visits in people's homes, and educate the public on matters relating to road, water and fire safety.

In the first round of inspections, which we carried out between June 2018 and August 2019, we had material concerns about the extent to which services were adequately prioritising protection work. There had been an observable underinvestment over a prolonged period, as well as a reduction in the number of specialist staff and fire safety audits.³

Services are responsible for enforcing fire safety legislation in relevant premises. Regrettably, our inspections revealed a reduction in the level of enforcement and prosecution work in many services. Most services didn't have enough qualified fire safety inspectors. These problems were made worse by a lack of focus and prioritisation of protection in services' IRMPs.

The improvements we have seen so far indicate that the sector has responded positively to our concerns.

Although we have inspected fewer than a third of services during our 2021 inspections, the improvements we have seen so far indicate that the sector has responded positively to our concerns. This is reflected by the overall improved grades we have given to the 13 services in relation to their effectiveness in protecting the public through the regulation of fire safety.

Avon FRS was the only service whose protection work we considered to be inadequate during Round 1. Since then, it has made material efforts to improve, and in Round 2 we graded it as requiring improvement. Northumberland and Surrey FRSs have had their grades lifted to good.

And although their grades have remained the same, we have observed significant improvements in both Buckinghamshire and Merseyside FRSs. These improvements include increasing the numbers of fire safety inspectors, developing their risk-based inspection programmes⁴ – which are used to determine which buildings should be prioritised for full fire safety audits, such as hospitals, care homes and some high-rise residential buildings – and ensuring that protection activity is a main strategic priority. This increased focus on protection activity must be maintained.

Most services have increased their number of fire safety inspectors; as a result, they have more capacity to carry out fire safety audits at high-risk premises. On 31 March 2021, there were 221 members of staff working in protection roles in the 13 services we inspected, which means that there were 44 more members of staff than in 2020. Between 31 March 2019 and 31 March 2021, the median number of staff working in protection roles in services rose from 12.5 to 14. Most of the services we inspected have reviewed their risk-based inspection programmes and made improvements to ensure they are auditing high-risk premises regularly. We also found that many services are responding more quickly to planning applications from local authority building controls (9 out of 13 services had responded to more planning applications within the required timeframe than they had in previous years).

All services have also adopted the *Competency Framework* for Fire Safety Regulators,⁵ which was published by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC). It establishes the required level of skills, knowledge and understanding for a fire safety inspector to be considered competent.

The Home Office has provided the sector with additional funding for investment in staff, training and technology. This funding is also intended to be used to help services cope with their additional workloads following the Grenfell Tower fire and the recommendations made in Phase 1 of the inquiry. This is making a difference, but it takes time to train and develop confident and competent fire safety inspectors, and it takes a material effort to retain them. It will be some time before the numbers of fire safety inspectors reach the numbers required in England.

We welcome the Fire Standards Board's new protection standard, which was published in September 2021.⁷ This standard is designed to make services more consistent in their protection work, improve the quality of that work, and reduce the risks of fires starting in buildings. Protection must continue to be a priority.



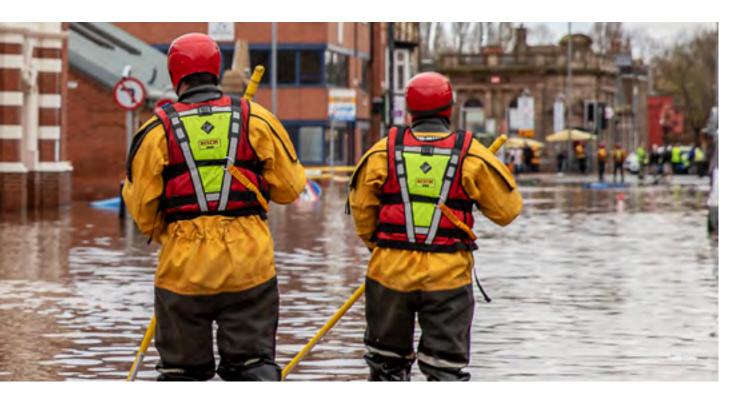


Building risk review work is on track

The building risk review programme is a government-funded scheme to review the safety of all high-rise residential buildings in England by the end of 2021. At the time of our 2021 inspections, the 13 services we inspected told us that they had either completed this work already or were on track to do so.

In July 2021, the Building Safety Bill⁸ was introduced in the House of Commons. The bill establishes how high-rise residential buildings should be constructed and maintained, and provides for the creation of a new building safety regulator. The regulator will be set up by and form part of the Health and Safety Executive; it is currently operating as a shadow body. It will monitor compliance with and enforce the legislation. Once fully operational, we expect the regulator to place additional demands on services' already stretched protection teams.

Services must carry out careful workforce planning to make sure these potential additional demands don't have a detrimental effect on their other work. This includes their risk-based inspection programmes and other statutory responsibilities.



Services aren't giving prevention work sufficient priority

In our Round 1 inspections, 11 of the 13 services had at least one area for improvement in respect of their prevention work. These services also needed to do more to improve how they established who was at greatest risk of fire and other emergencies. They also needed to prioritise prevention work and make sure that they were meeting the needs of those who were most vulnerable. All these services also needed to improve how they evaluated which interventions were most effective at helping those in need.

In our 2021 inspections, we were disappointed to find that many services hadn't made enough progress to address these areas for improvement; more than half needed further work. In three cases, we were troubled by the lack of progress made and have issued a cause of concern in this respect to each of the services in question. We will monitor progress made by these services closely.

An effective fire and rescue service must give a sufficient level of priority to its three principal responsibilities: prevention, protection and response. Neither one should be prioritised at the expense of the other; the cost to public safety is too great. Some services are carrying out unjustifiably low levels of prevention work.

Levels of prevention activity are declining, and targeting is poor

Some services are carrying out unjustifiably low levels of prevention work; this does not reflect the level of priority set out in their IRMPs. In the year ending 31 March 2020, an average of 12 home safety checks per 1,000 people were carried out by the 13 services we inspected. In the year ending 31 March 2021, this number dropped to four. While the pandemic was largely the reason, it wasn't always. In some services, we found that they had little or no adequate strategy in place to carry out prevention work.

We were encouraged to see that some services have continued to make improvements to the ways of working they introduced in response to the pandemic. These have included securing access to more comprehensive health data to help those who are most vulnerable, better use of technology to prioritise those individuals who would benefit most from meeting face to face, and assisting with vaccine clinics.

In 9 of the 13 services we inspected, we recommended that they proactively improve the way they identify and target members of the public who are most at risk from fire. It is essential, particularly when face-to-face prevention activity is carried out, that services are able to reach those who are most vulnerable.

It is unacceptable that some fire and rescue services don't take a sufficiently targeted approach to their prevention work. While some services rely solely on referrals from other organisations, others wait for members of the public to get in touch with them for support. Services can and should use the range of technology available so they can work with other organisations to establish who are the most vulnerable and target their resources accordingly.

Evaluation remains a weakness for the sector

Many services are still not doing enough to evaluate their prevention activities. Some of these activities include home fire safety checks (HFSCs). During an HFSC, a service visits a person's home to give advice on how to reduce the risk of fire. Safe-and-well visits are a more comprehensive type of HFSC, during which a service will provide advice on how to protect the home from fire, as well as general health advice. They will also refer people for specialist support if needed.

We found that services carry out their prevention activity in different ways. Most of the services we inspected had insufficient knowledge of what are the most effective interventions to mitigate the risk of fire. And only 3 of the 13 services we inspected (Cambridgeshire, Cheshire and Merseyside) had adequately evaluated their prevention activity. The remaining ten services we inspected had carried out either no or limited evaluation. This is not a new problem; we drew attention to it during our first round of inspections. More needs to be done and more urgently.

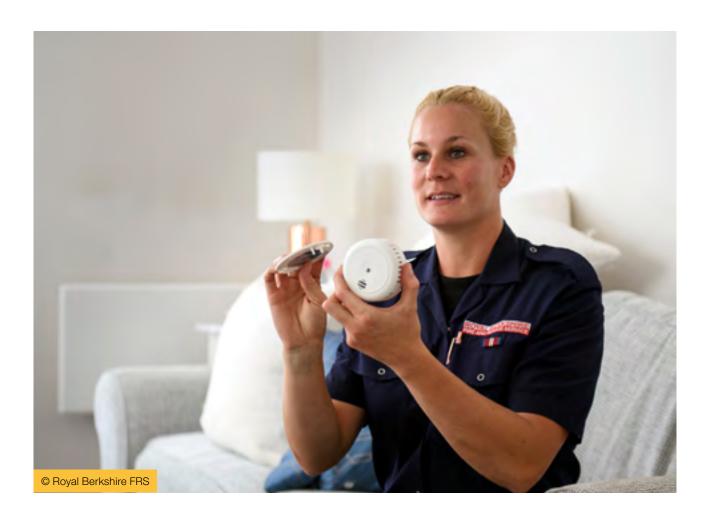


When fire and rescue staff carry out prevention work, they often come face to face with the most vulnerable in society. The NFCC is currently designing a method that services can use to evaluate objectively their prevention, protection and response activities, although it will not be ready for quite some time. Services must do more to make sure that information is available to their prevention, protection and response functions. They must also do more to make sure that each function is aware of how their actions could be beneficial when the service discharges one or both of its other functions. For example, firefighters responding to a house fire should be able to access information gathered during a prevention visit that explains if and how the occupant might be vulnerable and in need of help.

Safeguarding awareness has improved

When fire and rescue staff carry out prevention work, they often come face to face with the most vulnerable in society. It is therefore essential that they have the confidence to deal with those who are vulnerable and that they are aware of what can make a person vulnerable. Their awareness should go beyond matters relating to fire and should extend to problems such as human trafficking, domestic abuse and radicalisation. While we wouldn't expect fire services to have the skills to resolve these problems, they should have robust arrangements in place to recognise vulnerability and be able to refer people to the relevant authorities.

We are therefore encouraged by the fact that all but one of the services we inspected have good safeguarding arrangements in place. This is a significant improvement from our first full round of inspections. Avon, Bedfordshire, Greater Manchester, Hereford and Worcester, and Surrey FRSs have addressed the areas for improvement we gave them relating to safeguarding. However, we encourage all services to provide safeguarding awareness training to all staff, and not only to frontline firefighters and specialist prevention teams who are most frequently in contact with the public.



Proactive action is being taken to tackle firesetting behaviour

Working with people who are more likely to engage in fire-setting behaviour is an effective way of reducing the likelihood of their entering into the criminal justice system as arsonists. They are often vulnerable young people with complex ranges of needs.

We are therefore encouraged to see that all but one of the services we inspected have good arrangements in place to work with other organisations to identify and rehabilitate these individuals at an early stage.

At present, many services have difficulty sufficiently understanding the primary risk factors in their communities.

Work is being done at national level to improve prevention work

Despite the general lack of emphasis on prevention activities by services, we are pleased that national work is underway to promote improvements. In July 2021, the Fire Standards Board published a prevention standard9 which is designed to help services take a consistent approach to their prevention work and to help them educate their communities to adopt safer behaviours, reduce community-related risks and work collaboratively with others where appropriate.

The NFCC has also published guidance¹⁰ which encourages services to focus on people in their prevention activities. The guidance is designed to support services to take a more standardised and evidence-based approach to prevention. Once services have adopted the standard and made the NFCC's guidance part of their prevention work, they should be better placed to take effective action at the appropriate time.

But more should be done by the sector to standardise the data sets used by different services. Services should be able to plan their prevention work on the basis of comparable data. At present, many services have difficulty sufficiently understanding the primary risk factors in their communities. In some services, there is an unnecessary duplication of work. Services should also use their prevention data to assist with their protection and response planning.

Services are well prepared to respond to routine incidents

Responding to fires and other emergencies continues to be a strength of the sector. Most services we inspected had appropriate arrangements in place that enabled them to respond to emergency incidents efficiently and effectively.

In Round 1, we were concerned that many services didn't update their mobile data terminals (MDTs) in fire engines regularly enough. This meant that firefighters couldn't always access the most up-to-date risk information when they went to emergencies. Some services had MDTs that were unreliable. So far during our 2021 inspections, we have found that many firefighters now have better access to risk information when they attend emergencies. We are pleased that many services have taken steps to make these improvements.

We are encouraged to see an improvement in the availability of trained and competent incident commanders who can deal with a wide range of emergencies. In the 13 services we inspected, the proportion of incident commanders who were trained and assessed increased from 93 percent on 31 March 2020 to 99 percent on 31 March 2021. The proportion who are accredited nationally is 92 percent. National guidance says that services should assess the continued competence of incident commanders every two years. This should include refresher training and an assessment.

Fire and rescue services don't take a sufficiently common approach to explaining to the public how many fire engines are required and how long it takes to respond to an incident. And with no national response standards in place, there isn't a way for the public to compare their service with others.

Responding to fires and other emergencies continues to be a strength of the sector.

The NFCC, through its 'Definition of Risk'¹¹ project, has begun work to provide a risk rating for each service on the basis of its response to a range of common incidents. We are interested to see how services use this tool in the future to mitigate the risks they face.

We are concerned that some services cannot sufficiently assure themselves that their control rooms are adequately set up to handle multiple fire survival guidance calls or are able to adequately exchange real-time risk information with incident commanders. It is important that control rooms are resourced appropriately, and that services have fallback arrangements in place. Services must also make sure that control staff are well trained and equipped with the technology they need to work effectively. All too often we see that control staff aren't sufficiently included in training plans, and that support is prioritised for their response colleagues instead.



Other services have used technology to improve arrangements in their control room. For example, Bedfordshire FRS control staff use technology effectively to pinpoint the location of callers and to access live images from incidents. They use this information to inform their assessments of risk and response. The service can also access a live video feed once they have had permission from the caller. Footage from the feed can also be passed on to incident commanders and the other emergency services.

More needs to be done by services to attract on-call firefighters and make best use of them.

More needs to be done to improve the on-call crewing model

We continue to be worried that the sector has not been able to significantly improve the recruitment, retention and availability of on-call firefighters. These are firefighters who generally provide fire cover in remote and rural areas. They respond from their home addresses or their primary places of employment. The requirement to be within a set number of minutes away from a fire station (usually five) to respond to incidents promptly makes it difficult to attract and retain these staff.

During the pandemic, the availability of on-call firefighters improved when the country was in lockdown. Many on-call firefighters were furloughed from their primary employments. But the sector has not found a longer-term, more sustainable solution.

During our 2021 inspections, we found that some services have been more creative and flexible in relation to their use of on-call firefighters. For example, Buckinghamshire FRS uses its on-call staff to respond to larger incidents that are further away from on-call fire stations, instead of using them to respond to local incidents. This means on-call staff do not need to be immediately available to respond to an incident.

On-call firefighters are important: they are used to provide additional support when multiple fire engines are required to respond to an incident. But more needs to be done by services to attract on-call firefighters and make best use of them.

We are worried about the resilience of the marauding terrorist attack arrangements in place at some services.

Services are well prepared to respond to major and multi-agency incidents

In our first inspections, we found that services were well prepared to respond to major and multi-agency incidents. This is one of the sector's strengths; all services have good arrangements in place to work with other emergency services and organisations such as utility companies and local authorities. They are also good at helping other fire and rescue services and will respond to incidents outside their own fire authority borders.

All services and firefighters must be prepared to respond to a marauding terrorist attack (MTA). But we are worried about the resilience of the MTA arrangements in place at some services. Services must make sure that they are able to respond, quicky and effectively, to an MTA. Their procedures for responding to an MTA must be understood by all staff and properly tested. Currently, not all services have in place sufficiently robust arrangements to pay for this capability. Some services use overtime while others resort to additional responsibility allowances.

Responding to major incidents of terrorism is part of the role of the firefighter and is set out in the 'grey book' (the *National Joint Council for Local Authorities' Fire and Rescue Services Scheme of Conditions of Service*¹³). The NFCC has confirmed that fire and rescue services will be part of the emergency service response to all types of terrorist incident. In January 2020, we recommended that the Home Office should clearly set out its expectations of fire and rescue services and what the responsibilities of a firefighter are. This recommendation is now urgent as there is too much variation in the ways services approach establishing and paying for this capability.

Local resilience forums (LRFs) are made up of representatives from local public services. They are responsible for planning and preparing for localised incidents and catastrophic emergencies. During our pandemic inspections, LRF members told us that they appreciated the valuable contributions made by fire and rescue services.

The Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP) establish that the emergency services must work together as effectively as possible during major, serious and catastrophic incidents and events. In our Round 1 inspections, we found that supervisory managers who command smaller-scale incidents didn't understand the principles as well as middle and senior managers. Following our latest inspections, we are pleased to see that most of the supervisory managers we spoke with now have a better understanding of the principles.

Cross-border training is still below pre-pandemic levels

In Round 1, we found that services weren't doing enough joint exercises with neighbouring services to make sure their equipment and ways of working were aligned. As might be expected, fewer cross-border training exercises took place as a result of the restrictions put in place during the pandemic.



In the year ending 31 March 2020, a total of 21 joint training exercises with neighbouring services were carried out by one service (Hereford and Worcester FRS); however, some services didn't carry out any at all. In the same period, on average, services carried out ten joint training exercises.

In the year ending 31 March 2021, the average number of joint training exercises dropped to 5.6 – this was mainly a result of pandemic restrictions. In the Round 1 Tranche 2 staff survey, 75 percent of firefighters and specialist staff told us that they hadn't participated in training or exercising with neighbouring services in the past 12 months. Our expectation is that cross-border training will increase as the pandemic restrictions are lifted.

Services disseminate what they have learned widely

We are pleased that services are learning from significant emergencies and that they are disseminating what they have learned widely. Two platforms are used for this purpose: the joint operational learning platform, which is used by all emergency responder organisations, and the national operational learning platform, which is used by all fire and rescue services in the United Kingdom.

But we were disappointed to find that, in all but 4 of the 13 services we inspected, there was a need to improve the ways services debrief and learn from routine emergency incidents.

Home Office data shows in the year ending March 2021, 518,263 incidents were attended by fire and rescue services. This was a 7 percent decrease compared with the previous year (558,013), a 2 percent decrease compared with five years ago (529,674) and a 20 percent decrease compared with ten years ago (647,362). As we see a steady decrease in the number of emergency incidents attended by fire services, it is essential that the lessons learned from the incidents that do occur are widely disseminated within and by each service, and that improvements to operational preparedness are made as a result.

There is still an inconsistent approach to identifying and mitigating risk

In Round 1, we found too much variation in how services identified and mitigated risk. The content and quality of IRMPs and how services consulted their communities on their IRMPs also varied significantly. In our most recent public perceptions survey, 14 percent of respondents (1,981) said they didn't know what their fire and rescue services should be responsible for other than extinguishing fires. We have not seen any significant change during our 2021 inspections.

In May 2021, the Fire Standards Board published a standard¹⁴ on community risk management planning, which is the process a service follows to assess foreseeable risks and decide how to best use its resources to mitigate them. The standard was published during our 2021 inspections, so the services we inspected haven't yet incorporated it into their plans. We encourage services to adopt the standard as quickly as possible, as it will help the sector to meet our June 2019 recommendation that services should be more consistent in how they identify and determine risk as part of the IRMP process. We encourage the NFCC to provide a set of tools to further support services. It is important that the standard is applied consistently throughout the country.

In many of the services we recently inspected, prevention, protection and response work continue to take place in isolation. These principal areas of work are generally not sufficiently co-ordinated with each other to mitigate the main risks set out in IRMPs.

In our staff survey, 71 percent of those surveyed told us that they felt their service was extremely or very effective at identifying foreseeable risks faced by the community. We found that some services have made improvements in their approach to identifying and mitigating risk. But we are disappointed that too many services have not made any adequate progress since Round 1. These services have not acted sufficiently on the specific areas for improvement we gave them during their first inspection.

In many of the services we recently inspected, prevention, protection and response work continue to take place in isolation.

Local risk must be understood.

Data used by services to build risk profiles varies too much

Services use a range of data to build their risk profiles and to produce their IRMPs. This includes historical incident data, public health data and commercially available consumer data. But services use different data sets, and often the data isn't used effectively in their prevention, protection and response work. This includes the work they do to make sure their home fire safety visits are targeted at the right people, and to decide on the rationale for risk-based inspection programmes and where fire stations should be located.

There will always need to be some variation in the data used by services. Local risk must be understood, and this includes identifying high-impact but low-likelihood emergencies, such as train crashes, terrorist attacks and emergencies at nuclear power sites. But most data used is common to all services. This includes historical incident data, the locations of people most at risk from fire, and the locations of the highest risk buildings regulated by fire safety legislation. Services could be more efficient by making their data sets available to one another.

In its 'Definition of Risk' project, the NFCC has begun work to make sure that services use data more consistently. One aim of the project is to provide a comparable view of risk in each service by drawing on the same types of data. This will allow individual services to then consider and compare how efficiently they are allocating resources to prevention, protection and response.

Some services need to improve how they collect and disseminate risk information

During our 2021 inspections, we examined in detail the range of risk information that was collected and passed on to firefighters, incident commanders and control room staff. This is an area where we have placed great emphasis, following the recommendations made in the Grenfell Tower Inquiry's Phase 1 report.

We were pleased to find that most services were collecting good-quality risk information, including for high-risk and high-rise buildings. But we are concerned that some services haven't sufficiently prioritised making sure up-to-date risk information is available for firefighters, incident commanders and control room staff.

Disappointingly, in some services, we also found that control room staff didn't have immediate access to the same risk information available to incident commanders at the incident in question. A lack of consistent risk information could very well materially lower the quality of fire survival guidance provided by control room staff to people who may be trapped in a fire. And it could have an adverse effect on communication and co-ordination between the control room and incident commanders. This puts the public at unnecessary risk of harm.



Efficiency

In this pillar, we ask two questions:

- 1. How well does the FRS use its resources to manage risk?
- 2. How well is the FRS securing an affordable way of managing the risk of fire and other risks, now and in the future?



Our findings

Services are mitigating financial risks

Most services have a sound understanding of what financial difficulties they are likely to face in the future. We have seen some realistic assumptions made in respect of budgets, as well as examples of scenario planning in service plans and investment in future innovation. For example, Cheshire FRS has developed different scenarios to respond to unanticipated risks. It considers the wider external environment and carries out some scenario planning, while taking into account matters such as government funding, business rates and pay for future spending reductions. All services need to follow suit if they are to cope with future financial pressures.

Financial planning scenarios and future risks considered by other services include changes in pension settlements, future levels of council tax precepts, business rates, inflation and future pay increases for staff. Many services have also made plans that take into account the Government's comprehensive spending review.

But some services only produce financial plans for the year ahead. Their plans are reactive rather than proactive and make immediate short-term rather than long-term financial decisions. For example, one service's recent IRMP action plans have focused more on achieving immediate and short-term savings rather than on identifying and managing risk.

While short-term funding settlements are unhelpful for longer-term planning, these services should try to understand the future financial pressures they may face. Without doing so, they will not be able to take measures to adequately mitigate their main or significant financial risks.

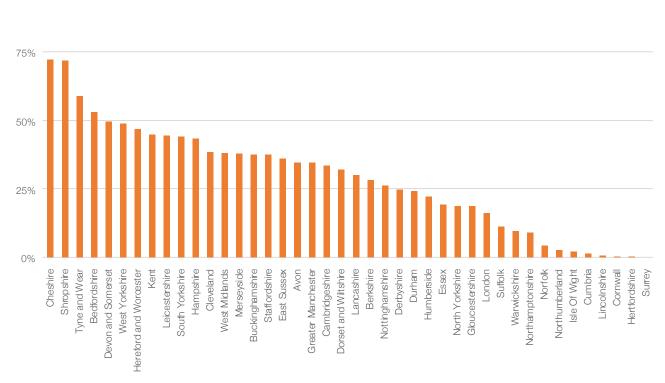
Some services only produce financial plans for the year ahead.

100%

Some services rely too much on their reserves to support revenue budgets, rather than use this money productively to support new ways of working. One service's plan for its reserves is particularly unclear and unsustainable. The reserves will shortly be depleted and it is unlikely that the service will be able to invest in future capital projects in fleet, estates and technology.

Services have different levels of reserves, and they don't all use them in the same way. The reason why services have different levels of reserves can be partially explained by the difference in governance models.

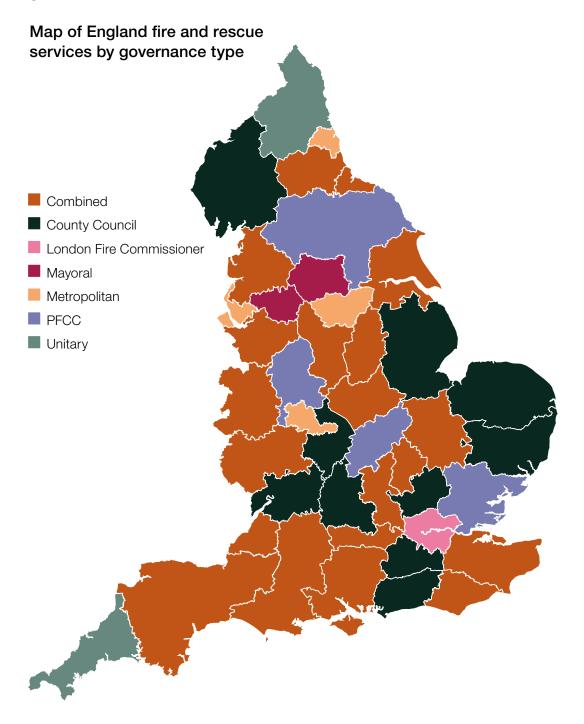
Figure 1: Reserves and provisions as a percentage of total expenditure 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020

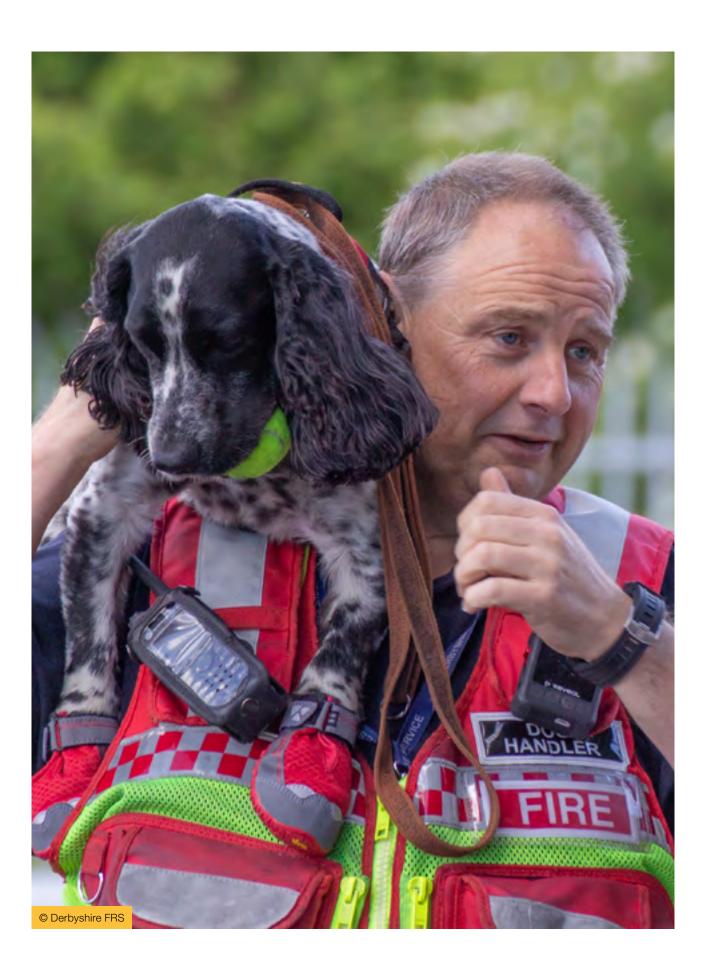


Source:: Annual financial data returns to Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy

Note: Data is not available for all services

This variation in governance can make financial comparisons between services difficult. While combined¹⁵ council and metropolitan services have specific budgets, it can be difficult to disaggregate the budget for the fire and rescue service from the budget for the larger organisation. Out of the 44 fire and rescue services in England, 24 are combined council or metropolitan, 13 are county council or unitary, 4 are PFCCs, 2 are mayoral, of which London has a separate governance structure called the London Fire Commissioner.





Services are making use of new ways of working

Many services have introduced positive changes to their working practices. This has been partly out of necessity as a result of the pandemic. But other changes have been made to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of services.

During the pandemic, many services quickly adapted many aspects of how they worked in order to enable staff to work from home. Some services plan to keep certain arrangements in place to allow for flexible working. In some services, staff in protection roles have carried out remote fire safety audits for businesses from their desktops. And some services have continued to provide training to staff virtually.

Buckinghamshire FRS has introduced a 'flexi firefighter contract', which enables staff to work more flexible shift patterns. Surrey FRS has reviewed the crewing models it uses to make sure appropriate numbers of staff are available when needed. Overtime is now being used far less to maintain fire engine availability.

During the 2019/20 financial year, £14.2 million was spent on ICT by services. This represented 9.1 percent of all capital expenditure, although this varied quite considerably across services. Despite this, we continue to find numerous examples of ineffective ICT structures which hamper staff productivity and the ability of services to provide effective fire safety. We are disappointed that, in some cases, problems with technology that we identified in our last inspection have not been resolved. This is particularly troubling considering that some services didn't give a sufficiently clear explanation of how they were intending to replace and update their ICT infrastructure.

In the services which have given us most cause for concern about their protection work, we have also found that they have unreliable ICT systems. For a service to promote fire safety effectively, it must be able to risk assess, plan and carry out audits, and maintain robust records of the buildings in its local area. It must also be able to easily disseminate risk information within the service and with local authorities and organisations.

Many services have introduced positive changes to their working practices.

These services have ICT systems that are difficult to retrieve information from, unwieldy to use and often aren't connected to other risk databases. This isn't satisfactory. As a result, staff find it difficult to use their time productively and to determine how useful are the audits that have been done.

Some services do actively exploit the opportunities arising from changes in technology. For example, Cambridgeshire FRS has improved the efficiency and effectiveness of its asset management system. Staff use scanners and tablet computers when carrying out equipment and fire engine checks, and when maintaining inventories. As a result of these automated processes, staff are spending less time on administration work.

More needs to be done to make sure workforces are productive

Overall, progress made by fire and rescue services to make sure that their workforces are productive is slow and limited.

Of the 13 services we inspected, we found that only 4 were improving the productivity of their workforces. For example, Cheshire FRS is reviewing some existing shift patterns and expanding its fleet of rapid response rescue units to all primary on-call fire stations to improve the availability of its staff. Merseyside FRS monitors the performance of each fire station and what its firefighters do.

Ineffective and inefficient ICT systems undermine some services' attempts to improve their productivity. During the initial stages of the pandemic, one service allocated periods of time to its staff during which they could access the service's ICT system remotely. However, this meant that they could only access the system at specific times of the day, and some members of staff told us that, at times, they had to work outside their contracted working hours – in the evenings or at weekends – to access the system. Some services could use firefighter time more productively by using them to help with prevention and protection work.

Resources aren't always aligned to risk

In their IRMPs, services establish what foreseeable risks they face and how they will allocate their resources between prevention, protection and response to mitigate those risks. In our 2021 inspections, we found that some services weren't able to adequately demonstrate that their budget and resource allocation were aligned to their IRMPs.

For example, one service reduced the number of staff in its prevention team. This was done to save money rather than to reflect reduced community risk. Other services allocated resources on the basis of previous funding allocations or historical information. And, in one case, a service couldn't guarantee that it had enough resources to meet the priorities in its IRMP.

Too many services have plans which aren't consistent with the risks and priorities in their IRMPs. This is significantly hindering their efficiency. Too many services have plans which aren't consistent with the risks and priorities in their IRMPs.



Some services rely too much on dual contracts and overtime to maintain operational response cover.

Many services can't fully cope

In Round 1, we found that, as budgets and staffing levels had been reduced, operational response was protected at the expense of prevention and protection. The majority of services have allocated more staff and funding to protection, but most services still don't have enough fire safety inspectors to carry out fire safety audits and other protection work. We are particularly worried by the reduction in the number of prevention visits, which are now below prepandemic levels.

Some services rely too much on dual contracts and overtime to maintain operational response cover. In some services, staff need to work extra hours or carry out multiple functions. However, some positive steps have been taken by some services. For example, Bedfordshire FRS is making more effective use of on-call firefighters to cover staffing shortfalls at wholetime fire stations.

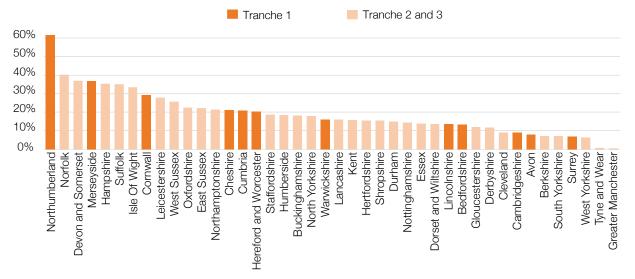
We are concerned that most services don't have sufficient capacity and capability to make the changes they need to improve their digital technology. We saw examples of staff having to use multiple ICT systems or programmes to access the information they needed to carry out their protection work. In one service, staff said that the ICT programme they use is unreliable and that it makes them much less efficient because they have to double-check everything manually.

Services need to make sure that they can make the changes required to enable them to operate more efficiently and effectively. They also need to make sure they invest enough money and have enough skilled people to bring in the ICT improvements they need.

Services need to better manage the use of dual contracts and overtime

Many services resort to using alternative working models when they have shortages of crews available at on-call stations; these include dual contracts and overtime arrangements. As at March 2020, 21.7 percent of wholetime firefighters had second jobs and 12.1 percent had dual contracts with the same service. However, when unmonitored or monitored ineffectively, this model to provide adequate cover can be inefficient, costly, and at worst, unsafe; it can also be detrimental to staff wellbeing.

Figure 2: Proportion of wholetime firefighters on dual contracts within their services as at 31 March 2020



Services with no staff on dual contract within the same service have been excluded from the graph

Source: HMICFRS data collection

If overtime isn't offered fairly to staff, this can also create inequalities of opportunity and feelings of resentment.

If services can establish shift patterns which both provide effective cover that matches the public's needs and reduce the need for excessive overtime arrangements, they will be more efficient.

We found that nearly half of the services we inspected were not fully evaluating their collaboration activities.

All services collaborate with local organisations and authorities to some extent, but evaluation is limited

Many services are generally proactive at looking for opportunities to work with other emergency responders. There are many examples of positive collaboration, particularly from some services that work in the same buildings as other emergency services.

Some services share control rooms to save costs and improve services. Merseyside FRS has a programme under way to develop a new training and development academy with the North West Ambulance Service NHS Trust. The ambulance service plans to base its hazardous area response team at the site. Other services work together on joint procurement, such as buying new vehicles.

However, some services aren't quite as proactive and some do nothing more than work in the same building. We found that nearly half of the services we inspected were not fully evaluating their collaboration activities.

Collaboration isn't only about making savings or efficiencies. Avon FRS works with the South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust and has provided a community first-responder vehicle at one of its fire stations. The service is also helping the trust by driving ambulances to incidents.

Cornwall FRS has worked with the other two emergency services to set up the new role of a tri-service safety officer. Staff in this position carry out a range of activities to support the fire, police and ambulance services. The new role has led to savings being made and safety benefits for the community.

Too many services don't consistently or effectively evaluate, review or monitor collaboration activities to assess the extent to which they work well and are cost-effective.

Fleet and estate strategies should be aligned to IRMPs

Services must carefully consider any changes to their estates and determine whether such changes could improve the service they provide to the public.

We are disappointed that many services either don't have fleet and estate strategies in place or that these strategies are inconsistent with their IRMPs. For example, we saw that one service had made plans for new training facilities and other changes at three of its sites. But it made very little progress against these plans.

Control room continuity plans need regular testing

It is vital that services, and their control rooms in particular, have robust arrangements in place so that they can continue to provide a service during periods of disruption. These arrangements are known as 'continuity arrangements'. In our 2021 inspections, we found that most services don't test their control room continuity arrangements often enough.

Many services haven't tested a full evacuation of their control rooms since before the pandemic; in some cases, it has been much longer. This means that staff aren't fully aware of what they should do if an evacuation is needed.

Services should test their evacuation plans often. While the pandemic has made it more difficult to test a full evacuation, it is still possible. Some services, such as Avon FRS, have managed to test their evacuation plans throughout the pandemic; it carries out four exercises each year to test its arrangements.

People

In this pillar, we ask four questions:

- 1. How well does the FRS promote its values and culture?
- 2. How well trained and skilled are the FRS staff?
- 3. How well does the FRS ensure fairness and diversity?
- 4. How well does the FRS develop leadership and capability?



Our findings

Values are better understood and demonstrated

Organisational cultures can have a material effect on staff wellbeing. In Round 1, we found few services that had both unambiguous values and a clear indication of acceptable workplace behaviours. In most services, we found that even if such values were in place, they weren't a sufficient part of the working culture and weren't communicated to staff effectively.

As a result, staff didn't properly understand these values and there were many instances of poor behaviour. We were particularly concerned to find outdated practices that prevented some staff from getting the formal help they needed. In several services, we also found evidence of cultures so toxic that bullying, harassment and discrimination were commonplace and unchallenged. This included use of inappropriate language, overly autocratic management styles and, most worryingly, staff finding amusement in the poor treatment of colleagues.

In our 2021 inspections, it was encouraging to find services have made the greatest improvement in this area. Work to promote and prioritise values and culture at all levels of fire and rescue services is well under way. Of the 8 areas for improvement related to values and culture that we previously issued in respect of the 13 services we inspected, 6 were closed during our 2021 inspections. In particular, Avon FRS proactively worked with its staff to improve its new values and behaviour framework. The service appointed 'cultural advocates' who were responsible for this work. They promoted these values and set clear behavioural standards for all staff in the service.

Every service we inspected had clearly defined values, of which almost all (96 percent) respondents to our 2021 staff survey said they were aware. We found that the vast majority of fire and rescue staff are diligent and proud to work for their organisations. They told us they want to do a good job to protect the communities that they serve.

Work to promote and prioritise values and culture at all levels of fire and rescue services is well under way.

We were pleased to see that, in most services, staff generally behaved in a way that was consistent with the service's values. The majority (84 percent) of respondents to our 2021 staff survey told us they agreed or tended to agree that they were treated with dignity and respect at work and were involved in decisions that affected them.

The numbers of grievances in services were low. Where there was evidence of poor behaviour, this was limited to small pockets of staff, and sometimes it took the form of a lack of the presence and visibility of members of the service's senior leadership team. We found that all services had some form of grievance resolution process in place, with a correlation between the more robust processes and consistent action taken on the basis of staff feedback. Some services encouraged managers to resolve grievances informally, which in some circumstances is appropriate. However, this sometimes resulted in grievances not being officially recorded, or no record being kept of a problem that had arisen and that needed to be resolved. It was unclear how, in these instances, services could assure themselves that they were able to identify trends in problems affecting their workforces.

We previously recommended that the sector would benefit from a code of ethics. Since then the *Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services* has been established by the NFCC, the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners and the Local Government Association; it was published in May 2021.¹⁷ The corresponding standard was published by the Fire Standards Board.¹⁸ Despite being released part way through our 2021 inspections, we are already seeing evidence of services, such as Cornwall and Merseyside, starting to consider how to integrate the code into their values and other policies. We hope all other services follow suit.

Health and safety and wellbeing provision are prioritised

In almost all services we inspected, staff wellbeing and health and safety continue to be priorities; this was also something we found in our pandemic inspections. In almost all services we inspected, we found that, in general, staff had high confidence in the wide range of support available to them and that staff understood procedures and policies well. We also found this in our Round 2 Tranche 1 staff survey.¹⁹

In almost all services we inspected, staff wellbeing and health and safety continue to be priorities.

Staff absences are managed in all services and, for the most part, policies are robust. There are, however, some areas where policies on absences fall short; some services may find it difficult to identify trends in absences. Some services would also benefit from management training in order to better deal with staff absences.

We found that there were some inconsistencies and gaps in performance management processes. This means that some opportunities are being missed when it comes to making sure staff have what they need to be safe and well at work. Services must have continuous open conversations with staff to make sure they provide them with the right tools and support for them to do their jobs.



We previously identified the need for services to better monitor overtime and secondary employment to make sure they and their employees were complying with the Working Time Directive (WTD). Cheshire FRS has a working time group and a health, safety and wellbeing committee, which it developed in response to an area for improvement we issued in Round 1. While there is evidence of some services having systems in place to monitor overtime and secondary contracts, it isn't clear how robust or effective these are. Some services still don't have adequate oversight of the hours their staff are working and staff are expected to manage WTD compliance themselves.

It is imperative that services have systems in place to effectively monitor the secondary employment, dual contracts and overtime arrangements of their workforces, to make sure working arrangements are safe and to minimise work stress.



Good intentions to promote equality, diversity and inclusion aren't always successful

In Round 1, equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) was an area in desperate need of improvement. We found that many services wanted to improve diversity, but there was still a great deal more to do. Three services received an inadequate judgment in this area and five causes of concern were issued.

In the 13 services we inspected, we found shortcomings in the approach two services had taken to improve EDI, and we issued causes of concern as a result. We do not want to inhibit leaders from prioritising and promoting this important area of work, but efforts to improve EDI must lead to positive outcomes for workforces. We found that all other services were promoting EDI in some way, although their methods weren't always effective.

Some members of staff said they had reservations about how successful EDI changes would be. Some of the most important EDI needs for staff were missed. Only three services we inspected (Cheshire, Greater Manchester and Humberside) provided evidence of strong EDI planning. In some cases, it wasn't clear what services hoped to achieve with their EDI strategies. In this respect, services need to work closely with staff to try to understand and meet their needs.

Despite services using a considerable range of feedback channels to communicate with their workforces, we found only three services that consistently took effective action as a result of staff feedback (Cambridgeshire, Cheshire and Merseyside).

We also found that services either didn't use equality impact assessments and staff networks, or that they used them inconsistently. There was a lack of information and training on EDI, including among managers, and a poor understanding of it by staff. This may explain why we continued to find examples of inappropriate and non-inclusive language. Services must do more to make sure that their people understand the importance of diversity and why it is necessary.

Services must do more to make sure that their people understand the importance of diversity and why it is necessary.

Workforces don't always represent the communities they serve

The workforces of all services remain woefully unrepresentative of many of the communities that they serve, and services should do more to recruit people from diverse backgrounds.

According to Home Office data, as of 31 March 2020, 17 percent of the workforce identify as female. This is slightly higher than in previous years (16.7 percent in 2019, 14.5 percent five years ago and 15.1 percent ten years ago). The majority of female staff work in fire control and support staff roles. Only 7 percent of firefighters identify as female.

Only 5 percent of the workforce identify as being from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) background. Only 4.4 percent (1,410) of firefighters identified as being from an ethnic minority, compared with 4.3 percent (1,368) in the previous year, and 3.8 percent (1,276) five years ago.

In the three years since 2017/18, only 5 percent of all new firefighters were from a BAME background and only 12 percent identified as female. A high proportion of diversity characteristics were either not recorded or not stated. In the three years since 2017/18, an average of 22 percent of new firefighters and 22 percent of all new joiners did not state their ethnicities.

To truly understand whether progress is being made to attract more diversity into the sector, we need services to gather more detailed data and make sure that staff feel comfortable providing this information. Recruiting a more diverse workforce is only the first step for services; they must make sure they provide the right environment and culture for all staff to flourish and to keep them in the sector in the long term.

Equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives must not be carried out in isolation

A more equal and diverse workforce will make services more efficient and effective because more people of high ability, dedication and commitment, who work hard and effectively, will join from under-represented communities.

Working towards inclusive practice is everyone's responsibility. Evidence from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development establishes that EDI initiatives carried out in isolation do not work, and they will not make workplaces more diverse or inclusive.²⁰ Inclusive behaviour allows individuals to work together effectively and creates a healthy environment for employees. It enables people, regardless of their differences, to work together effectively and avoid stereotyping. Services should make sure their EDI initiatives are parts of co-ordinated strategies and woven through their day-to-day activities, rather than being standalone actions.

As we continue our second round of inspections, we will continue to assess what services are doing to improve their diversity and equality, how they are tackling unlawful or undue discrimination, educating their workforces, and working with their diverse communities.

A more equal and diverse workforce will make services more efficient and effective.



Many services are failing to establish adequate succession plans for future leadership.

Lack of workforce planning

In Round 1, only a third of services had in place sufficiently strong processes to carry out workforce and succession planning in a way that was consistent with their IRMPs. In Round 2 Tranche 1, not much progress had been made in this respect, with still only a third having adequate processes in place (Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Surrey). We are worried that some services continue to operate without a clear understanding of the skills and capabilities of their workforces.

Ineffective, reactive or narrow planning can lead to some areas being understaffed. In their planning, services should anticipate any potential staff shortages and factor these in. For example, Cheshire FRS anticipated that many members of staff would retire, so they proactively recruited in advance. This is simply good management, and it is disappointing that it is not done routinely everywhere.

Not enough is being done to plan for future leaders

Many services are failing to establish adequate succession plans for future leadership. This is particularly important following the recent high turnover of chief fire officers.

It is crucial that succession planning for leaders includes the need to consider a diverse range of individuals. In our 2021 inspections, we continued to find senior management teams, including recent appointments, comprising people who look, sound and think the same. Brigade, area and group managers are all leadership positions in services. In 2020, only 7.2 percent of brigade managers were female, and approximately 6 percent of all brigade, area and group managers were female. The numbers of staff from BAME backgrounds at these levels were also disappointingly low.

We found services were making efforts to remove the risk of bias from internal recruitment processes; one way this was done was by using independent panel members and assessing applications without the names of the applicants being shown.

However, in some cases, services couldn't always provide evidence of how the latter stages of appointment processes (such as interviews) had been carried out; it wasn't clear whether the measures to remove the risk of bias had always been applied. As such, services couldn't always assure themselves, and others, that the recruitment process in its entirety was fair.

Many on-call staff didn't feel that they had the same development opportunities as other staff.

A lack of people with protected characteristics in leadership teams is not the only problem. We found that not enough was being done to attract people from outside the sector; most people who were appointed to senior positions had held traditional firefighter roles. This failure to recruit from elsewhere limits the diversity and volume of suitable candidates.

Services should also develop their staff and provide consistent and fair opportunities as part of their workforce succession planning. This will help to make sure their staff have the skills they need to be able to do their jobs and take on more senior roles in the future. We found that, in some services, operational, corporate and support staff didn't always have the same development and promotion opportunities, with the balance being tipped in favour of operational staff.

In Round 1, we found a lack of talent management programmes. We also found that staff performance and development appraisals were not being done often enough. In Round 2, it was therefore encouraging to find many services had improved their provision of learning and development for staff, and staff reported a high level of confidence that these met their needs. Where we did find problems, these were a result of ineffective manager training, or inequality of training provision between non-operational and operational staff, with the latter having either greater or more structured access to learning and development opportunities, or both.

In the Round 2 Tranche 1 staff survey, 30 percent of those who responded told us they had a conversation with their managers about their performance no more than once a year. Access to development was often linked to appraisals, so it is a matter of concern that we found that 26 percent of on-call firefighters hadn't completed an appraisal or performance development review in 2020/21; many on-call staff didn't feel that they had the same development opportunities as other staff.