

Fire & Rescue Service 2021/22

Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service



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About this inspection

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

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

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

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

What inspection judgments mean

Our categories of graded judgment are:

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








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





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




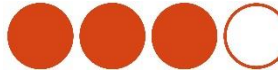


If we find shortcomings in the service, we will judge it as requires improvement.

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

Overview

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

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

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

HM Inspector's summary

It was a pleasure for the team to revisit Tyne and Wear 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 Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service in keeping people safe and secure from fires and other risks, although it needs to improve in some areas to provide a consistently good service. For example, the service needs to improve fairness and diversity in the workforce and how it develops future leaders.

We were pleased to see that the service has made progress since our 2018 inspection. The service is now more effective and has secured a sustainable financial future. But more work is needed to make the service a good place to work for everyone.

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

- The service needs to do more to improve fairness and diversity to better reflect the community it serves. The service also needs to do more to support staff with developing leadership and managerial skills, at all levels of the service.
- The service has made good improvements with training for risk-critical skills and how it prepares operational commanders to manage incidents. The service has also improved its prevention activities in people's homes.
- We also found the service is good at financial management and collaborating with partners and other agencies to provide an overall efficient and effective service to the public. But improvements are not always aligned to risk or provide the most efficient way of delivering the service.

Overall, Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service is providing a good service to the public and is financially sustainable. The service also continues to respond well to the pandemic, playing a leading role in supporting other agencies with testing and vaccination in the local area.

However, the service needs to improve ways to promote diversity and fairness within its workforce and do more to support and develop current and future leaders. The service also needs to continue to drive efficiency in operational delivery through innovative practice and transformational change.



Roy Wilsher

HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Service in numbers



Response

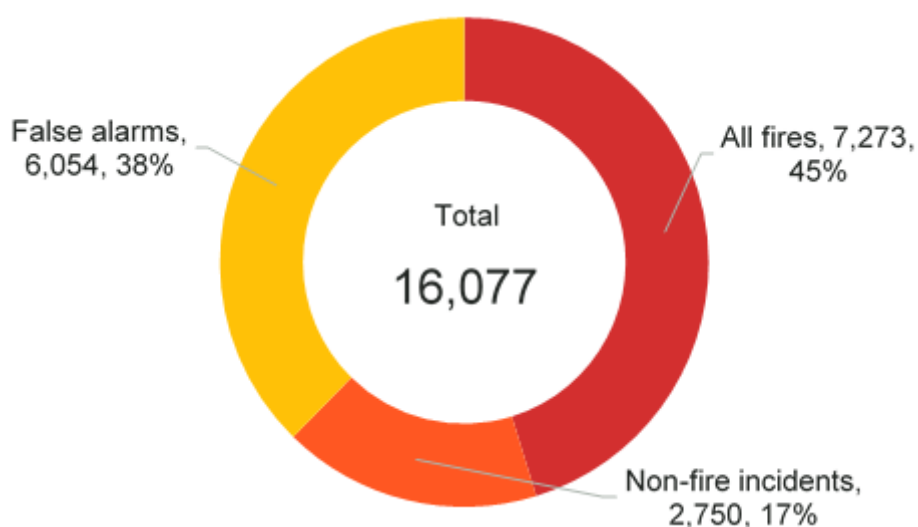
	Tyne & Wear	England
Incidents attended per 1,000 population Year ending 30 June 2021	14.02	9.36
Home fire safety checks carried out by fire and rescue service per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	4.27	4.47
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises Year ending 31 March 2021	1.85	1.70
Average availability of pumps Year ending 31 March 2021	99.4%	86.4%



Cost

	Tyne & Wear	England
Firefighter cost per person Year ending 31 March 2021	£28.48	£23.73

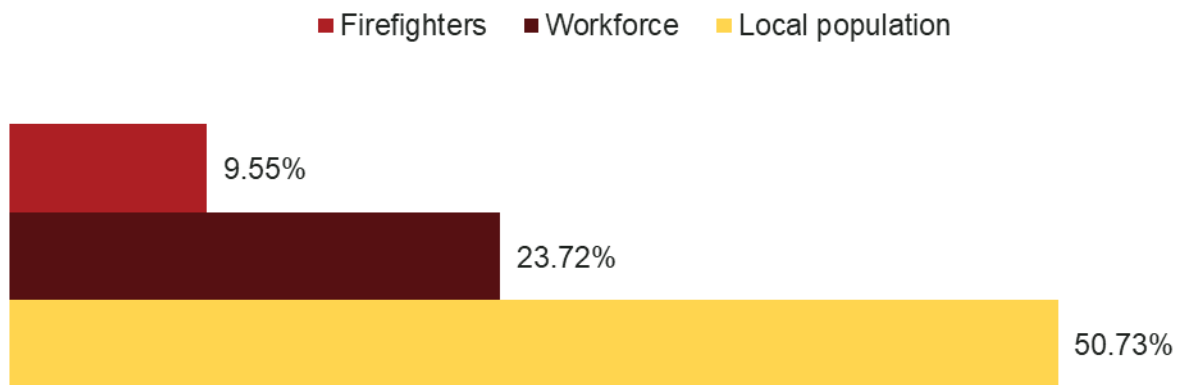
Incidents attended in the year to 30 June 2021



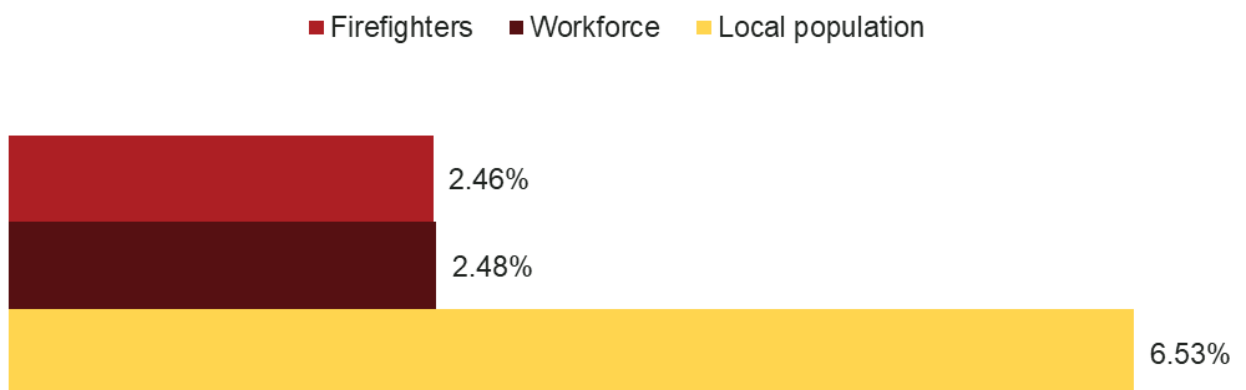


Five-year change in total workforce 2016 to 2021	-6.67%	-1.60%
Number of firefighters per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	0.52	0.62
Percentage of firefighters who are wholetime Year ending 31 March 2021	97.5%	64.4%

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



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



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

Effectiveness



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



Good

Summary

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

Tyne and Wear is good at providing an effective fire and rescue service.

It has improved areas of its prevention activity identified in round one, so we now grade it as good. But activity must be aligned to strategies and plans that are current and aligned to the [integrated risk management plan \(IRMP\)](#).

The service has adopted an approach to presenting its plans to the public that we found difficult to follow. From the plans presented it was difficult to understand how contributions from prevention and protection are fully represented in the IRMP. The service continues to be good at protecting the public by regulating fire safety measures and we are pleased to see it is on target to complete extra work required after the fire at Grenfell Tower.

The service has made improvements to its operational response, which we identified were needed in its round one inspection. It continues to have good plans in place to deal with major incidents and to work with neighbouring fire and rescue services.

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies



Good (2019: Good)

Tyne and Wear 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 that the aims and objectives of prevention, protection and response activity are clearly outlined in its IRMP.

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

Good at identifying risk

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

Information sources the service uses to identify and understand risk include:

- national risk register;
- census data;
- social, financial and health data;
- partner agency data and information;
- incident data and information;
- mapping and geographical information;
- fire safety information; and
- service data and information.

When appropriate, the service has consulted and undertaken constructive conversations with communities and other interested parties, such as local politicians, including local MPs, the police and crime commissioner and councillors. Consultation also used partner agencies and mainstream and social media to explain the risk to the public and how it intends to mitigate it.

Strategic commitments for managing risk need to be more clear

The community risk profile identifies risks to the public but strategic plans, including the IRMP, don't clearly set out how risks will be managed through prevention and protection activities.

This makes it difficult for the public to understand how the service intends to use its prevention and protection resources to mitigate or reduce risks, both now and in the future.

The service is better at gathering and recording risk information

The service routinely collects and updates the information it has about the people, places and threats it has identified as being at greatest risk. This includes tall buildings and buildings the service has assessed as being high risk.

This information is readily available for the service's prevention, protection and response staff, which enables it to identify, reduce and mitigate risk effectively. For example, we saw how premises' risk information for local risks are immediately available to operational crews when they are being [mobilised](#) to emergencies. Where appropriate, risk information is passed on to other organisations such as the local licensing authority and departments responsible for public health.

Operational activity is used well to build understanding of risks

The service records and communicates risk information effectively. It also routinely updates risk assessments and uses feedback from local and national operational activity to inform its planning assumptions. For example, the service identified an increase in rescues from open water so now works with the RNLI to improve education, training and lifesaving equipment in areas with a high risk of accidental drownings.

Service response to recommendations from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry is good

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

Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service has responded positively and proactively to learning from this tragedy. At the time of our inspection, the service was on track to having assessed the risk of every high-rise building in its service area.

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

Preventing fires and other risks



Good (2019: Requires improvement)

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

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

Area for improvement

The service should develop and publish its organisational plan for prevention, to make clear to the public how prevention activity is driven and provided.

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

Prevention plans need updating

The Community Safety Plan for prevention was out of date at the time of inspection. This makes it difficult to see how prevention activity is aligned to the IRMP.

The service works well with other organisations on prevention, such as local authorities, 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, supervisory managers run daily checks of recent incidents to identify where to target prevention work.

Good management of the effects of the pandemic on prevention work

We considered how the service had adapted its prevention work during our COVID-19-specific inspection in September and October 2020. At that time, we found it had adapted its public prevention work appropriately. Since then, we are encouraged to find that prevention work increasingly takes place in person, including operational crews making [safe and well visits](#).

Improvements with targeting prevention activity need to continue

Targeting of prevention activity has improved. Now, the service clearly prioritises people most at risk from fire and other emergencies. For example, dedicated staff from the prevention and education team target the highest-risk members of the community through direct contact.

However, station activity for prevention work remains focused on achieving targets within station areas. This approach can leave higher-risk premises in neighbouring station areas waiting longer for prevention work, while crews carry out lower-risk work in their own area. Station-based targets should consider risks across the whole service area. For example, by crews working across station boundaries to tackle higher-risk areas.

The service takes account of a broad range of information and data to target its prevention activity at [vulnerable](#) individuals and groups. This includes information such as the age of any residents, history of fires, presence of working smoke alarms, and time since last visit by the service.

It provides a range of interventions that it adapts to the level of risk in its communities. While the main prevention activities are making safe and well visits, the service also carries out targeted activity to address deliberate fire setting.

Staff competence has improved with providing safe and well checks

Staff told us they have the right skills and the confidence to make safe and well visits. They also said that their competence has improved since our previous inspection. These checks cover an appropriate range of hazards that can put vulnerable people at greater risk from fire and other emergencies. Staff told us that, because of the pandemic, these checks are made in a doorstep questionnaire, but staff are trained to know when to enter a property to do an individual risk assessment.

Staff are good at identifying and responding to safeguarding concerns

Staff we interviewed told us about occasions when they had identified [safeguarding](#) problems. They told us they feel confident and trained to act appropriately and promptly. All staff in operational roles, including [on-call](#) firefighters, could give at least one example of having identified safeguarding issues. Their examples often involved people with mental health problems and how staff had been able to use local procedures to request support.

Collaboration with other agencies and voluntary sector are good

The service works with a wide range of other organisations such as local health authorities and adult and child services to prevent fires and other emergencies.

We found evidence that the service routinely refers people at greatest risk to other organisations that may be better able to meet their needs. These organisations include adult and child services and GPs. Arrangements are in place to receive referrals from others. Third party referrals come through a dedicated email address that is monitored by staff from the prevention and education team. The service acts appropriately on the referrals it gets. For example, it has a target of ten days to respond to any requests but prioritises requests based on risk.

The service routinely exchanges information with other public sector organisations about people and groups at greatest risk. It uses the information to challenge planning assumptions and target prevention activity. For example, the service works with the RNLI to reduce the risk of drowning along the two main rivers in the area.

The service also runs the community education and support centre known as [SafetyWorks!](#) This is in partnership with the Northumbria police and crime commissioner and a local transport company. SafetyWorks! is an interactive centre to educate young people and support community groups, including vulnerable people and those with disabilities and drug and alcohol problems.

The service is active at tackling fire-setting behaviour

The service has a range of suitable and effective interventions to target and educate people of different ages who show signs of fire-setting behaviour. This includes local crews monitoring antisocial fires in their area and being responsible for tailoring the advice and education to reduce these fires through local schools and youth clubs. The service also supports the juvenile firesetters education programme and receives referrals from parents, carers, social workers and other professional bodies.

When appropriate, the service routinely shares information with other partners, to support the prosecution of arsonists. It works closely with Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service and Northumbria Police to help investigate deliberate fires.

The service still needs to get better at evaluating its prevention activity

The service has some evaluation tools in place. For example, it reviewed over 3,000 partner referrals and identified that most were low risk. This is now being addressed with the referring agency to improve the referral process.

We also found that performance monitoring had improved. But we didn't see how this informed planning assumptions to improve future activity.

Also, we didn't see how the service uses feedback from the public, other organisations, and other parts of the service to continuously improve its prevention activities.

Protecting the public through fire regulation



Good (2019: Good)

Tyne and Wear 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.

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 RBIP and the community risk profile

The service's RBIP is clearly linked to the risks identified in its community risk profile.

But links between the IRMP and the RBIP are not clear. At the time of inspection, the organisational plan for community safety was not yet published. This made it difficult to follow the strategy for protection, through to frontline delivery.

Staff across the service are involved in the RBIP, with information effectively exchanged as needed. For example, we saw that operational crews pass risk information to protection teams so they can identify issues with high-rise buildings. Information is used to adjust planning assumptions and direct activity between the service's protection, prevention and response functions. This means that resources are properly aligned to risk.

Protection work adapted well during the pandemic

We considered how the service had adapted its protection activity during our COVID-19-specific inspection in September and October 2020. At that time, we found it had adapted its protection work well. Since then, we are encouraged to find the service has returned to face-to-face inspections for most of its protection work, with appropriate measures in place.

Protection work has clear links to local risks

The service's RBIP is focused on the service's highest-risk buildings. We saw how the service uses a range of data to determine risk. The service approach is in line with national guidance and is supported through local knowledge and experience of premises, including previous enforcement history and incident data, to inform the overall risk.

The audits we reviewed were completed by the deadlines the service has set itself. Audits are generated quarterly, with inspectors prioritising workloads based on local knowledge to complete audits within three months.

The service is on target to complete audits of buildings identified through the building risk review programme

Audits have been carried out at premises with cladding similar to that installed on Grenfell Tower. Information gathered during these audits is made available to response teams and control operators, enabling them to respond more effectively in an emergency.

At the time of our inspection, the service was on schedule to audit all high-rise, high-risk buildings it has identified in its service area.

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 RBIP, 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.

Quality assurance arrangements are appropriate

Quality assurance of protection activity takes place in a proportionate way. Line managers sample a minimum of four audits each year, including on-site visits, and have full access to all audit reports for desk-based quality assurance.

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

The service takes a proportionate approach to enforcement

The service recognises it is better to gain compliance through education and advice. It is willing and able to prosecute where appropriate. In the year to 31 March 2021, the service issued 3 alterations notices, 98 informal notifications, 5 enforcement notices, 8 prohibition notices and had 1 prosecution underway.

Resourcing problems need to be addressed

The service has allocated appropriate funding to protection but at the time of inspection was struggling to recruit and retain suitably qualified staff. When all posts in fire protection are filled, the service will be able to provide the range of audit and enforcement activity needed, both now and in the future.

Working with others should be developed to improve public safety

The service works closely with other enforcement agencies to regulate fire safety and routinely exchanges risk information with them. During inspection we saw evidence of how the service shares information with the local licensing authorities and social housing providers.

The service has a programme of joint visits with police and local licensing authorities to inspect night-time venues. But it doesn't routinely inspect these venues during normal operating hours, so it can't properly assess the risks to the public.

Good at responding to building regulations and licensing consultations

The service responds to all building 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 95 percent of building regulations consultations within the 15 working days time limit and 98 percent of licensing consultations within the time limit.

Support for local businesses is active and proportionate

The service proactively engages with local businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation. Although the service doesn't have a dedicated business support team, it has a communications team that supports fire safety campaigns and messaging. We saw examples of how the service used traditional and social media to share messages about fire doors, cooking safely, and balancing COVID-19 risk assessments with fire safety risk assessments.

The service is active at reducing unwanted fire signals

An effective risk-based approach is in place to manage the number of unwanted fire signals. The service hasn't introduced a cost-recovery scheme for attending unwanted fire signals but has stopped immediate attendance at certain premises during normal working hours. The list of premises they don't go to immediately is reviewed frequently, with more premises recently added after consultation with responsible persons.

It gets fewer calls because of this work. In 2020/21, the service received 336 fewer calls from automatic fire alarms than in 2019/20. Fewer unwanted calls means that fire engines are available to respond to genuine incidents rather than responding to a false one. It also reduces the risk to the public if fewer fire engines travel at high speed on the roads.

The primary authority scheme is active and continues to grow

At the time of inspection, the service was the lead authority for 14 local and national businesses through the [primary authority scheme](#). The scheme benefits businesses by reducing bureaucracy and providing a single point of contact for compliance with fire safety regulations. The scheme is self-funding and pays for two full-time employees in the service, supporting the service and local economy.

Responding to fires and other emergencies



Good (2019: Good)

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

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

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

Response improvements are a priority for the service

The service's response strategy is linked to the risks identified in its IRMP. Its fire engines and response staff, as well as its working patterns, are designed and located to enable the service to respond flexibly to fires and other emergencies with the right resources. For example, the service has changed crewing arrangements at two fire stations and enhanced its response to the west of Newcastle. It has also improved its response to tall buildings.

The service is quick at responding to fires

There are no national response standards of performance for the public. At the time of inspection, the service was piloting a standard for response times, but this standard was yet to be agreed and published at the time of inspection.

However, the service does have one of the fastest response times in England. In the year to 31 March 2020/21, the service's average response time to [primary fires](#) was 6 minutes and 28 seconds. Only 2 fire and rescue services in England recorded an overall faster response time in 2020/21.

In 2020/21, the service had an average response time of 5 minutes and 56 seconds to dwelling fires. This is the fastest average response in England to this type of incident.

Overall good availability of fire engines

To support its response strategy, the service aims to have all fire engines available in daytime hours and a maximum of two fire engines unavailable during night-time hours, replaced by smaller fire engines. This gives a target availability of 94 percent for all fire engines. In 2020/21, the service's overall availability was 99 percent. While most fire engines exceeded their target for availability, the single on-call fire engine was available for only 79 percent of the time. This needs to improve.

The service is recruiting and training [wholetime firefighters](#) to increase availability.

Incident command has improved

The service has improved training for incident commanders who are assessed regularly and properly. The service now has a system in place to make sure all incident commanders are trained and assessed in line with national guidance. This is an improvement from our previous inspection. It enables the service to safely, assertively, and effectively manage the whole range of incidents that it could face, from small and routine ones to complex multi-agency incidents.

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

Control is well integrated into operational response

We are pleased to see the service's control staff integrated into the service's command, training, exercise, debrief and assurance activity. During inspection, control staff told us how they have been involved in training and exercises relating to recommendations from Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry and terrorist related scenarios. We also saw how the operational learning process had supported staff in control with handling calls from members of the public who are in emotional crisis.

Control staff are well prepared to handle multiple fire survival guidance calls

The control room staff we interviewed are confident they could provide fire survival guidance to many callers simultaneously. This was identified as learning for fire services after the Grenfell Tower fire.

Control has good systems in place to exchange real-time risk information with incident commanders and other responding partners and supporting fire and rescue services. Maintaining good situational awareness enables the service to communicate effectively with the public, giving them accurate and tailored advice.

We saw how the service had developed a system to achieve this using existing technology that staff are already familiar with.

Managing information about temporary risks needs to improve

We sampled a range of risk information from the central database and fire stations to see what information is available to staff at an incident. We found that, for permanent sites, risk information is good, and the service had put considerable effort into making recent improvements. Information included what is in place for firefighters responding to incidents at high-risk, high-rise buildings and what information is held by [fire control](#).

The information we reviewed was up to date and detailed. It could be easily accessed and understood by staff. Encouragingly, it had been completed with help from the service's prevention, protection and response functions when appropriate.

But for temporary risks, information isn't always available to everyone who might need it and isn't kept up to date. Arrangements are ad-hoc and rely on individuals updating the system when information is no longer relevant.

The service is good at evaluating operational performance

As part of the inspection, we reviewed a range of emergency incidents and training events. These included two large fires, one of which required multiple rescues, and another that was protracted over several days. We also reviewed an incident where operational procedures may not have been followed.

We are pleased to see the service routinely follows its policies to assure itself that staff command incidents in line with operational guidance. Internal risk information is updated with the information received. This information is exchanged with other interested partners such as members of the [local resilience forum \(LRF\)](#), where relevant.

The service has responded to learning from incidents to improve its service for the public. We saw, for example, how training for control staff was provided to help assist with distressed members of the public.

The service keeps the public informed about incidents

The service has good systems in place to inform the public about ongoing incidents and to help keep them safe during and after incidents. This includes an active communications team who make use of traditional and social media outlets to provide information on a range of incidents that may be of interest, or concern, to the public.

It was also good to see that incident commanders, from station manager and above, get media training so they can give informed and relevant updates when they need to.

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents



Good (2019: Good)

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

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

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

Preparedness for major and multi-agency incidents is good

The service has effectively anticipated and considered the reasonably foreseeable risks and threats it may face. These risks are listed in both local and national risk registers as part of its IRMP. For example, the recently updated risk register now includes a wider range of scenarios and events, such as cyber-attacks and malicious attacks.

The service is also familiar with the significant risks that could be faced by neighbouring fire and rescue services that it might reasonably be asked to respond to in an emergency. These include marauding terrorist attacks (MTAs), major flooding and industrial sites covered by regulations for major incidents.

Firefighters have access to risk information from neighbouring services. Tyne and Wear shares a mobilising system with its neighbours, Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service, and each has full access to the other's risk information. Tyne and Wear also has access to risk information up to 10 miles into Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service.

The service has good arrangements for responding to major and multi-agency incidents

We reviewed the arrangements the service has in place to respond to different major incidents, including [incident sites covered by the Control of Major Accident Hazard \(COMAH\) regulations](#), terrorist related incidents and major flooding.

The service has good arrangements in place, which are well understood by staff. For example, we saw how the service has a dedicated member of staff to work with all 11 COMAH sites in the service area. We also saw how the service has trained its non-specialist staff to respond to an MTA.

At the time of inspection, the service had never needed to host national assets for a major incident in its own area. However, it has developed plans to accommodate national assets at a pre-planned strategic holding area and told us these plans had been tested and exercised.

The service is good at supporting other fire services

The service supports other fire and rescue services responding to emergency incidents. For example, it provides an aerial appliance to Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service when requested. 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 high-volume pumping capability for both flooding and tackling large wildfires in the summer.

Cross-border exercise plans are returning to on-site activity

The service has a cross-border exercise plan with neighbouring fire and rescue services so they can work together effectively to keep the public safe. The plan includes the risks of major events at which the service could foreseeably provide support or request assistance from neighbouring services. We were encouraged to see that feedback from these exercises is used to inform risk information and service plans. During inspection, we saw evidence of cross-border exercising with Northumberland for responding to a COMAH site and with Durham and Darlington for dealing with an MTA-type incident.

JESIP are established at all levels

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

The service provided us with strong evidence that it consistently follows these principles. This includes providing training on JESIP at all levels and assessing for incident command. We also saw how the operational learning process has a dedicated section for reviewing how JESIP are applied to multi-agency incidents.

The service works well with other partners

The service has good arrangements in place to respond to emergencies with other partners that make up the Northumbria LRF. These arrangements include a recent review and update of the community risk register and regular testing and exercising of plans. All members of the LRF are involved in regular meetings to help understand each organisation's capabilities and limitations.

The service is a valued partner of and contributes to the strategic and tactical co-ordinating groups of the LRF. It also chairs the LRF Risk Management Group and is represented at the LRF Training and Exercising Group, as well as at other groups as required.

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. Recent examples include the joint and continuing response to COVID-19, where the service contributes to the local effort to support testing and vaccinations.

National learning is adopted in the operational learning cycle

The service keeps itself up to date with [national operational learning](#) updates from other fire services and [joint organisation 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.

However, we didn't see examples of the service contributing to national or joint learning through its own debrief processes.

Efficiency



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



Good

Summary

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

The service is investing in frontline resources and digital and data transformation. It is good at working with other organisations to generate savings for the public.

The service does, however, need to continue to take steps to reduce how much it relies on pre-planned overtime. It also needs to further develop its business continuity plans.

The service is affordable now and for the immediate future. Although it could make further efficiencies to its operations through making innovative changes.

Making best use of resources



Good (2019: Good)

Tyne and Wear 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 2019/20 is £49.9m. This is a 3.1 percent increase from the previous financial year.

Area for improvement

The service should make sure its programme for testing business continuity plans is fully implemented.

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

Plans to support service objectives need to be based on risk

The service's financial and workforce plans, including allocating staff to prevention, protection and response, reflect and are consistent with service priorities. But some decisions are not always aligned to risk.

As a result of a legal ruling, the service has changed its crewing arrangements at two fire stations. [On-call](#) staff now provide cover during the night at one of these fire stations. This is despite neighbouring fire stations providing a faster response. The decision by the [fire and rescue authority](#) isn't aligned to the risk identified by the service and is less efficient than the option recommended by the chief fire officer.

The service plans to reduce the number of special fire engines it has for attending tall buildings from three to two. But these fire engines will have dedicated crews. This will generate a capital saving and provide a faster response to fires in tall buildings.

Financial 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. All budget holders receive training and have regular meetings with the finance manager to monitor spending and identify areas for further savings. The service also complies with statutory requirements for managing public finances and is audited independently.

Staff productivity continues to improve but overtime remains high

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

The service is taking steps to make sure the workforce's time is as productive as possible. This includes implementing new ways of working. For example, operational staff have clear objectives for training, prevention, protection and gathering risk information. Staff in prevention and protection have targets linked to local risks.

The service has improved performance monitoring and uses IT to provide real-time data that is accessible and simple to understand.

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 operational staff making [safe and well visits](#) without entering homes unless risks are identified during face-to-face assessments. Hybrid working is now commonplace and videocalls have

become an accepted way of working to reduce travel time and costs, as well as reducing the environmental impact of avoidable journeys.

The service relies on high levels of pre-arranged overtime to cover gaps in crewing. In 2019/20, the service spent £826 per head of workforce on pre-arranged overtime, compared with an England average of £478. The service is addressing this and has run 3 [wholetime](#) recruits' courses in 18 months. This has reduced total spend on pre-arranged overtime by 5.7 percent in 2020/21.

Collaboration is good and extensive

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 works with 25 different organisations to provide 76 areas of co-location. Main partners for co-locating are Northumbria Police and North East Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust. The service headquarters host the CCTV control room for Sunderland City Council, using space made redundant by improvements in technology. This returns an overall financial saving to the public and a more resilient service.

Collaborative work is aligned to the priorities in the service's IRMP. For example, the SafetyWorks! facility, provided in collaboration with the office of the police and crime commissioner and a local transport company, communicates prevention messages and activities to young people and vulnerable groups in the community.

The service comprehensively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and results of its collaborations. Notable results include work with the RNLI where the RNLI calculates that five lives have been saved from drowning, through education and training of staff in local businesses.

Gaps in business continuity arrangements require improvement

The service continues to have gaps in its continuity arrangements for areas where threats and risks are considered high. For example, arrangements for industrial action rely on an assessment of low risk of strikes taking place. We also saw evidence that plans to test business continuity arrangements for a full outage of IT had yet to take place.

Business continuity plans for the control room are good and we saw these had been tested against a range of scenarios. Plans for dealing with the ongoing pandemic continue to be reviewed and tested.

Financial management is sound

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 robust procurement arrangements in place and effective contract management. The procurement team has been recognised in national awards for their effectiveness.

The service has made savings and efficiencies, which haven't affected its operational performance and the service it provides to the public. Savings that were reported to

the fire authority for 2019/20 included £888,000 in revenue savings and £225,000 savings in capital outlay. Previous savings of £2.41m are recorded from reviews of working practices of non-operational areas, and £1.69m from a management review.

The service is taking steps to make sure important areas, including estates, fleet and procurement, are well placed to achieve efficiency gains through sound financial management and best working practices. The strategy for estates is comprehensive and links directly to strategic plans, including the medium-term financial plan. The strategy for estates identifies 14 organisations the service has partnership or collaboration arrangements with, to drive efficiencies and improve services to the public.

Fleet and asset management is good, with collaboration used to make savings. The service has arrangements in place with Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service to support cost-effective fleet maintenance for both services. Arrangements are also in place with Cleveland Fire Brigade to share costs of maintaining compressors for breathing apparatus cylinders. Fire stations are also used by Northumbria Police to access cheaper fuel through the service's procurement arrangements.

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



Good (2019: Requires improvement)

Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service is good at making the service affordable now and in the future.

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

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

The service is good at improving value for money

We are encouraged to see the improvements the service has made since our last inspection. The service has developed a sound understanding of future financial challenges. It plans to mitigate its main or significant financial risks. For example, the medium-term financial plan extends to 2025 and relies on a reasonable assumption of growth of 2.4 percent in the base budget from £49.9m to £51.1m by 2025.

The underpinning assumptions are robust, realistic, and prudent, and take account of the wider external environment and some scenario planning for future spending reductions. These include an assumption of a maximum 2 percent increase in annual council tax income. The service anticipates compensation from central government for loss of revenue from business rates.

We are pleased to see that the service has identified savings and investment opportunities to improve the service to the public or generate further savings. The service has saved £225,000 from the capital budget and £653,000 through improved procurement and contract management. It gets £345,000 from co-location with other services. The service now directs 93 percent of its non-salary costs through national [framework agreements](#) and managed contracts to get value for money.

The service has identified a range of financial risks and has set aside [reserves](#) to manage these risks. Risks identified include volatility of insurance costs, early retirements, private finance initiative scheme costs and reductions in government grant schemes. Contingency plans to reduce capital expenditure are in place to protect revenue budgets from any reasonable financial shocks.

Financial reserves are high but with sound plans in place

In 2019/20, the service had a higher rate of reserves, at 58.8 percent of total expenditure, than other metropolitan services at 43.2 percent. However, the service has a detailed policy for using reserves up to 2025.

The policy for the reserves includes using them to offset the £2m business rate deficit using government funding for 75 percent of losses caused by the pandemic.

Other plans include £8.3m for transformation and reform to support investment in modernising the service and £3.5m for contingency planning and unforeseen costs.

Plans for fleet and estates have strong links to strategic plans

The service strategies for fleet and estates are aligned with the service's IRMP. Both strategies exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness. This is planned through continuing collaboration and partnerships to share and reduce costs with other fire and rescue services, other emergency services and local authorities.

The estate strategy supports 76 examples of co-location with 25 partners. The fleet strategy supports continuing collaboration using national frameworks and joint fire engine procurement and vehicle maintenance.

The strategies are regularly reviewed so that the service can properly assess the impact of any changes in estate and fleet provision or future innovation on risk.

Improvements in digital and data are central to service strategy for transformation

The service actively considers how changes in technology and future innovation may affect risk. It is in the process of replacing all its fire engines. New fire engines are designed to support firefighter safety and be better for the environment.

The service also seeks to exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness presented by changes in technology. Working practices have evolved with improved digital platforms, online learning for all staff and performance management through better IT. The service now uses Power BI to monitor performance across the service and to inform its plans.

The service has put in place the capacity and capability needed for sustainable transformation, and it routinely seeks opportunities to work with others to improve efficiency and provide better services in the future. It has invested £1.3m over the past 3 years in IT and has increased the numbers of staff working in IT from 9 to 19.

Investments have been made in cloud technology, new hardware and portable devices, upgraded servers, storage and a new intranet. Improvements in digital and data are now central to the service strategy for 2021 to 2025 and a detailed transformational policy links to the medium-term financial plan.

The service is good at generating income and securing funding opportunities

The service actively considers and exploits opportunities for generating extra income. The service receives around £345,000 each year through co-location schemes, which will continue to grow as new schemes start. This includes the co-location of the CCTV monitoring suite for Sunderland City Council that is now housed at service headquarters.

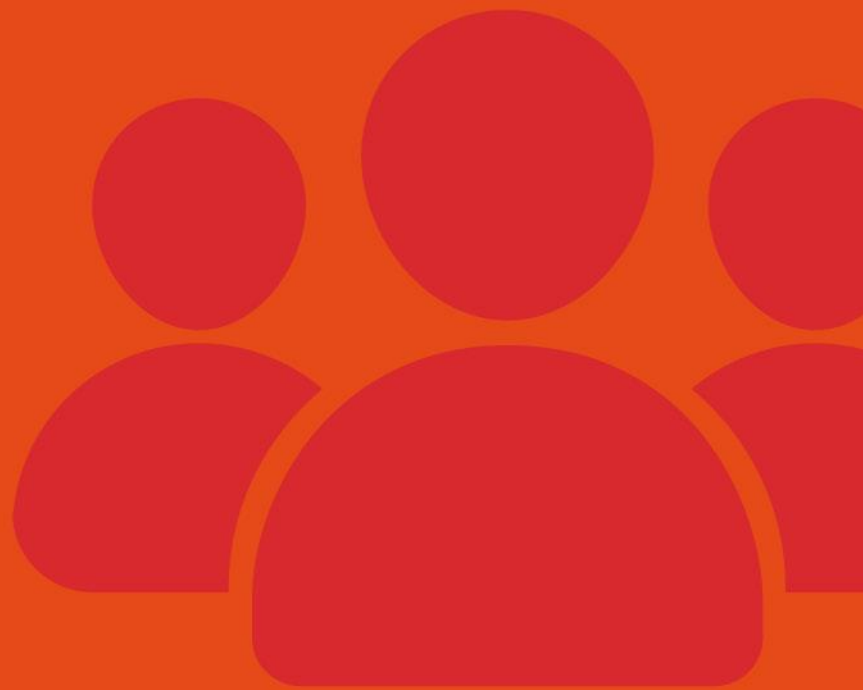
Where appropriate, the service has secured external funding to invest in improvements to the service provided to the public. This includes around £600,000 for protection activities to respond to the recommendations made from Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.

The service has established a new trading arm

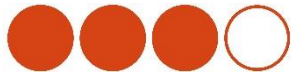
The service has a newly established trading arm called TWFRS Ltd. The trading arm doesn't yet generate income and at the time of our inspection was waiting for legal agreements to be completed.

We expect that lessons learned from liquidating the previous trading arm will be implemented with TWFRS Ltd.

People



How well does the service look after its people?



Good

Summary

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

The service has made good improvements with skills and training and building trust in the promotion process.

For most people, Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service is a positive place to work. Although some members of staff have said that they feel unheard and under-represented.

The service needs to do more to promote fairness and diversity, especially in attracting staff from ethnic minority backgrounds, to be more inclusive/reflective of the local community.

The service also needs to do more to support and develop leaders at all levels.

Promoting the right values and culture



Good (2019: Good)

Tyne and Wear 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.

Area for improvement

The service should review monitoring arrangements for operational fitness testing to make sure testing is carried out safely and the results are reliable.

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

Service culture and values are good but there are still areas for improvement

The service has well-defined values that are understood and demonstrated by most staff. This was reflected in our staff survey where 95 percent of respondents told us they are aware of the service values.

Behaviours that reflect service values are shown at all levels of the service. This was reflected in our staff survey where 92 percent of respondents (209 staff) stated that service values are constantly modelled and maintained by colleagues and 85 percent (194 staff) for line managers.

Staff are proud to work for Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service and most staff told us how their workplace is a safe place to work. During inspection, we saw how the service is working to implement the new national [Core Code of Ethics](#) through a newly created plan for people and organisational development. We look forward to seeing progress with this at our next inspection.

Senior leaders act as role models. For example, 73 percent of respondents (166 staff) to our staff survey told us senior leaders constantly model and maintain service values. This was reflected through our inspection.

However, while most staff spoke positively of senior managers, we also heard from staff who didn't trust the process for challenging senior leaders.

Our staff survey supported this view. For example, 38 percent of respondents (91 staff) told us they are not confident in feedback mechanisms at all levels and 39 percent (92 staff) do not feel able to challenge without fear of detriment.

There is a positive working culture, but not all staff are engaged in decisions that affect them. Staff told us that formal consultation through representative bodies is good, but too often direct communication and updates from senior managers left people feeling uncertain about the personal impact of changes. Some staff felt communication could have been better with recent contract changes, known as the Grey to Green project. But examples weren't limited to this area alone.

The service should consider how it can improve engagement with all staff members, during periods of formal consultation, to promote an inclusive and supported workforce.

There is good support for workforce mental and physical wellbeing

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 for both physical and mental health. For example, most staff told us their line manager and peer group are their greatest area for immediate support. For more challenging situations, staff told us they have immediate access to specialist trauma support. Additional support is available through [occupational health](#), who provide a good service, and act as a gateway to specialist advice and support. Several positive and personal examples were shared with inspectors.

Most staff reported they understand and have confidence in the wellbeing support processes available. 70 percent of respondents reported talking to their line manager about wellbeing at least once a year; of these staff, 84 percent (158 staff) agreed that they found the conversation useful.

There is a positive health and safety culture, but fitness monitoring needs to improve

The service continues to have effective and well understood health and safety policies and procedures in place. We saw examples of improvements having been made to risk assessments and procedures as a direct result of the reporting of accidents and near-misses, including on lone working and working at height.

These policies and procedures are readily available and are effectively promoted to all staff. Staff and representative bodies have confidence in the health and safety approach taken by the service, with 96 percent of respondents (228 staff) to our staff survey agreeing they can work safely. And two representative bodies agreed the service looked after the health and safety of staff well.

Effective arrangements are in place to protect wellbeing of staff who have both [wholetime](#) and [on-call](#) contracts.

During inspection, we saw the policy and procedure for the routine fitness testing of operational staff wasn't always followed. Staff reported inconsistent use of medical safety checks before fitness testing and poor-quality assurance for monitoring results. These allegations are supported by test results that recorded just 1 failure of 1,034 tests in 2020/21. We look forward to seeing how the introduction of a new fitness advisor will support staff with maintaining their physical fitness.

There is room to improve in managing absence

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

We found there are clear processes in place to manage absences for all staff. There is clear guidance for managers, who are confident in the process. Absences are mostly managed well and in accordance with policy, including return-to-work interviews. But there is room for improvement. We found that in some cases of long-term absence, contact with staff wasn't consistent with local procedures and outcomes weren't always recorded.

Overall, the service has seen a decrease of 59 percent in staff absences in 2020/21 compared to the previous year. In 2020/21, the service lost 4,410 shifts to sickness absence.

Getting the right people with the right skills



Good (2019: Requires improvement)

Tyne and Wear 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 review its succession planning to make sure it has effective arrangements in place to manage staff turnover while continuing to provide its core service to the public.

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

Workforce planning needs to consider the impact of changes

The service does some workforce planning but hasn't taken full account of the skills and capabilities it needs to be able to effectively meet the needs of its IRMP. We found evidence that the service's planning allows them to consider workforce skills in most areas but that it didn't consider the impact of changes to staff contracts. For example, we saw how staff turnover in prevention and protection has resulted in problems recruiting and retaining staff in these areas. We were told these problems reflected local and national challenges, with protection staff often lost to the private sector.

These factors should be considered during workforce scenario planning.

Skills and training are recorded and monitored well

The service has improved how it records and monitors staff competence, an area identified in our previous inspection. The service uses a training database and uses it to regularly update its understanding of staff's skills and risk-critical safety capabilities. This allows staff and local managers to plan training and spot any gaps that will arise in 30 days. A review of training records showed 100 percent of staff had up-to-date incident command assessments and over 90 percent had up-to-date blue light driving assessments.

This approach means the service can identify gaps in workforce capabilities and resilience and can make sound and financially sustainable decisions about current and future needs.

More evaluation of training and learning and development could drive improvements

A culture of continuous improvement is promoted throughout the service and staff are encouraged to learn and develop. For example, our staff survey identified that 89 percent of respondents (213 staff) had talked to their line manager about their personal development in the past 12 months. Of the staff who responded to our survey, 73 percent (166 staff) found the conversation useful. General feedback from staff supported the view that learning across the service is good.

Most staff told us that they can access a range of learning and development resources. These include online learning resources and access to external learning providers. This allows them to do their job effectively.

But we saw only a few examples of how evaluation is included in the training and learning cycle. Integrating evaluation into the continuous training cycle will support the service with further improvements and help drive efficiencies.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity



Requires improvement (2019: Good)

Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at ensuring fairness and promoting diversity.

Creating a more representative workforce will provide huge benefits for fire and rescue services. This includes greater access to talent and different ways of thinking, and improved understanding of and engagement with their local communities. Each service should make sure equality, diversity and inclusion are firmly understood and demonstrated throughout the organisation. This includes successfully taking steps to remove inequality and making progress to improve fairness, diversity and inclusion at all levels of the service. It should proactively seek and respond to feedback from staff and make sure any action taken is meaningful.

Areas for improvement

- The service should assure itself that all staff are confident using feedback mechanisms to understand how effective engagement is.
- To identify and tackle barriers to equality of opportunity, and make its workforce more representative, the service should make sure that equality, diversity, inclusion and fairness are well understood throughout the workforce.

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

Not all staff trust the service's mechanisms for feedback and challenge

The service has a range of means for gathering staff feedback, including network groups, listening events and engagement sessions with members of the senior leadership team.

Staff representative bodies report positive engagement with senior managers, describing it as always meaningful.

But staff have limited confidence in the service's feedback mechanisms and don't think they are effective. Of respondents to our survey, 38 percent (91 staff) feel they can't challenge ideas without possible detriment to themselves. Our inspection supported this view. While the majority of staff do feel safe to challenge, some feel that feedback mechanisms lack confidentiality or could lead to personal detriment.

Since our last inspection, the confidential whistle blowing service, Safe Call, has been used four times. The formal grievance process was used 5 times in 2020/21.

The service needs to build trust and confidence in its formal feedback mechanisms to create a safe environment for appropriate challenge.

Identifying and tackling discrimination needs to improve

The service could go further to improve staff understanding of bullying, harassment and discrimination and their responsibilities for eliminating them. Through our staff survey, 15 percent of respondents (36 staff) told us they had been subject to discrimination, and 7.6 percent (18 staff) to bullying and/or harassment over the past 12 months. Of these staff, nobody thought their concerns had been properly dealt with, or that it was too early to tell.

The service has clear policies and procedures in place to deal with staff grievances. But staff and managers told us they prefer to resolve problems informally. We also found that local managers are not reporting back to the service on problems they have found, and how they have been resolved. This means the service is not able to identify and tackle any trends or patterns of bullying, harassment or discrimination effectively.

The service has improved its recruitment process but should do more to address diversity

The service needs to do more to target and promote its recruitment processes to under-represented groups. Staff told us they had more trust and confidence in the new promotion process, but this was a pilot scheme and isn't reflected in service policy at the time of inspection.

Recruitment campaigns above the role of wholetime firefighter aren't directed to under-represented groups and the service isn't leading change in this area to increase the diversity of its workforce. For example, more is needed to increase diversity of staff from ethnic minority backgrounds.

There has been some progress to improve both ethnic background and gender diversity for all staff in the service. In 2017/18, 2.9 percent of new joiners were from ethnic minority backgrounds. This remained the same in 2020/21, where 2.9 percent

of new joiners were from ethnic minority backgrounds. In the same years, women made up 44.7 percent and 25.3 percent of new joiners, respectively. The number of female firefighters increased from 7.6 percent in 2017/18 to 9.5 percent in 2020/21, and from 1.7 percent to 2.5 percent for firefighters from ethnic minority backgrounds. On 31 March 2021, 2.5 percent of the workforce were from ethnic minority backgrounds and 23.7 percent were women.

The service needs to encourage applicants from different backgrounds into middle and senior level positions. We saw that positive action is limited to wholetime firefighter recruitment and under-represented groups aren't actively encouraged to apply for senior positions.

There has been limited progress in promoting EDI

The service needs to continue to improve its approach to EDI. We heard how the role of the inclusion manager was vacant and work in this area had stalled as a result. At the time of inspection, the service plan for positive action recorded only one completed action, with other actions yet to start or be completed.

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 engage with both internal and external networks to inform this approach.

We noted the service has made inclusion a central part of its strategy for service development to 2025. We look forward to seeing how this supports the promotion of EDI.

Managing performance and developing leaders



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at managing performance and developing leaders.

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

Area for improvement

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

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

Formal methods for managing individuals' performance can improve

There is a good performance management system in place, which allows the service to effectively develop and assess the individual performance of all staff. For example, 93 percent of wholetime firefighters have an appraisal recorded in 2020/21, although this drops to 70 percent for support staff.

But our inspection identified that staff don't find the formal process for reviewing staff performance as meaningful as other conversations with line managers. This was reflected in our staff survey, where 59 percent of respondents (133 staff) stated their appraisal was useful, while 73 percent (166 staff) found conversations with their line manager about learning and development as being useful.

The service should make sure all discussions about personal development are meaningful for staff from all roles.

Promotion processes have improved, but temporary promotions need to be managed better

The service has put considerable effort into developing its promotion and progression processes so that they are fair and understood by staff. We saw how the service uses a range of methods to assess the suitability of candidates. Measures are now in place to improve fairness, such as blind sifting at the application stage of the process, and the use of objective online assessments to test for aptitude. Staff we spoke to welcome the changes made by the service, but service policy needs to align with the new promotion procedures, which no longer reflect current practice.

Selection processes are managed consistently by staff from the human resources department, who showed us how the process is evaluated after each application of the process.

However, we found an absence of clear policy and procedure for managing temporary promotions. The service should clearly set out its policy for managing temporary promotions fairly, to further improve staff confidence.

Improvement is still needed to develop leadership and high-potential staff

The service still needs to get better at actively managing the career paths of staff, including those with specialist skills and for leadership roles.

It should consider putting in place more formal arrangements to identify and support members of staff to become senior leaders. There is a gap in its succession planning.

The service has limited talent management schemes in place to develop leaders and high-potential staff. These are limited to access and support with the promotion process.

It was disappointing to see that the previous development programme for staff, called Engage, is no longer in use and hasn't been replaced with a suitable alternative. The service needs a structured framework and clear pathways for staff to develop into senior leadership roles.

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