

Fire & Rescue Service 2021/22

Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service



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About this inspection

This is our third inspection of fire and rescue services across England. We first inspected Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service in June 2018, publishing a report with our findings in December 2018 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 COVID-19 pandemic. This inspection considers for a second time the service's effectiveness, efficiency and people.

In carrying out our 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 Bedfordshire 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 we find serious critical failings of policy, practice or performance of the service, we will judge it as inadequate.

Overview

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

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

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

HMI summary

Before I provide my assessment of Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, I would like to pay tribute to the late Chief Fire Officer Paul Fuller who sadly died this year. Paul led Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service for 19 years. He embodied public service in his commitment to the people of Bedfordshire and those who worked for him in the Fire and Rescue Service. He is much missed by all those who knew him and we are indebted to him for his service.

Since our 2018 inspection, the service has improved its efficiency and how it treats its staff. However, it needs to be more effective in keeping the public safe and secure. Specifically, the service requires improvement in preventing fires and other risk, and protecting the public through fire regulation.

The service has sound financial management and scrutiny. It also has robust monitoring and targets for response. And it has a good process in place to make sure that staff are trained and competent.

The service could do more to assure itself of the quality and content of its risk-based inspection programme. It should also update the programme to reflect its expanded classification of high risks.

The service has made improvements in its use of technology. For instance, it has introduced new ways of working. It needs to make sure it is using available technology effectively.

The service has robust arrangements in place to respond to large-scale, multi-agency incidents. It also has clear processes and procedures that staff clearly understand.

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service has new service values. These are well understood by staff, who helped to develop them.

The service has taken positive action to improve staff diversity. I look forward to this action being reflected in its recruitment processes.

During the pandemic, the service has innovated and used new technology to help other organisations. It has adapted to enable staff to work from home. And its firefighters are helping local businesses to comply with COVID-19 restrictions. I am especially pleased that the service took the lead in setting up and managing mass vaccination centres.

Overall, I would like to see improvements in the year ahead in two areas of effectiveness and two areas of efficiency.



Roy Wilsher

HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Service in numbers



Response

Bedfordshire

England

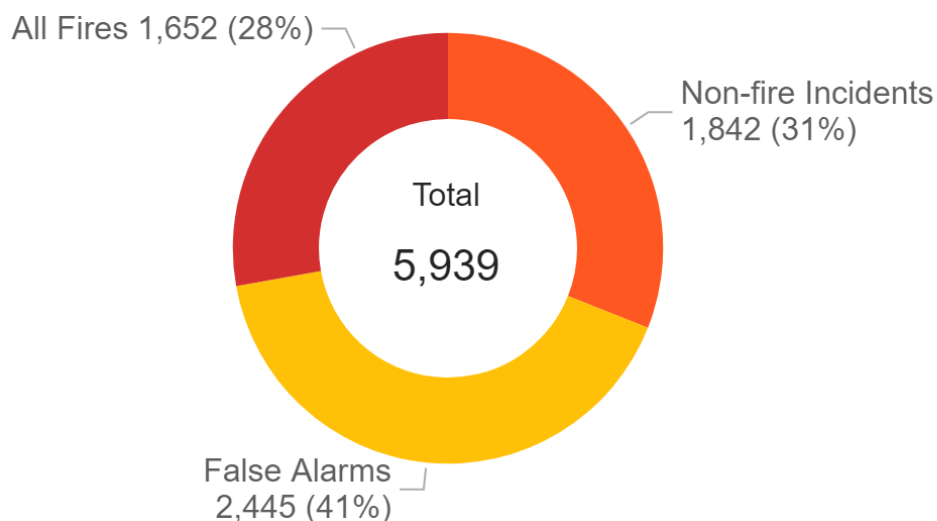
Incidents attended per 1,000 population Year ending 31 December 2020	8.80	9.39
Home fire safety checks carried out by fire and rescue service per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2020	8.45	10.17
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises Year ending 31 March 2020	7.26	2.55
Average availability of pumps Year ending 31 March 2020	72.60%	83.07%



Cost

Firefighter cost per person per year Year ending 31 March 2020	£23.75	£23.82
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Incidents attended in the year to 31 December 2020

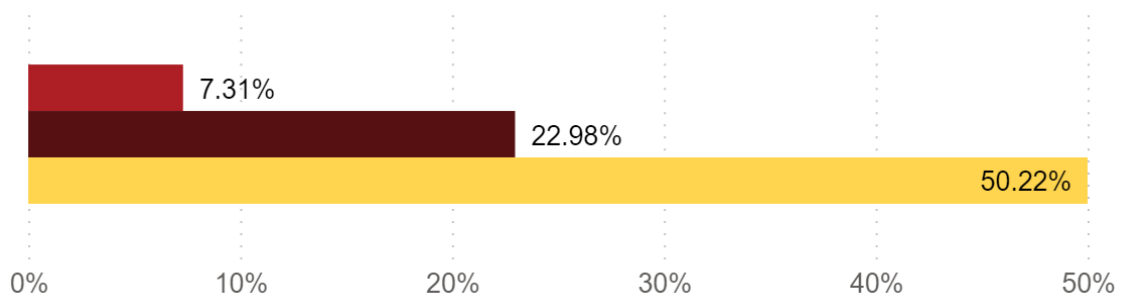




Five-year change in total workforce 2015 to 2020	4.04%	-5.30%
Number of firefighters per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2020	0.64	0.63
Percentage of firefighters who are wholetime Year ending 31 March 2020	65.50%	65.10%

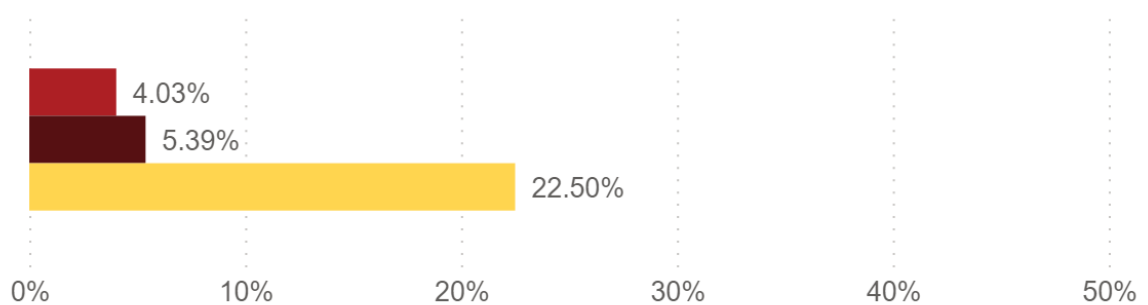
Percentage population, firefighters and workforce who are female as at 31 March 2020

Female ● Firefighters ● Workforce ● Local population



Percentage of population, firefighters, and workforce who are Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) as at 31 March 2020

BAME ● Firefighters ● Workforce ● Local population



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, respond promptly with the right skills and equipment to deal with the incident effectively. Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service's overall effectiveness is good.

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service has a clear and structured approach to managing site-specific risk information. Operational crews have access to the risk information they need to keep the public safe. The service could improve how quickly and robustly it gathers this information.

Regarding prevention, the service has improved its referral routes. It has also introduced an online system for people to self-refer for fire prevention support. The service has improved how it rates risk, based on the information it receives on a referral. (This involves looking at people's information and risk, whether they live remotely, and the speed of response time to their property.)

The service needs to have the systems and processes in place to make sure its activity is focused on mitigating the risk it has identified. We note that the service has kept some high priority prevention activity unactioned for long periods of time.

In relation to protection, the service has expanded its classification of high risks, and is taking steps to develop a better understanding of the risks its communities face. But the service has yet to update its risk-based inspection programme (RBIP) to reflect this. Also, there are deficiencies in the management information system that the service uses. This means that the service can't assure itself of the quality and content of its RBIP.

The service has expanded its protection team and is working to conform to the national competency framework. However, seven of its fire safety officers have no clear route to gaining accreditation through recognised prior learning.

The service has a good process in place to make sure that staff are trained and competent to respond to incidents. It carries out local [hot debriefs](#) after incidents, and it has a clear learning process from operational incidents, based on written submissions. The service has agreed a new process for debriefs to broaden learning opportunities for operational staff. This new process is in place, but at the point of writing this report the service hasn't yet responded to any incidents that will trigger this process.

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies



Good (2018: Good)

Bedfordshire 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 needs to improve how it engages with its local community to build a comprehensive profile of risk in its service area.

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

The service identifies the risks within the communities it serves

The service has assessed an appropriate range of risks and threats after a thorough community planning process. When assessing risk, it has considered relevant information collected from a broad range of internal and external sources and data sets. The service uses social and societal data. It is an active participant in the Bedfordshire [Local Resilience Forum \(LRF\)](#), which gives it a broad overview of local risks. The service commissioned a comprehensive risk assessment to assess future demand. This assessment considers incident and comprehensive data sets.

When appropriate, the service has consulted and undertaken constructive dialogue with communities and others, such as using the Bedfordshire Fire Alert Community messaging system. This involves talking to members of the public while carrying out other activities such as delivering food through the pandemic and making good use of social media. The service also consults staff and representative bodies. While the service has made some progress with making contact with members of the community, the following area for improvement, identified in 2018, remains: more

needs to be done to improve how the service engages with the local community to build a comprehensive risk profile. We found good examples of the service using new ways of getting messages to hard-to-reach groups. But there is a lack of central co-ordination to take this information about communities and use it to inform future activity.

The service has an effective community risk management plan

After assessing relevant risks, the service has recorded its findings in an easily understood community risk management plan (CRMP). This plan describes how prevention, protection and response activity will mitigate or reduce the risks and threats the community faces, both now and in the future. The service is committed to improving its use of technology. One way in which it has already followed through on this commitment is by providing virtual learning material for use in schools.

The service has robust plans in place at a local level to support the execution of the CRMP. It has also introduced a live performance dashboard to support the plan. The service needs to develop the dashboard to enable senior leaders to assure themselves that risks in prevention and protection are being managed appropriately.

The service has a clear and structured approach to managing 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 having processes and systems in place to capture and record site-specific risk information. This information is readily available to all staff.

Staff carry out familiarisation visits to high-risk premises. They do this to gather information and work with building owners to put measures in place to reduce fire risks.

The service has a process to capture short-term risk within the county (for example, at sporting events and festivals). A procedure is also available to record risk to [vulnerable](#) members of the community (for example, known hoarders, and oxygen users).

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, information is stored on portable [mobile data terminals](#) aboard the fire engine. It is also available through safety broadcasts, meetings and staff emails. Where appropriate, risk information is passed on to other organisations such as the police, health organisations and local authorities.

The service uses local and national operational activity to inform its understanding of risk

The service records and communicates risk information effectively. It also routinely updates risk assessments and uses feedback from local and national operational activity to inform its planning assumptions. The service has a monitoring programme in place. Designated officers attend incidents covering a three-year rolling programme of topics (such as high-rise building fires). Once reviewed, the service shares these findings with the relevant teams and organisations.

The service monitors risk information from national incidents and acts where necessary. For example, a potential risk to firefighters was identified after Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service issued a national safety notice. In response, Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service developed risk documentation, constructed an internal [safety flash](#) notice and recorded completion of a confirmation assessment.

The service has acted to reduce risk after the Grenfell Tower Inquiry

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

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service has responded to learning from this tragedy. The service is on track to having assessed the risk of each high-rise building in its service area by the end of 2021.

It has carried out a fire safety audit and collected and passed relevant risk information to its prevention, protection and response teams about buildings identified as high risk and all high-rise buildings using cladding that is similar to the cladding installed on Grenfell Tower. The service has also bought extra equipment to enhance its firefighting capabilities (such as equipment to help the control of smoke).

Preventing fires and other risks



Requires improvement (2018: Requires improvement)

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement 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 share intelligence and risk information with these other organisations when they identify vulnerability or exploitation.

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure it targets its prevention work at people most at risk.
- The service should ensure it quality assures its prevention activity, so staff carry out safe and well visits to the appropriate standards.

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

The service has a prevention strategy linked to its CRMP

The service's prevention strategy is clearly linked to the risks identified in its CRMP. The prevention strategy is based on internal and external data and information, and regular communication with the service's protection and response functions.

Prevention work doesn't take place in isolation, with appropriate information sent to other relevant teams across the service. Information is used to adjust planning assumptions and direct activity between the service's prevention, protection and response functions. For example, the mobilising system is updated to reflect operational risks identified through prevention activity.

COVID-19 impact on prevention

We considered how the service had adapted its prevention work during our COVID-19 specific inspection carried out between 12 and 23 October 2020. At that time, we found it had adapted its public prevention work appropriately, but it could do more to update its community risk profiles.

We are encouraged to find that since then, the service routinely looks for innovative ways of making sure that inter-agency referrals are made efficiently. For example, the service has started to use a QR-code keyring, which links to a quick reference guide for other organisations. The service has also invested in training other organisations to identify vulnerabilities when visiting a person's home.

We are pleased that the service has taken the lead role in setting up and managing mass vaccination centres on behalf of the LRF. Staff have worked within local vaccination centres to identify vulnerable people who weren't previously known to them.

The service should improve the management of its safe and well programme

After our 2018 inspection, we gave the service an area for improvement. We wanted it to make sure that its prevention work is aimed at those who are most at risk. Since then, the service has carried out significant activity to address this area for improvement. For instance, it has:

- introduced an online safe and well referral portal on its website;
- contacted members of the public at flu vaccination clinics held at fire stations; and
- improved referral routes for other organisations.

However, the service needs to do more work to make sure it prioritises [safe and well visits](#) more effectively, so that it visits those most at risk in a timely manner.

Staff are confident in carrying out safe and well checks

During our inspection, staff told us that they are proud of the impact they make when carrying out safe and well visits. These checks cover an appropriate range of hazards that can put vulnerable people at greater risk from fire and other emergencies.

These checks also allow staff to identify where additional support may be needed.

Staff are trained and confident to address vulnerability and safeguarding issues

There is a clear path for staff to signpost a vulnerable person for additional support where the risk and need warrants it. The service also has a process in place to visit homes in areas where a fire has occurred.

The service has improved its [safeguarding](#) training for staff, and it has introduced an annual refresher programme. The service is an active partner on local adult and child safeguarding boards. 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.

The service works well with others to reduce the number of fires and other risks

The service works with a wide range of other organisations, such as Bedfordshire Police and East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust to prevent fires and other emergencies.

We found good evidence that it routinely refers people at greatest risk to other organisations which may be better able to meet their needs. These organisations include social and healthcare providers, and those accessing the homes of people who are at higher risk. Arrangements are in place to receive referrals from others including local authority partners. The service acts appropriately on the referrals it receives. For example, it carries out safe and well visits to assess what further support is needed.

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.

The service works closely with partners across prevention, protection and response. For example, the service has staff assigned to deal with referrals relating to dementia. It also exchanges data to help identify road accident hotspots.

The service works with partners to tackle fire-setting behaviour

The service has a range of suitable and effective interventions to target and educate people of different ages who show signs of fire-setting behaviour. This includes working with local authority community safety partnerships. In this context, the service directs its prevention activity at arson reduction.

When appropriate, it routinely exchanges information with other partners, including Bedfordshire Police, to support the prosecution of arsonists. The service gives additional support to those who are under the threat of arson (for example, by fitting external letter boxes and extra smoke-detection devices).

The service's website provides information to members of the public about arson prevention. The service works with other organisations to educate children at schools, and it carries out interventions to support the rehabilitation of people who have been convicted of arson offences.

There is no formal quality assurance in place for prevention activities

The service has no formal arrangements in place to quality assure prevention activity, or information entered onto the system. These measures would make sure there is consistency in working practices.

We found some evidence of managers at fire stations monitoring safe and well activity. However, this was done locally and with no corporate oversight.

There is limited evaluation of prevention activities

Following our 2018 inspection, we gave the service an area for improvement. It highlighted that the service should evaluate its prevention work, so it understands the benefits better.

The service has introduced an evaluation toolkit, but this focuses on customer satisfaction rather than the activity's effectiveness. This means that the service doesn't know if the work it is doing is benefitting the public, and it is unable to make continuous improvements.

Protecting the public through fire regulation



Requires improvement (2018: Requires improvement)

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at protecting the public through fire regulation.

All fire and rescue services should assess fire risks in certain buildings and, when necessary, require building owners to comply with fire safety legislation. Each service decides how many assessments it does each year. But it must have a locally determined, risk-based inspection programme for enforcing the legislation.

Areas for improvement

- The service should assure itself that it has effective systems and processes in place to manage its risk-based inspection programme.
- The service should make sure it has an effective quality assurance process, so staff carry out audits to an appropriate standard.
- The service should assure itself that its enforcement plan prioritises the highest risks and includes proportionate activity to reduce risk. It should also include appropriate monitoring and evaluation.

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

The service has a protection strategy which forms part of its CRMP

The service's protection strategy is clearly linked to risk and forms part of its CRMP.

Staff across the service are involved in this activity, with information effectively exchanged as needed. For example, firefighters carry out checks in communal areas of low-rise buildings. Information is, in turn, used to adjust planning assumptions and direct activity between the service's protection, prevention and response functions.

COVID-19 impact on protection

We considered how the service had adapted its protection activity during our COVID-19 specific inspection of October 2020. At that time, we found it was slow to suitably adapt its protection work for the public. We also found that it didn't carry out the full range of protection activities that were needed during the initial stages of the pandemic. Since then, the number of audits has increased.

The service has an RBIP in place

The service's risk-based inspection programme (RBIP) is focused on the service's high-risk buildings.

Since our last inspection, the service has improved the way it identifies high-risk premises. This has led to an increase in the number of high-risk premises it intends to audit. We are satisfied that the service has the capacity to complete this more ambitious programme.

The service has a system in place to manage its RBIP. But this system is overly reliant on manual inputs, and extracting information from it can be difficult. The system is administratively burdensome and doesn't offer effective and timely management information.

The audits we reviewed were completed in the timescales the service has set itself.

The service has carried out fire safety audits at high-rise buildings

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

The service is on track to visit all the high-rise and high-risk buildings it has identified in its service area by the end of 2021.

The service doesn't assure the quality of its audits

We reviewed a range of audits of different premises across the service. This included audits as part of the service's RBIP, after fires at premises where fire safety legislation applies, where enforcement action had been taken and at high-rise and high-risk buildings.

The audits we reviewed weren't always completed in a consistent, systematic way. The service should have an effective quality assurance process in place to make sure it carries out audits to a consistent, appropriate standard.

We did find that the service uses relevant information from the audits to update site-specific risks. It also makes this information available to operational teams and control room operators.

The service doesn't routinely evaluate the effectiveness of its protection activities

The service does take steps to make sure that local communities get equal access to protection services. For example, it offers business safety advice on its website. This advice can be translated into many languages, and the website also offers various accessibility options.

However, the service doesn't evaluate its protection activity to measure its effectiveness.

The service has made some progress on taking enforcement action

In the year to 31 March 2021, the service issued two alteration notices, three enforcement notices, nine prohibition notices and undertook no prosecutions.

After our 2018 inspection, we gave the service an area for improvement. This highlighted that it should assure itself that its enforcement plan includes proportionate activity to reduce risk. Since the last inspection, we are encouraged to see that the service has increased its use of enforcement powers.

The service has taken no prosecutions since 2016. But at the time of our inspection, we found that it is increasingly willing to do so. This area for improvement remains to make sure the service develops a strong, consistent record for managing its enforcement activity.

The service has expanded its protection team and taken steps to meet the requirements of the competency framework

Following our 2018 inspection, we gave the service an area for improvement. This highlighted that it should ensure it makes better use of its specialist resources in implementing its RBIP.

The service has expanded its protection team to meet the requirements of its changing RBIP. The service has introduced fire safety advisers, a technical fire engineer and a data analyst. It has also improved the skills of 12 operational firefighters so that they can carry out protection activity. The service plans to carry out regular reviews of its staffing needs.

A further area for improvement highlighted that the service should assure itself that operational staff carry out audits competently. We found that operational firefighters were now carrying out protection activity appropriate to their training.

Most staff have completed, or are undergoing, training to meet the requirements of the protection competency framework.

The service works closely with other agencies to regulate fire safety

The service works closely with other enforcement agencies to regulate fire safety and routinely exchanges risk information with them. We found evidence of the service working effectively with other organisations. For example:

- a dedicated inspector works with the local authority housing teams to reduce fire risk in houses of multiple occupancy;
- the service works with the Crown Premises Fire Safety Inspectorate to reduce the impact of fires in prisons; and
- the service has an agreement with Essex County Fire and Rescue Service to share advice and guidance for fire engineers.

The service responds well to building consultations

The service responds to most building consultations on time, so meets its statutory responsibility to comment on fire safety arrangements at new and altered buildings.

The service works with businesses to support compliance with fire safety regulation

The service proactively engages with local businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation. Firefighters and protection staff talk to, and work with, local businesses to share information and expectations on compliance with fire safety regulations. For example, firefighters carry out COVID-19 compliance checks at business premises to support compliance with national guidance. In addition, the protection team has annual targets to organise business engagement sessions. The service's website also offers comprehensive information to support business safety.

The service takes action to reduce unwanted fire alarm signals

An effective risk-based approach is in place to manage the number of unwanted fire signals. [Fire control](#) operators challenge calls that are associated with automatic fire alarms based on risk.

The service will attend where there is a reasonable belief that a fire has broken out. Staff also work with alarm-receiving centres and building owners to identify the cause of an alarm and to see what can be done to reduce any further unwanted activations.

The service gets fewer calls because of this work. The service attended a little over half of all automatic fire alarm calls that it received up to 31 March 2020. This is similar to most other services. Fewer unwanted calls mean that fire engines are available to respond to a genuine incident should one occur rather than responding to a false one. It also reduces the risk to the public if fewer fire engines travel at high speed on the roads.

Responding to fires and other emergencies



Good (2018: Good)

Bedfordshire 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 within their areas.

Area for improvement

The service should make sure it uses its [on-call](#) crews effectively to respond to incidents based on risk.

Innovative practice: Control staff make good use of technology to improve information gathering

Fire control staff use technology effectively to pinpoint accurate location of callers and access live imagery from incidents to inform assessment of risk and appropriate response. With permission but minimal interaction from the caller, the service is able to access a live video feed from their mobile device, which can be shared with incident commanders and emergency service partners.

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

The service has measures in place to align its resources to the risks identified

The service's response strategy is linked to the risks identified in its CRMP. Its fire engines and response staff are located to enable the service to respond flexibly to fires and other emergencies with the appropriate resources.

The service has carried out a comprehensive risk assessment to review where its fire stations and appliances should be located, as well as a review of its working patterns. This work will inform the next version of the service's CRMP.

The addition of a technical response unit will mean the service can give specialist support to East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust at incidents involving complex patients.

The service is meeting its response targets

There are no national response standards of performance for the public. But the service has set out its own response standards in its CRMP. The service aims to attend life-risk incidents (such as house fires) within 10 minutes 80 percent of the time. The service's average response time for this type of incident is 9 minutes and 15 seconds.

Home Office data shows that in the year to 31 March 2020, the service's average response time to [primary fires](#) was 10 minutes and 24 seconds. This is higher than the average for other significantly rural services.

Two factors contribute to how quickly the service can attend incidents: the availability and location of appliances. The service has reviewed its station locations, working practices and incident information to inform future changes. Prevention activity is rated a higher priority in rural areas, where response times are longer.

The availability of on-call fire appliances supports the response standard

The service hasn't set itself targets of numbers of fire engines that need to be available to support its response strategy. Instead, the service seeks to improve the availability of all fire stations.

For the year to 31 March 2020, on-call availability was in line with the average for other predominantly rural services.

The service can effectively command incidents

After our 2018 inspection, we gave the service an area for improvement. This highlighted that the service should ensure staff know how to command emergency incidents assertively, effectively and safely. We are pleased to find effective monitoring and recording processes in place.

The service has trained incident commanders who are assessed regularly and properly. This enables the service to safely, assertively and effectively manage the whole range of incidents that it could face, from small and routine incidents to complex multi-agency incidents.

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

Fire Control is involved with the service's command, exercise, debrief and assurance activity

We are pleased to see the service's control staff integrated into its command, training, exercise, debrief and assurance activity. Control room supervisors complete incident command training. They also have to show ongoing upkeep of their skills. The service manages control exercises locally and details them in its control annual plan.

Fire control can provide fire survival guidance to multiple callers

The service has developed processes to manage multiple fire survival guidance calls, and to respond to incident changes in line with national guidance. The control room staff we interviewed are confident they had the training in place to manage 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, other responding partners and other supporting fire and rescue services. For example, the service sends fire officers to the control room to maintain a central view of incident information.

Where appropriate, the service uses technology to locate callers and access live video of an incident. Maintaining good situational awareness enables the service to communicate effectively with the public, providing them with accurate and tailored advice.

Risk information is easily accessible to staff

We sampled a range of risk information associated with several properties with both short and long-term risks. This included looking at what information is in place for firefighters responding to incidents at high-risk, high-rise buildings.

The information we reviewed was up to date and detailed. Staff told us that they could easily access and understand the information. Encouragingly, it had been completed with input from the service's prevention, protection and response functions when appropriate.

The service has a system in place to evaluate its operational performance

After our 2018 inspection, we gave the service an area for improvement. This highlighted that it should ensure it has an effective system for staff to use learning and debriefs to improve operational response and incident command.

As part of the 2021 inspection, we reviewed a range of emergency incidents and training events. We found that the service routinely monitors incidents which trigger a debrief. There is a clear (but limited) learning cycle from operational incidents. This is based on written submissions. The service has introduced a revised assurance structure and a new process for debriefs to broaden learning opportunities. We are keen to see the service build on this new process.

The service routinely carries out local hot debriefs after incidents. Staff told us they found these debriefs to be beneficial. Staff can share outcomes from these debriefs for further action.

The service uses national operational guidance to inform its policies

We are pleased to see the service routinely reviews its policies to assure itself that staff command incidents are in line with operational guidance. Internal risk information is updated with the information received. The service has done a gap analysis, monitoring its progress against adopting [national operational guidance](#).

The service has committed staff time to make sure it is contributing to, and acting on, learning from other fire and rescue services or operational learning gathered from other emergency service partners.

The service is effective at keeping the public informed

The service has good systems in place to inform the public about ongoing incidents and help keep them safe during and after incidents. This includes local information posted by station staff on social media. Members of the public can register to receive alerts about incidents in their area. The service also has arrangements in place with LRF partners to inform the community about ongoing incidents.

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents



Good (2018: Good)

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

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

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

The service is prepared for major and multi-agency incidents

After our 2018 inspection, we gave the service the following two areas for improvement:

- it should make sure it understands national and cross-border risks; and
- operational staff should have good access to cross-border risk information.

During our 2021 inspection we found that firefighters have access to some basic information from neighbouring services through the fire engines' mobile data terminal. In addition, the service shares information about cross-border special and major risks through a national database. The service sends a fire service officer and firefighters to any cross-border incident to access risk information.

The service has effectively anticipated and considered the reasonably foreseeable risks and threats it may face. These risks are listed in both local and national risk registers as part of its community risk management planning. They include flooding, industrial action and severe weather.

It 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. Such risks include high-rise buildings and special risks in Cambridgeshire.

The service can respond to major and multi-agency incidents

We reviewed the arrangements the service has in place to respond to different major incidents, such as high-risk buildings, widespread flooding and marauding terrorist attacks.

We found the service has good arrangements in place, which are well understood by staff. Staff gave positive feedback about the service's preparedness to respond to marauding terrorist incidents. The service also has a comprehensive exercise programme that tests changes to marauding terrorist procedures.

The service has a clear process in place for requesting extra and specialist staff if needed. Incident commanders understand this process.

The service works well with other fire services

The service supports other fire and rescue services responding to emergency incidents. It has an arrangement in place with Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service to provide mutual cover for incident command. 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 sending firefighters and equipment to South Yorkshire to support the response to widespread flooding.

The service exercises with other services

Following our 2018 inspection, we gave the service an area for improvement. This highlighted that it should arrange a programme of over-the-border exercises, sharing the learning from these exercises. We found that the service undertakes cross-border exercises with neighbouring fire and rescue services so that they can work together effectively to keep the public safe. However, we found that although the exercises take place, they have been locally led with no central oversight or co-ordination. Cross-border exercising is included in community fire station plans for 2021–2022 to give formal structure and oversight. We are keen to see that all staff understand and adopt this process.

Incident commanders understand JESIP

The incident commanders we interviewed had been trained in, and were familiar with, the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP). These are national principles which support all emergency services in working together at incidents.

The service could give us strong evidence that it consistently follows these principles. The service has given JESIP training to station commanders and those who rank above them. It has also included the training in development programmes for all operational managers. Staff showed a good understanding of the principles. The service uses operational debriefs to evaluate the use of JESIP principles.

The service has good arrangements in place to work with partners

The service has good arrangements in place to respond to emergencies with other partners that make up the Bedfordshire LRF. These arrangements include leading the command support group, and co-ordinating information in the event of a large-scale incident. The service has a clear process to prepare multi-agency site-specific response plans where needed. The service enters risks that are classed as special or very high on to a national database.

The service is a valued partner and is represented at the LRF's strategic and tactical co-ordinating groups and subgroups. 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. These include multi-agency strategic and tactical command exercises. Debriefs take place after large-scale multi-agency exercises. They include all partners.

The service uses national learning to inform planning

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

The service chairs the LRF risk group and through this role, also monitors national risks.

Efficiency



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



Requires improvement

Summary

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

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service has sound financial management and scrutiny. It has systems and processes in place to manage its risk-based inspection programme (RBIP). But they aren't effective and lack the proper performance management to make sure its protection workforce is both effective and productive.

The service has robust monitoring and targets for response. But it needs to make more effective use of its [on-call](#) staff. It especially needs to improve how it trains and uses these staff.

The service has targets for protection and prevention work. But it could do more so that it can assure itself of the efficiency of its service to the public (and, in turn, the efficient use of resources).

The service has made improvements in its technology. These improvements include increasing available risk information on [mobile data terminals](#) and increased ability for staff to work more flexibly.

In terms of business continuity, the service lacks plans that cover all main risks and the need to test and exercise them.

Considering the pandemic, the service is taking a prudent approach in its medium-term financial plan in relation to government funding.

Making best use of resources



Requires improvement (2018: Requires improvement)

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at making best use of its resources.

Fire and rescue services should manage their resources properly and appropriately, aligning those resources to meet the services' risks and statutory responsibilities. They should make best possible use of their resources to achieve better outcomes for the public.

The service's budget for 2020/21 is £32.496m. This is a 1 percent increase from the previous financial year.

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure it has appropriate business continuity arrangements in place which are regularly reviewed and tested and take account of all foreseeable threats and risks.
- The service should have effective measures in place to assure itself that its workforce is productive and that its time is used as efficiently and effectively as possible to meet the priorities in the IRMP.

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

The service has plans in place to support its objectives

The service's financial and workforce plans, including allocating staff to prevention, protection and response, reflect (and are consistent with) the risks and priorities identified in the community risk management plan (CRMP). We found that the service clearly links its operational activity to risk, and it has carried out reviews of its operational response cover.

Since our last inspection, the service has put more money into its protection function. It used government funding to do this. However, the service should have effective measures in place to assure itself that its workforce is productive and that its time is used efficiently and effectively. For example, the service has an area for improvement that it should have effective systems and processes in place to manage its RBIP. This will impact how efficient the service is at reviewing its workforce plans.

Following our 2018 inspection, we gave the service an area for improvement. This highlighted that it should ensure it is making best use of its transformation reserve to improve how the service works.

We found evidence of the service using [reserves](#) for transformational change, including improvements to technology and mobilising systems. Where the service

agrees that permanent changes will generate benefits in the future (such as programme management), it sustains these through its base budget.

The service needs to further improve how it monitors workforce productivity

After our 2018 inspection, we gave the service an area for improvement to make sure workforce time is used efficiently and effectively. This relates to the use of [wholetime](#) and [fire control](#) resources, and the potential use of on-call staff in the strategic reserve system.

The service now has a structure in place for reviewing and reporting on response performance at all levels of the organisation. This makes use of department plans and live performance information. Teams have set objectives and targets in place. The service has also taken steps to improve the availability and productivity of on-call staff. For example, it makes more effective use of on-call firefighters to cover shortfalls at other fire stations.

However, there is limited performance management of the other main functions (such as prevention and protection). Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service has some targets in place, but it could do more to measure the service it provides to the public. For instance, it could introduce timescales for responding to safe and well referrals. As a result, the service could broaden its focus on productivity to make sure all its staff are as efficient as they can be, and resource plans stay up to date.

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated changes to working practices which are being implemented as business as usual. The service adapted to the change in circumstances by giving staff, that could, the technology they need to work from home during the pandemic. It also changed its training methods, and how it communicates with staff, to do so virtually. It intends to continue to invest in the efficiencies that are gained from agile working.

The service is improving its evaluation of how it collaborates with partners to ensure value for money

After our 2018 inspection, we gave the service an area for improvement which highlighted that it should make sure it effectively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and outcomes of any initiatives. This should include collaboration. We are encouraged to see the significant improvements the service has made on this.

The service has introduced a blue light collaboration board and a robust evaluation framework. It is carrying out a retrospective evaluation of existing partnerships and collaborations. The service has also established a reference group to evaluate its collaboration with East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust and the return on the service's investment.

The service has an additional process for non-blue light collaborations to be proposed and evaluated. Department managers manage this process locally. The process would benefit from a more consistent approach, such as that applied to the blue light collaboration process.

The service does not have robust business continuity arrangements in place

The service has gaps in its continuity arrangements for areas where threats and risks are considered high. For example, we found limited evidence of business continuity planning or exercising of critical systems.

The service doesn't regularly review and test business continuity plans. We found that the service has some business continuity exercising arrangements in place, but there is limited monitoring or review. This means staff aren't fully aware of the arrangements and their associated responsibilities.

In August 2020, the service introduced a business continuity task and finish group to address these issues. We are keen to see the impact of this group in terms of making sure the service has appropriate business continuity arrangements, which it regularly reviews and tests.

The service has sound financial management and scrutiny processes in place

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 reports finance and performance through certain processes. Internal audit has reviewed these processes and given a good assessment of them. The [fire authority](#) also reviews and provides scrutiny on a quarterly basis.

Savings and efficiencies made have had no negative impact on operational performance and the service to the public. The service has taken a prudent approach in its medium-term financial plan in relation to government funding. This is because the full impact of the pandemic isn't yet known.

The service is taking steps to make sure important areas, including estates, fleet and procurement, are able to achieve efficiency gains through sound financial management and improved working practices. The finance team supports the broader organisation. In addition, the director of finance now forms part of the corporate management team. The finance head is part of strategic meeting structures and monitors high areas of spend, such as fleet.

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



Good (2018: Requires improvement)

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service is good at making itself 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 should invest in better services for the public.

Area for improvement

The service needs to ensure that it has a robust and comprehensive fleet strategy which is regularly reviewed and evaluated to maximise potential efficiencies.

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

The service has robust enough plans in place to address future financial challenges

The service has a sound understanding of future financial challenges. It plans to mitigate its main or significant financial risks. The service has a savings and efficiencies plan to limit the effect of future austerity. It can show a balanced budget in the medium term. It has improved processes for managing corporate risk and mitigation. This includes specialist risk training for the corporate management team.

The underpinning financial assumptions the service works to are relatively robust, realistic and prudent, and take account of the wider external environment and some scenario planning for future spending reductions. These include government funding, business rates and pay.

We are pleased to see that the service had identified savings and investment opportunities to improve the service to the public or generate further savings. For example, it has identified savings for changes to estate and a large programme of works. The latter includes replacing the fire service control mobilising system and mobilising equipment at stations.

The service has a sustainable plan for using its reserves

After our 2018 inspection, we gave the service an area for improvement. This highlighted that the service needs to secure an affordable way of managing the risk of fire and other risks, now and in the future. This related to the service's use of reserves to cover gaps in budget. We found the service has a sensible and sustainable plan for using its reserves, with a reduced reliance on them for filling budget gaps. The reserves strategy gives financial support for activities that arise from the CRMP. The service uses these as part of overall budget setting.

Work is required to develop a working fleet strategy

The service's estate strategies have clear links to the CRMP. For example, the service is developing a shared estates strategy between the three blue light services. Estate-modernisation plans include more efficient heating systems, generators and uninterruptable power supplies. These plans will meet the service's environmental needs and improve estates facilities for female staff.

It should be noted that Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service doesn't have a fleet strategy. There is some evidence of fleet-related discussions informing the service's plans and meeting structures. But this lack of strategy limits the service's

ability to understand its effectiveness and efficiency, and to identify opportunities to improve its fleet provision.

The service is taking steps to transform but more needs to be done

Following our 2018 inspection, we gave the service an area for improvement. This highlighted that the service needs to make better use of technology to improve bureaucratic frontline working practices that rely on paper-based processes. We found the service had taken some steps to improve in this respect, but it still needs to do more.

The service has made many positive changes. For instance, it has:

- introduced an online referral portal for [safe and well visits](#);
- enhanced mobile data terminals on all fire engines;
- implemented Microsoft Office 365; and
- facilitated mobile working (by providing laptops and tablets).

The protection team uses a management information system. However, the system is overly reliant on manual inputs and is difficult to get information from. It is administratively burdensome and doesn't give effective and timely management information.

The service has created a programme management office. It has also developed documentation and associated processes to standardise management of successful projects. We are keen to see the impact of this structure in managing risks resulting from complex IT projects. The service needs to assure itself that its IT systems are resilient, reliable, accurate and accessible.

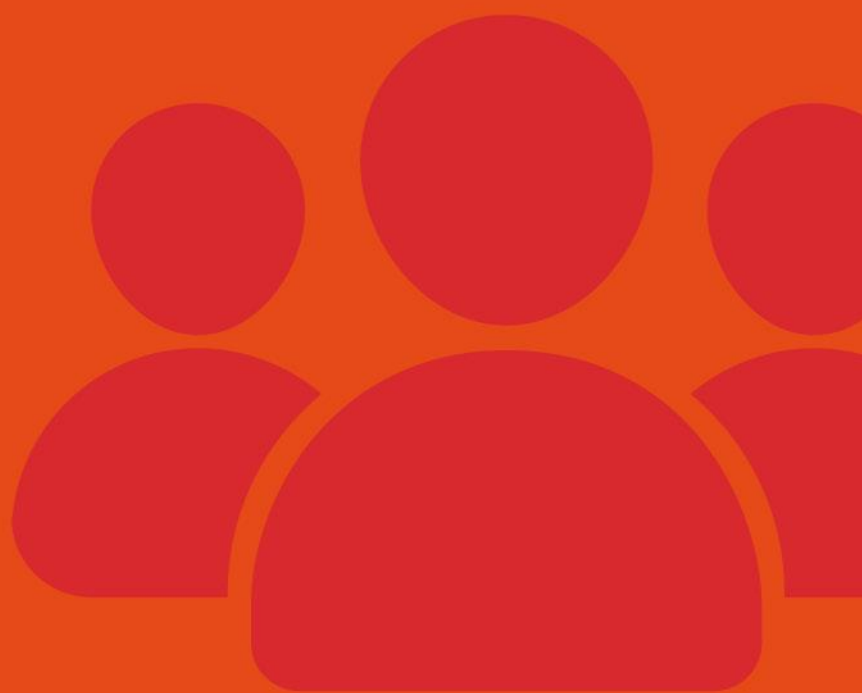
The service takes advantage of opportunities to secure external funding and generate income

The service actively considers and exploits opportunities for generating extra income. For example, it generates extra income from commissioned services, including servicing vehicles for East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust.

Where appropriate, it has secured external funding to invest in improvements to the service provided to the public. Such funding includes a government grant of approximately £50,000 for building-risk-review work. The service used this money to:

- recruit staff;
- improve the protection team's capabilities; and
- buy extra equipment (such as smoke hoods and smoke curtains).

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 is embedded in everything the service does and its staff understand their role in promoting it. Overall, Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service is good at looking after its people.

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service has new service values. It developed these with its staff, therefore the values are well understood by staff at all levels. Senior managers have more to do to make sure they are demonstrating these values at all times.

The service has good health and wellbeing processes in place. These include absence management and reasonable adjustments to support those in the workplace.

There are robust and monitored learning and competency arrangements throughout the service. Staff understand them well.

The service needs to make improvements to its arrangements for selecting and supporting people for development, including into senior roles. It also needs to make sure these improvements happen throughout the organisation.

Promoting the right values and culture



Good (2018: Requires improvement)

Bedfordshire 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 effectively promoted, and staff should have access to a range of wellbeing support that can be tailored to their individual needs.

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

The service values are well understood by staff at all levels of the organisation

After our previous inspection, we identified an area of improvement for the service to make sure its values and behaviours are understood and demonstrated at all levels of the organisation.

The service has made significant progress in both introducing new values and making sure they are reflected in the behaviours of most staff. But senior leaders need to do further work to make sure they are always demonstrating the new values.

The service worked with staff to develop new values, as such they are well understood. Ninety-seven percent of staff who responded to our staff survey (193 of 200) said that they are aware of the service's statement of values.

Staff we spoke to said that the behaviours of both their colleagues and line managers were reflective of the service's values. Eighty-eight percent of respondents to the staff survey said that their line managers consistently model and maintain the service values. This figure was 91 percent for colleagues. Of those who responded to our staff survey, most staff would feel confident in approaching senior managers. However, only 66 percent of respondents felt that senior leaders consistently model and maintain the service's values.

There is a positive working culture across the service, with staff engaged in decisions that affect them. For example, the service has introduced a virtual employee-engagement forum, where any member of staff can ask questions of the senior team directly.

Staff have access to a range of services to support both their mental and physical health

The service has well-understood and effective wellbeing policies in place that are available to staff. A significant range of wellbeing support is available to support both physical and mental health. For example, the service offers:

- occupational health practitioners;
- [trauma risk management](#) practitioners; and
- a 24/7 employee assistance programme (for work and non-work-related matters).

There are good provisions in place to promote staff wellbeing and staff can access them easily. Wellbeing is a clear priority for the service and is a focus in the weekly staff bulletins. Eighty-four percent of staff who responded to our staff survey (167 of 200) told us that they have had a conversation with their manager about their health and wellbeing. Ninety-six percent (191 of 200) felt able to access services to support

their mental wellbeing. Most staff reported they understand, and have confidence in, the wellbeing support processes available.

Staff understand and have confidence in health and safety policies

The service continues to have effective and well-understood health and safety policies and procedures in place. The service gives health and safety training to all staff as part of their induction. It has effective processes in place to make sure that staff receive and understand urgent safety messages. The service also communicates non-urgent information and campaigns through meetings, news bulletins, emails and the staff intranet.

Staff have confidence in the health and safety approach taken by the service. Our staff survey shows that 94 percent of staff (187 of 200) feel their personal safety and welfare is treated seriously at work.

The service has a robust absence management process

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. Individual absences are managed well and in accordance with policy. The average number of shifts per full-time equivalent person that are lost to long-term sickness is below the national average.

The service doesn't have a formal process for forecasting sickness trends. This makes it difficult for it to make staffing decisions and to introduce support for staff to reduce sickness absence in future.

Getting the right people with the right skills



Good (2018: Good)

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

Fire and rescue services should have workforce plans in place that are linked to their [integrated risk management plans](#), set out their current and future skills requirements, and address capability gaps. This should be supplemented by a culture of continuous improvement that includes appropriate learning and development across the service.

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

The service has effective workforce planning arrangements in place

The fire and rescue service has good workforce planning in place. This means skills and capabilities are aligned with what is needed to effectively implement the community risk management plan (CRMP). The service has a four-year people strategy in place. This focuses on workforce planning, development and leadership. It supports the service in forming an accurate picture of its workforce and future needs.

Most staff told us that they could access the training they need to be effective in their role. The service's training plans make sure they can maintain competence and capability effectively. Eighty-five percent of staff who responded to the staff survey (170 of 200) agreed that they have received sufficient training to effectively do their job.

Following our previous inspection, we gave the service an area for improvement to ensure that it was achieving value for money (and making the right resourcing decisions) in relation to probationary training requirement for [on-call](#) firefighters to transition to a [wholetime firefighter](#) role. The service has significantly improved these training arrangements. We found that the service carries out a training gap analysis for everyone. It also makes a realistic assessment as to whether a full or adapted course is needed.

The service monitors operational staff competence by planning and tracking activities in a central system. At the time of our inspection, the service was introducing this system to all staff. The service regularly updates its understanding of staff's skills and risk-critical safety capabilities through regular oversight by line managers and monthly reporting for formal scrutiny. 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.

The service supports staff with a range of learning and development resources

A culture of continuous improvements is promoted across the service and staff are encouraged to undertake learning and development. For example, staff take part in regional and national projects (such as multi-agency training for specialist response teams). The service has adapted how it provides learning and development opportunities during the pandemic. This has included maximising the use of virtual platforms.

We are pleased to see that the service has a range of resources in place to develop staff. These include allocating mentors to new and developing staff. In addition, the service has mandatory learning in place for all staff, which involves a monthly reporting system.

Overall, 79 percent of staff survey respondents (158 of 200) told us that they were able to access a range of learning and development resources to undertake their role effectively.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity



Good (2018: Requires improvement)

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service is good at ensuring fairness and promoting diversity.

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

Area for improvement

The service should ensure it has robust processes in place to undertake equality impact assessments and review any actions agreed as a result.

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

The service has made enough improvements to its overall approach to EDI

The service has taken positive steps to improve its approach to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). We found a good understanding of inclusion at all levels. Also, the service has made reasonable adjustments to improve the ability of staff with specific needs to carry out their roles. These adjustments include offering portable screen filters for use with [mobile data terminals](#) at incidents, and providing coloured stationery to alleviate visual stress for people with dyslexia.

The service has appointed a new EDI lead. Mandatory basic training is in place for all staff. We found that the service is proactive in building staff awareness; EDI is a regular feature in the service's weekly ebulletin.

However, although the service does have some means of gathering staff feedback on matters relating to EDI, they are inconsistent and not wide ranging. For example, the service has one formal staff network (LGBTQ+). This is limited in scope and doesn't focus on specific staff needs relating to other [protected characteristics](#).

Although the service has a process in place to assess equality impact assessments, this is limited in scope and not widely understood. The impact on each of the protected characteristics isn't properly assessed or acted on. More could be done to engage with both internal and external networks to inform this approach.

The service has a good understanding of the diversity of its workforce

Following our 2018 inspection, we gave the service an area for improvement which highlighted that the service should make its workforce more representative.

The service has acted positively to improve diversity. For example, it has introduced a mobile recruitment vehicle, and more targeted recruitment, in a bid to reach those it might not otherwise attract. Also, women and those from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds can sign up for additional support to become firefighters. This is supported by the workforce. We are keen to see the impact these actions have on improving diversity within future recruitment.

Despite the above actions, the service has made limited progress to improve both female and BAME diversity. Since 2017/18, the percentage of staff who have self-declared as being female or from a BAME group has stayed broadly the same. Positively, the percentage of staff who don't declare their ethnicity has reduced from 6.9 percent to 3.9 percent. The overall percentage of firefighters who are female is 7.3 percent. This is in line with the average for England.

The service has some processes in place to understand and remove the risk of disproportionality in recruitment processes, such as mandatory [unconscious bias](#) training for all staff. However, there were limited examples of the service giving consideration to EDI during recruitment processes, including making sure its interview panels were diverse.

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

Following our previous inspection, we identified an area for improvement. We wanted the service to assure itself that it has effective grievance procedures. The service has a revised comprehensive grievance procedure in place. It also has a training plan to introduce to all staff.

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

Our staff survey revealed that, over the past 12 months:

- 12 percent of respondents felt they had been subject to bullying and harassment (23 of 200); and
- 12 percent felt they had been subject to discrimination (24 of 200).

Of the 200 respondents to the staff survey, 23 respondents told us they have felt bullied or harassed at work in the last 12 months, and 24 respondents told us they have felt discriminated against at work in the last 12 months. Of those, only five said that any action had been taken as a result of reporting the incidents. However, during our inspection many staff told us that they are confident in the service's approach to tackling bullying, harassment and discrimination, as well as grievances and disciplinary matters.

Representative bodies (such as the Fire and Rescue Services Association and the Fire Leaders Association) feel that the service has put appropriate processes in place and that it takes appropriate action to eliminate bullying and harassment.

The service doesn't have many grievance cases. Managers are encouraged to resolve grievances at a local level.

Managing performance and developing leaders



Good (2018: Requires improvement)

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service is good at managing performance and developing leaders.

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

Area for improvement

The service should ensure it has arrangements in place to identify, develop and support all high-potential staff across the organisation.

Innovative practice: The service has improved the way it manages succession planning for senior leadership roles

The service has signed a regional concordat to allow opportunities for secondment of senior manager(s) between service to fill gaps while a full and open recruitment process takes place. The secondees gain from the experience of working as a principal officer and the services benefit from the mutual exchange of knowledge and development.

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

Managing individuals' performance

There is a good performance management system in place which allows the service to effectively develop and assess the individual performance of all staff. Ninety-one percent of respondents to our staff survey (181 of 200) said they had had a personal development review or appraisal in the last 12 months. In addition, the service supports staff to achieve academic qualifications (and apprenticeships) and allocates mentors to new and developing staff members.

Through our staff survey, most staff reported that they have received regular discussions with their manager and that they were meaningful. Each staff member has individual goals and objectives, and regular assessments of performance. Staff feel confident in the performance and development arrangements that are in place.

The service has improved how it develops operational staff. Further work is needed to ensure arrangements in place to support all staff across the organisation

Following our previous inspection, we identified an area of improvement. We wanted the service to ensure that its selection, development and promotion of staff is open, transparent and fair.

We found the service has put considerable effort into developing its internal recruitment, promotion and progression processes for operational personnel, so the processes are fair and understood by staff. The service has introduced new promotion processes, which to date, staff feel are open and fair. (The service is introducing these processes in stages.) On-call and wholetime personnel can apply for all operational posts. The service advertises vacancies both internally and externally, to encourage applicants into middle and senior management roles.

We gave the service an additional area for improvement. It highlighted that the service should put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders.

We found the service had made significant improvements, including:

- putting effective succession planning processes in place to manage the career pathways of operational staff, including into leadership roles;
- introducing promotion gateways and tailored development for operational staff; and
- agreeing secondments from other fire and rescue services for senior roles, to allow full and open recruitment processes to take place.

However, changes to selection, development and promotion currently focus primarily on operational staff. This has resulted in some staff feeling less valued. The service should make sure it has arrangements in place to identify, develop and support all high-potential staff throughout the organisation.

The service has taken steps to reduce temporary promotions through its gateway procedures. But it needs to do more to make sure these procedures are being used appropriately. At the end of March 2020, figures showed that the average length of temporary promotion was 456 days. This is higher than the average for England.

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