

Fire & Rescue Service 2021/22

Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Cambridgeshire 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 Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service in March 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 pandemic. This inspection considers for a second time the service's effectiveness, efficiency and people.

In this round of 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 Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service.

What inspection judgments mean

Our categories of graded judgment are:

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

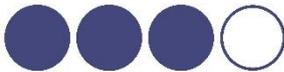
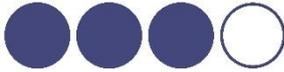
Good is our expected graded judgment for all fire and rescue services. It is based on policy, practice or performance that meet pre-defined grading criteria, which are informed by any relevant [national operational guidance](#) or standards.

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 fire and rescue 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	 Good	Good
Protecting the public through fire regulation	 Good	Good
Responding to fires and other emergencies	 Good	Good
Responding to major and multi-agency incidents	 Good	Good

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

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	Good
Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity	 Good	Good
Managing performance and developing leaders	 Good	Good

HMI summary

I am grateful for the positive and constructive way that the service engaged with our inspection.

I want to thank the service for working with us by accommodating the virtual approach of this inspection. Inspections would normally be conducted using a hybrid approach of on-site and virtual working, but inspecting against the backdrop of the pandemic meant we had to carry out the inspection virtually. I also want to recognise the disruption caused by the pandemic. This has been considered in our findings.

Overall, the service is doing a good job. It is effective and efficient at keeping people safe and secure from fire, and it looks after its people well.

The service clearly prioritises the physical and mental health and wellbeing of its staff. People from all levels of the organisation told us that it is a great place to work. They spoke about an open management structure, and how they felt safe and supported to challenge the status quo and suggest ideas.

It is also clear that the service invests in continuous improvement. It seeks, for example, external scrutiny, feedback and evaluation in areas, including call-handling times and mental health provision.

There have been marked improvements since our last inspection. These are most notable in how the service responds to and learns from operational incidents; shares risk information with other fire and rescue services and partners; and evaluates prevention and protection activities.

But there are several areas where the service should still make improvements. Either because there is a lack of assurance, or because links aren't being made between plans.

- In finance, the day-to-day management of finance is good and the service collaborates to make savings and uses technology to improve efficiencies. But it isn't clear how the service will make best use of its budget and resources beyond the medium term. While the service has identified areas where it can make savings, it hasn't linked them to the risks in its [integrated risk management plan \(IRMP\)](#). The cause and effect, like asking how a station closure would affect response times, is missing.
- Similarly, the fleet and asset management strategies are missing connections between spending/saving/investing and the IRMP.
- The service would like its staff to feel empowered and be motivated to take charge of their learning and development. It has a good performance management system and a clear policy, but too many staff haven't had a conversation about personal development in the past year. Both the service and staff would benefit from a more structured approach that results in consistent, regular performance management and training uptake.

The service has improved its approach to equality, diversity and inclusion and is making sure it can offer the right services to its communities and support staff with a [protected characteristic](#). But the service should make sure that these assessments take place and that their findings are a good enough standard to inform strategies and plans.

We look forward to seeing the service continue to make the improvements it needs, this time in these important areas.



Roy Wilsher

HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Service in numbers



Response

Cambridgeshire

England

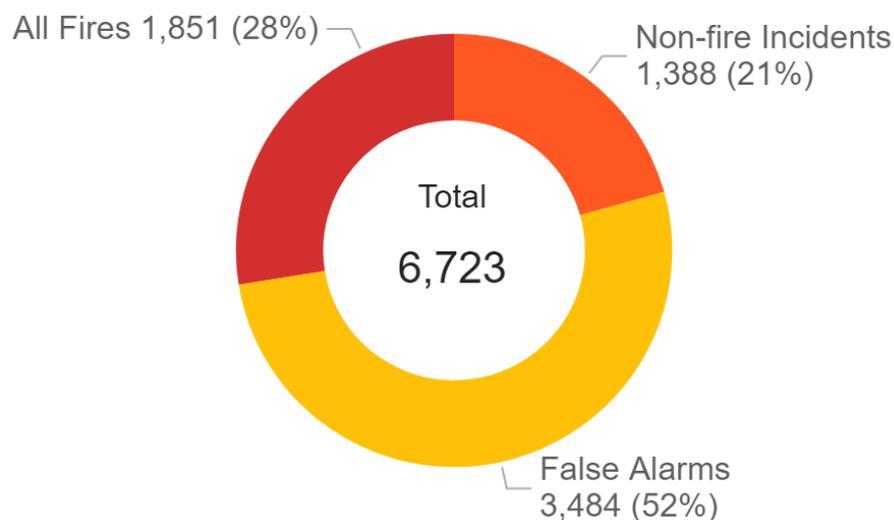
Incidents attended per 1,000 population Year ending 31 December 2020	7.86	9.39
Home fire safety checks carried out by fire and rescue service per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2020	5.15	10.17
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises Year ending 31 March 2020	6.14	2.55
Average availability of pumps Year ending 31 March 2020	82.45%	83.07%



Cost

Firefighter cost per person per year Year ending 31 March 2020	£19.79	£23.82
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Incidents attended in the year to 31 December 2020

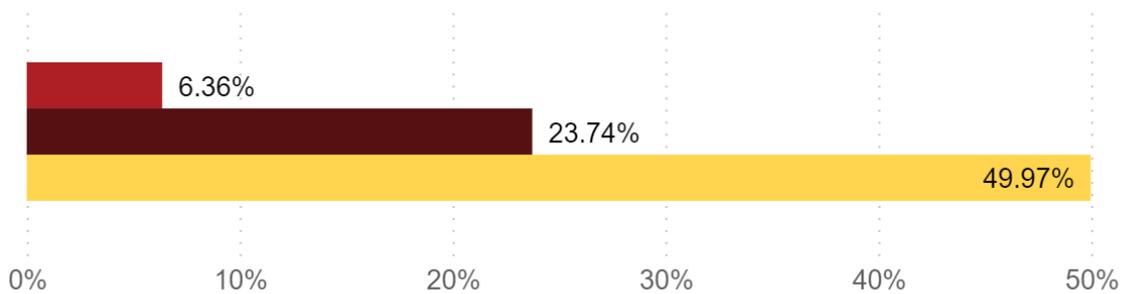




Five-year change in total workforce 2015 to 2020	-8.99%	-5.30%
Number of firefighters per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2020	0.49	0.63
Percentage of firefighters who are wholetime Year ending 31 March 2020	60.82%	65.10%

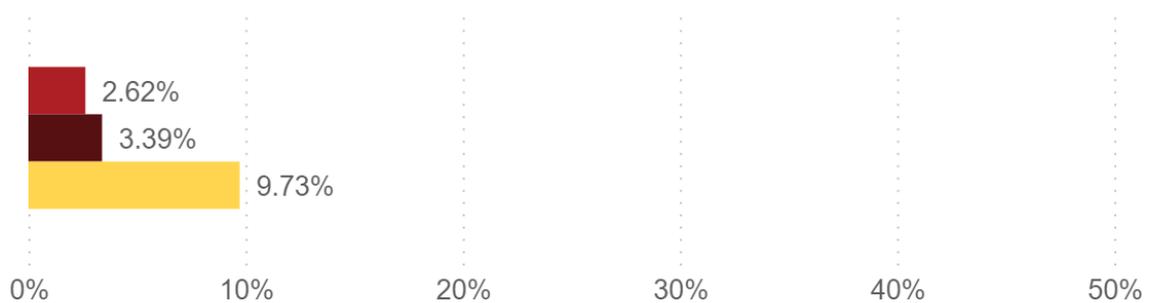
Percentage population, firefighters and workforce who are female as at 31 March 2020

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

The service has a good [integrated risk management plan \(IRMP\)](#). It makes clear links to its prevention, protection and response strategies. And the service aims to continuously improve. For example, by looking at best practice across the fire sector.

Since our last inspection, the service has improved:

- the way it evaluates prevention and protection activities, to improve its service for the public;
- systems for learning and debriefing, to improve operational response and incident command; and
- the way it makes national and cross-border information, including learning, available to its staff and [fire control](#).

However, the service should:

- improve its consultation process for the seldom heard;
- do more to reduce unwanted fire signals; and
- ensure that its quality assurance of fire safety audits is more consistent.

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies



Good (2018: Good)

Cambridgeshire 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.

More could be done to engage with difficult to identify and hard to reach communities

The service has assessed an appropriate range of risks and threats after a thorough IRMP planning process. When assessing risk, it has considered relevant information collected from a broad range of internal and external sources and data sets. This includes incident data from their mobilising system, the national incident reporting system, ward profiling and socio-demographic data from third-party sources. The service is building on this with a move to include more business listing information.

But we found the service had limited response to consultation on its IRMP from the public. And it had limited meaningful interaction with difficult to identify and hard to reach (sometimes referred to as 'seldom heard') communities. The service should improve how it engages with these communities to understand the risks they might face and explain how it intends to mitigate them.

The service's risk management plan is clear and easy for staff, the public and partners to understand

After assessing risks, the service has recorded its findings in an easily understood IRMP. This plan describes how prevention, protection and response activity is to be effectively resourced to mitigate or reduce the risks and threats the community faces, both now and in the future.

The plan sets out the service's vision and strategic aims under four specific action plans:

- people;
- community safety excellence;
- operational excellence; and
- value for money.

Within these plans, the service has identified specific areas of focus. These areas include organisational culture and staff engagement; improving and supporting mental health and staff wellbeing; collaborating with other blue light services; and partnership working.

The service has published performance measures for fires, false alarms, road traffic collisions and its response to incidents. As we said at our previous inspection, to further enhance this plan, the service should consider including clear and challenging targets for all performance.

The service is effective at gathering, maintaining and sharing a good range of risk information

The service routinely collects and updates the information it has about the people, places and threats it has identified as being at greatest risk. Operational staff routinely gather risk information from businesses. Staff who are qualified in fire protection inspect and audit premises for fire safety compliance.

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, risk information is made available to operational staff via [mobile data terminals](#) and tablets.

The service has systems in place to make staff aware of any significant changes to risk information. We saw new and emerging risks communicated using a range of methods. These included providing information on a mobile and web application (that is a fully interactive source of service news and information) and email and service action notes, which are monitored to ensure its staff are aware.

Where appropriate, risk information is passed on to other organisations. For example, the service has a memorandum of understanding with building control of 3C Shared Services – a strategic partnership between Cambridgeshire city council, Huntingdon district council and South Cambridgeshire district council – to communicate and share building risk information.

The service is good at learning from operational incidents

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 dedicated resources to communicating national operational guidance and lessons learned from national operational work. The service central county risk

analysis group reviews emerging information gathered from operational activity and changes its response to the risks where needed.

The service responded proactively to the recommendations and learning from phase one of the Grenfell Tower fire inquiry

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

Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service has responded to learning from this tragedy. The service has a comprehensive action plan and has bought smoke hoods and new fireground radios for operational crews. It has tested and exercised handling multiple fire survival calls in response to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. Letters of assurance and home fire safety advice were sent to residents in high-rise premises.

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 that have cladding similar to the type installed on Grenfell Tower.

Preventing fires and other risks



Good (2018: Good)

Cambridgeshire 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, as well as with the police and ambulance services. They should provide intelligence and risk information with these other organisations when they identify vulnerability or exploitation.

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

The service's prevention strategy clearly links to the risks identified in its [integrated risk management plan \(IRMP\)](#)

The service's prevention strategy is clearly linked to the risks identified in its IRMP. The service has identified those who may be vulnerable and at higher risk from fire and road traffic collisions.

The service is an important partner in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Road Safety Business Partnership, focusing specifically on reducing injury and deaths among younger drivers. The service has dedicated staff working in Cambridgeshire

and Peterborough [Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs](#). This makes sure they can make the right referrals and support those most vulnerable from fire and other risks.

All functions in the service use prevention information (from the prevention team) to plan and direct activity, both within their function and across the organisation. Such activities include:

- [Firebreak](#), an intervention programme to provide young people with improved knowledge in areas such as basic life support and road safety. Attendees receive a unit award scheme certificate on completion.

The pandemic has had an impact on prevention activities

We considered how the service had adapted its prevention work during our COVID-19 specific inspection (carried out between 5 and 16 October 2020). At that time, we found it had adapted its public prevention work appropriately. The impact of the pandemic resulted in no safe and well visits taking place between 1 April 2020 and 30 June 2020. Since then we are encouraged to find that safe and well visits have resumed, based on an assessment of risk and vulnerability.

The service is good at targeting those most at risk from fire

Prevention activity is clearly prioritised using a risk-based approach towards people most at risk from fire and other emergencies. The service takes account of a broad range of information and data to target its prevention activity at vulnerable individuals and groups. This includes health data from the Care Quality Commission (CQC), Adult Social Care and the NHS.

The service is targeting the over 65s and the vulnerable, with 4,073 of the 4,408 safe and well visits carried out by the service between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020 being targeted towards someone over 65 and/or with a disability. It also has arrangements in place to receive referrals from others. For example, the service provides what it calls olive branch training to care providers and other agencies so they can assess who is vulnerable to the risk of fire and make referrals for safe and well visits in a more targeted way. Referrals from care providers are assessed and acted on by the business support group.

Staff are confident at providing safe and well checks

Staff told us they have the right skills and confidence to make safe and well visits. These checks cover an appropriate range of hazards that can put vulnerable people at greater risk from fire and other emergencies. The visit assesses six main elements: fire safety, falls prevention, alcohol abuse, staying well and warm, crime, and smoking.

There are arrangements for staff to raise [safeguarding](#) concerns, but the service should prioritise the roll-out of its training

The service provides safeguarding training and has arrangements for staff to raise safeguarding concerns to the multi-agency safeguarding hubs. The staff we interviewed told us about occasions when they had identified safeguarding problems.

But not all staff we interviewed had had safeguarding training. The service should prioritise this training for all staff so they are capable and confident at recognising

safeguarding issues and vulnerability. This will improve the service it provides to the public.

The service is good at collaborating

The service works with a wide range of other organisations, such as The Prince's Trust, Dementia Friends and Safer Peterborough, to prevent fires and other emergencies. 4,408 safe and well visits were carried out by the service between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020, 1,687 were from referrals from other agencies. During the same period 840 home fire safety checks were carried out in the service area by partner agencies.

Reducing harm and road deaths in young drivers is a priority. The service provides road safety courses such as [Biker Down](#) and education in schools. It is an effective contributor to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Road Safety Partnership.

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 has signed up to a county community data sharing agreement for information on vulnerability, hoarding and scams. It is one of the main organisations in this agreement.

The service has effective interventions for reducing fire-setting behaviour

The service has a range of effective interventions to target and educate people of different ages who show signs of fire-setting behaviour. This includes a fire-setter intervention programme, which involves fire staff visiting children who play or have a fascination with fire, and Project Icarus, a therapeutic one-to-one arson intervention programme.

When appropriate, it routinely shares information with other partners such as Cambridgeshire Police and the prison and probation service to help integrate offenders back into communities.

The service has effective processes to evaluate prevention activities

We are pleased to see, since our previous inspection, that the service has improved the way it evaluates its prevention activity. The service has good evaluation tools in place to measure how effective its work is. This helps it know what works, and means its communities get prevention activity that meets their needs. For example, the service has put in place a structured evaluation process for safe and well visits to record feedback and check what someone understands about the safety information they have been given.

Two Nottingham Trent University students helped evaluate how well community fire safety is delivered as part of a volunteer project. Their findings have contributed to an improved service to the public.

Protecting the public through fire regulation



Good (2018: Good)

Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service is good at protecting the public through fire regulation.

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

Areas for improvement

- The service should make sure it has an effective quality assurance process, so staff carry out audits to an appropriate standard.
- The service should make sure it effectively addresses the burden of false alarms.

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

Protection is clearly linked to the [integrated risk management plan \(IRMP\)](#)

The service's protection strategy is clearly linked to the risk it has identified in its IRMP.

Staff across the service are involved in this activity, with information effectively exchanged as needed. For example, the service uses a range of information from its risk-based audit programme, risk modelling, ward profiling and workforce planning to inform its integrated risk management and action plans. Information is in turn used to adjust planning assumptions and direct activity between the service's protection, prevention and response functions. This means resources are properly aligned to risk.

COVID-19 has had an impact on protection activities

We considered how the service had adapted its protection activity during our COVID-19 specific inspection. We found it had adapted its protection work well. Since then, we are encouraged to find it is maintaining a risk-based approach and has been effective at working with partners and completing (virtual) building control consultations on time. Over 99 percent (433 of 437) of building consultations received between 1 April 2020 and 30 September 2020 were completed on time.

The service is continuously improving its risk-based inspection programme

The risk-based inspection programme is focused on the service's highest-risk buildings. The service has improved its programme by:

- increasing the amount of data and number of information sources it considers; and
- studying best practice from other services across the fire sector.

This has improved its risk level identification – that is, it has a better understanding of how much risk there is and how often it should inspect a premise or risk factor.

The service has audited all high-rise buildings similar to Grenfell Tower

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 made available to response teams and control operators, enabling them to respond more effectively in an emergency.

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

The quality of fire protection audits is inconsistent

We reviewed a range of audits of different premises across the service, including:

- audits as part of the service's risk-based inspection programme;
- audits after fires at premises where fire safety legislation applied, where enforcement action had been taken; and
- audits at high-risk, high-rise buildings.

Not all the audits we reviewed were completed in a consistent, systematic way, or in line with the service's policies. We found incomplete audits. Some lacked the required comments to support the understanding of risk and the risk judgment.

The service doesn't consistently quality-assure its fire protection audits

We found the service has quality assurance processes in place, but they aren't consistently applied. For example, the service doesn't quality-assure its audits unless enforcement action is being taken.

The service would benefit from evaluating its enforcement activity

The service's approach to enforcement involves educating, engaging with and supporting businesses to manage fire safety.

However, it sees enforcement as a last resort. It hasn't used its full range of enforcement powers. And it isn't always clear if the service wants to prosecute those who don't comply with fire safety regulations.

The service would benefit from evaluating its enforcement strategy to make sure it understands its effect on keeping people safe and secure from fire.

In the year to 31 March 2020, the service issued:

- 122 informal notices;
- no alteration notices;
- three enforcement notices; and
- eight prohibition notices.

It did not undertake any prosecutions.

The service has improved the way it evaluates protection activity and engages well with local business

We are pleased to see, since our previous inspection, that the service evaluates most of its protection activity. 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 the right access to the protection services that meet their needs. For example, the service hosts fire protection seminars for the business community.

The service is improving the resourcing of protection activities

The service has enough qualified protection staff to meet the requirements of its risk-based inspection programme. And to increase capacity, it has trained [wholetime firefighters](#) to support the risk-based inspection programme and carry out compliance checks at lower risk, less complex premises.

The service works well with other enforcement agencies

The service works closely with other enforcement agencies to regulate fire safety and routinely exchanges risk information with them. For example:

- the service is an active partner in local safety advisory groups, with whom it shares risk information and intelligence; and
- it participates in joint enforcement work with housing and licensing agencies, as well as the police force.

The enforcement work resulted in prohibition notices being issued.

The service has improved its building consultations processes

The service responded on time to almost all (433 of 437) building consultations received between 1 April 2020 and 30 September 2020, so consistently meets its statutory responsibility to comment on fire safety arrangements at new and altered buildings. It has improved its consultation process by:

- Agreeing a memorandum of understanding with 3C Shared Services.
- Sending building consultations electronically (which is quicker and more traceable than producing and posting hard copy).

The service promotes fire safety

The service proactively engages with local businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation. It provides bespoke business fire safety seminars and is an active partner in the [primary authority scheme](#), which provides assured compliance advice and guidance.

The service should do more to reduce the burden of unwanted fire signals

The service's unwanted fire signal (false alarm) policy is inconsistently applied, particularly in relation to those premises where there are regular false alarms. As a result, it doesn't take sufficient action to reduce the number of unwanted fire signals. This places an unnecessary burden on [fire control](#).

The service has been collecting unwanted fire signal data. However, it does this in an inconsistent way which makes it difficult to use.

Responding to fires and other emergencies



Good (2018: Good)

Cambridgeshire 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.

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 using performance data to improve response and availability

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 appropriate resources. For example, it is piloting using two of its day-crewed pumps differently to cover on-call areas when the on-call fire engine is not available.

The service prioritises covering its on-call strategic stations to improve its response standard. It uses on-call capacity to cover other stations and provide prevention and protection activities.

The service has plans to improve its response times, which are already good

There are no national response standards against which the service can benchmark its performance for the public. But the service has set out its own response standard in its IRMP.

The service's response standard is for the first fire engine in attendance to arrive at the most serious incidents within an average of 9 minutes in urban areas, and 12 minutes in rural areas. The service told us its average response time to the most serious incidents in urban areas in the year to 31 March 2020 was 8 minutes and 33 seconds. This meets its standard. In the year to 31 March 2020, the service told us its average response time to the most serious incidents in rural areas was 12 minutes and 19 seconds. This is slightly outside its standard. It has plans to improve this.

The service consistently meets its standard for wholetime fire engine availability

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

- 100 percent of wholetime fire engines available on 100 percent of occasions; and
- on-call fire engines available on 55.31 percent of occasions.

It consistently meets the wholetime standard, however, the service should continue to improve its on call availability. In the year to 31 March 2020 wholetime fire engine availability was 100 percent and on-call fire engine availability was 64.9 percent.

The service commands operational incidents effectively

The service has trained incident commanders who are assessed regularly and properly. It has an effective system to ensure that they have regular training (level 3 and 4 incident command training); and uses an externally accredited training provider to (re)assess their command competence every two years. At 31 March 2020, 219 of 234 incident commanders were within accreditation, with COVID-19 affecting the availability of reaccreditation facilities.

This 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 confident 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 \(JESIP\)](#). They are also confident in the use of operational discretion – they know when to use their professional judgment in an unforeseen situation at an incident and that the service will support their decisions.

We found that incident commanders make good use of available support materials including checklists, command support packs, analytical risk assessments and decision logs.

The service has improved the consistency of 999-call handling

The service has a combined fire control with Suffolk FRS. One fire control, based in Cambridgeshire FRS headquarters in Huntingdon, handles all 999 calls for both services. During our previous inspection we found differences in mobilising procedures across the two services affected call-handling times. The service has undertaken an evaluation of its call-handling and we found improvements since the last inspection.

We are pleased to see the service's control staff included in the service's command, training, exercise, debrief and assurance activity. For example:

- control staff made a significant contribution to a recent high-rise and multiple fire survival call exercise;
- there are processes for those working in fire control to carry out a debrief following incidents of six fire engines, or incidents of interest; and
- control staff were invited to the service's structured (formal) debrief following a critical incident.

The service responded proactively to learning from the Grenfell Tower fire

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. A recent high-rise exercise had tested their ability to manage multiple fire survival calls and share information with incident commanders.

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. Maintaining good situational awareness enables the service to communicate effectively with the public, providing them with accurate and tailored advice.

The service makes risk information readily available to firefighters

We sampled a range of risk information, including:

- records on the service's community fire risk information management system; and
- site-specific risk information records on the fire engines' [mobile data terminals](#).

The records include permanent and temporary risk information for firefighters responding to incidents at high-risk, high-rise buildings. Firefighters also have access to information from fire control. (Permanent information would include records for hospitals and factories while temporary information would list, for example, oxygen users.)

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

The service has improved the way it evaluates operational performance and plans to adopt national operational guidance

As part of the inspection, we reviewed a range of emergency incidents and training events including:

- wide area flooding;
- domestic fires; and
- critical incidents, operational discretion incidents and exercises.

We are pleased to see an improvement, since our last inspection, in the way the service evaluates operational performance. The service has an effective system for staff to use information from learning and debriefing activity to improve operational response and incident command. It has created a comprehensive incident monitoring and debriefing policy; and has improved its structured debriefs for larger, more complex incidents. We saw the service use its range of debriefing processes following a critical incident. Staff had good knowledge and understanding of them.

We are also pleased to see that the service routinely follows its policies to assure itself that staff command incidents in line with operational guidance. Internal risk information is updated as it is received. Learning from exercises and incidents is fed into an operational support group that collates and communicates it through 'closing the loop' reports. The group uses service action notes, email and Workplace to inform all staff about the reports and any other learning.

The service has responded to learning from incidents to improve its service for the public. Staff are confident that it listens to their feedback and takes action as a result of learning from operational incidents. For example, when staff found that fire appliance (fire engine) CCTV was interfering with the service's new radios. The problem was raised in the debriefing process, highlighted in a health and safety bulletin and rectified.

We are encouraged to see the service is contributing towards, and acting on, learning from other fire and rescue services or operational learning gathered from other emergency service partners. For example:

- safety flashes or review of practices to improve from the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#)'s Central Programme Office; and
- the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP).

We found that most of the service's operational policy aligns with national operational guidance (NOG). The service has an active role in the regional NOG group. It (the service) plans to fully adopt NOG by 2022.

The service keeps the public informed about ongoing incidents effectively

The service has good systems in place to inform the public about ongoing incidents and help keep them safe during and after incidents. They include:

- proactive use of social media, particularly Twitter and Facebook;
- the incident tab on the service's website;
- media-trained incident commanders; and
- mobile technology to record and report incidents live (that is, as they happen).

We saw evidence that the service provides incident updates using these systems.

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents



Good (2018: Good)

Cambridgeshire 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 has improved access to risk information from neighbouring services and is well prepared for major and multi-agency incidents

The service has effectively anticipated and considered the reasonably foreseeable risks and threats it may face. These risks are listed in both local and national risk registers as part of its integrated risk management planning.

The service hosts the community risk register on its website. It highlights the top ten risks (that is, those with the highest likelihood and the potential to make a significant impact) to Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Risks include:

- emerging infectious diseases;
- major contamination of the food chain; and
- flooding, cold and snow.

We are pleased to see that, since our last inspection, firefighters have been given access to risk information from neighbouring services. It is easily accessible on mobile data terminals.

The service is familiar with the significant risks that neighbouring fire and rescue services could face, that it might reasonably be asked to respond to in an emergency. These include [control of major accident hazard \(COMAH\)](#) incidents and flooding on the east coast.

The service can respond effectively to major and multi-agency incidents

We reviewed the arrangements the service has in place to respond to different major incidents such as wide area flooding and marauding terrorist attacks.

The service has good arrangements in place. Staff demonstrated a good understanding of what would constitute a major incident. They understand their responsibilities and how to request additional resources, including national assets, if required.

The service makes e-learning modules for major incidents available to firefighters. At the time of inspection, the service had almost completed training its operational

staff on the updated marauding terrorist attack (MTA) national joint operating procedures.

The service has specialist, national interagency liaison officers who provide 24/7 cover to support its MTA response. It maintains and staffs a high-volume pump that is also available to the [National Resilience programme](#).

The service works with other fire services and has improved the resilience of its principal officer's rota

The service supports other fire and rescue services responding to emergency incidents. For example, it has a memorandum of understanding with Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service to share a principal officer rota. We are pleased to see this. It has increased the service's capacity and resilience by making more senior officers available to respond to incidents.

It is interoperable with other services and can form part of a multi-agency response.

The service's cross-border exercise plans have been affected by COVID-19

We are encouraged to see that the service has tested operational guidance for breathing apparatus during exercises with Bedfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk Fire and Rescue Services. Such exercises enable them to work together effectively to keep the public safe. Additionally, feedback (from the exercises) informs risk information and service plans.

The service exercise plans have understandably been affected by COVID-19 – there were no cross-border exercises in 2020. Future plans should include exercises with neighbouring services.

Incident commanders have been trained in and understand JESIP

The incident commanders we interviewed had been trained in and were familiar with JESIP. Evidence that the service consistently follows these principles includes:

- staff knowledge and use of the joint decision-making model; and
- the use of the nationally recognised messaging (that is, messages that all emergency services and related agencies understand).

The service is an active member, and lead partner, of the LRF

The service has good arrangements in place to respond to emergencies with other partners that make up the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Resilience Forum (LRF). These arrangements include having staff available to respond to requests from partners during the pandemic. Staff:

- supported East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust with ambulance driving;
- helped fit face masks for frontline NHS and clinical staff; and
- supported the national mass vaccination programme with marshalling, logistics and vaccinators.

The service contributed to the LRF response to the pandemic with:

- communications to the public;
- loggists (a loggist is a trained note taker for formal, emergency management meetings); and
- staff to chair the tactical co-ordinating groups.

The service is a valued LRF partner. The chief fire officer is the chair of the LRF. The service takes part in regular training events with other members and uses the learning to develop planning assumptions about responding to major and multi-agency incidents.

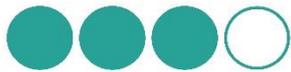
The service keeps up to date with national learning

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.

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. Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service's overall efficiency is good.

The service proactively collaborates to make savings and improve outcomes for the public. It also uses technology to increase its efficiency. And since our last inspection, it has improved its ways of working and performance monitoring.

However, the service's departments are still planning in isolation. The service should improve its approach to financial planning so that it connects its estates, fleet and reserves strategies with scenario plans and the IRMP. Its reserves strategy should clearly show how it plans to promote new ways of working. And its fleet and estates management strategies should demonstrate an understanding of how future changes (to those strategies) may impact its service to the public.

The service should also make sure it has sufficiently robust plans to address medium-term financial challenges (that is, beyond 2024) and secure an affordable way of managing the risk of fire and other risks.

Making best use of resources



Good (2018: Good)

Cambridgeshire 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 service's risks and statutory responsibilities. Services should make best possible use of resources to achieve the best results for the public.

The service told us its revenue budget for 2020/21 is £30.419m. This is a 1.07 percent increase from the previous financial year.

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

The service could better align resources to the risks and priorities identified in its [integrated risk management plan \(IRMP\)](#)

The service uses its resources to manage risk. Its workforce plans, including allocating staff to prevention, protection and response, continue to reflect and are consistent with the risks and priorities identified in the IRMP.

However, its forecasting and planning are short term. The service allocates resources to activities on an annual basis, after it has reviewed the previous year's base budget and adjusted for inflation and savings. It does not look, for example, three to five years ahead to anticipate where it might need to make a significant change in the way it spends, operates or saves.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority provides overview and scrutiny of the service's budget performance to ensure the appropriate use of public money.

The service monitors performance effectively

We are pleased to see the service's arrangements for monitoring performance had improved since our last inspection.

Its operational excellence group evaluates important areas of performance and progress against its IRMP, action plans and strategic priorities. For example, better aligning operational resources, including response times and availability, to risk and demand. At the time of the inspection, the service was piloting using two of its day-crewed pumps differently to cover on-call areas when the on-call fire engine is not available.

The service has a governance structure – that is, layers of management, teams and functions – to monitor performance across the organisation. It sends the fire authority reports and makes quarterly performance newsletters available to staff via its intranet.

The service has improved its ways of working

We are encouraged to see the improvements the service has made to the way it works since our last inspection. It is taking steps to make sure the workforce's time is as productive as possible, including implementing new ways of working. For example, the service has moved to targeted community safety, prioritising over 65s and the vulnerable. We also found on-call staff being trained to undertake prevention and protection activities, to ensure their time is productive while on stand-by duties.

The service has a more joined-up approach to carrying out prevention, protection and response activities. For example, it has introduced wholetime monthly priority plans. Station commanders and community risk managers agree the community fire safety and business engagement priorities within the plans. Wholetime watches are then allotted community fire safety hours and technical fire safety (business engagement) targets of operational risk work per month, reducing duplication of activity.

The service responded to our last inspection and has reviewed its training provision to make trainers available during evenings and weekends. It is working with representative bodies to introduce more flexible contracts and improve trainers' work-life balance.

The service recognises that further improvements are needed. It is in the process of training 20 assistant trainers. We are interested to see how this develops.

The service collaborates and improves outcomes for the public

We are pleased to see that the service meets its statutory duty to collaborate, and routinely considers opportunities to collaborate with other emergency responders.

The service shares its information and communication technology (ICT) provision with Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service. And it has purchased a new mobilising system with Suffolk and realises savings of approximately £400,000 a year (from a combined [fire control](#)).

The service also collaborates well with the health sector. It is currently volunteering to support the national COVID-19 vaccination programme, providing marshalling, logistics and vaccinators.

Collaborative work is aligned to the priorities in its IRMP. For example, volunteers from [The Bobby Scheme](#) carry out home fire safety checks for the vulnerable and disabled people on behalf of the service.

The service actively explores opportunities to collaborate and improve services to the public. For example, it has made its stations available for free to host blood donation sessions. Since 2017, this has saved the [NHS Blood and Transplant](#) £6,500 in venue costs.

We are pleased to see the service monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and outcomes of its collaborations. The service is not afraid to make difficult decisions when a collaboration does not provide value for money or causes significant delays. For example, the service decided not to renew its contract with its wide area network (WAN) provider when the cost went up. It switched provider and collaborated with Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service to make savings of approximately £200,000 (for the length of that contract).

The service has good business continuity arrangements

The service has good continuity arrangements in place for high-risk areas. The threats and risks are regularly reviewed and tested so that staff are aware of the arrangements and their associated responsibilities. For example, during our recent COVID-19 inspection, we found that the service had a pandemic flu plan and business

continuity plans which were in place and in date. It also has plans for industrial action and fall-back control which it reviews regularly.

Day-to-day financial management is good

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 made savings of approximately £25,000 between 1 March and 31 July 2020 from BP's national fuel offer; and
- replaced diesel cars with petrol in 2019/20 which saved approximately £85,000.

The service has processes to ensure consistency of procurement. For example, the procurement team uses benefit cards (like prompt cards) to help ensure compliance, transparency, consistency and value for money.

Departmental underspend is reallocated to areas of need.

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



Requires improvement (2018: Good)

Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement for how it makes 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 should invest in better services for the public.

Areas for improvement

- The service should make sure it has sufficiently robust plans in place which address the medium-term financial challenges beyond 2024 and secure an affordable way of managing the risk of fire and other risks (R1 AFI).
- The service should have a clear and sustainable strategic plan for the use of its reserves which promotes new ways of working.
- The service should ensure that its fleet and estates management programmes are linked to the IRMP, and it understands the impact future changes to those programmes may have on its service to the public.

Innovative practice

The service has effective and efficient asset management systems. Staff use scanners and information tablets for:

- undertaking equipment and appliance checks and inventories;
- automating the recording of defects; and
- alerting fleet and estates to action, significantly reducing administration.

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

The service should ensure it has sufficiently robust plans to address medium-term financial challenges and secure an affordable way of managing risks including fire

The service has an understanding of its financial challenges. We are pleased to see that it has undertaken comprehensive spending review scenario planning for future spending reductions. However, it has not linked the scenario planning to its medium-term financial plan (MTFP) or IRMP. Its planning assumptions don't adequately recognise the wider external environment and risk, which limits its ability to ensure it will be able to allocate resource to risk. It also means that savings will have minimal impact beyond 2024.

More could be done to align the scenario planning to the MTFP and IRMP to:

- identify changes in demand/risk;
- understand costs;
- benchmark against other fire and rescue services; and
- identify areas where the service has performed well or was comparatively expensive.

There is scope for the service to consider more sophisticated budget allocation models that would help do this.

The service is planning to spend a significant amount of its financial reserves over the next two to three years. This means it will be left with a much-reduced cushion against future changes in its income or spending; and will have limited opportunity to invest in service improvements

Reserves are set to fall significantly. At the start of 2020/21 the service had reserves totalling £12.2m, this total is set to fall to £3.6m by 2023/24. Around £6m from reserves is planned to be spent building the new training centre and station development in Huntingdon.

By 2023/24 the service plans to reduce its general reserve from £3.1m to £1.2m, and its earmarked reserves will be £2.4m; there is a risk that they will have been depleted too much. For example, the service overspent on some staffing budgets by around

£0.5m and on supplies, services and IT by a further £0.7m in 2020/21; the remaining reserves will provide less scope to balance future annual budget shortfalls.

The service's plans do not say how reserves will be used to promote new ways of working. They offer limited opportunity to invest, save or cushion any unexpected reduction in income/increase in costs.

More could be done to link fleet and estates strategies to the priorities in the integrated risk management plan (IRMP)

The service has fleet and estates strategies, but they are not clearly linked to the risks in the IRMP.

The service does not routinely or systematically monitor the efficiency and effectiveness of its fleet. For example, the service has identified local performance indicators that could be used to understand existing and future trends to deliver service improvements, but they have not been developed yet.

The service is not properly assessing the impact any changes in estate and fleet provision or future innovation may have on risk. For example, there are no performance measures other than budgetary spend. Budget planning is done annually and simply set to increase incrementally year to year.

The service uses technology to improve efficiencies

The service actively considers how changes in technology and future innovation may affect risk. It also seeks to exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness presented by changes in technology. For example, it uses scanners and tablets for fire appliance (fire engine) equipment checks and inventories. This improves the efficiency and effectiveness of its asset management process.

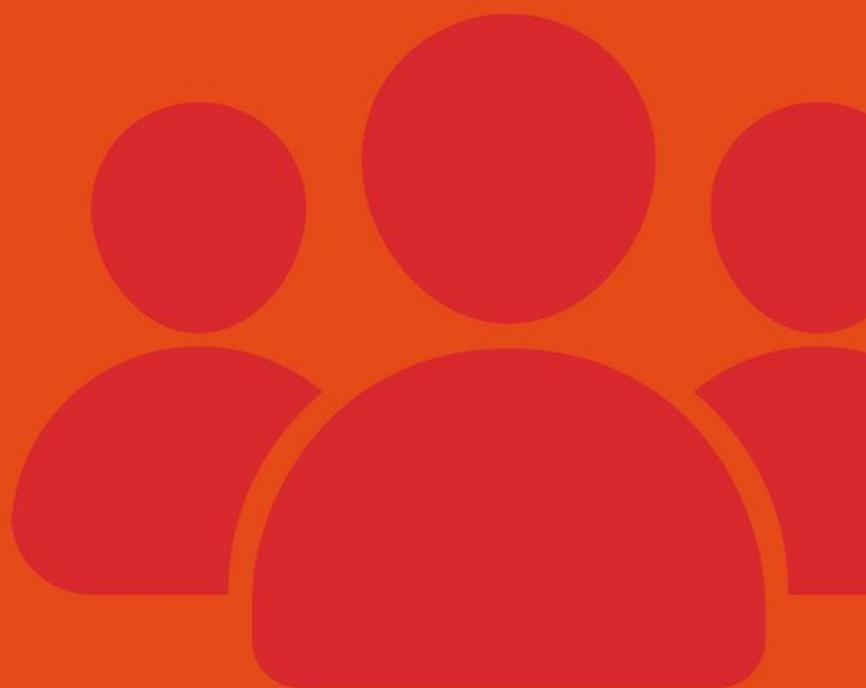
The service has invested in a service transformation and efficiency programme (STEP) that automates and streamlines business processes including:

- on-call payments;
- sickness;
- performance and development reviews;
- recruitment; and
- budget information.

STEP has removed the need for paper forms and reduced duplication, as a single data entry populates multiple systems.

The service has put in place the capacity and capability needed to achieve sustainable transformation, and it routinely seeks opportunities to work with others to improve efficiency and provide better services in the future. For example, it is developing its own interface (through STEP) for a new mobilising system (Systel) and on-call availability system (Gartan) to make savings.

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

The service has created a positive working culture where staff feel valued and listened to. The behaviours it expects and the values it promotes are understood and demonstrated by all.

The service seeks to establish a culture of learning and development. It makes courses and opportunities available to all staff. And it seeks to learn as an organisation, for example, working with external companies, the British Safety Council, and a listening event, to get evaluation and feedback on how it can improve working practices and support for staff.

Since our last inspection, it has improved the awareness and understanding of its career management process among all staff.

However, many courses are optional. For example, leadership development. There is confusion over some mandatory courses, including [safeguarding](#); equality diversity and inclusion; and health and safety. And the personal development review process lacks assurance. It is applied inconsistently. This means that the service cannot assure itself that all staff have the required capability and competence to deliver the objectives of the IRMP.

Additionally, more could be done to:

- ensure that mandatory courses are completed on time and kept up to date;
- increase staff diversity; and
- improve the consistency and quality of equality impact assessments.

Promoting the right values and culture



Good (2018: Good)

Cambridgeshire 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.

Innovative practice

The service commissioned the British Safety Council to undertake an assurance assessment of its response to keeping its staff safe from COVID-19.

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 positive working culture, where staff understand values and required behaviours

The service continues to have well-defined values that are understood by staff. Behaviours that reflect service values are shown at all levels across the service. Our staff survey, conducted as part of this inspection, indicates that 98.3 percent of respondents (284 of 289) are aware of the service's statement of values.

The leadership team is visible. For example, throughout the 2020/21 lockdowns senior leaders communicated regularly with staff via vlogs (on Workplace) and engagement visits when safe to do so. Senior managers are accessible and approachable. Staff told us that they feel they are listened to.

Senior leaders act as role models. For example, the senior leadership team volunteers to support the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

There is a positive working culture across the service, with staff engaged in decisions that affect them. Eighty-four percent (244 of 289) of staff responding to our survey said they are confident their ideas or suggestions will be listened to.

The service prioritises mental and physical health and 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 to support both physical and mental health. For example, the service has/offers:

- a well-resourced occupational health department that offers health and wellbeing advice, health screening, medicals and fitness testing (among other things);
- an effective trauma-focused peer support system – [Trauma Risk Management \(TRiM\)](#) with trained staff to support colleagues who have experienced a traumatic, or potentially traumatic event; and
- 24/7 access for all staff to an employee assistance programme (from an external health provider).

There are good provisions in place to promote staff wellbeing, including:

- a dedicated Wellbeing Matters Hub on Workplace;
- contributions to private health insurance;
- Employee Assistance Programme; and
- signposting to provisions such as [MIND](#) mental health charity.

All staff we spoke to understand and have confidence in the wellbeing support processes available. Our survey indicates that 94 percent of staff feel the service is effective at ensuring their wellbeing is supported. Many told us they had used the wellbeing services and described how helpful they found the support they had received.

The service was one of the first to purchase and introduce lateral flow testing for its staff.

It exceeds expectations in supporting mental health. For example, it recently conducted a staff mental health survey to understand their concerns and where (additional) provisions are needed.

The service's wellbeing strategy focuses on preventing, protecting and responding to mental health and wellbeing needs. It is clearly linked to the IRMP. It was clear to us that developing and improving the ways in which it can support staff mental health and wellbeing is a priority for the service.

It promotes a coaching culture and has started to encourage regular conversations between line managers and staff about wellbeing, performance and development. We are interested to see how this develops.

The service manages health and safety effectively

The service has effective and well understood health and safety policies and procedures in place, including:

- the service uses a service transformation and efficiency programme (STEP) to record and manage reporting and investigations;
- the health and safety committee and chief officer advisory group monitor and report on remedial actions; and
- staff are kept informed via health and safety bulletins and Workplace.

The assistant chief fire officer provides oversight.

The staff survey indicates that:

- 97.9 percent (283 of 289) of respondents understand the policies and procedures the service has in place; and
- 94.5 percent (273 of 289) of respondents feel that they have been provided appropriate, and properly-fitting, personal protective equipment to make sure they can work safely.

There is an organisational culture of continual learning and seeking to improve workable practice. For example, the service commissioned the British Safety Council to assure and assess its actions to keep staff safe from COVID-19 while maintaining operational response.

Staff we spoke to have confidence in the health and safety approach taken by the service.

The service has good absence processes, but more could be done to ensure they are applied fairly and consistently

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.

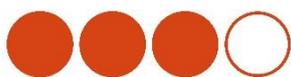
We found there are clear processes in place to manage absences for all staff. There is clear guidance for managers, who are confident in the process. Staff we spoke to have a clear understanding of the service's absence reporting processes.

However, we found inconsistencies in the levels of training in absence management and decision making. Most managers had the knowledge and skills to conduct absence management, but some felt insufficiently trained. They weren't confident that they could recognise symptoms of poor mental health and wellbeing.

In response to staff feedback, the service recently revised its absence management policy to ensure fairness in absence management. Managers are now more closely supported by the service's occupational health and human resource people partners. We are interested to see how this develops.

The service told us that absence stayed almost the same between 1 April 2020 and 30 March 2021, with 19.71 and 20.07 days lost per person per year, respectively. COVID-19 did not have an impact on absence rates.

Getting the right people with the right skills



Good (2018: Good)

Cambridgeshire 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.

Area for improvement

The service should assure itself that all staff are appropriately trained for their role.

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

The service aligns skills and capabilities to its IRMP

The service has good workforce planning processes in place. This makes sure skills and capabilities align with what is needed to effectively deliver the [integrated risk management plan \(IRMP\)](#). The workforce plan is monitored by the development advisory board. It includes the service's approved and actual establishment levels. The plan forecasts future staffing levels, potential impacts and a range of options to reduce the risk of high levels of staff retirement.

Most staff told us that they could access the training they need to be effective in their role; 91.7 percent (265 of 289) of those who responded to the staff survey agreed that they have received sufficient training to effectively do their job.

The service monitors staff competence through the training, recording and competence system. It regularly updates its understanding of staff skills and risk-critical safety capabilities through performance management dashboards on the intranet.

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.

A culture of continuous learning and improvement is promoted, but many courses are optional and not taken

Through our staff survey, most staff told us that they were able to access a range of learning and development resources. We are pleased to see that the service has a range of resources in place. These include e-learning modules, coaching, mentoring and shadowing.

The service promotes a culture of continuous improvement. Staff are encouraged to be responsible for their own learning and development; and managers accountable for facilitating staff development. The service offers two leadership development programmes, 'insight' and 'aspire'. However, these are optional and not a requirement for promotion.

We did not get a consistent response when we asked staff about mandatory programmes (training and e-learning). For example, we found that many staff had not completed equality, diversity and inclusion training, or it was out of date. Many staff were unsure if it was mandatory, although their managers believed it was. Meanwhile, the people team said it was mandatory, but that staff were responsible for their own compliance.

More rigour is needed to ensure that everyone in the service completes mandatory training, as well as help staff maximise the learning and development opportunities available. If not, there is a risk they may lack important skills for the future. This will affect what the service can offer the public.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity



Good (2018: Good)

Cambridgeshire 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 monitor equality impact assessments and review any actions agreed as a result.

Innovative practice

The service commissioned a listening event to better understand the impact on its workforce of the COVID-19 virus and the tragic death of George Floyd.

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

The service proactively seeks, and acts on, staff feedback and challenge

The service has improved the way it manages staff feedback since our last inspection. For example, we saw a dedicated group on an internal communication platform for staff to ask questions and seek feedback, and post incident reporting and equipment reporting forms.

Staff told us that leaders are approachable and open to ideas. They respond in a timely fashion to feedback and challenge, and to resolve workforce concerns. The service's 2019 staff engagement survey had an 80 percent response rate, which is a ten percentage point increase on the response rate for the 2015 survey.

Most staff felt able to challenge ideas without having to worry about how they would be treated afterwards.

More could be done to ensure that staff see the promotion process as fair, and increase diversity across the organisation

There is an open, fair and honest recruitment process for staff or those wishing to work for the fire and rescue service.

The service has put considerable effort into developing its recruitment, promotion and progression processes so that they are fair and understood by staff. The promotion and recruitment policies are comprehensive and cover opportunities into all roles. Recruitment opportunities are advertised internally and externally. But there was a perception among some staff we spoke to that there is a culture of networking prior to a promotional process, which made them feel disadvantaged.

Cambridgeshire has the third highest proportion (23.7 percent) of workforce that is female of all fire and rescue services in England. However, this varies greatly by role:

- on-call firefighters – females make up 5 percent of the workforce;
- [wholetime firefighters](#) – 7 percent;
- support staff – 54 percent; and
- fire control – 83 percent.

More should be done to increase staff diversity. Between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2020:

- 5.7 percent of new joiners self-declared as being from a BAME background (of those who stated their ethnicity); and
- 28.6 percent of new joiners were female.

However, for firefighter recruitment specifically:

- 1.6 percent of new recruits were from a BAME background (of those who stated their ethnicity); and
- 9.9 percent were female.

At 31 March 2020:

- 3.4 percent of the service's total workforce was from a BAME background (of those who stated their ethnicity) compared to 9.7 percent of the local population; and
- 23.7 percent of the workforce was female.

The service has improved the way it tackles bullying, harassment and discrimination

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

Through our survey, 5.5 percent (16 of 289) of staff told us they had been subject to bullying or harassment, and 8.0 percent (23 of 289) to discrimination over the past 12 months.

We are pleased to find that the service did not report any formal bullying, harassment or discriminatory cases since our last inspection.

Most staff are confident in the service's approach to tackling bullying, harassment and discrimination, grievances and disciplinary matters. Staff told us they felt empowered to challenge inappropriate behaviour and that the service would support them.

The service has trained all staff on what steps they should take if they encounter inappropriate behaviour. Service leaders have put in place several mechanisms for feedback from staff, and have improved how they act so that staff, including those from diverse backgrounds and under-represented groups, have a better experience.

Although the service promotes equality, diversity, and inclusion, more could be done to monitor and review equality impact assessments

The service has improved its approach to equality, diversity and inclusion and is making sure it can offer the right services to its communities and support staff with a [protected characteristic\(s\)](#). For example, the service has an Inclusion Steering Group that oversees an equality, diversity and inclusion network. That network includes representatives from the women's network and representative bodies, and has a range of RESPECT champions, positive action officers and diversity custodians. (RESPECT champions are volunteers from across the organisation who have been trained to listen to, support and direct people who feel they are experiencing bullying or harassing behaviours.)

It has developed several ways to engage with staff on equality, diversity and inclusion. This includes methods to build all staff awareness, as well as targeted engagement to identify issues that affect different staff groups, including to remove disproportionality. The service is a member of several external networks including [Women in the Fire Service](#), and [the Employers' Network for Equality and Inclusion \(enei\)](#). There is a dedicated equality and inclusion forum on Workplace.

The service commissioned a listening event to better understand the impacts of COVID-19 and the tragic death of George Floyd on its workforce. An external company conducted group interviews between August and November 2021 and has communicated its findings. We are interested to see how the service builds on the findings.

It has a process in place to assess equality impact. However, we found that the service was not monitoring whether the assessments had been completed, or their quality (if they had). It should ensure that impact assessments are completed to a high standard so that it can use them to improve equality, diversity and inclusion.

Managing performance and developing leaders



Good (2018: Good)

Cambridgeshire 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 the performance development review process is being applied consistently for all staff.

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

More should be done to ensure that all staff have meaningful performance conversations

The service has a good performance management system and a clear policy. It encourages staff to have high quality, regular one-to-one wellbeing and performance conversations with their line managers. Fifty-four percent (157 of 289) of respondents to our staff survey said they have regular discussions with their manager about their performance.

An area for improvement from our last inspection was for the service to improve understanding and application of the new performance development review process among staff. We are disappointed to find that the understanding and application of this process is still inconsistent.

We found staff (of varying levels and through interview, focus group and survey) who had not had a conversation about learning and development, or a personal development review in the last 12 months. Not all staff had specific and individual

objectives. And not all had had their performance assessed in the past year – many were only having development conversations.

The service has a system to assure itself that staff have regular, high-quality performance, development and review conversations where specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely (SMART) objectives (aligned to the IRMP) are recorded. However, we found that not all managers were recording conversations or specific, individual objectives (aligned to the IRMP). Personal development conversation sessions for staff and ‘developing your team’ and ‘objective’ sessions for managers are optional.

The service cannot be assured that all staff are treated fairly as it doesn’t monitor whether conversations happen or ensure managers are competent at having high-quality performance and development conversations with their staff.

The service has improved awareness and understanding of its career management process among all staff, as well as the development of leadership and high-potential staff at all levels

The service has effective succession planning processes in place which allow it to effectively manage the career pathways of staff, including into leadership roles and roles requiring specialist skills.

To manage talent, the service has:

- a talent management strategy;
- a performance and potential framework; and
- a development advisory board.

The board measures potential and performance using a talent matrix. It helps determine emerging and advancing talent, as well as those ready for promotion.

Staff who have been identified as high potential are offered leadership development opportunities through the aspire and insight programmes. (These programmes are optional.)

The service advertises all talent and leadership opportunities fairly through its internal communication platform for all staff to consider.

Selection processes are managed consistently and fairly by the development and assessment board. Temporary promotions are used appropriately to fill short-term resourcing gaps.

We are pleased that staff had an awareness and understanding of the service’s career management processes.

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