

Fire & Rescue Service 2021/22

Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Cornwall 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 Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service in July 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 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 Cornwall 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.

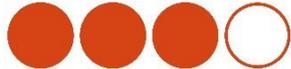
If we find shortcomings in the service, we will judge it as requires improvement.

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	 Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Understanding fires and other risks	 Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Preventing fires and other risks	 Requires improvement	Good
Protecting the public through fire regulation	 Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Responding to fires and other emergencies	 Requires improvement	Inadequate
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	 Requires improvement	Good

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

HMI summary

It was a pleasure to re-visit Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service, and I am grateful for the positive and constructive way that the service and its staff engaged with our inspection. I want to thank the service for working with us by accommodating the virtual approach of this inspection. Inspections usually take a hybrid approach but inspecting during the pandemic meant we had to adapt. I also want to recognise the disruption caused by the pandemic. This has been considered in our findings.

The service has experienced resource limitations and other challenges, including changes in senior leadership, COVID-19, and preparations for the G7 conference. However, I am satisfied with some aspects of the performance of the service.

The tri-service safety officer collaboration has developed and been expanded. This innovative scheme has provided a range of community safety benefits for several rural Cornish communities, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. This has led to financial efficiencies for the service and its partners.

I am also pleased the culture in the service has improved. There are signs of progress in people management. But there are barriers to the service improving equality, diversity and inclusion. It must also get better at identifying and developing future leaders and staff with high potential.

I am pleased that I can discharge the cause of concern we found in our 2018 inspection. But it is disappointing that the service has been slow to respond to some areas for improvement identified in our last inspection. And we identified one new cause of concern. The service still doesn't have effective systems in place to manage risk-critical information. This information should be collected, shared and reviewed consistently and when it is needed.

It also should improve the alignment between the community risk profile, risk management plans and key service strategies. Its risk management plans must include simple, clear, measurable outcomes. It can then use them to show progress and effectiveness to the public.

Management oversight and assurance still isn't good enough in several areas. These include acting on shared risk information, following up fire safety requirements and completing actions from equality impact assessments. As a result, the service cannot assure itself that important actions are completed.

The service must robustly address its finance and resource needs so it can build capacity for improvement and change. It should base resourcing decisions on risk, not on savings.

I am satisfied with some aspects of Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service's performance. But there are areas it still needs to improve.



Wendy Williams

HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Service in numbers



Response

Cornwall

England

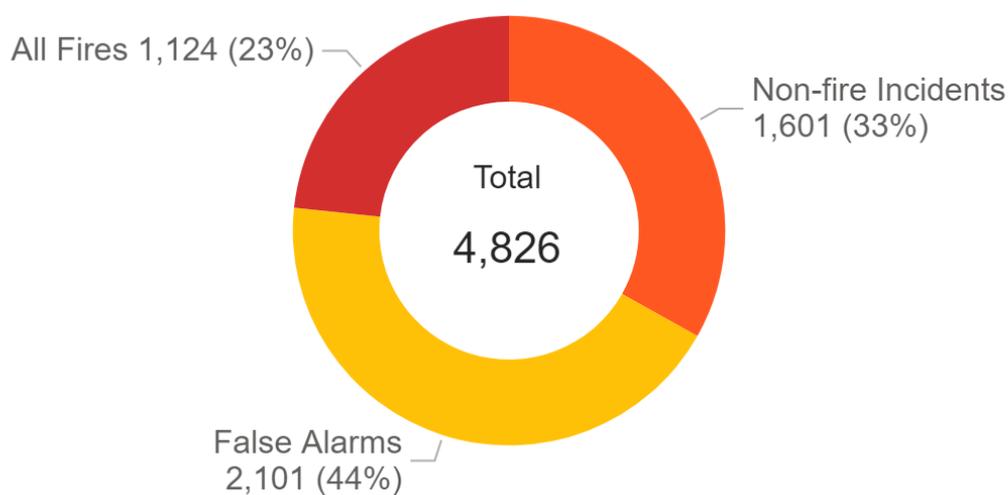
Incidents attended per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	8.42	9.16
Home fire safety checks carried out by fire and rescue service per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	3.81	4.47
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises Year ending 31 March 2020	1.75	2.55
Average availability of pumps Year ending 31 March 2020	89.20%	83.07%



Cost

Firefighter cost per person per year Year ending 31 March 2020	£26.73	£23.82
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Incidents attended in the year to 31 March 2021

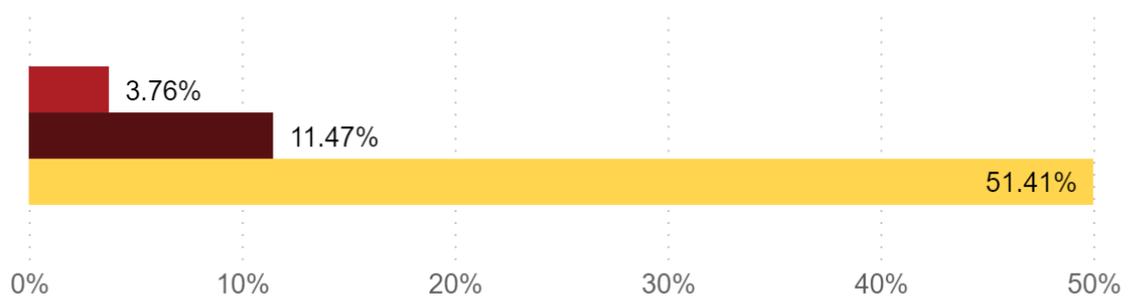




Five-year change in total workforce 2015 to 2020	2.27%	-5.30%
Number of firefighters per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2020	1.05	0.63
Percentage of firefighters who are wholetime Year ending 31 March 2020	32.38%	65.10%

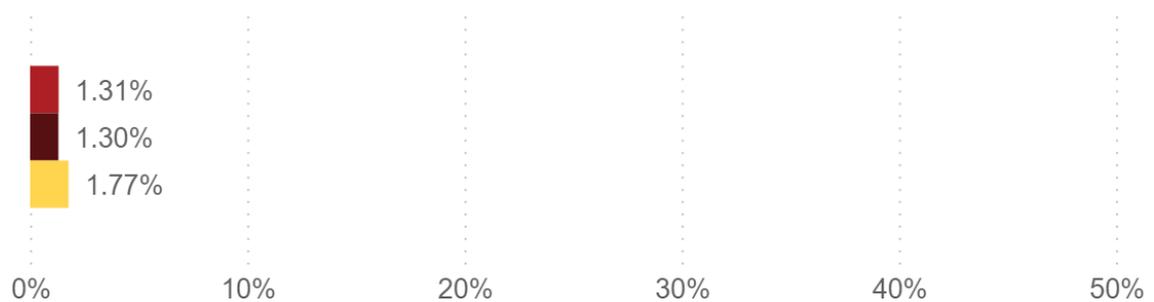
Percentage population, firefighters and workforce who are female as at 31 March 2020

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?



Requires improvement

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. Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service's overall effectiveness requires improvement.

The service should make clearer links between its risk assessment and risk management plans.

We are concerned that the service is not reviewing or updating risk information for firefighters promptly. This affects public and firefighter safety.

We saw good progress in response to the Grenfell Tower inquiry. But the service needs to improve its handling of fire survival guidance calls.

The protection team is still understaffed so high-risk buildings are not inspected often enough.

The service reduced the prevention team to cut costs. But now there is a backlog of high-risk home safety visit referrals.

The service is still not evaluating all its prevention activity, so it can't assess what actions are effective and how well they work. It needs to do more to assure the quality of its protection work.

Positively, we found a notable improvement in [safeguarding](#) knowledge since our last inspection. And we were impressed by the innovative tri-service safety officer collaboration. Incident commanders are well trained, and the service keeps the public informed about incidents. It has good arrangements for major incidents involving other emergency services, including neighbouring fire services.

We saw improvements since our first inspection, but the service has not made enough progress.

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies



Requires improvement (2018: Requires improvement)

Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement 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.

Cause of concern

The service still does not have effective systems in place to manage risk-critical information to make sure it is collected, shared and reviewed in a consistent and timely manner.

Recommendations

By 31 August 2021, the service should:

- have a plan in place to manage the backlog of outstanding site-specific risk visits;
- make sure that it regularly updates risk information on [mobile data terminals](#), so that firefighters responding to incidents can see the most up-to-date information;
- make sure that the systems it has in place to share risk-critical safety information between departments are effective; and
- review the plans it has in place to undertake site-specific risk visits to make sure they are achievable with quality assurance and strategic oversight arrangements in place.

Area for improvement

The service should make sure its integrated risk management plan includes clear outcomes which show the public how it is mitigating risk.

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

The service uses a wide range of information to identify risk

The service considers a wide range of risk information from a variety of sources. It analyses incident data and risk information in depth to develop its strategic assessment of risk. It refers to this as the risk-based evidence profile (RBEP). When developing the RBEP, the service worked with Cornwall Council colleagues and drew on data from internal and external sources. For example, it used population information from the Office of National Statistics and traffic forecasts from the Department of Transport.

When appropriate, the service has consulted communities and stakeholders such as Disability Cornwall and the Dyslexia Council. The majority of the consultation has been to explain the proposals in its [integrated risk management plan \(IRMP\)](#). Examples include changes in its local response standards in 2020 and to its use of resources in 2021. It also worked with the Consultation Institute, a non-profit organisation that promotes best practice, to assure and improve its consultation process.

Lack of engagement means the service misses chances to understand risk to hard-to-reach communities

The service recognises it has not spoken with all communities and interested parties to improve its understanding of local risk. So, it is missing opportunities to identify [vulnerable](#) and harder-to-reach groups during its community risk assessment. It is reviewing its communication approach so it can address this for future assessments.

The integrated risk management plan is not clearly linked to the risk profile

The service's IRMP provides a summary outline of how it will use its prevention, protection and response resources to manage risk. This explanation is not clearly linked to the RBEP or the performance measures included in the plan. The service does not clearly show the outcomes it will use to demonstrate to the public that it is mitigating risk. It does not show how it will monitor the effectiveness of the plan and report this in an accessible and easily understood way. There is limited information on what steps the service plans to take in response to anticipated change in risk levels.

Risk information is not reviewed and updated quickly enough

The service collects risk information about the sites and buildings it has identified as being the highest risk. Firefighters have this information and use it to make sure they know the hazards they face when attending an incident. This allows them to keep the public and themselves safe. The information is also shared with prevention and protection staff to inform their work.

When we inspected in 2018, we found problems with the time it took to update these records. Staff were often relying on paper copies which are difficult to keep up to date. We raised this as part of a cause of concern following that inspection.

We sampled a number of risk records during this inspection. We were concerned to find not all records had been reviewed as planned and changes are not shared effectively or on a timely basis. We were disappointed to find over 20 percent of

records had not been reviewed by their due date. One record was more than four years out of date.

Prevention, protection and response teams do not share risk information effectively. The process to do this is used inconsistently and the service was not able to assure itself that critical risk information was updated and available to operational staff. For example, the protection team recorded details about changes in evacuation procedures in a high-rise building. But despite this, these details were not made available to fire engines or control through the risk information system.

We were told that it could take between two or three days and several months to add updated risk information to the [mobile data terminals](#) on fire engines. So, firefighters do not always have prompt access to the most up-to-date information they need to keep the public and themselves safe.

Control passes short-term and temporary risk information to operational staff. But this is dependent on local staff identifying the information and passing it to control, and there is no central oversight of this.

The service uses learning from incidents to update its response plans

We were reassured to find the service has a range of mechanisms for learning and understanding risk following operational activity. We reviewed a sample of major incidents and multi-agency exercises and heard examples of shared learning from local and national incidents. For example, the meeting point for Newlyn Downs was moved to a better position after a multi-agency exercise.

The service has a single, co-ordinating department for operational learning it receives and shares nationally. We saw an example of information the service provided which was shared nationally. And we also saw a staff briefing based on learning the service received.

Good preparation for high-rise incidents, but more work needed to support residents

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.

Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service has responded to learning from this tragedy positively and proactively. The service has two high-rise residential buildings in its area and has already assessed the risk of both. It is working with private sector housing partners to identify and assess other similar residential buildings.

It has carried out a fire safety audit of the two high-rise residential buildings. Response teams have undertaken familiarisation visits and training exercises at the buildings. The prevention team has engaged with residents at both sites, but has not made any home safety visits.

Preventing fires and other risks



Requires improvement (2018: Good)

Cornwall 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, 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.

Areas for improvement

- The service should make sure it allocates enough resources to meet its prevention strategy.
- The service should make sure it adequately resources prevention work in areas covered by on-call stations.
- The service should evaluate its prevention activity so it understands what works.

Innovative practice

The service and its partners have developed the tri-service safety officer (TSSO) scheme. This combines aspects of fire, police and ambulance prevention roles into a single officer. The initiative achieves financial efficiencies and community safety benefits for the community and the services involved.

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

Prevention strategy linked to risk but needs updating

The service has a prevention strategy which covers the period 2019–2022. It identifies the service's main priorities as accidental dwelling fires and road traffic collisions. It refers to additional risks such as drowning, carbon monoxide poisoning and deliberate fire setting. The strategy contains overarching objectives for improving community safety. But there are no clear and measurable objectives which the service can use to show the impact of its prevention work.

The strategy links to risk identified in the IRMP. But it has not been updated to take account of changes. Examples of such changes are the recent reduction in prevention staff; and deliberate fire setting being removed as a priority from the IRMP.

A recent restructure has seen the central prevention team reduced to fewer than four full-time staff. We were told the service intended to use other staff to support prevention. For example, firefighters will do road safety work. This appeared to be in its early stages. The service does not have a clear plan detailing how it will effectively fulfil its prevention duties with reduced resources.

Prevention work is mainly done by a central team. This is complemented by the tri-service safety officers, who do community engagement and [home fire safety visits](#), as well as by [wholetime firefighters](#) who make home fire safety visits and organise some local risk-reduction initiatives such as beach safety in St Ives and road safety at Falmouth.

We were surprised to find the service has made little progress in improving its prevention work in on-call areas. This was an area for improvement in 2018. The service recognises that it has limited capacity to reach on-call areas, most of which are remote. We heard that some [on-call station staff](#) make home fire safety visits, although these are primarily from local referrals. We are not assured it has the resources to make sure there is effective coverage of all on-call areas.

Appropriate prevention work has been maintained during the COVID-19 pandemic

In 2020, we found the service had adapted appropriately to do prevention work during the pandemic. We were pleased to see work has continued with the local authority to identify vulnerable people. Specialist staff make COVID-safe home safety visits for those in greatest need. Numbers of operational staff making home safety visits were limited during the second and third lockdowns. The service told us that as soon as restrictions were lifted these would be restarted.

Prevention focuses on greatest risk

The service prioritises its home safety visit referrals well. It assesses six factors to determine if a request is high risk. It has set a 15-day target for completing high-risk referrals, although we heard that the team will try to do these sooner. In some cases, an urgent referral will be sent to local wholetime firefighters. Medium-risk referrals get a visit within 30 days. Low-risk people get an information pack.

Reduced staff and pandemic have caused a backlog in prevention work

At the time of our inspection, there was a backlog of 237 high-risk referrals waiting to be completed. This was due to the impact of COVID restrictions and recent reductions in the number of specialist staff. The service said it had been unable to keep the level of medium- and low-risk referrals under review.

To mitigate the loss of some administrative staff, the service plans to update the home safety visits recording system. A delay to this affected the availability of central staff time to complete visits. The service told us it was working to reduce the backlog, but it had not set a date for completion.

We heard that the service had engaged with residents of high-rise buildings in Cornwall. This included awareness activity with a local housing association and some coffee mornings hosted by local operational crews. But we were disappointed to find that it had not offered or completed any home fire safety visits.

Staff feel confident to do home safety visits and other prevention work

Operational staff we spoke to were confident in their ability to plan and complete home fire safety visits. Wholetime staff receive training as part of their early development. They also shadow colleagues on such visits. Selected on-call staff receive some familiarisation so they can make these visits, but the detail of this was not clear to us. The central team are the only members of staff who are trained to do living safe and well checks.

The service has improved its response to safeguarding concerns

The service had made good progress in making sure its staff can recognise vulnerability and make appropriate safeguarding referrals. This was highlighted as part of a cause of concern in 2018. Staff we spoke to at wholetime and on-call stations were confident to recognise signs of vulnerability and make a referral or seek advice. We heard many practical examples from staff to support this.

We were pleased to see the service has recently introduced a specialist safeguarding role which is jointly funded with Devon and Cornwall Police. This is a positive move. It is intended to improve how the service handles complex safeguarding cases. It makes it easier for the fire service, Devon and Cornwall Police and Cornwall Council to share information about vulnerable people.

The service collaborates well with others to improve community safety

Cornwall FRS works with several local organisations to reduce community risk. The primary focus of these arrangements is home fire safety visits. The service told us it had 19 active partnerships, including with local housing associations such as Ocean and Coastal Housing, and Western Power. Where appropriate the service refers individuals to other organisations following either a safeguarding or other concern identified during a home fire safety visit.

Most partners refer clients to the service for a home fire safety check. Three partners have staff who are trained to do basic risk checks and fit smoke detectors. The service records 800–900 home safety visits a year by their partners.

We were pleased to see the service has continued to work with Devon and Cornwall Police and South Western Ambulance Service Foundation Trust (SWASFT) to develop the tri-service safety officer (TSSO) role which combines aspects of fire, police and ambulance roles into a single officer. TSSOs do prevention and emergency response work on behalf of the service in some of its rural communities. Following evaluation, the scheme has recently been extended to a further three locations in Cornwall. This is an innovative practice that achieves financial efficiencies and community safety benefits for the community and the services involved.

No co-ordinated programme to reduce the impact of deliberate fire setting

During our 2018 inspection we found the service had joint working and information sharing arrangements to tackle fire-setting behaviour. We were disappointed that the service has not continued this. We heard this was due to a reduction in staff and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We were given examples of visits to provide safety advice. During these visits the service supplied specialist equipment such as smoke detectors and fire-retardant bedding. It also referred people to adult social services. These visits were in response to referrals to the service about fire setting and they were not part of a co-ordinated programme of work.

The service recognises the limitations of its current approach. It told us it has plans to train the tri-service safety officers to tackle fire-setting behaviour. This work would be overseen and co-ordinated by the new safeguarding role which is working with Devon and Cornwall Police. We look forward to seeing how these plans develop.

The service still has no effective evaluation arrangements for prevention work

We were disappointed to find the service had made little progress towards evaluation of the full range of its prevention work. We highlighted this as an area for improvement during our last inspection in 2018. We heard that the service continues to do a before and after survey to assess the quality of its home fire safety checks. But we saw little other evidence of evaluation.

The service would benefit from establishing a routine approach to evaluating its prevention work. This will help it better understand the benefits of its prevention initiatives and improve its service to the public. Given the limited resources the service has for prevention, this would help it to ensure its initiatives make the best contribution to its community risk-reduction objectives.

Protecting the public through fire regulation



Requires improvement (2018: Requires improvement)

Cornwall 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 make sure it allocates enough resources to complete its risk-based inspection programme.
- The service should make sure it has an effective quality assurance process, so staff carry out audits to a consistent 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.

There is limited information for building owners and public about the protection strategy

The service has developed a protection strategy which outlines how it intends to review safety in the highest-risk buildings. The strategy reflects the properties highlighted in its 2019–2022 IRMP as presenting the greatest risk.

The strategy is very high level. It provides limited information for the public and building owners about how the service will work with businesses, review safety and act on shortfalls. There are no measures which show how the service will evaluate the effectiveness of its protection work or improvements in public safety.

The process the service has for sharing information is not good. It is used inconsistently, and the service can't assure itself information is acted on in a timely way. For example, we saw information about risks in a residential building which was not followed up by the protection team for nearly ten months.

Limited progress towards providing enough resources to the protection team

We were particularly disappointed to find the service has yet to secure additional resources for its protection team. We identified this as an area for improvement in 2018. The service has taken too long to act on it.

A recent enquiry by members of Cornwall Council accepted the need for additional posts in the protection team. But the service has not secured sustainable funding for the posts. So, it does not have a plan for recruiting all the additional staff it needs. Some more capacity has been brought into the team, but the funding for this is short term. The main impact of limited capacity in the protection team is that it can only visit high-risk buildings every five years. The service has assessed that it needs to visit them every three years.

Protection staff receive specialist training, to a nationally recognised level, for their roles. However, it takes two to three years to fully train an inspector. This will extend the time needed to build protection capacity once new staff are recruited. The service is training some operational staff to do lower-level fire safety work. This will help reduce some of the burden on their specialist protection colleagues.

The service plans to restart face-to-face audits after the COVID-19 pandemic

We considered how the service had adapted its protection activity during our COVID-19 specific inspection in September 2020. At that time, we found it had adapted its protection work well. The service had not changed its operating model since. But we were pleased to hear that it plans to restart face-to-face audits as lockdown measures are lifted.

Protection is aligned to risk but the risk-based inspection plan lacks detail

The service's risk-based inspection programme (RBIP) is based on the risk identified in its IRMP and protection strategy. We were pleased to find this had improved since our first inspection in 2018. Protection staff we spoke to had a clear and consistent understanding of the highest-risk buildings, and they understood where risk reduction activity would be focused. However, the RBIP contained limited detail about the time it would take the service to visit all high-risk buildings and the resources it needs to do this.

Good progress auditing high-rise buildings and those with ACM cladding

In Cornwall there is one high-rise residential building and one multi-storey residential building with ACM cladding similar to Grenfell. The service has visited and audited both buildings. It is working with the building managers to reduce the risk. Sprinklers have been installed and the evacuation procedures changed.

Operational staff have visited both buildings and done training exercises in them. So they are familiar with the buildings and with procedures for any incident. The service has established a partnership with private sector housing to jointly review other multi-storey residential accommodation in Cornwall.

Improved oversight of audits needed to ensure follow-up work is done

We reviewed a range of audits carried out at different premises across the service. This included audits that were made:

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

Not all the audits we reviewed were completed in a consistent or systematic way. In particular, some post-fire and low-risk audit records were missing details and follow-up inspections had not been completed in line with timescales that the service had given the building owners. The service should consider how it can better oversee its audits to make sure records are consistent and follow-up work completed in a timely manner.

No improvement in protection work quality assurance since our previous inspection

We were disappointed to find limited evidence of quality assurance of protection activity. This was an area for improvement we identified during our 2018 inspection.

When we last inspected, protection staff had their work reviewed for quality every quarter. Now, because of limited capacity, these reviews are every year. With an infrequent quality assurance process, the service will lose opportunities to promote consistency and drive improvement.

There has been some improvement in the use of enforcement powers

The service has made some progress in increasing its use of enforcement powers to deal with failures to comply with fire safety regulations.

There was a modest increase of 44 audits in 2019/20. But the number of enforcement notices issued more than doubled to 27. Although there were no prosecutions in 2019/20, the service told us about two successful fire safety prosecutions in 2020/21. And a further two are due to go to court.

The service recognises it has more work to do. It has some staff who are trained to investigate and prepare prosecutions. But the cases the service is dealing with were described as 'complicated' and are taking time to progress. The service should review recent and forthcoming cases when they conclude. This is to ensure it learns from them so it can make improvements.

The service works with others to improve building safety

We found the service regularly works with other organisations to regulate fire safety. It works with the Cornwall Council housing team on joint inspections of residential buildings. It has recently joint funded a post to bring specialist housing knowledge into the service as part of the national building risk review project.

We heard that the service works with other partners on joint inspections. And it shares information about risks in buildings with them. These partners include the Care Quality Commission, the Health and Safety Executive and Cornwall Council trading standards. The service also does petroleum and explosive licensing inspections.

The majority of building consultations are completed on time

The service does building control consultations with Cornwall Council and approved building inspectors. Cornwall Council told us it had a positive working relationship with the service. The council said the majority of consultation requests got a response within the agreed 14 working days. The council could talk to the service to resolve any delays.

The service uses its limited resources well to engage with businesses

The service told us capacity issues were affecting its ability to promote compliance with fire safety regulation to local businesses. It has worked with Cornwall Council on webinars for businesses where it advises businesses about their responsibility for managing fire safety. It also promotes business safety using social media. And it runs publicity campaigns in line with the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) (NFCC) campaign calendar.

The service told us it has six [primary authority](#) partnerships where it provides bespoke advice to assist businesses to meet their fire safety responsibilities. This is an area the service would like to expand should additional resources become available.

More could be done to highlight the problem of unwanted fire alarms

The service's main approach to unwanted fire signals is through a call challenge. As a result, it does not send an emergency response to approximately 33 percent of the automatic fire alarm calls it receives. This reduces the number of times fire engines are committed to unwanted calls and not available for genuine emergencies. But the service could do more to highlight to businesses the importance of managing their alarm systems to prevent unwanted calls.

Responding to fires and other emergencies



Requires improvement (2018: Inadequate)

Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement 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.

Areas for improvement

- The service should develop a response strategy which clearly links to the risks in its IRMP.
- The service should review its ability to provide fire survival guidance to many callers simultaneously. It should put in place a plan to increase capacity where required.

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

The response strategy is not linked to the IRMP

The service's response strategy isn't clearly linked to the risks identified in its IRMP. It has not reviewed the locations of its fire stations for over ten years. And its risk profile is based on incident types rather than specific locations.

To address changes in risk, the service has introduced measures to reduce the impact of seasonal demographic changes and the remoteness of some of its stations. These include a seasonal crewing increase at Newquay, enhanced crewing, and community safety support at Bodmin and tri-service officers who support on-call response.

The service told us it intends to review its station locations as part of research for its next community risk management plan in 2022. We look forward to seeing this progress.

The service does not meet its response standards

There are no national response standards against which the service can [benchmark](#) its performance for the public. The service introduced a new response standard in April 2020. This is an 11-minute response for wholetime and 16 minutes for on-call fire engines, it aims to achieve this for 70 percent of calls. The service doesn't meet these standards. It told us that in the first year (2020/21) it achieved these standards on 63.4 percent of occasions for wholetime and 65.1 percent of occasions for on-call.

The service recognises there is more it can do to improve this. It told us that it had recently upgraded the communications equipment at its fire stations. This would improve the speed of alerting firefighters. It expects this to improve performance against its response standard.

Fire engine availability is good

Given the predominantly rural nature of the service's area, travel times can be extensive. So, the service aims to crew its fire engines with five firefighters. It does this to ensure there are enough staff to deal with an incident while waiting for additional crews to arrive. The service set a performance standard of 87.5 percent of its fire engines available with a crew of five for the year 2019/20. The service exceeded this standard with 93 percent availability. We were pleased to see control staff had confidence in the accuracy and reliability of information about fire engine availability. This has improved since our last inspection.

Incident commanders are well trained

The service has a clear programme to train and assess its incident commanders. Incident commanders we spoke to were confident in their training and ability to command the full range of incidents they would be expected to face. This included large and multi-agency incidents, for which strategic commanders receive additional training. The service regularly assesses the skills of incident commanders.

As part of our inspection we interviewed incident commanders from across the service. We found them to be familiar with assessing risk, making decisions and recording information at incidents. And they did these things in line with national best practice, as well as the [joint emergency services interoperability principles \(JESIP\)](#).

[Operational discretion](#) allows incident commanders to use their professional judgment at incidents to make decisions in an unforeseen situation. The service has recently completed additional training on operational discretion. But we were not assured that this was fully understood by all incident commanders.

Emergency control staff have a greater involvement in debriefing

The service has focused on improving its debriefing process following our inspection in 2018. We were pleased to find this has seen critical control staff getting more involved in wider service debriefs, as well as their own team debriefs.

The use of online conferencing, which the service introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, had helped staff from control to attend debriefs. They can attend without leaving the control room. Staff we spoke to were clear about how the debrief process worked.

Handling of fire survival guidance calls needs to be improved

The service hasn't reviewed its ability to provide fire survival guidance to many callers simultaneously. This was identified as learning for fire services after the Grenfell Tower fire. We were told the service would find it difficult to resource fire survival guidance for 10 to 15 simultaneous callers. The service has arrangements to draw on call-handling resources from partner services in other parts of the country. But they have not planned and tested this for an incident involving multiple simultaneous calls about survival guidance. While staff appear to have received training in this area, the support material for managing calls was neither easy to access nor up to date.

We don't have confidence in the systems the service has to exchange real-time risk information with incident commanders, other responding partners and other supporting fire and rescue services or the public. The service has yet to introduce arrangements to pass large amounts of information from fire survival calls to incident commanders. Poor situational awareness limits the effectiveness of the advice the service can give the public.

Firefighters have better access to risk information

We sampled a range of risk information, including what is in place for firefighters responding to incidents at high-risk, high-rise buildings. The information we reviewed wasn't always up to date. For example, some records had not been reviewed within the timescale set by the service.

We did find that access to risk information on fire engines had improved since our last inspection in 2018. Staff told us that the mobile data terminals on fire engines had improved, were easier to operate and provided information quicker. The mobile data terminals also included risk information for the bordering service. We were told this information was updated every two weeks.

Control staff can't easily access all available risk information

Staff in emergency control have access to some risk information from the despatch system. They can access a wider range of risk information through a separate computer. But it is not connected to the despatch system. Staff have to leave their work position to access the computer. In practice this rarely happens.

Despite improvements in debriefing and operational learning, more work is needed

While there is still work to do, we were encouraged that the service has improved how it reviews incidents and learns from operational activity. This was raised as part of the service's cause of concern in 2018.

The service holds [hot debriefs](#) on site immediately after an incident, and formal debriefs later on. Staff told us these had increased since our last inspection in 2018

and it was easier to submit debrief and learning information using an online form. We were also told the outcomes from debriefs were easy to find, through a debrief document which is sent to all stations and made available on the service's intranet.

The operational assurance team reviews all information from debriefs and co-ordinates the service's follow-up actions. It has recently introduced a new tracker system to help with this. We found the system needed more work. It was not easy to search and retrieve information. Some information in the system was incomplete and it didn't allow the service to check that debrief actions had been completed. We look forward to seeing how the service develops the system and the improvements it brings once fully established.

There are good arrangements to keep the public informed about incidents

The service has effective systems to inform the public about ongoing incidents.

For major and significant incidents, Cornwall Council leads communications, with the service providing fire-specific messages and briefings. There is also a group of incident commanders with media training. They can provide media updates at smaller incidents.

The service makes extensive use of social media to provide incident information, updates and safety messages to the public. Information about recent incidents is also available from the service's website.

Areas which gave concern have improved

When we last inspected, we saw notable shortfalls in some areas. As these were significant, we gave the service a cause of concern with recommendations for improvement. We were pleased to find the service has made sufficient progress in these areas for the original cause of concern to be lifted. We will continue to work with the service to review its progress and make sure the improvements are sustained.

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents



Good (2018: Good)

Cornwall 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 well prepared for major and multi-agency incidents

The service has improved since 2018, and it has effective plans to deal with major and multi-agency incidents. It has considered the reasonably foreseeable risks it may face. These include site-specific risks such as Newlyn Downs and Wheal Jane mine; community risks such as wide area flooding; and event risks like the Historic Tall Ships and Maritime festival. Throughout the inspection, the service was working with blue light, local authority, and national partners to plan for the G7 conference held near St Ives.

The service has also worked with its bordering service, Devon and Somerset, to prepare for risks in their area which it could reasonably be asked to respond to. These include Devonport military docks and high-rise flats in Plymouth with cladding similar to Grenfell Tower.

The service shares risk information with Devon and Somerset fire service on a reciprocal basis. Firefighters can access this information through the mobile data terminals on fire engines.

There are good arrangements for major incidents

The service has good arrangements to respond to major and multi-agency incidents. Critical control staff were familiar with what to do when a major incident is declared, and they knew how to request [national resilience assets](#). Incident commanders receive specific major and multi-agency incident training and flexible duty officers are trained to run multi-agency briefings. Incident commanders we spoke to were confident in their ability to manage multi-agency incidents and work with partners.

The service and its local agency partners have signed the Combined Agency Emergency Response Protocol (CAERP). This details arrangements for responding to major incidents. We heard about the service working with partners to test response plans including an exercise at the Torpoint oil storage depot and a water supply exercise using a national resilience asset in St Ives.

Some staff at fire stations told us they were not regularly involved in major incident or multi-agency exercises. They were not clear about the programme for these exercises. The service should make sure the programme has effective management oversight and that all operational staff are included in such training.

The service can work with its neighbouring fire service

The service borders one fire and rescue service – Devon and Somerset. It works closely with its neighbouring service to make sure both services can work effectively together and provide emergency response into each other's areas. It regularly attends incidents with its neighbour. It is interoperable with this service and can form part of a multi-agency response.

Operational staff from Cornwall FRS visit Devon and Somerset frequently for risk familiarisation and training. There is an annual training update for Cornwall FRS staff in Devon and Somerset on the capability and use of national resilience assets.

The service has a plan for cross-border exercising, but it needs updating

The service has an exercise plan which includes multi-agency and cross-border exercises. The service has completed some cross-border exercises recently. But progress on the plan had been affected by the COVID pandemic and some exercises had been postponed. The service should review and update its plan to make sure its staff are prepared for incidents at the sites in the plan.

Incident commanders understand JESIP

The incident commanders we interviewed had been trained in, and were familiar with, the JESIP. They were confident in these. They knew when they should be applied and could describe the joint decision model and decision-control process. The service could give us examples of the principles being applied in practice. This included a recent incident involving a crashed military aircraft. Virtual working arrangements developed during COVID allowed the incident command group to be established very quickly.

There are good arrangements to work with partners

The service has good arrangements to respond to emergencies with other partners in the Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly [local resilience forum \(LRF\)](#). It contributes to the assessment of risk sites and provides specialist knowledge when planning response to, for example, sites which are registered as presenting a major hazard.

It is a valued member of the LRF. During the pandemic it took the initial lead on procurement of PPE. It also led on PPE distribution, supported the NHS and care homes by fitting face masks for staff and delivered welfare packages to vulnerable people. The service also supported South Western Ambulance Service Foundation Trust (SWASFT) by providing staff to drive ambulances. It continued to support SWASFT in this way during the inspection. The trust told us this had allowed it to maintain a 'business as usual' response to emergency calls throughout the winter, despite increased demand.

The service works with its partners to review plans for response to risk sites. For example, we were told about a recent review which highlighted an improved site for the multi-agency strategic holding area. This was incorporated into the plan when it was updated in 2020.

The service learns from national services and organisations

Cornwall FRS has good arrangements to share and receive operational learning nationally. This is managed by the operational assurance team, which acts as a single point of contact for receiving and sharing information.

We saw examples of learning which the service had shared after a fatal incident on a fishing trawler. We were also shown an example of an operational bulletin sent to staff highlighting hazards associated with fires in shipping containers. This was as a direct result of information the service received from the [national operational learning](#) team.

We heard about the service providing specialist advice on wildfires and response planning to a submission for the national risk register made by the LRF.

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 outcomes for the public. Plans should be based on robust and realistic assumptions about income and costs. Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service's overall efficiency requires improvement.

The service's budget, financial and staffing plans aren't clearly aligned to its risk management plans.

The council provided funding to meet additional expenditure during the pandemic. So COVID-19 did not affect the service's budget.

The service needs a more systematic approach to achieving value for money. But we were pleased that it has improved staff productivity.

The service needs to make sure its budget plans are sustainable. But budget forecasts show only inflationary increases. So, it is not clear whether the service's plans for the future will be affordable.

IT systems that do not meet the service's needs have affected effectiveness and efficiency.

The service should ensure income generation plans offer measurable safety and financial benefits.

Although there have been improvements, the service has not made enough progress since our first inspection.

Making best use of resources



Requires improvement (2018: Requires improvement)

Cornwall 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 2021/22 is £19.377m. This is a 3.04 percent change from the previous financial year, although we noted this is to correct previously unsustainable budgets.

Areas for improvement

- The service needs to show a clear rationale for the resources allocated between prevention, protection and response activities. This should reflect, and be consistent with, the risks and priorities set out in its integrated risk management plan.
- The service should make sure it effectively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and outcomes of any collaboration activity.
- The service should make sure that it is taking action to reduce non-pay costs and can demonstrate how it is achieving value for money.

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 budget does not clearly link to or support its risk reduction plans

The service sometimes uses its resources well to manage risk, but there are weaknesses that need addressing. The service still does not have a consolidated workforce plan which clearly sets out the level of staff and training needed to reduce the community risks in its IRMP. We highlighted this in our last inspection in 2018. As a result, it cannot be clear about the funding it needs to meet its future risk management plans. The service's medium-term budget for 2022/23 onwards shows only inflationary increases. The service's next IRMP is due for publication in 2022, but it is not clear if the service's future budget will be enough to meet its objectives for reducing community risk.

The service's plans, including allocating resources to prevention, protection and response activities, aren't consistent with the risks and priorities identified in the IRMP. For example, the service has recently reduced the number of staff in its prevention team but this has been done to save money, rather than to reflect reduced community risk.

Plans aren't informed by robust scenario planning. While the council uses reasonable scenario planning to inform the budget, service budgets are based on funding for previous years, adjusted for growth or savings. The service has seen overspend in recent years. Some of these were significant. These are due primarily to unachievable income targets and increased operational activity. While there has been a budget increase for 2021/22, this represents a correction rather than growth. The service told us about a move to activity mapping and a new community risk management plan. We look forward to seeing how this improves the scenario planning which it uses to develop future budgets.

The service's financial controls still need to be improved so that public money is used well. We highlighted this as an area for improvement in 2018. While there are strong internal budget monitoring and reporting processes, other controls are less robust. Procurement procedures, while rigorous, can be cumbersome and time consuming. Budgets are audited at council level, so the service budget is not subject to detailed external audit scrutiny.

New ways of working have improved staff productivity

We are pleased to see that the service's arrangements for managing performance clearly link resource use to the IRMP and the service's strategic priorities. The service has introduced a system to use spare staff capacity for additional tasks such as [home fire safety visits](#) and updating building-specific operational risk information.

The service is taking steps to make sure the workforce's time is as productive as possible. This includes implementing new ways of working. The service has introduced a pool of operational staff who can step in if there are crewing shortages at fire stations. This makes better use of staff time and is more efficient as reserve capacity is held at a central level rather than on each station. The service developed its tactical reserve based on an approach it took to manage staff availability and deployment during the COVID-19 pandemic. It has also extended monitoring of council CCTV by control room staff.

Collaboration with other emergency responders

We are pleased to see the service meets its statutory duty to collaborate. It routinely considers opportunities to collaborate with other emergency responders. We found examples of the service using its estate efficiently by sharing premises with other blue light responders. This includes South Western Ambulance Service Foundation Trust (SWASFT) and Devon and Cornwall Police. It is done on a cost-sharing basis. So, the service benefits from savings in utility costs such as heating and light. The service has also provided staff to drive ambulances for SWASFT. This collaboration, which developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, helped the ambulance service to meet peak demand throughout the challenges of the pandemic.

The service is a member of the South West emergency services collaboration group. It is considering opportunities for sharing its vehicle workshops with Devon and Cornwall Police. A plan to develop a tri-service centre at Wadebridge did not progress because of financial concerns from the service's partners. The service is now considering a joint fire and police facility at St Ives fire station.

Collaborative work is aligned to the priorities in the service's IRMP. For example, highlighted in the service's 2019–2022 IRMP, the tri-service safety officer (TSSO) scheme creates efficiencies by consolidating elements of fire, police and ambulance roles into a single officer. The TSSO does prevention and emergency response work on behalf of Cornwall FRS in some rural communities, with the objective of improving service to the community.

Disappointingly, the service still does not routinely monitor, review and evaluate the benefits and outcomes of most of its collaborations, a point we highlighted in 2018. So, the service can't quantify the community and financial benefits it achieves from its collaborative activity. And it can't tell if they represent value for money.

A notable exception is the external evaluation of the TSSO scheme. The service and its partners commissioned this in 2020. The report highlighted the value the service and its partners saw in the scheme, which exemplified their strategic commitment of working together to make Cornwall safer. Benefits to the fire service were:

- reductions in property fires;
- the community value of visits to fit a smoke detector;
- increased availability of on-call fire engines.

The partners have agreed to extend the scheme to a further three areas of Cornwall.

Continuity arrangements for industrial action need to be updated

The service has gaps in its continuity arrangements for industrial action by staff. For example, the service's current plan does not have detailed information about the funding needed to meet any additional costs arising should the plan be activated. And it does not set out the arrangements for reviewing or testing the plan. As the plan has not been regularly reviewed and tested, staff will not be fully aware of the arrangements and their associated responsibilities.

A need for a more systematic approach to achieving value for money

We found limited examples of the service taking a robust and systematic approach to reviewing its expenditure and driving cost efficiencies. In 2020, the service did an activity mapping exercise. This allowed it to better understand the relationship between its expenditure and outcomes and identify associated efficiencies. But it was clear that it made changes because of budget cuts, not because it was seeking value for money.

Where savings have been needed, these have largely been made through organisational restructure and staff reductions. We were disappointed to find that booking system improvements, planned to mitigate the loss of some administrative staff posts, had not happened. This has affected the level of service which can be provided. Specialist staff are still using the old system. This has given them additional administrative tasks, so they have less time for home safety visits and high-risk building inspections.

The service procures through Cornwall Council. Processes were described as bureaucratic and sometimes slow, which led to some frustration in the service. For large contracts, the service can access procurement specialists and improved

contract management arrangements through the council. This was seen as an improvement which offered better value for money.

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



Requires improvement (2018: Good)

Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement 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.

Areas for improvement

- The service must make sure scenario plans for future spending reductions are subject to rigorous analysis and challenge, including the impact on services to the public. The service should make sure it has sufficiently robust plans in place which address the medium-term financial challenges beyond 2022–23 and secure an affordable way of managing the risk of fire and other risks.
- The service should make sure 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.

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

Service needs to better understand future budget challenges for sustainable funding

We are disappointed to see that there has been little improvement since the last inspection in how the service ensures it is affordable. The impact of the pandemic on the economy of Cornwall combined with one-year funding settlements has limited the service's understanding of future financial challenges. This weakens its ability to mitigate its main or significant financial risks. As a result, recent IRMP action plans have focused more on achieving immediate and short-term savings rather than identifying and managing risk.

The service's main strategies should align to the risk reduction activity described in the IRMP. It doesn't have a workforce plan or an estate strategy. And its fleet strategy is not clearly aligned with the IRMP. This limits the service's ability to profile its future budget needs. We are not assured the service has access to enough information on which to base its future financial plans and make sustainable, evidenced funding submissions to Cornwall Council.

The opportunities the service has identified to make savings or generate further income are limited. We saw some examples of the service making savings through improved contract placement and management arrangements. But these are limited and do not generate significant cost reductions. The service also raises income through Phoenix Services. And it has also increased its monitoring of council CCTV through its control room, which raises further income. But some staff told us that time spent on this work reduced the time they had for training in emergency call handling.

Clear arrangements for the use of reserves

[Reserves](#) are held by Cornwall Council. There is a robust process for the service to access reserves if they are needed. With the exception of funding to support additional activity related to the pandemic, we are encouraged that the service has not needed to access reserves from the council in the past 12 months.

Fleet and estate strategies should be aligned to the IRMP

The service's fleet strategy is included in its operational asset management strategy. This gives a rolling four-year budget profile for provision and disposal of the service's fire engines, rescue and emergency equipment, IT equipment, and protective clothing for firefighters. There is an associated 15-year (2016/17–2030/31) asset management capital budget of £27m.

The strategy states it is aligned to the service's risk reduction activities. There were some examples of the service buying smaller fire engines to serve communities with narrow roads. But it was not clear how this aligns to the objectives in the IRMP. The service has recognised this and plans to align its fleet strategy and IRMP during 2021. We look forward to seeing this work progress as the service develops its next community risk management plan throughout 2021 in readiness for publication in 2022.

The service monitors usage of its fire engines and moves these between stations to maximise their usable life. As a result, the lifespan of some vehicles has been extended to 20 years. But the strategy does not show how the service routinely exploits opportunities to improve efficiencies and effectiveness presented by changes in fleet provision.

The service does not have an estates strategy. We were told this was because most of the service's property is provided and maintained under a private finance initiative (PFI). We heard there is some flexibility in the PFI agreement which has allowed, for example, the rationalisation of two stations in Camborne and Redruth to a new site at Tolvaddon. However, the PFI agreement has limited the service's ability to fully assess the impact that changes in its estate provision may have on risk.

The PFI agreement ends in 2028 and the service is starting to consider the opportunities and challenges this presents. Estate planning is a long-term process. So we look forward to seeing how the service develops its estates strategy and aligns this to the risk reduction proposals in its next community risk management plan, to be published in 2022.

IT provision needs to be improved

The service relies on Cornwall Council's information technology (IT) department to source, provide and support its IT and systems. Our last inspection in 2018 highlighted the service's need to improve and update its IT. The service has recognised the opportunities technology offers to streamline processes and make better use of staff time. It has made some progress with this. We saw that it had updated [mobile data terminals](#) on fire engines. And it recently improved the communications equipment in fire stations and also hardware for staff working in prevention and protection.

But we also found that a risk management and administration system, intended to mitigate the loss of staff from a restructure, had not been updated. This increased staff workloads and led to delays in visits. The service has also recently moved to a new payroll system, but it does not meet the service's requirements. It has led to delays and incorrect payments to some staff.

The service has highlighted concerns about its IT provision and support. It has escalated these issues. Despite this, progress remains particularly slow. It was not clear during the inspection how long it would take to resolve this, so the service had reliable IT which met its needs. The service should assure itself the support services it buys in represent value for money.

The service operates a lean staff model. So, a number of managers have multiple responsibilities. For example, the head of workforce improvement is also the lead for health and safety. But we were not assured that the service has enough capacity to bring about sustainable future change.

The service should ensure income generation plans are efficient and beneficial

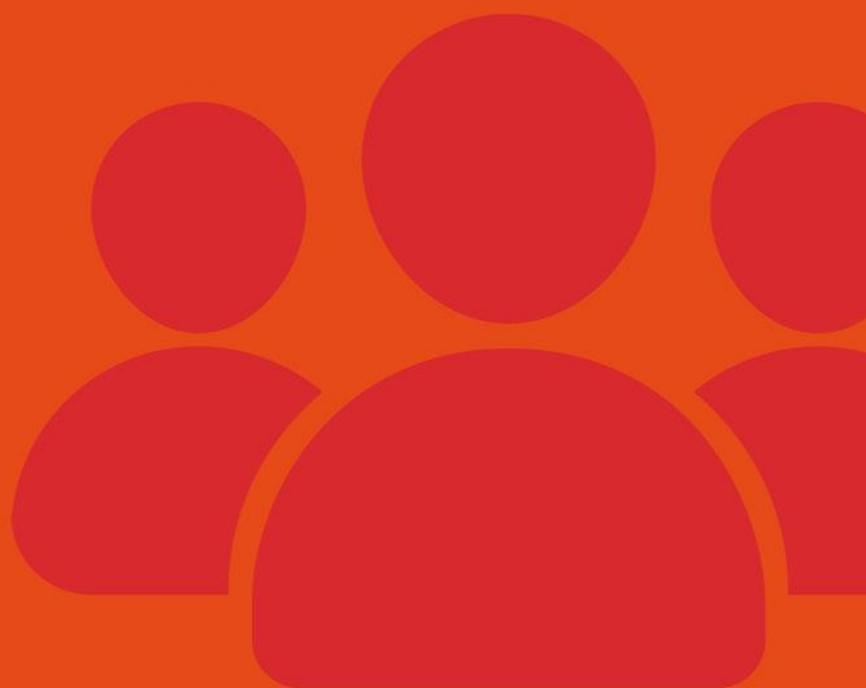
The service has established arrangements to generate additional income. These are control staff monitoring council CCTV and Phoenix Services.

Phoenix Services generates income for the service by selling training and business support services. It has contracts with the European Social Fund to train young people and adults in the Cornwall area.

But Phoenix Services has not met previous income generation targets. This, in part, led to overspends on the service's budget in 2019/20 and 2020/21. Cornwall Council has increased the service's budget to address this. Phoenix Service's income targets have been adjusted accordingly for 2021/22. There are now arrangements to make sure Phoenix Services meets its targets for income generation. But it is not clear how the service assesses whether these represent value for money. And it is not clear if they allow the service to invest in risk reduction and service improvement.

The service should establish a set of operating principles and objectives for Phoenix Services. It can make an objective judgment against these of the financial and community risk benefits which the organisation offers.

People



How well does the service look after its people?



Requires improvement

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, Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at looking after its people.

Staff have a good range of learning opportunities. But there are differences between those for operational and non-operational staff.

Communication by leaders has improved. But this is sometimes seen as one-way. The service needs to ensure staff are comfortable challenging leaders.

Senior leaders are committed to promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion. But the plans need more focus and better co-ordination.

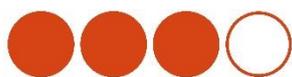
It is not clear how the service uses recruitment and promotion policies to increase diversity. We found examples of the promotion policy being applied inconsistently.

The service uses the personal development review process inconsistently. We saw a low level of completion.

More work is needed to manage and develop aspiring leaders and high-potential staff.

We acknowledge that the service has made some improvements since our last inspection. But more needs to be done.

Promoting the right values and culture



Good (2018: Good)

Cornwall 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.

A welcome move to an open and approachable culture

The service has well-defined values. While not all staff could quote the service's values, they were clearly reflected in the behaviours of staff we spoke to at all levels in the organisation. Our staff survey, conducted as part of this inspection, indicates that 91.6 percent of respondents (110 of 119) are aware of the service's statement of values. We were also encouraged by the cultural improvements the service had made since our 2018 inspection. Staff we spoke to recognised and welcomed the move to a culture which is much more open and approachable.

Senior leaders act as role models. For example, the chief fire officer is an advocate for equality and fairness both within the service and nationally. The deputy chief fire officer led the move to change the service's culture, pioneering a 'one team' approach, demonstrating his openness and approachability through increased staff engagement, including weekly 'sit reps' which started during the pandemic. 81.7 percent of respondents to the staff survey (89 of 109) said that senior leaders consistently model and maintain the service's values. This increased to 89 percent when they were asked about line managers, and more than 90 percent for their colleagues. The service has considered the requirements of the new national code of ethics, which supports culture improvement and improved workplace behaviour in the fire service. It has plans to implement this.

There is a positive working culture across the service. The service has introduced mechanisms to increase staff involvement and engagement in decisions about the service and in decisions which affect them. These include staff working on 'task and finish groups', the introduction of project champions and development opportunities which are tailored to specific individuals. Of the staff responding to our survey 73.9 percent (88 of 119) said they are confident their ideas or suggestions will be listened to.

Effective support for staff's physical and mental wellbeing

The service has well-understood and effective wellbeing policies which are available to staff. There is a significant range of wellbeing support for both physical and mental health. For example:

- occupational health;
- one-to-one meetings with managers;
- referral to external mental health support; and
- [critical incident](#) defusing.

The service extended this support during the pandemic. It placed greater emphasis on local management through one-to-one meetings with line managers and the introduction of welfare officers.

There are good provisions to promote staff wellbeing. This includes availability of welfare information and contact details on workplace notice boards and regular updates about wellbeing support included in senior leader 'sit reps'. Of the staff that responded to our survey, 92.4 percent (110 of 119) said they could access services to support their mental wellbeing. Most staff reported that they understand and have confidence in the wellbeing support processes available. However, we found that some staff working remotely were not fully aware about the range of wellbeing support available and how to access it. The service should consider how it can further promote its wellbeing support offerings among all staff, particularly those who work remotely or spend much of their time away from their base locations.

There is a robust approach to health and safety

The service takes a robust approach to health and safety management. It uses the council's health and safety policy and has its own policies for fitness testing, secondary employment, lone working, and absence management. The service has received ISO 45001 accreditation for its health and safety framework.

Staff we spoke to and those responding to our survey were clear about their health and safety responsibilities. Among the staff who responded to our survey, 91.6 percent (109 of 119 respondents) were satisfied their health, safety and wellbeing was treated seriously at work; 97.5 percent (116 of 119) stated the service had clear procedures to report all accidents, [near misses](#), and dangerous occurrences. But this view was not fully shared by the two staff associations which responded to our survey. Both felt that accident reporting procedures were not clear. The service should engage with the associations to understand and resolve their concerns.

A robust but supportive approach to absence management

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 clear processes to manage absences for all staff. There is clear guidance for managers, who get training and support to manage absence effectively. We reviewed a range of absence cases which had been managed well and in

accordance with policy. We saw a robust approach to managing absence, particularly for long or repeated absences. But we were pleased to see the procedure applied sensitively and compassionately. The service told us that its approach had led to reductions in both short- and long-term absence, most notably in the last year.

Getting the right people with the right skills



Requires improvement (2018: Good)

Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement 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 \(IRMPs\)](#), 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 make sure its workforce plan takes full account of the necessary skills and capabilities to carry out the integrated risk management plan.

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 improve its approach to workforce planning

The service has started to introduce arrangements to plan for future skills needs and forecast retirements. But it has not made enough progress towards introducing a consolidated workforce plan which meets the needs of the IRMP. This was an area for improvement we identified in 2018. We found limited evidence that the service's planning allows them to fully consider workforce skills and overcome any gaps in capability. For example, there were vacancies in the specialist area of protection. And reductions in prevention staff were driven by the need to make savings. There are also a large number of staff who have been temporarily promoted to fill gaps in workforce capability and resilience.

Most staff told us that they could access the training they need to be effective in their role. The service has a training needs assessment which informs development of its training plan. The annual training plan ensures all staff can maintain competence and capability effectively. For example, training plans for on-call stations take account of the specific needs of staff at the station, length of service and level of development. 79.8 percent of staff (95 of 119) stated they had received sufficient training to do their job effectively.

Local managers are responsible for regularly reviewing the records for their staff. They schedule training and book courses to make sure skills and competence remain

current and up to date. The service has increased the number of group training instructors who support on-call stations and make sure risk-critical skills such as breathing apparatus and incident command remain current. We reviewed a sample of training records for all operational staff. These were up to date and all risk-critical skills were current.

The service has a centralised system to record and monitor staff competence. But this applies to operational staff only. It was less clear how the service records and monitors training and skills for non-operational staff. During our last inspection we found staff were frustrated as the system used to record operational training did not link to the computer-based training system. The service was slow to respond to this. It did not link the two systems until our latest inspection. We look forward to seeing if the anticipated improvements are achieved once the new systems are fully established.

The service provides opportunities for staff learning and development

Staff can access a range of learning resources. These include online resources for all staff from the council's website, computer-based training for operational staff and tailored training for [on-call staff](#). The chief fire officer and senior team promote learning opportunities during weekly briefing sessions. Seventy-four percent of staff (88 of 119) stated they were satisfied with the level of learning and development they received.

While there are examples of a culture of promoting learning and development across the service, there are inconsistencies in the format and structure of this between operational and non-operational staff.

Training for operational staff is highly structured and systematically monitored to make sure staff keep their operational competencies and risk-critical skills up to date and validated.

Non-operational staff told us they were required to complete mandatory training such as manual handling and equality, diversity and inclusion. While they can access further training related to their role, this had to be agreed with their line manager first, often as part of a routine performance review. While discussions with managers about learning and development were largely found to be helpful, 75.6 percent of staff (90 of 119) stated these occurred twice a year or less.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity



Requires improvement (2018: Good)

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

Creating a more representative workforce will provide huge benefits for fire and rescue services. This includes greater access to talent and different ways of thinking, and improved understanding of and engagement with their local communities. Each service should make sure 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.

Areas for improvement

- The service should make sure that all staff understand the benefits of EDI and their role in promoting it.
- The service should assure itself that staff are confident using its feedback mechanisms and doing so would not disadvantage them.
- The service should make sure its selection, development and promotion of staff is open and fair.

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 visible and engaging leaders

Senior leaders have worked hard to create a culture of approachability and openness. The majority of staff we spoke to told us they had seen a positive change since our last inspection. They described leaders as approachable, more visible and engaging. We also heard that the service has recently started to encourage staff to become involved with service projects and planning groups. This originated during the COVID-19 pandemic and has since been extended.

Better response needed to staff feedback and challenge

This shift in leadership is a positive step which is to be welcomed. However, the increase in communication has not been seen universally as an increase in engagement. Communications were sometimes described as 'one way'. Some staff stated they were not confident to challenge ideas or raise issues. Thirty-seven percent of staff (44 of 119) who responded to our survey stated they felt unable to challenge ideas without worrying about how they would be treated afterwards.

Cornwall Council surveyed the staff in 2018. While there were some staff communications in response to the council's action plan, there has been no co-ordinated response by the service. We found limited evidence of the service making changes in response to staff feedback.

There is commitment to improving equality, diversity and inclusion

Senior leadership is committed to improving equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in the service. It has established a community engagement, equality and diversity (CEED) group which has set equality objectives including:

- increasing the number of applications for employment from underrepresented groups;
- encouraging staff to declare personal diversity information; and

- making sure staff complete equality training which helps improve understanding of the importance of a fully inclusive workplace.

EDI plans need more detail and co-ordination

However, we found the service's approach to improving EDI lacks co-ordination and there is insufficient detail in the CEED plan to measure and evaluate progress. So, the service has not made the progress it hoped to. For example, most staff we spoke to didn't fully understand the value of a diverse workforce and a diverse workplace. Additionally, there is low declaration of demographic data: 30 percent of the workforce don't declare their ethnicity. This means the service has limited data on which to base its understanding of disproportionality in the workplace and introduce improvements.

We also found concerns about the provision of gender-appropriate facilities at all fire stations. Staff we spoke to said access to appropriate facilities depended on the station. Five percent of staff (6 of 118) said they did not have access to appropriate facilities. We were disappointed to find the service does not have a plan for providing gender-appropriate facilities at all fire stations.

The service uses Cornwall Council's equality impact assessment process. But when we reviewed some completed impact assessments, we found issues with the way this was applied and how actions were followed up. Impact assessments are applied inconsistently. For example, the service had not completed an assessment for the recent promotion policy. The service does not routinely consult or involve its staff groups when completing assessments. While actions arising from an assessment are assigned to an owner, there was no system to monitor progress and assure the service that effective follow-up actions were being taken.

Recruitment and promotion are not directly linked to increasing workforce diversity

It is not clear how the service intends to increase the diversity of its workforce through recruitment. The service does not have a detailed recruitment strategy linked to its IRMP that shows how it will improve the diversity of its workforce. We reviewed a recent recruitment plan which expressed the service's commitment to improved diversity and referred to the use of positive action. But there was no detail on how this would work in practice and what measures would be used to evaluate success.

The service has a comprehensive policy for promotion. But it does not set out how it will improve workforce diversity. The policy is not always applied consistently. 38.6 percent of staff (46 of 119) who responded to our survey stated they felt the service's promotion process was not fair. Some staff told us they felt the promotion policy did not focus on a proven track record as the basis for promotion.

We reviewed a selection of promotions and found the service did not always follow its policy. We found evidence of recent promotions which were not made in line with the service's policy or subject to external competition.

We noted the service was consulting on a new promotion policy during our inspection.

Robust promotion of zero tolerance for bullying, harassment and discrimination

The service promotes a zero-tolerance approach to bullying, harassment and discrimination. It encourages staff to challenge inappropriate behaviours.

Staff we spoke to had a good understanding of appropriate behaviours. They felt confident to challenge and report unacceptable behaviour. This view was broadly reflected by the staff representative bodies who responded to our survey. We were told that the service would act quickly to address inappropriate and unacceptable behaviours.

Through our survey, 10.1 percent (12 of 119) of staff told us they had felt bullied or harassed. And 11.8 percent (14 of 119) felt discriminated against over the past 12 months.

More needs to be done to address staff concerns about bullying

We were surprised to see that out of the 12 respondents who reported feeling bullied or harassed, only 9 had reported it. Of these, only one reported that any action had been taken. And they also reported that they did not think that this would make a difference. The service should consider how it can make sure that staff who raise concerns feel that they have been taken seriously and dealt with appropriately.

Managing performance and developing leaders



Requires improvement (2018: Requires improvement)

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

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

Areas for improvement

- The service should improve all staff understanding and application of the performance development review process.
- The service should put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders.

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

Individual performance managed inconsistently

The service uses Cornwall Council's performance and development review (PDR) policy to assess and develop its staff. There is a bespoke service format for on-call staff. The PDR policy is clear on timescales and content for meaningful review and feedback and arrangements to make sure the process is fair and inclusive.

Some staff, including most non-operational staff, told us they saw the PDR process as positive. They saw it as a way to discuss their performance and future aspirations with their manager, review progress and agree objectives for the coming year. But others did not see its value. They felt it was a 'tick-box' exercise that did not reflect their role. We also heard about operational staff having difficulties recording their reviews following the move to a new IT system. This caused frustration.

The PDR process is applied inconsistently. 47 percent of staff (56 out of 119) stated they had not had a PDR or appraisal in the past 12 months. The service told us it was unable to monitor completion rates centrally. The onus for having an up-to-date PDR sits with the individual. So, the service could not assure itself about progress. This was further complicated as Cornwall Council did not require PDRs to be completed during the pandemic.

Leadership development is improving but more work is needed

The service has begun to introduce arrangements to actively manage the career pathways of staff. This includes those with specialist skills and those aspiring to leadership roles. We identified this as an area for improvement during our 2018 inspection. The service has not made enough progress.

The service does not have a plan for improving the way it manages career pathways. It needs to do more to introduce a co-ordinated talent-management programme, establish succession planning and link this to the new promotion process.

We heard that the service has started to introduce succession planning. This was not documented in detail, but we were told how the service had introduced a tiered approach. It plans to use information from the PDR to assess an individual's performance and behaviour as part of the gateway to progression opportunities.

The service has started to widen the development opportunities it offers to staff. These include the chance to work on service development projects or management cells and champion roles in specialist areas. The senior management team has had a period of change recently. The service has used this to develop the skills and experience of some of its senior leaders.

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