

Fire & Rescue Service

Effectiveness, efficiency and people 2018/19

An inspection of Essex County Fire and Rescue Service



Contents

About this inspection	1
Service in numbers	2
Overview	4
Effectiveness	7
How effective is the service at keeping people safe and secure?	8
Summary	8
Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies	9
Preventing fires and other risks	11
Protecting the public through fire regulation	13
Responding to fires and other emergencies	15
Responding to national risks	19
Efficiency	21
How efficient is the service at keeping people safe and secure?	22
Summary	22
Making best use of resources	23
Making the fire and rescue service affordable now and in the future	25
People	28
How well does the service look after its people?	29
Summary	29
Promoting the right values and culture	30
Getting the right people with the right skills	32
Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity	34
Managing performance and developing leaders	36
Annex A – About the data	38
Annex B – Fire and rescue authority governance	44

About this inspection

This is the first time that HMICFRS has inspected fire and rescue services across England. Our focus is on the service they provide to the public, and the way they use the resources available. The inspection assesses how effectively and efficiently Essex County Fire and Rescue Service prevents, protects the public against and responds to fires and other emergencies. We also assess how well it looks after the people who work for the service.

In carrying out our inspections of all 45 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. After taking all the evidence into account, we apply a graded judgment for each of the three questions.

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**.

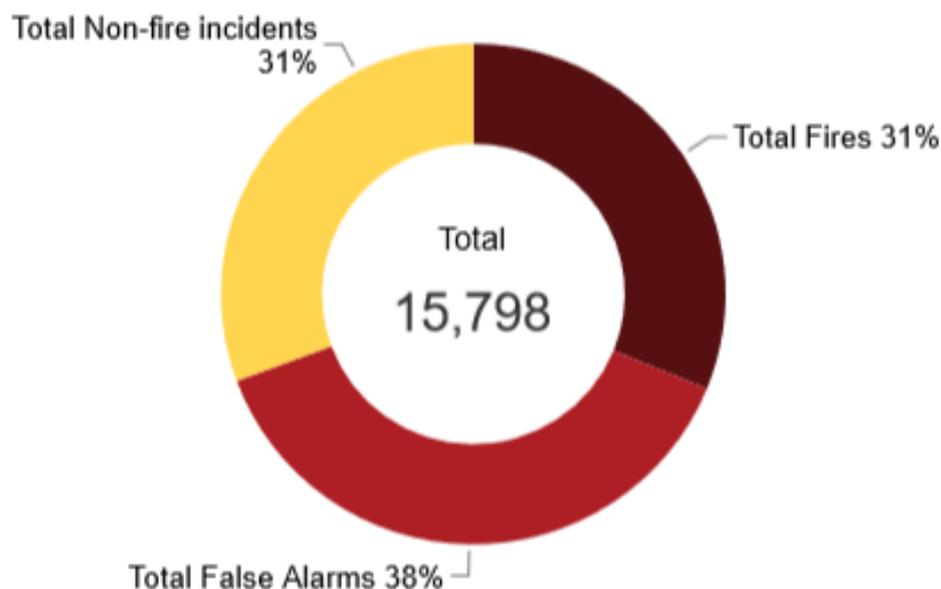
If we find serious critical failings of policy, practice or performance of the fire and rescue service, we will judge it as **inadequate**.

Service in numbers

 Public perceptions	Essex	England
Perceived effectiveness of service Public perceptions survey (June/July 2018)	86%	86%

 Response	Essex	England
Incidents attended per 1,000 population 12 months to 31 December 2018	8.7	10.4
Home fire risk checks carried out by FRS per 1,000 population 12 months to 31 March 2018	4.7	10.4
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises 12 months to 31 March 2018	3.1	3.0

Incidents attended in the 12 months to 31 December 2018





Cost

Essex

England

Firefighter cost per person per year
12 months to 31 March 2018

£19.63

£22.38



Workforce

Essex

England

Number of firefighters per 1,000 population
As at 31 March 2018

0.6

0.6

Five-year change in workforce
As at 31 March 2013 compared with 31 March 2018

-11%

-14%

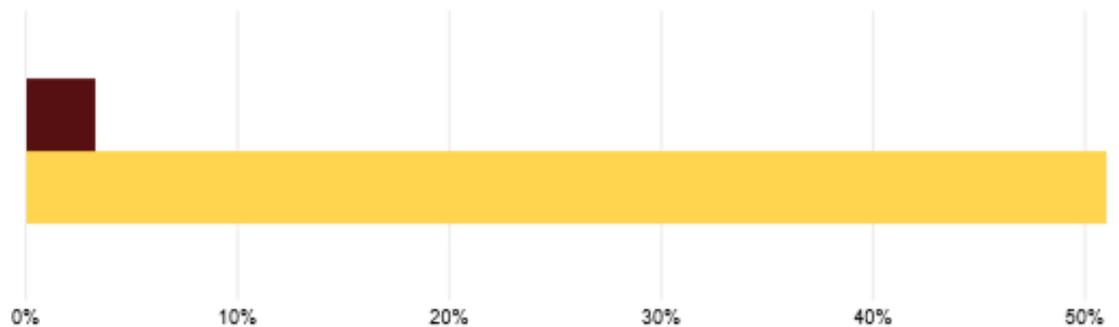
Percentage of wholetime firefighters
As at 31 March 2018

60%

70%

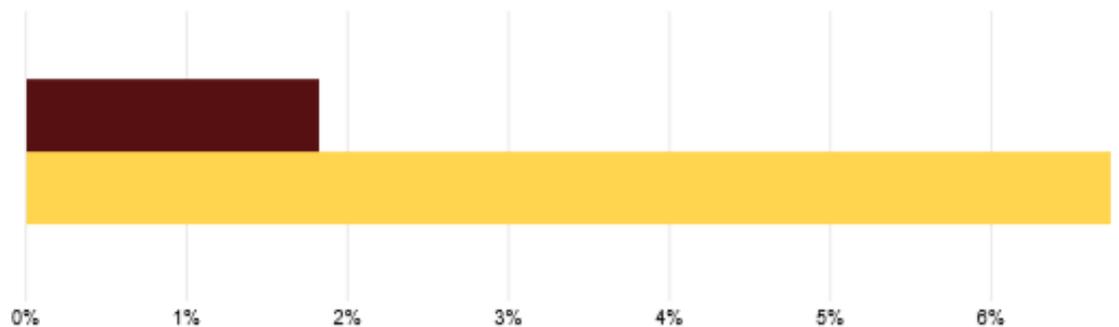
Percentage of female firefighters as at 31 March 2018

● Female firefighters ● Female residential population



Percentage of black, Asian and minority ethnic firefighters as at 31 March 2018

● BAME Firefighters ● BAME residential population



Please refer to annex A for full details on data used.

Overview

 Effectiveness	 Requires improvement
Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies	 Requires improvement
Preventing fires and other risks	 Requires improvement
Protecting the public through fire regulation	 Requires improvement
Responding to fires and other emergencies	 Good
Responding to national risks	 Good
 Efficiency	 Requires improvement
Making best use of resources	 Requires improvement
Making the fire and rescue service affordable now and in the future	 Good



People



Requires improvement

Promoting the right values and culture



Inadequate

Getting the right people with the right skills



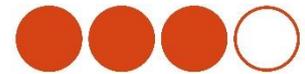
Requires improvement

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity



Requires improvement

Managing performance and developing leaders



Good

Overall summary of inspection findings

We are satisfied with some aspects of the performance of Essex County Fire and Rescue Service (FRS). But there are several areas where the service needs to make improvements.

We judged Essex County FRS to require improvement to the effectiveness of its service. It requires improvement to how it:

- understands the risk of fire and other emergencies;
- prevents fires and other risks; and
- protects the public through fire regulation.

But it is good at responding to fires and other emergencies. And its response to national risks is good.

The service's efficiency requires improvement, in particular to how it uses resources. But it is good at making its services affordable.

The way Essex County FRS looks after its people requires improvement. We judged the way it promotes the right values and culture to be inadequate. It requires improvement to how it:

- gets the right people with the right skills; and
- ensures fairness and promoting diversity.

But it is good at managing performance and developing leaders.

Overall, we would like to see improvements in the year ahead.

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 will target its fire prevention and protection activities to those who are at greatest risk from fire. It will make sure businesses comply with fire safety legislation. When the public calls for help, the fire and rescue service should respond promptly with the right skills and equipment to deal with the incident effectively. Essex County Fire and Rescue Service's overall effectiveness requires improvement.

The service needs to better understand the risk of fire and other emergencies. Its [integrated risk management plan](#) (IRMP) sets out its priorities. But there is no effective mechanism to translate this into operational activity.

The service needs to improve the way it prevents fires and other risks. There were some good examples of prevention work, such as road safety and in schools. But the service isn't doing enough [home fire safety checks](#). Other organisations pass on referrals for some of these checks to the service.

Staff understand how to [safeguard vulnerable people](#).

The service needs to better protect the public through fire regulation. The service is aware that it hasn't met the requirements of its risk-based inspection programme. It is failing to meet its targets for the number of audits it plans to carry out. And it isn't effectively targeting high-risk premises.

We have concerns about the service using operational staff to carry out fire protection visits to high-risk premises. They don't have enough training to make judgments about fire protection issues.

The service is good at responding to fires and other emergencies. Incident commanders have good access to risk information to help them manage incidents. But the service should make sure that it is meeting its response standards. It needs to learn more from operational incidents.

The service is good at responding to national risks. And it has provided staff and equipment to support services in other parts of the UK and abroad.

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service should produce guidance that translates its risk management plan into operational activity.
- The service should ensure it gathers and records relevant and up-to-date risk information.

All fire and rescue services should identify and assess all foreseeable fire and rescue-related risks. They should also prevent and mitigate these risks.

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

Understanding local and community risk

The service understands its local communities and identifies risks to them. When it developed its IRMP (2016–20), it analysed data, reviewed options and used a company to help it consult with the public.

Before the current IRMP, the service consulted on a range of fire cover options. These included changing how it crews some fire stations, from day-crewed to [on-call](#) staffing. The service uses a broad range of information to develop its strategic assessment of risk. This document is reviewed each year. It underpins the IRMP. The service could keep the public more informed on the plan's progress. This should include updates about potential delays to station crewing changes. The changes were due to be complete by 2020. But this is now likely to be 2021.

The consultation was extensive and run by an independent organisation. It included exhibitions in libraries and shopping centres, as well as via local and social media. There were also forums for staff, the public and organisations the service works with. A total of 17,630 people responded. The [fire authority](#) chose the most popular option.

The service could use its data more to better understand risk – especially what it has learned from its prevention and protection work. To help the service better understand risk, community safety officers meet with members of the community and other organisations. These include hearing-impaired people and groups for people with dementia. But these discussions aren't recorded, which limits the service's understanding of wider community risk.

In 2017, the service asked a research company to review its stations. The review used incident and response data from a five-year period. This helped the service identify key stations where operational cover needed to be prioritised. The review also helped the service better plan for the future.

Having an effective risk management plan

While the strategic intentions of the service are clear, there is no plan to translate expectations of the IRMP into operational activity. A draft document, attempting to address this, is due to be published later in the year after our inspection. This will be used to bridge the gap until the new IRMP is finalised.

The current IRMP explains how the service identifies fire and rescue risks, both by itself and working with other organisations. It broadly sets out how its prevention, protection and response work meet its strategic aims. The plan is in line with the requirements of the [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England](#).

As an active member of the Essex [resilience forum](#) (ERF), the service has a clear process to use information from the local resilience risk register to help it plan. It also adds risks to the service's register to inform its strategy. Its work with the ERF helps keep other agencies informed.

The service uses its business intelligence reporting tool to learn from activities such as station audits and thematic reviews. These feed into the IRMP's objectives.

Maintaining risk information

The service needs to improve how it gathers and holds risk information. Its strategy showing how it prioritises its visits to higher-risk sites isn't clear. Firefighters visit these sites regularly to gather risk information and update plans. As at 31 December 2018, the service had 1,025 risk sites. When asked, it was unable to provide us the number of these sites which it had inspected, although it could when we subsequently asked in May. Some plans for these sites are out of date; 14 percent of plans for high-risk sites (called 'level 3 plans' locally) had passed their review date when we inspected.

The service presents its information in many ways. This makes it difficult for incident commanders to use it. Its approaches to quality assuring plans are inconsistent. While some managers have a good process to quality assure plans, many don't. And information from prevention and protection work isn't shared with the response team.

The service is good at gathering and communicating risk information for major music and sporting events. But, for smaller events, attendance at safety advisory groups to help make plans was inconsistent.

Firefighters access risk information using computers on fire engines called [mobile data terminals](#) (MDTs). Staff are confident in using these. New handheld tablet computers have good vehicle crash data and can be taken to incidents to help keep firefighters safe. Officers carry tablet computers containing risk information and operational procedures. These are kept up to date and can help decision making.

The service communicates general risk information well through alerts and email ‘flashes’. These appear in individual training records and are tracked. Information is passed on effectively during briefings at the start of shifts at fire stations. The service produces a weekly briefing note called ‘60 seconds’. These are read out at on-call drill nights. They brief staff with limited time on critical issues. Most on-call stations use these. However, many leave staff to read the notes themselves because they often relate to longer documents.

Preventing fires and other risks



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service should develop a clear prevention strategy to guide its work and ensure it makes best use of resources to achieve its targets.
- The service should evaluate its prevention work, so it understands the benefits better.

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

Prevention strategy

The service doesn’t have a clear prevention strategy to guide its work. And it doesn’t fulfil the prevention activity promised in its IRMP. [Wholetime firefighters](#) don’t carry out home safety visits other than in one area where these are being trialled.

The service uses data to assess community risk. And it uses volunteers and specialist officers to carry out visits. These visits include identifying potential fire risks; taking action to reduce fire risks; ensuring working smoke alarms are fitted; advice on social welfare; advice on slips, trips and falls; health prevention and crime prevention. In the year to 31 March 2018, the service did 8,513 home fire safety checks. But the service is doing less than half the national average of checks per 1,000 population (4.7 compared with 10.4). The service completed 58.8 percent of these checks at homes of older people and 28.6 percent to homes of people who had a disability. These are similar to the England rates. The service recently decentralised management of its prevention activity. This should improve its work within communities.

During our inspection, there were good examples of referrals from other organisations (for example, from care workers) for [safe and well checks](#) for people at more risk of fire. But ‘after-incident response’ visits are inconsistent. These are when crews visit nearby premises to give fire safety advice after fires in residential properties.

The service recently worked with Essex University to review accidental residential fires to understand where risk was high and how best to target those at most risk. But it hasn't yet used this information to target its work.

It is evaluating its 'Surround a Town' events. These involve a multi-agency approach to prevention and community engagement in Essex. The service doesn't assess its wider prevention work.

We reviewed many prevention case files during our inspection. Some files had data missing. And the electronic system managing this information was slow and difficult to use. The service is aware of this and has plans to address it.

Promoting community safety

Essex County FRS carries out wide-ranging prevention work. Central teams offer school education, arson awareness and programmes to deter fire-setting. It aims to provide prevention packages to all schoolchildren in Essex. Its work in schools involves the police and includes messages from both services.

The service's community safety officers carry out 'crucial crew' events. These focus on talking to schoolchildren about subjects such as firework safety and knife crime.

The service also runs a community inclusion programme called 'Firebreak'. This helps build skills and confidence in referred students who come from schools, prisons and other organisations. This is getting good results, with noticeable changes in behaviour in many who take part. The service runs a programme for juvenile fire setters as part of its work with Essex Police to reduce arson. The service works with the police to support prosecutions.

Staff understand how to identify vulnerable people. They are confident in making safeguarding referrals, despite some having no recent training. The service's fire safety officers then work with other organisations to deal with these.

The service has taken positive steps to reduce the risk of fire for those at most risk. For example, its 'Think sprinkler' initiative offers to fund up to 50 percent of domestic installation costs. It will do this with the support of partners such as councils and charities. It has pledged £250,000 to support this campaign.

The service's volunteers also help with clearing hoarding. And the service works with the local authority handyperson scheme to help make people safer by fitting equipment to help prevent fire in vulnerable people's homes.

The service's prevention and communication teams could work better together. And the service relies too heavily on digital media to communicate with vulnerable people because many of them can't access information in this way.

Although the service follows national campaigns, we found station plans were generic. This means that activity doesn't necessarily best address local risk. But there were some good examples of local initiatives. These include multi-agency approaches to tackling community safety issues, such as the risk of fire in high-rise buildings.

Road safety

Essex County FRS leads on improving safety on the county's roads. It is part of the Safer Essex Road Partnership, which involves councils, Highways England, the police and the ambulance service. The service is considered to be an active and valued member.

Essex County FRS has a full-time road safety team. This carries out a range of initiatives, including free better biking courses and advanced skills courses. It also works with high-risk groups, such as modified car enthusiasts. The service uses loaned high-performance vehicles to encourage interaction and education through safety messages. It also offers road safety courses to schools and military, commercial, older and newly qualified drivers.

Protecting the public through fire regulation



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure it works with local businesses and large organisations to share information and expectations on compliance with fire safety regulations.
- The service should ensure it has effective arrangements for providing specialist protection advice out of hours.

Causes of concern

The service has insufficient resources to meet its risk-based inspection programme. It is currently not meeting its targets. As a result, partially skilled operational staff are carrying out high-risk visits, although the service acknowledges that these are not audits. There is an absence of quality assurance of audits and visits. There is a low amount of enforcement activity. There is limited proactive engagement with businesses to promote fire safety.

Recommendations

- By 31 March 2020, the service should develop and implement a clear strategy for how it will effectively meet its obligations in relation to ensuring compliance with fire safety. This should include ensuring it has appropriately trained resources, a consistent use of enforcement powers and a mechanism to assure itself on the quality of its inspections.

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

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

Risk-based approach

The service isn't meeting the requirements of its risk-based inspection programme. Fire safety managers weren't clear about the service's definition of high-risk premises. And the service can't show that these premises get priority.

As at 31 December 2018, the service had identified 4,691 high-risk premises. It aims to inspect these every year. But in the year to 31 December 2018, it had only done 686 inspections.

The service's information technology (IT) systems don't support effective working. For example, inspections stopped for several weeks in 2018. This was because the management system wasn't working. It is slow and has caused a backlog of paperwork that needs processing.

The service uses a range of data to calculate risk. This includes:

- FSEC codes;
- historic incident data;
- enforcement activity history; and
- Home Office data.

The service isn't meeting its targets for responding to building regulation consultations. It aims to respond to all of them within 15 working days. Between 1 April 2018 and 31 December 2018, the service received 601 building regulation consultations. Of these, 87.2 percent were completed within the required time frame.

Essex County FRS's inspectors are trained to the national standard ([Level 4 Fire Safety](#)). But during our inspection, the team had nine vacancies within its 34-strong team.

Wholetime firefighters need to make judgments about issues during fire protection visits. But they don't have enough inspection training to do this. And their work isn't quality assured unless they raise an issue with the inspection team. Firefighters have been visiting high-risk premises. This is because there aren't enough inspectors.

The service can't make sure inspectors are available outside working hours. During these times, it isn't always able to respond to fire protection concerns, complaints or dangerous conditions, where it may be necessary to issue [prohibition notices](#).

The service is working with other FRSs to review its inspection programme.

Enforcement

The service works with businesses to promote compliance rather than taking [enforcement action](#). While we recognise the desire to support compliance, there are times when prosecution is needed. We were disappointed to find a reluctance to act when premises repeatedly breach fire safety.

Protection files we reviewed were missing detail. And some were overdue for inspections. Some fire safety inspectors couldn't explain how actions to address issues from inspections are followed up.

The number of audits carried out has fallen from 3,634 in the year to March 2014 to 1,290 in the year to March 2018. Despite this, it equates to 3.1 audits per 100 known premises. This is similar to the England rate (3.0).

Some 97 percent of premises inspected by the service in the year to 31 March 2018 were satisfactory. This is much higher than the England rate of 68 percent. It indicates that the service isn't inspecting the highest-risk premises. During that same period, it issued 112 formal notifications, three alteration notices, five enforcement notices and no prohibitions. It has recently carried out a prosecution and has access to legal advice.

Working with others

Due to the lack of capacity, the service doesn't currently work proactively with businesses to promote legislative compliance. It relies solely on its website's business safety section, which signposts people to national advice and guidance.

Some inspection staff work with organisations to share information and carry out joint visits. During our inspection, there were examples of joint visits. These included with the local authority to a mobile home park. But this isn't consistent across the service. Staff told us that capacity constraint was the main reason.

Responding to fires and other emergencies



Good

Essex County Fire and Rescue Service is good at responding to fires and other emergencies. But we found the following areas in which it needs to improve:

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure it has effective systems in place to reliably understand the operational capabilities of resources available to respond to incidents.
- The service should ensure it has an effective system for staff to use debriefs and improve operational learning.

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

Managing assets and resources

As at 1 April 2019, the service had:

- 12 [wholetime fire stations](#), two of which had an on-call fire engine;
- 4 day-crewed fire stations; and
- 34 on-call fire stations.

It had specialist vehicles and equipment to deal with a range of incidents. These included heavy rescue vehicles so it could respond to road traffic collisions.

The service uses three staffing models. These are:

- wholetime shift – these stations are staffed 24/7;
- day-crewed – full-time staff during working hours;
- on-call – staff who respond to incidents.

The service is changing its four day-crewed stations to on-call. This should be complete by 2021.

The service is failing to meet its targets for the number of available fire engines. Between 1 April 2018 and 31 December 2018, the monthly availability ranged from 80.7 percent to 87.1 percent. The service's plan is for this figure to be 90 percent. It prioritises key stations when possible. Its optimum number of pumps is 66 but, on a monthly average between 5.00pm and 8.00pm, it didn't achieve this between April 2018 and December 2018.

Wholetime fire engine availability is managed centrally. But the service can't guarantee cover because staff are able to book annual leave at short notice. The service pays off-duty staff to cover when there are shortages.

The service doesn't have effective systems to manage on-call availability. It uses an electronic rota book. How this is used varies across stations. There were examples of people using it to book time off when there weren't enough firefighters available. This meant their fire engine couldn't be used. The system doesn't link with [fire control](#)'s [mobilising](#) system, so it relies on operator input for updates when there are changes. This delay risks trying to mobilise crews that aren't available.

The number and availability of on-call staff is both a service and a national problem. The service doesn't have enough on-call staff in some stations. And these are regularly unavailable to respond. The service is aware of this problem. It is promoting the role and recruiting in the area.

Response

The service is working with neighbouring fire services to put [national operational guidance](#) in place. This is expected to be done by 2020. There are good systems in place to be able to respond to incidents. These is based on national information about types of incident.

In the year to 31 December 2018, the service went to 8.7 incidents per 1,000 population. This compares with the England rate of 10.4 over the same period.

The Home Office collects and publishes data on response times by measuring the time between the call being made and the first fire engine arriving at the scene. This gives consistent data across all 45 services. But services measure their own response times in different ways.

The service's response standard is to respond to potentially life-threatening incidents within an average of 10 minutes, calculated from time of call to the arrival of the first pump. The service's response standard is also to arrive at 90 percent of emergency incidents within 15 minutes from the time the call was first received. Between 1 April 2018 and 31 December 2018, the service did not meet these standards. The average time from call to the first pump attending was 10 minutes 48 seconds for life-threatening incidents, and for all emergency incidents within 15 minutes on 86 percent of occasions.

According to Home Office data collected from all services, in the year to 31 March 2018, the service's average response time to [primary fires](#) was 10 minutes and 5 seconds. This is from the time of call to the first vehicle arriving at the incident. This was an increase from 9 minutes 12 seconds in the year ending 31 March 2011. The service's average response time is similar to the average for other significantly rural services of 10 minutes 6 seconds.

The service has a good range of systems for recording and reporting incident information. These include standard messaging, incident risk assessments and decision logs. Fire control staff can add limited incident information to turnout instructions and MDTs.

Command

During our inspection, fire control staff were confident to change the number of fire engines sent to incidents depending on information from callers. They also move fire engines to cover gaps in station availability.

Incident command courses are taught centrally, and training records showed that staff were up to date with these. Generally, commanders had good knowledge of incident command and were confident in applying it at incidents. They were well trained and up to date for annual assessment. But we found a small number weren't sure of how to apply new command processes – for example, applying [operational discretion](#).

We asked staff what they thought of the service (see Annex A for more details). Of the 64 crew managers or above who responded to our survey, 42.2 percent agreed the service would support them if they used operational discretion at an incident rather than simply following standard procedures.

Keeping the public informed

The service has a communications team. This offers 24/7 support and talks to the media on behalf of staff. Its website gives updates about incidents. Some of these include fire safety messages. And there are good examples of the service using reports from larger incidents to recruit on-call firefighters.

There is a clear social media policy, which staff understand. The service also uses YouTube although, over the past year, this has been limited to recruitment.

Crews can identify vulnerable people and make safeguarding referrals when needed. Fire control staff are confident in advising the public about fire survival. This is despite a lack of refresher training.

Evaluating operational performance

The service needs to improve how it evaluates operational performance. It has a range of documents as part of a command and control system. These include risk assessments, and message and decision logs completed at incidents. But the service is poor at managing this information after an incident. Documents weren't always returned. And few reviews had been done that might help improve performance and staff competence.

Crews told us they routinely have [hot debriefs](#) at incidents. This is where learning is shared before leaving the scene. For larger incidents, all commanders must complete a debrief form. This will include any learning or feedback they want to share.

There were examples of improvements to procedures following incidents – for example, a change to radio procedures. Significant incidents trigger a structured debrief. Important information learned is recorded on individual training records (known as the 'TASK' system).

But some commanders aren't aware of how to raise issues about operational learning. Staff told us they would like to have a central location to review and learn from debriefs for incidents they hadn't been to. Thirty-seven percent of the 135 firefighters and specialist support staff who responded to our survey weren't confident the service takes action as a result of learning from operational incidents. A further 10.4 percent did not know.

Commanders are monitored by a more senior officer at incidents. Station managers are routinely assessed. But crew and [watch](#) managers are only monitored for a limited number of incident types. This is even when the manager is new in post or temporarily promoted.

When appropriate, the service shares its development plans via [national operational learning](#). It described to us three occasions when it had done so. One was an incident where firefighters were injured when using a ladder. The service also monitors external learning and shares this with the ERF.

Responding to national risks



Good

Essex County Fire and Rescue Service is good at responding to national risks. But we found the following areas in which it needs to improve:

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure that its procedures for responding to terrorist-related incidents are understood by all staff and are well tested.
- The service should make sure it participates in a programme of cross-border exercises, sharing the learning from these exercises.

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

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

Preparedness

The service gave examples of when it had supported national incidents. These include helping other services during wildfires in 2017. Senior commanders and control operators confidently described the arrangements to request and manage national assets. These included high-volume pumps and [urban search and rescue](#) units.

The service works closely with the ERF to make sure that Essex is prepared for major incidents. ERF members consider the service to be a proactive and valued part of the forum.

The service has good plans for high-risk sites. It shares these with ERF partners and via [Resilience Direct](#), a national information-sharing platform used by emergency responders. High-risk sites include oil refineries. The service carries out exercises at high-risk sites regularly to prepare its response to incidents. These often involve other emergency services.

Working with other services

The service is among the FRSs working with the East Coast Flood Group, which covers the east coast of England. There were examples of high-level planning and exercises for large sites, such as the Lakeside Shopping Centre and airports. But there were few examples of stations training with neighbouring services. Operational staff told us they would like to train more with their neighbours, especially using equipment such as breathing apparatus. Of the 135 firefighters and specialist support staff who responded to our survey, only 20.7 percent said the service trains regularly with other FRSs, but 30.4 percent did not know.

Crews can access risk information from some neighbouring FRSs – but not all – on their MDTs. Risk information for other FRSs is only available on Resilience Direct. This is something the service should address because it is important that crews have this information when responding to incidents.

Operational commanders showed a mixed level of understanding of national models such as the [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles](#) and the incident command decision control process.

Working with other agencies

The ERF arranges multi-agency training, exercises, debriefs and seminars. These include exercises at airports and the Dartford Crossing, as well as Brexit planning. The service takes part in all these. It works with others at [sites under the Control of Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1999](#). These include local site management, the Health and Safety Executive and the Environment Agency. This is to make sure that plans are in place and tested.

Senior incident commanders understood how to take part in a multi-agency response. The service has funding to provide specialist teams to respond to terrorist incidents. It has well-trained specialist teams and equipment to respond to large-scale national incidents. But we found most operational crews are less confident. They would benefit from training in dealing with terrorist attacks.

Fire control aren't involved in training with other services although inter-agency liaison officers are involved in monthly tests that make sure they can talk to other emergency services using their radios.

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 spend money properly and appropriately. It will align its resources to its risk. It should try to keep costs down without compromising public safety. Future budgets should be based on robust and realistic assumptions. Essex County Fire and Rescue Service's overall efficiency requires improvement.

The service has clear financial plans that balance its budget to 2024 and include making savings. An example is cutting costs by changing the crewing system at four of its fire stations. This is due to be in place by 2020 but is likely to take longer than expected.

The service invests in technology that will improve its service to the public. But we saw some computer systems that may increase staff workload.

There is a lack of planning for allocating resources to prevention, protection and response activities. For example, there is a shortage of fire protection inspectors. The service isn't using its firefighters to carry out home safety visits. But it states in its [IRMP](#) that this is a big part of its day-to-day work.

The lack of annual leave policy potentially enables staff to affect fire engine availability by taking leave at short notice. The service addresses this by using overtime payment for other staff. But this is expensive.

The service has a range of business continuity plans to deal with potential impacts on its ability to provide a service. But most of these haven't been tested or exercised.

The service has done some good work with other FRSs around joint procurement of uniforms and equipment. This has helped improve efficiency. It plans to work more with other services.

Making best use of resources



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service needs to show a clear rationale for the resources allocated between prevention, protection and response activities. This should be linked to risks and priorities set out in its integrated risk management plan.
- The service should assure itself that its workforce is productive.
- The service should ensure that its business continuity plans are tested and reviewed.
- The service should assure itself that it makes the most of collaboration opportunities and that they are 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.

How plans support objectives

The service's medium-term financial plan is based on good planning assumptions and is subject to robust scrutiny and challenge.

As the risk had reduced in some areas, the service cut the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff by 11.2 percent between 31 March 2013 and 31 March 2018. This followed review of its fire cover provision. Its IRMP states that prevention is a big part of the day-to-day work of [wholetime firefighters](#). This isn't currently the case. There also aren't enough protection staff to complete the planned number of audits.

The service recently identified that its operational training programme isn't good enough. This has resulted in an unexpected £1.4m to pay for additional training. This will be funded from [reserves](#).

The service doesn't have an effective annual leave policy. This means that staff can book leave at short notice. As a result, some engines may not be available because there aren't enough trained staff to crew them. As mentioned earlier, this can increase the amount of time it takes to attend incidents because other engines would need to be deployed. These could potentially be further away. Staffing gaps are covered by overtime payments, which isn't efficient. In the nine months to 31 December 2018, the service spent just over £0.7m on pre-arranged overtime and £0.6m on casual overtime.

Productivity and ways of working

The service is changing four stations from day-crewed to on-call. This will improve efficiency. The aim was to have done this by April 2020, but it is now expected to take until 2021. Posts have been found at [wholetime stations](#) for the staff who will no longer be needed at these four stations. As a result, while the changes are being made, some [watches](#) on these stations are short-staffed. These gaps are filled by firefighters being paid overtime.

The service uses pre-arranged and casual overtime payments to keep its wholetime stations available. We were told that uniformed staff from support teams are used to maintain cover at stations. But we found that this rarely happens. Staff told us that [on-call](#) contracts lack flexibility. This makes it more difficult to recruit new staff and keep them if their circumstances change, and this affects the cover the service can offer.

The service now does more [safe and well visits](#). In the year to 31 March 2013, it carried out 1.1 visits per 1,000 population. This increased to 4.7 in the year to 31 March 2018. This is still below the England rate of 10.4.

As mentioned before, the service isn't using its wholetime staff to help meet its targets. A pilot scheme of firefighters doing [home fire safety checks](#) in a small number of stations started in spring 2019. It shows that full-time staff have capacity to carry out prevention work. This is under-used.

It is good that operational staff are visiting risk premises to familiarise themselves. But approaches can be inconsistent and inefficient.

The service produces performance reports to help performance management. Staff told us they felt station plans are too generic, and that managers create their own spreadsheets to help them manage performance.

The service could use technology better, particularly the customer relationship management (CRM) software that is slow and unreliable. The service has set money aside to improve its IT. But at the time of our inspection, a solution hadn't been agreed.

In the year to 31 March 2018, the firefighter cost per head of population was £19.63. This compares with the England rate over the same timescale of £22.38. But many factors influence this cost – for example, the ratio of wholetime to on-call staff. This is partly influenced by how rural the area is.

Collaboration

The service led a programme to develop a common standard for fire engines in the region. By working with Bedfordshire FRS on [fire control](#) procurement, it saved £84,300 between 2014/15 and 2018/19. It also works with the Essex Emergency Services Collaboration Programme. This involves ambulance crews and Essex Police using certain fire stations and their facilities as strategic bases.

The service works with Essex Police to improve community safety work in schools. It is also developing plans to work together in areas such as fleet, estates, control rooms and training facilities. The service is aware that it needs to work with others more, and with a wider range of organisations – for example, around business safety.

A good example of collaborative working is the service's role in the Safer Essex Roads Partnership. Data from the partnership suggests that Essex's roads have become safer. The number of people killed or seriously injured in Essex almost halved between 2005 and 2017. This was from 350 to around 200 per million vehicle miles.

But the service doesn't routinely review and monitor opportunities to work with others.

Continuity arrangements

The service has business continuity plans to make sure that it can provide critical services during times of disruption. But, other than fire control evacuation, these haven't been tested or exercised. At the time of inspection, some plans were out of date and some key staff couldn't find relevant plans for their area of work.

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



Good

Essex County Fire and Rescue Service is good at making its services affordable now and in the future. But we found the following area in which it needs to improve:

Areas for improvement

- The service needs to assure itself that it is maximising opportunities to improve effectiveness and efficiency through the better use of technology.

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

Improving value for money

The service understands its finances and financial pressures. Its annual budget for 2019/20 is £73.8m. This is down from £79.5m in 2014/15. It is using £2.4m from reserves to address a gap left by higher than expected costs from pay settlements and delays in converting four stations to on-call.

In the year to March 2018, the service had around £5.5m in earmarked reserves, around £6.8m in general reserves and £848,000 in provisions.

The service's financial plans balance the budget until 2020/21. Although it has explored a wide range of potential options, it isn't clear how it will make savings after this. However, it is confident that it will achieve the savings needed to 2024.

The service reduced its workforce (FTE) by 11.2 percent between 31 March 2013 and 31 March 2018. And consultancy costs dropped from £1.1m in the year to 31 March 2016 to £0.7m in the year to 31 March 2018. It is also reducing casual and temporary staff costs.

The service works with others to procure uniforms. This is expected to save around £215,000 a year until 2027. Similar joint procurement projects are making more savings. These include personal protective equipment. The service also led on the procurement of 'working at height' equipment on behalf of the national procurement board.

The service has a good fleet strategy. The aim is to ensure best value by using national, regional or collaborative frameworks when procuring new vehicles.

The service doesn't have an overall estates strategy, but it uses premises scorecards which show the efficiency and effectiveness ratings for its properties to help the service make improvements.

Innovation

Essex County FRS has invested in technology to help staff deal with incidents better. The demountable [MDTs](#) give staff information about vehicle safety systems at road traffic collisions.

Operational officers use tablets to get information while at incidents or in meetings. They can also use them to see multi-agency plans for dealing with major incidents.

The service has been slow to use other technology to help it work better. Many of the systems it relies on, such as the CRM software, are slow and not interoperable. The service is aware of this. It has identified the issue on its risk register and has around £1m set aside for improving IT.

Future investment and working with others

The service reviews its reserves each year. This is to make sure that there is flexibility in how they are allocated.

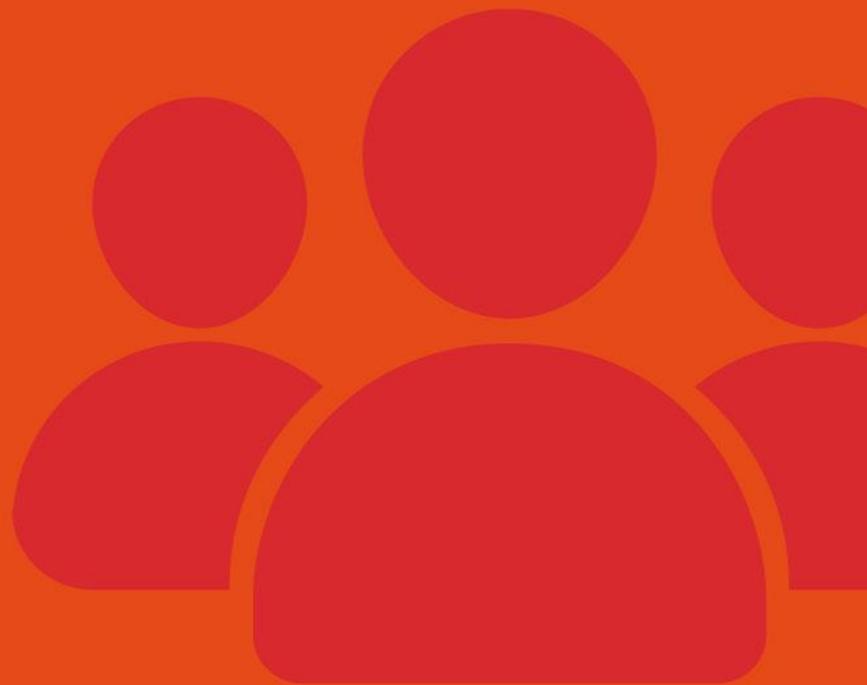
The service is working with both Devon and Somerset FRS and Kent FRS to set up a procurement hub and build national procurement capability. The service secured £220,000 of [fire transformation funding](#) in 2015. This helped it establish the Fire and Rescue Indemnity Company Ltd. This is an innovative and collaborative approach to risk protection and insurance. It involves eight other FRSs. The project is expected to have saved over £2.8m across the nine FRSs by 2025.

The service's subsidiary company, EFA (Trading) Limited, carry out its trading. The company sells training and engineering services. It also sells off end-of-life vehicles and equipment.

The company doesn't employ people directly. Instead, it uses off-duty staff on secondary contracts. It made a small profit of around £25,000 for the year to 31 March 2018. Profits go into a community foundation, with grants that can come back into the service. The service is reviewing its trading arm and looking at how other services operate theirs. The aim is to make it more profitable.

The service will generate more capital when it sells the 25 houses adjacent to its day-crewed stations. This will be once they have been converted to on-call.

People



How well does the service look after its people?



Requires improvement

Summary

A fire and rescue service that looks after its people should be able to provide an effective service to its community. It should offer a range of services to make its communities safer. This will include developing and maintaining a workforce that is professional, resilient, skilled, flexible and diverse. The service's leaders should be positive role models, and this should be reflected in the behaviour of the workforce. Overall, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at looking after its people.

There is a need for significant improvement in the organisational culture of Essex County FRS. The service has a legacy issue of failings at all levels, including inappropriate behaviour and bullying. These failings were highlighted in an independent review in 2015. The service has since moved under the governance of a police, fire and crime commissioner and has appointed a new chief fire officer, who in turn has appointed a new service leadership team.

The police, fire and crime commissioner is clear about the need to continue to improve culture. There is a strong commitment from the chief fire officer and her team to address these issues, and recently introduced initiatives are designed to help with this.

A good start has been made, with positive feedback from staff on visible improvements. However, the scale of the challenge is significant. Embedding strong positive values through every level of the organisation will take time, and there is a lot of work to do. Poor data around workforce diversity makes effective analysis difficult. It is also clear that some staff don't fully understand the benefits of, and need for, diversity. We were disappointed to find examples of behaviour that don't reflect the service's values, and concerned to find reports of bullying and harassment made by staff not being addressed by some managers.

Some firefighters have secondary contracts of employment outside the service. The service only has records of very few of these, although there is a robust policy in place. It should make sure that these staff are well rested and safe to work.

There isn't enough assurance to make sure that competence levels among staff are being maintained through training. The service is taking this seriously and is investing £1.4m in improving operational training.

Significant work has been done to improve the appraisal process and completion rates have dramatically improved. Staff told us that they welcomed the new approach of senior managers, but they said middle managers needed to be braver in tackling poor performance.

The service has good processes for looking after staff wellbeing. This includes supporting personal issues outside work. Staff who have used these services have praised them. However, others don't know this support exists. The service is good at looking after its staff's health and safety, and it learns from accidents and dangerous occurrences.

Promoting the right values and culture



Inadequate

Causes of concern

There is a clear intent from senior officers to improve the culture of the service, and many staff reported improvements under the new chief fire officer. However, more needs to be done. We are concerned to have found evidence of behaviours that are not in line with service values, such as sexism and bullying. Despite being reported, at times these behaviours have not been challenged by managers.

Recommendations

By 31 March 2020, the service should produce an action plan that ensures:

- it communicates service values to staff effectively, ensuring that they understand and can demonstrate acceptable behaviours at all times; and
- managers at all levels demonstrate service values through their positive workplace behaviours and are capable of challenging inappropriate language and behaviour when identified.

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

Workforce wellbeing

Staff told us that Essex County FRS's wellbeing processes have improved in recent years. They have access to physiotherapy services and an employee assistance programme. Those who have used these praised them, but not all staff are aware of them.

Some staff didn't feel supported in managing large workloads. Views about the service's occupational health service were mixed. Some managers would like more training in how to identify signs and symptoms of stress in their colleagues.

The service offers support after traumatic incidents although some staff don't understand the process.

Health and safety

The service has an established health and safety culture. It learns from accidents – for example, it updated its driver training in response to a rise in [near misses](#). This followed new fire engines being introduced.

Staff get health and safety messages via email bulletins. These are followed up by questionnaires to confirm that everyone understands them. The health and safety team has visited fire stations to raise awareness of issues. It also updates staff each month.

Of the 258 staff who responded to our survey, 94.2 percent knew how to report all accidents, near misses and dangerous occurrences.

We found a lack of oversight of staff working hours and a lack of reliable information about secondary employment. This is despite a robust policy being in place. The service needs to make sure that staff are well rested and safe to work, and that the working time regulations are followed.

Culture and values

Following an independent cultural review in 2015, the service's senior leaders are clear about their intention to improve its culture. Staff have seen noticeable improvements. An example is the new chief officer, who many staff described as positive and approachable.

Staff created service values. While there has been a growing commitment to them, some staff don't yet understand them.

Senior managers visiting workplaces have received mixed feedback from staff. Some told us that they rarely see, or have never met, their senior leaders. This is despite some working in the same building.

The service has commissioned an external company to carry out engagement with every member of staff so their views can be heard. This will inform a 'cultural improvement plan'. And the chief fire officer has introduced a monthly recognition award and annual staff awards.

Despite these measures, we were concerned to find evidence that inappropriate behaviours remain. A number of staff told us they had been victims of unacceptable language and behaviour. This included sexism. And staff gave examples of being bullied and ostracised by some managers and peers.

Some support staff reported poor treatment at the hands of operational staff. This included harassment. And we found significant divisions between [wholetime](#) staff and [on-call](#) staff. Some on-call staff told us they felt that wholetime colleagues looked down on them. Of the 258 responses to the staff survey, 26.0 percent said they had felt harassed or bullied at work in the past 12 months.

We were most concerned at the lack of action from a range of managers to address these issues when concerns were raised. The service has a lot of work to do to challenge these behaviours, to create an inclusive culture.

Getting the right people with the right skills



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service needs to assure itself that all staff are appropriately trained for their role. It needs to ensure all staff keep their skills up to date and have a consistent method of recording when they have received training.

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

Workforce planning

The service predicts retirements and movement of operational staff quarterly. This helps predict shortages in operational cover.

Detailed six-monthly workforce planning reports are given to the service leadership team. This helps it plan recruitment, training and promotions. But there is a lack of effective workforce planning in some critical areas. For example, there are vacancies in the technical fire safety department. This means that the service is failing to meet its targets.

A central staffing team assesses the skills at stations – for example, the number of fire engine drivers. This helps to plan who should attend which courses, and from which stations. The service offers enough courses to meet predicted demand. This means that staff can maintain their core skills, and progress, to help meet the service's needs.

The service offers good staff training from its training centre and focuses on risk-critical skills. It carries out theoretical testing and practical assessment. And it gives initial and refresher courses for wearing breathing apparatus and for commanding incidents. There are clear assessment criteria linked to national

standards. If risk-critical skills expire, staff don't take part in operational duties until their training is up to date.

As mentioned earlier, the service has prioritised cultural change. But many managers are aware that they need training in essential 'softer skills'. These include performance management, industrial relations, and handling discipline and grievances. The service should consider making this training compulsory. This would make sure that managers at all levels are able to lead staff through this time of change.

Until recently, the service had a high number of staff in temporary posts. As at 31 December 2018, there were 123 staff on temporary promotion compared with 196 as at 31 March 2017. This has recently been addressed with the 'talent pool' promotion process. Data provided by the service shows it appointed 52 staff into substantive roles. Data from the service shows 46 more staff have entered the 'pool' and are being trained for future roles.

Learning and improvement

The service has a good central recording system for training, such as breathing apparatus and incident command. This highlights when staff need to complete refresher courses. These centrally taught core skills are well maintained and supported by the training team. Operational staff told us that centrally delivered training was of a high standard.

But we found a different picture of locally provided training at stations. This is supported by e-learning packages and is led by the service's TASK system. This records that staff have attended a training session. But the service is aware that the system doesn't offer good evidence of competence.

There were many inefficiencies with the system, including when trying to audit skills and competencies. Some e-learning packages were described by staff as being of poor quality. The service is aware of the problems with TASK and is making improvements.

As well as issues with recording training, staff told us they were unhappy with the standard of training at stations. This training is mostly provided by line managers who aren't qualified to train or assess. There is no co-ordinated training programme for [fire control](#) staff. And flexible-duty officers were concerned that there is no oversight of their TASK records.

Only 61 percent of the 258 staff who responded to our survey said they felt they had enough training to enable them to do their job. The service is aware that it needs to do more to make sure that the workforce has the right skills and capabilities. It is investing in new training staff. These staff will work a rota pattern. This will include evenings and weekends to help them better support on-call training.

The service has training schedules for stations to follow, which include arranging training exercises with neighbouring stations. It completes many training exercises with other agencies and FRSs. Between 1 April 2018 and 31 December 2018, the service undertook 10 joint exercises/training with other FRSs, 49 multi-agency exercises/training and one national resilience exercise/training. These help the service work better with others.

Operational crews haven't had enough training to enable them to carry out protection activities. And there aren't records of the limited training done so far.

But officers who carry out [safe and well checks](#) have an annual training plan and monthly updates. They are trained to a high standard.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service should assure itself that it has effective grievance procedures which include clearly documented actions and outcomes.
- The service should make sure issues identified through its staff survey are appropriately addressed and that actions taken are communicated to staff in a timely way.
- To identify and tackle barriers to equality of opportunity, and make its workforce more representative, the service should ensure diversity and inclusion are well-understood and become important values of the whole of the service.

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

Seeking and acting on staff feedback

The service has a range of employee engagement and feedback tools. It has made changes as a result of this feedback. But it isn't always good at telling staff about these changes. The senior leadership team told us of its continued commitment to visiting all staff and locations. But we found mixed opinions about whether the senior leaders are visible to staff.

The service has manager briefings and had a recent exercise called 'Everyone Matters'. As part of this, so far over 200 employees have talked to independent reviewers about how they feel the service could improve.

There is an annual staff survey. This is managed by a third-party company that generates an action plan for addressing staff concerns. But many staff are reluctant to take part because they don't trust its anonymity. This is a result of a culture of mistrust. The results weren't communicated well to staff either.

The service meets regularly with unions. Not all of them are willing to attend together. So, managers have to hold two meetings each time. Union representatives gave us examples of times when their feedback had been listened to and changes made. But there were also examples of delays to putting policies in place due to a failure to reach agreement with unions.

The service is asking for feedback from its on-call staff. This is being done through focus groups. It will help it to work out how to improve the on-call experience, recruitment and availability.

There were examples of poor communication around structural changes within teams. Staff told us they heard about changes to their working conditions unofficially. They felt this was disappointing.

During our review of grievances, record keeping was poor, the management system was hard to audit and some files were missing or incomplete. There was little evidence of learning from grievances. Managerial staff would benefit from training in resolving disputes and grievance. And the service needs to assure itself that actions and outcomes are dealt with effectively.

Diversity

The workforce doesn't reflect its wider community. As at 31 March 2018, 1.8 percent of its firefighters were from a black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) background. This compares with a BAME residential population of 6.7 percent. A total of 53.4 percent of the workforce ethnicity is not stated. This makes analysis difficult. This is by far the highest percentage of any English FRS. The England rate is 9.6 percent.

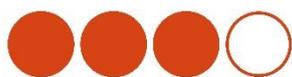
As at 31 March 2018, only 3.3 percent of Essex's firefighters were female. The service has tried to address this by targeting its recruitment at women and people from BAME communities. It uses targeted social media and advertising campaigns. The aim is to increase applications from under-represented groups.

As a result, the service states that 10 percent of its recent wholetime recruits were female. The service has also recently established a women's forum. This is sponsored and supported by the chief officer.

Despite this work, some staff don't fully understand the benefits of, and need for, diversity. They were negative about initiatives to address this. There was evidence of poor behaviour towards people who had raised concerns about inequality. There were several examples of managers failing to tackle inappropriate behaviour such as gender discrimination. Some managers have failed to support staff with learning difficulties, such as dyslexia. Of the 258 responses to the staff survey, 24.4 percent said they had felt discriminated against at work in the past 12 months.

The service has recently appointed 50 volunteer 'dignity at work' champions to help support staff in the workplace. This has been well received by staff. But there is a lot of work to do.

Managing performance and developing leaders



Good

Essex County Fire and Rescue Service is good at managing performance and developing leaders. But we found the following area in which it needs to improve:

Areas for improvement

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

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

Managing performance

The service has an appraisal process for all members of staff. It has clear reporting and monitoring lines, and is supportive of staff and management. After a recent review, the service has improved the process. Completion rates have dramatically increased as a result.

In March 2018, 2.3 percent of wholetime firefighters had completed appraisals. By March 2019, this had risen to 75 percent. The process includes having effective conversations with line managers at least twice each year.

Despite completion rates improving, staff have mixed views about the effectiveness of the appraisal process. Some welcome it and feel that it is easier to complete appraisals than before. Others feel it is only relevant to those seeking promotion and see it as a 'tick box' exercise.

Some staff weren't clear whether there is a link to service objectives. They said that they would benefit from training in how to complete appraisals effectively. The service should make sure that its new process is giving all staff the opportunity to have genuine and meaningful conversations about performance.

Some staff told us they felt there is a lack of effective performance management. They told us leaders, particularly middle managers, need to be braver in tackling poor performance of staff. They welcomed the new style of leadership from the senior leadership team but were keen to see significant organisational change and improvements.

Of the 258 staff who took part in our survey, only 52.7 percent felt satisfied with their current level of learning and development.

Developing leaders

The service's annual review policy doesn't have a defined process for identifying high achievers. Its promotion process establishes when people are ready for promotion. But there isn't a clear process for finding potential senior leaders early on.

The people strategy shows an intention to create a development programme. This would offer fast-track development for suitable candidates, but it isn't mentioned in the promotions or appraisal guidance.

Access to the promotion process was fair and transparent. Those who are successful enter the service's development pool. They are offered development and temporary promotion opportunities. But there were mixed views on how fair the process was for securing a permanent or temporary role. There were examples of managers interfering with the process. These included some people being selected over others, despite being less qualified for the role. Of the 258 staff who responded to our survey, 51.6 percent felt they are not given the same opportunities to develop as others.

Annex A – About the data

Data in this report is from a range of sources, including:

- Home Office;
- Office for National Statistics (ONS);
- Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA);
- our public perception survey;
- our inspection fieldwork; and
- data we collected directly from all 45 fire and rescue services (FRSs) in England.

Where we collected data directly from FRSs, we took reasonable steps to agree the design of the data collection with services and with other interested parties, such as the Home Office. This was primarily through our Technical Advisory Group, which brings together representatives from the fire sector and the Home Office to support the inspection's design and development, including data collection.

We give services several opportunities to validate the data we collect to make sure the evidence presented is accurate. For instance, we asked all services to:

- check the data they submitted to us via an online application;
- check the final data used in each service report; and
- correct any errors they identified.

We set out the source of Service in Numbers data below.

Methodology

Use of data in the reports and to form judgments

The data we cite in this report and use to form our judgments is the information that was available at the time of inspection. Due to the nature of data collection, there are often gaps between the timeframe the data covers, when it was collected, and when it becomes available to use.

If more recent data became available after inspection, showing a different trend or context, we have referred to this in the report. However, it was not used to form our judgments.

In a small number of cases, data available at the time of the inspection was later found to be incorrect. For example, a service might have identified an error in its original data return. When this is the case, we have corrected the data and used the more reliable data in the report.

Population

For all uses of population as a denominator in our calculations, unless otherwise noted, we use [ONS mid-2017 population estimates](#). At the time of inspection this was the most recent data available.

2018 survey of public perception of the fire and rescue service

We commissioned BMG to survey attitudes towards FRSs in June and July 2018. This consisted of 17,976 surveys across 44 local FRS areas. This survey didn't include the Isles of Scilly, due to its small population. Most interviews were conducted online, with online research panels.

However, a minority of the interviews (757) were conducted face-to-face with trained interviewers in respondents' homes. A small number of respondents were also interviewed online via postal invitations to the survey. These face-to-face interviews were specifically targeted at groups traditionally under-represented on online panels, and so ensure that survey respondents are as representative as possible of the total adult population of England. The sampling method used isn't a statistical random sample. The sample size in each service area was small, varying between 400 and 446 individuals. So any results provided are only an indication of satisfaction rather than an absolute.

[Survey findings are available on BMG's website.](#)

Staff survey

We conducted a staff survey open to all members of FRS workforces across England. We received 3,083 responses between 8 March and 9 August 2019 from across the 15 Tranche 3 services.

We view the staff survey as an important tool in understanding the views of staff who we may not have spoken to, for a variety of reasons, during fieldwork.

However, you should consider several points when interpreting the findings from the staff survey.

The results are not representative of the opinions and attitudes of a service's whole workforce. The survey was self-selecting, and the response rate ranged from 7 percent to 40 percent of a service's workforce. So any findings should be considered alongside the service's overall response rate, which is cited in the report.

To protect respondents' anonymity and allow completion on shared devices, it was not possible to limit responses to one per person. So it is possible that a single person could have completed the survey more than once.

Each service was provided with a unique access code to try to make sure that only those currently working in a service could complete the survey. However, it is possible that the survey and access code could have been shared and completed by people other than its intended respondents.

We have provided percentages when presenting the staff survey findings throughout the report. When a service has a low number of responses (less than 100), these figures should be treated with additional caution. Percentages may sum to more than 100 percent due to rounding.

Due to the limitations set out above, the results from the staff survey should only be used to provide an indicative measure of service performance.

Service in numbers

A dash in this graphic indicates that a service couldn't give data to us or the Home Office.

Perceived effectiveness of service

We took this data from the following question of the 2018 survey of public perceptions of the FRS:

How confident are you, if at all, that the fire and rescue service in your local area provides an effective service overall?

The figure provided is a sum of respondents who stated they were either 'very confident' or 'fairly confident'. Respondents could have also stated 'not very confident', 'not at all confident' or 'don't know'. The percentage of 'don't know' responses varied between services (ranging from 5 percent to 14 percent).

Due to its small residential population, we didn't include the Isles of Scilly in the survey.

Incidents attended per 1,000 population

We took this data from the Home Office fire statistics, '[Incidents attended by fire and rescue services in England, by incident type and fire and rescue authority](#)' for the period from 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2019.

Please consider the following points when interpreting outcomes from this data.

- There are seven worksheets in this file. The 'FIRE0102' worksheet shows the number of incidents attended by type of incident and fire and rescue authority (FRA) for each financial year. The 'FIRE0102 Quarterly' worksheet shows the number of incidents attended by type of incident and FRA for each quarter. The worksheet 'Data' provides the raw data for the two main data tables (from 2009/10). The 'Incidents chart - front page', 'Chart 1' and 'Chart 2' worksheets provide the data for the corresponding charts in the statistical commentary. The 'FRS geographical categories' worksheet shows how FRAs are categorised.
- Fire data, covering all incidents that FRSs attend, is collected by the Incident Recording System (IRS). For several reasons some records take longer than others for services to upload to the IRS. Totals are constantly being amended (by relatively small numbers).
- We took data for Service in Numbers from the August 2019 incident publication. So, figures may not directly match more recent publications due to data updates.

Home fire safety checks per 1,000 population

We took this data from the Home Office fire statistics, '[Home Fire Safety Checks carried out by fire and rescue services and partners, by fire and rescue authority](#)' for the period from 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018.

Each FRS figure is based on the number of checks it carried out. It doesn't include checks carried out by partners.

Please consider the following points when interpreting outcomes from this data.

- Dorset FRS and Wiltshire FRS merged to form Dorset and Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire FRSs before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.
- Figures for 'Fire Risk Checks carried out by Elderly (65+)', 'Fire Risk Checks carried out by Disabled' and 'Number of Fire Risk Checks carried out by Partners' don't include imputed figures because a lot of services can't supply these figures.
- The checks included in a home fire safety check can vary between services. You should consider this when making direct comparisons between services.
- Home fire safety checks may also be referred to as home fire risk checks or safe and well visits by services.
- After inspection, East Sussex FRS resubmitted data on its total number of home fire safety checks and the number of checks targeted at the elderly and disabled in the year to 31 March 2018. The latest data changes the percentage of checks that were targeted at the elderly (from 54.1 percent to 54.9 percent) and disabled (from 24.7 percent to 25.4 percent) in England. However, as noted above, in all reports we have used the original figures that were available at the time of inspection.

Fire safety audits per 100 known premises

Fire protection refers to FRSs' statutory role in ensuring public safety in the wider built environment. It involves auditing and, where necessary, enforcing regulatory compliance, primarily but not exclusively in respect of the provisions of the [Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005 \(FSO\)](#). The number of safety audits in Service in Numbers refers to the number of audits services carried out in known premises. According to the Home Office's definition, "premises known to FRAs are the FRA's knowledge, as far as possible, of all relevant premises; for the enforcing authority to establish a risk profile for premises in its area. These refer to all premises except single private dwellings".

We took this from the Home Office fire statistics, '[Fire safety audits carried out by fire and rescue services, by fire and rescue authority](#)' for the period from 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018.

Please consider the following points when interpreting outcomes from this data.

- Berkshire FRS didn't provide figures for premises known between 2014/15 and 2017/18.
- Dorset FRS and Wiltshire FRS merged to form Dorset and Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire FRSs before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.

- Several FRAs report ‘Premises known to FRAs’ as estimates based on historical data.

Firefighter cost per person per year

We took the data used to calculate firefighter cost per person per year from the annual financial data returns that individual FRSs complete and submit to CIPFA, and [ONS mid-2017 population estimates](#).

You should consider this data alongside the proportion of firefighters who are wholetime and on-call.

Number of firefighters per 1,000 population, five-year change in workforce and percentage of wholetime firefighters

We took this data from the Home Office fire statistics, ‘[Total staff numbers \(full-time equivalent\) by role and by fire and rescue authority](#)’ as at 31 March 2018.

Table 1102a: Total staff numbers (FTE) by role and fire authority – Wholetime Firefighters and table 1102b: Total staff numbers (FTE) by role and fire authority – Retained Duty System are used to produce the total number of firefighters.

Please consider the following points when interpreting outcomes from this data.

- We calculate these figures using full-time equivalent (FTE) numbers. FTE is a metric that describes a workload unit. One FTE is equivalent to one full-time worker. But one FTE may also be made up of two or more part-time workers whose calculated hours equal that of a full-time worker. This differs from headcount, which is the actual number of the working population regardless if employees work full or part-time.
- Some totals may not aggregate due to rounding.
- Dorset FRS and Wiltshire FRS merged to form Dorset and Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire FRSs before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.

Percentage of female firefighters and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) firefighters

We took this data from the Home Office fire statistics, ‘[Staff headcount by gender, fire and rescue authority and role](#)’ and ‘[Staff headcount by ethnicity, fire and rescue authority and role](#)’ as at 31 March 2018.

Please consider the following points when interpreting outcomes from this data.

- We calculate BAME residential population data from ONS 2011 census data. This figure is calculated by dividing the BAME residential population by the total population.
- We calculate female residential population data from ONS mid-2017 population estimates.
- The percentage of BAME firefighters does not include those who opted not to disclose their ethnic origin. There are large variations between services in the number of firefighters who did not state their ethnic origin.

- Dorset FRS and Wiltshire FRS merged to form Dorset and Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire FRSs before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.

Annex B – Fire and rescue authority governance

These are the different models of fire and rescue authority (FRA) governance in England. Essex County Fire and Rescue Service is a police, fire and crime commissioner FRA.

Metropolitan FRA

The FRA covers a metropolitan (large urban) area. Each is governed by locally elected councillors appointed from the constituent councils in that area.

Combined FRA

The FRA covers more than one local authority area. Each is governed by locally elected councillors appointed from the constituent councils in that area.

County FRA

Some county councils are defined as FRAs, with responsibility for fire and rescue service provision in their area.

Unitary authorities

These combine the usually separate council powers and functions for non-metropolitan counties and non-metropolitan districts. In such counties, a separate fire authority runs the fire services. This is made up of councillors from the county council and unitary councils.

London

Day-to-day control of London's fire and rescue service is the responsibility of the London fire commissioner, accountable to the Mayor. A Greater London Authority committee and the Deputy Mayor for Fire scrutinise the commissioner's work. The Mayor may arrange for the Deputy Mayor to exercise his fire and rescue functions.

Mayoral Combined Authority

Only in Greater Manchester. The Combined Authority is responsible for fire and rescue functions but with those functions exercised by the elected Mayor. A fire and rescue committee supports the Mayor in exercising non-strategic fire and rescue functions. This committee is made up of members from the constituent councils.

Police, fire and crime commissioner FRA

The police, fire and rescue commissioner is solely responsible for the service provision of fire & rescue and police functions.

Isles of Scilly

The Council of the Isles of Scilly is the FRA for the Isles of Scilly.

December 2019 | © HMICFRS 2019 | ISBN: 978-1-78655-924-1

www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs