Fire & Rescue Service
Effectiveness, efficiency and people 2018/19

An inspection of London Fire Brigade

Contents

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 was undertaken between May and July 2019 and assesses how effectively and efficiently London Fire Brigade 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 brigade.

This inspection was one of many of our routine inspections into fire and rescue services. It was not in response to the fire at Grenfell Tower to which London Fire Brigade responded on 14 June 2017. Our focus during inspection was only on lessons learned since the event, changes made in service as a result, and support provided for staff affected by the incident.

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry, an independent public inquiry, is assessing the appropriateness of the fire and rescue service response and fire safety activity leading up to the incident.

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

	London	England
Perceived effectiveness of service Public perceptions survey (June/July 2018)	84%	86%

Response

	London	England
Incidents attended per 1,000 population 12 months to 31 December 2018	12.0	10.4
Home fire risk checks carried out by FRS per 1,000 population 12 months to 31 March 2018	9.4	10.4
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises 12 months to 31 March 2018	5.8	3.0

Incidents attended in the 12 months to 31 December 2018

Total Non-fire incidents 33%

Total Fires 19%

Total
105,864

Total False Alarms 48%
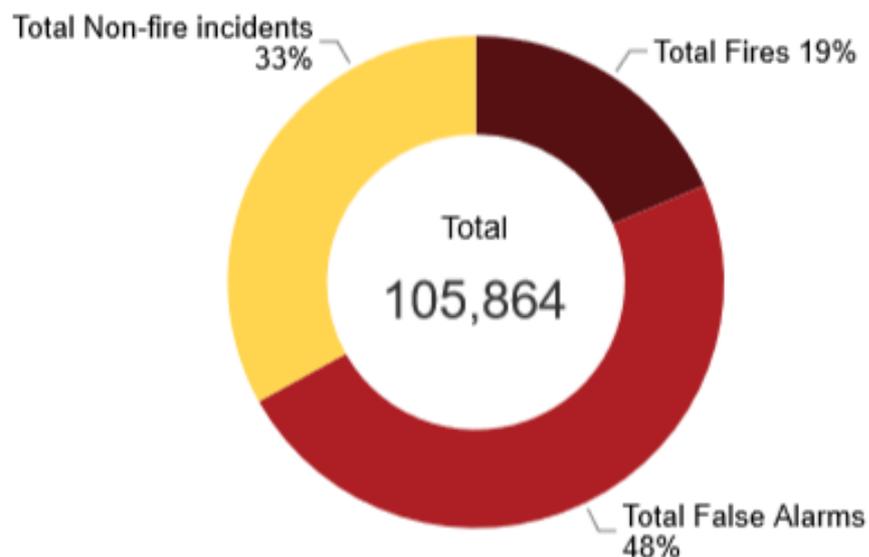
£ Cost

	London	England
Firefighter cost per person per year 12 months to 31 March 2018	£28.33	£22.38

Workforce

|	London	England
Number of firefighters per 1,000 population As at 31 March 2018	0.5	0.6
Five-year change in workforce As at 31 March 2013 compared with 31 March 2018	-18%	-14%
Percentage of wholetime firefighters As at 31 March 2018	100%	70%

Percentage of female firefighters as at 31 March 2018

● Female firefighters ● Female residential population
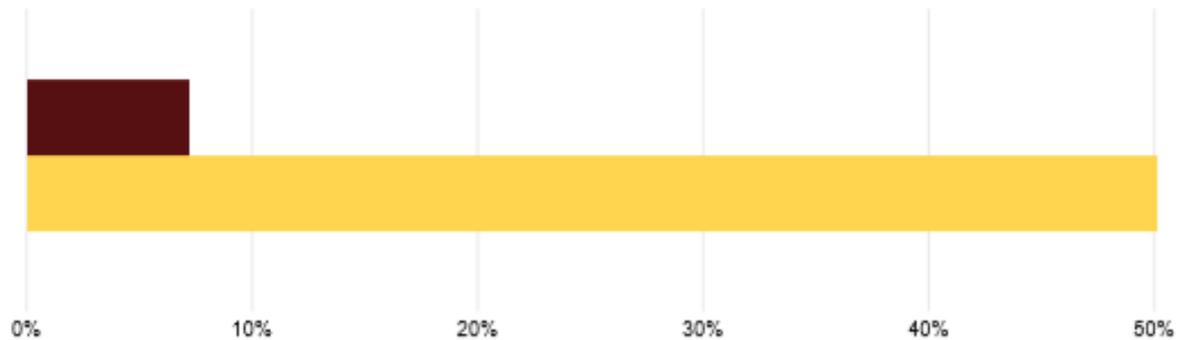
Percentage of black, Asian and minority ethnic firefighters as at 31 March 2018

● BAME Firefighters ● BAME residential population
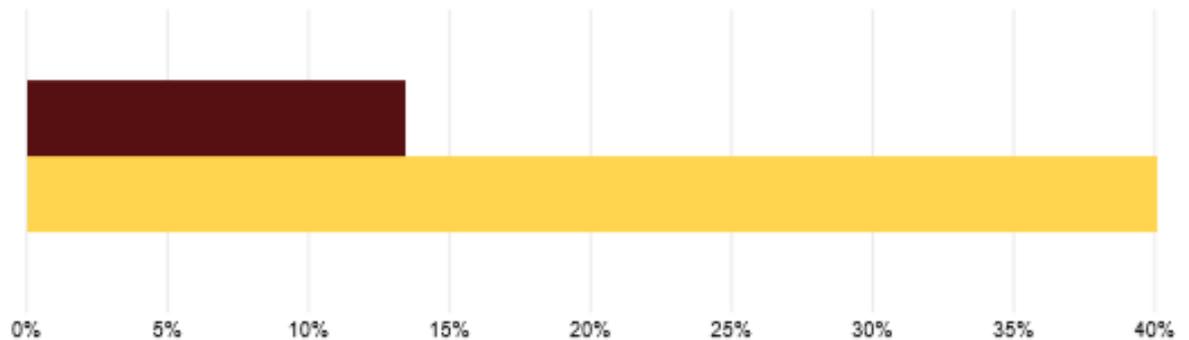
Please refer to annex A for full details on data used.

Overview

Effectiveness	●●○○	**Requires improvement**
Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies	●●●○	Good
Preventing fires and other risks	●●●○	Good
Protecting the public through fire regulation	●●○○	Requires improvement
Responding to fires and other emergencies	●●○○	Requires improvement
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	●●○○	Requires improvement

👥 People

Requires improvement
● ● ○ ○

Promoting the right values and culture	● ● ○ ○ Requires improvement
Getting the right people with the right skills	● ○ ○ ○ Inadequate
Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity	● ● ○ ○ Requires improvement
Managing performance and developing leaders	● ● ○ ○ Requires improvement

Overall summary of inspection findings

We are satisfied with some aspects of the performance of London Fire Brigade. But there are several areas where the brigade needs to make improvements.

The effectiveness of the service provided by London Fire Brigade requires improvement in the way it:

- protects the public through fire regulation; and
- responds to fires and other emergencies.

But it is good at:

- understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies;
- preventing fires and other risks; and
- responding to national risks.

The efficiency of London Fire Brigade's services also requires improvement, both to the way it:

- uses resources; and
- makes its services affordable now and in the future.

The London Fire Brigade requires improvement to the way it looks after its people. Worryingly, it is inadequate at getting the right people with the right skills. It also requires improvement at:

- promoting the right values and culture;
- ensuring fairness and promoting diversity; and
- managing performance and developing leaders.

We would like to see improvements in the year ahead. The brigade should act immediately to assure itself of the continuing competence of all its incident commanders and emergency drivers.

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. The London Fire Brigade's overall effectiveness requires improvement.

The London Fire Brigade is a well-resourced brigade that exceeds its own standards on response times to fires and other emergencies.

The brigade's operational policies and procedures are comprehensive, but they don't fully reflect national operational guidance (NOG), even for risk-critical areas such as incident command. This is worrying, especially since it is coupled with the need to improve the maintenance of competence of all its incident commanders and emergency drivers through training and assessment. This needs immediate attention.

The brigade also needs to know precisely how many high-risk premises it audits each year. Without this knowledge, it can't meet the requirements of its risk-based inspection programme and assure itself that it effectively protects the public from fires. It needs to respond on time to building regulation consultations and could do much more to reduce the burden of false alarms. It should also make sure that staff accurately record risk assessments and control measures put in place at an incident, and pass them on to oncoming crews. This will alert commanders to workplace risks and help put safety control measures in place at the incident.

More positively, the brigade consults widely and engages effectively with the public in developing its integrated risk management plan (known as the London Safety Plan).

The brigade needs to make sure its firefighters have access to relevant risk information through mobile data terminals (MDTs), which aren't available on older fire engines.

The brigade is good at preventing fires and works well with its partner agencies and other organisations to do so. It makes [vulnerable people](#) a priority for [home fire safety visits](#).

The London Fire Brigade has shown that it has learned many lessons since the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017. But it could improve how it records what it has learned from incidents in its operational debrief system.

Finally, the brigade is good at responding to national risks, which it has shown in its responses to several high-profile incidents. But it should make sure all frontline staff, and not just specialist response teams, are well protected and well prepared for being part of a multi-agency response. This includes responding to a marauding terrorist attack, given the relatively high likelihood of such incidents in London. It could also do more to make sure that crews are aware of cross-border risks and are trained to deal with them.

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies

Good

The London Fire Brigade is good at understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies. But we found the following area in which it needs to improve:

Areas for improvement
- The brigade should make sure all its firefighters have good access to 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 brigade's performance in this area.

Understanding local and community risk

The London Fire Brigade is good at gathering and understanding risk information about its communities and using it to inform its planning. It faces some unique risks associated with the capital city. London is the country's financial and political centre, and has seen an increase in terrorist-related incidents. The brigade gives support to many different communities and has the largest population of any fire and rescue service in England. It uses computer-based modelling to assess risk, which informs the London Safety Plan. This approach has been in place for many years and is well established.

Risk modelling is mainly based on giving the best possible emergency response times to the public, with many scenarios regularly tested. Risk information is also used to offer home fire safety visits to the people who most need them. The brigade is working to have community safety plans for all London boroughs, and most are in place. These community safety plans reflect the different risks in local communities.

The brigade works with communities and other agencies, such as local authorities, the police, ambulance services and Transport for London (TfL) to understand and exchange information about local risk. This is available to the public on the brigade's website. The public have opportunities to tell the brigade their concerns about risks in their area. When the brigade was developing its last London Safety Plan in 2016/17, it held a comprehensive consultation programme that generated 1,968 returns. After a review, it refocused consultation on specific groups of people who were under-represented in the returns.

The brigade is good at regularly gathering a wide range of data to maintain a current risk profile – for example, from emergency incidents, census data about population density, age and deprivation levels, and crime and lifestyle data. It also gets information from partners. Data is updated every year and communicated internally when there are significant changes that affect the risk of fires and other emergencies.

The brigade has a guiding principle of equal entitlement supported by borough rules. This means that, regardless of area risk, all Londoners get a broadly similar type, speed and weight of response. In areas where the brigade has more incidents, they have allocated more resources.

Having an effective risk management plan

The brigade's London Safety Plan for 2017–21 is effective. The plan outlines current and future changes in risk, and it clearly sets out how the brigade will manage risks to the public through prevention, protection and response activities.

The plan states the brigade's intent to work with blue light partners and other agencies to support their goals and help meet the broader safety agenda. It outlines how the brigade will work with the building industry, looking at innovative design for buildings and the development of major transport infrastructure. It describes the brigade's arrangements to support national, cross-border, multi-agency incidents and to respond to terrorist attacks. It is a comprehensive document that aligns with the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England. Its planning assumptions incorporate recommendations from two independent reviews: the 2016 Harris review into London's preparedness to respond to a major terrorist incident and the 2016 Mayer review (which addressed the levels of resourcing required by the brigade to make sure it is fully equipped to fight and prevent fires, and to respond effectively to a terrorist attack or a major incident, such as flooding).

The London Safety Plan is supported by an action plan. But, since its publication in 2017, the brigade's strategic direction no longer has clear links with it. We explain this later in the report, in terms of 'How efficient is the service at keeping people safe and secure?' (see page 26).

Maintaining risk information

Firefighters regularly gather risk information, including from underground sites, to help in pre-planning and decision making at incidents. The brigade has updated its risk data over the past year. For high-rise residential buildings, firefighters complete an electronic premises information plate (EPIP). This EPIP risk record includes important information such as building layout drawings, locations of hydrants, lifts and sprinklers, and equipment likely to be needed. Not all high-rise residential premises in London have an EPIP yet, but the brigade is implementing its plan to make sure they do.

The brigade varies how often it reassesses a site's risk depending on the rating given at their last visit.

Firefighters can see risk information on maps on fire engine-mounted MDTs. Fire control operators and station management can also view them on their computer screens. But on older fire engines this information isn't always available for firefighters. The brigade has made alternative arrangements to try to manage this risk until the engines are replaced.

On newer fire engines, systems immediately upload new risk records when they are completed. This gives firefighters fast access to new information.

Since the Grenfell Tower fire, the brigade has been making more risk visits across London. If a high-rise residential building is at higher risk because it is clad with aluminium composite material, firefighters must visit weekly. These visits are to check that temporary special fire safety measures agreed with the building owner remain in place.

These temporary measures may include a simultaneous evacuation procedure, in which all parts of a building are evacuated in the event of fire at one time. Extra options may include a 24/7 'waking fire watch'. This is a system provided by the building owner whereby their staff should continually patrol all floors and the exterior perimeter of the building. This means they could respond to a fire, call the fire service and help evacuate the building. Firefighters report fire safety changes to the enforcement department and visits occur less often as the risk reduces. This is an effective mechanism for managing this type of risk. It is also efficient because, as the risk reduces, visits are made less frequently.

Other risk information is passed to crews in different ways depending on local station management arrangements and whether the information is temporary or permanent. The brigade uses written handover notes, emails, operational or health and safety bulletins, printouts of temporary events or changes, and pop-up messages on the screens of control room operators.

Preventing fires and other risks

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Good

The London Fire Brigade is good at preventing fires and other risks. But we found the following area in which it needs to improve:

Areas for improvement

- The brigade should better evaluate its prevention work so it fully understands how effective it is at reducing the risk of fires and other emergencies.

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

Prevention strategy

The brigade's community safety and prevention strategy was implemented in 2018. It is comprehensive and informed by risk, mayoral priorities, the law, national requirements and the London Safety Plan. The strategy shows where risks are greatest and presents a clear rationale for the level of work planned.

The brigade works nationally with other fire and rescue services, and with many partners and communities in London. The brigade is seen as proactive and is well respected by partners, having representatives on several national committees.

Firefighters visit people in their homes to do home fire safety checks, give fire safety advice and fit free smoke alarms where appropriate. Other staff do safe and well visits, giving extra advice and offering referrals to services provided by health and voluntary sector partners. Safe and well visits are part of a two-year pilot in five London boroughs.

In the year to 31 March 2018, the brigade made 83,331 home fire safety checks. This is 9.4 checks per 1,000 population, just below the England rate of 10.4. The brigade has an eligibility scoring system, so residents believed to be at greater risk of fire are prioritised to be offered these checks. Priority visits are offered to people who have been referred and meet more than three of the brigade's criteria – that is, they are over 60, live alone, are in social housing, have mobility difficulties, have a mental health problem, or are dependent on alcohol or drugs.

The brigade also uses postcode risk data to plan cold call visits (80 percent of visits are referrals or in higher risk postcodes). Station computer systems clearly show where the people at greatest risk of fire are likely to live. This allows the brigade to direct work where it is needed. Postcode risk is determined by data on history of fires, deprivation levels, demographic household classification data (Experian's Mosaic data), and so on.

In the year to 31 March 2018, the brigade made 35.7 percent of these visits to households of an elderly person. This is below the England rate of 54.1 percent. Visits to households of someone with a disability increased to 36.8 percent, which is above the England rate of 24.7 percent.

The brigade recognises that targeting could be improved further and it is piloting alternative approaches. The quality of the process is periodically checked during and after visits, for example by managers attending visits and making follow-up contacts. But we saw little evidence of changes being made as a result.

How involved station staff are in other community safety work varies across boroughs. Campaigns and safe and well visits are managed by a dedicated team, so don't affect the brigade's response function.

Community safety work has been taking place for several years, but there is limited evaluation of it. The brigade can't, therefore, fully assess which parts of its prevention work are most effective in reducing the risk of fires and other emergencies, to inform decisions about future priorities. The safe and well visit project will end this year, and evaluation won't take place until after the project has finished. It isn't clear whether the project will continue.

Promoting community safety

The central community safety team works with borough commanders and many partners to develop, promote and run several safety programmes, including national campaigns. Attendees for the programmes are referred by partners, for example youth offending teams, the police, local authorities, depending on the nature of the programme. The brigade prioritises the schools that should get educational talks by risk assessment. The brigade also has 120 community volunteers running youth cadet schemes across London. The Mayor of London has given extra funds to extend this programme in 2019/20.

We welcome the innovative approach the brigade has taken in redirecting resources to emerging risks. For example, acid attacks at tourist sites have become increasingly prevalent, and the brigade has given training to hotels and restaurants in these locations to enable them to help victims of such attacks.

We found that staff are good at identifying vulnerable people and making safeguarding referrals. They evaluate referrals to identify safeguarding themes and what might be learned from them. For example, a high percentage of referrals come from youth teams. Crews are also referring more socially isolated people and people with mental health problems.

The brigade works well in partnership to tackle fire-setting behaviour. Station managers work with multi-agency panels to safely manage the release of arsonists. Crews check local arson hotspots and refer risks to local councils, waste companies and the police. They also fit fire safety equipment to properties at risk from arson. Central teams offer juvenile fire-setters intervention schemes and do arson reduction work. Fire investigation officers work with the police to prosecute arsonists.

The brigade has had many successes with fire investigation and is approached for advice by other fire and rescue services. It has successfully lobbied Government and manufacturers. An example is the recent 'Total Recalls' campaign involving white goods.

Road safety

The responsibility for road safety in London lies with TfL devolved through the London boroughs. The brigade, City of London Police, Metropolitan Police Service, British Transport Police and London Ambulance Service NHS Trust are partners. Partners told us they value the brigade's contribution, despite the limited resources.

The brigade promotes road safety, working closely with TfL to make sure its road safety objectives match those of the Safer Roads Partnership. A small central team leads several programmes. It examines data on injuries and deaths on roads and their causes to decide the best interventions for each borough. Road safety is also addressed on school visits.

Protecting the public through fire regulation

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Requires improvement

> **Areas for improvement**
> - The brigade needs to be able to measure that it is meeting the targets set out in its risk based inspection programme to be assured it is effectively protecting the public from fires.
> - The brigade should make sure it responds in time to building regulation consultations.
> - The brigade should make sure it addresses effectively the burden of false alarms.

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 brigade's performance in this area.

Risk-based approach

The brigade has a comprehensive fire safety enforcement policy and risk-based inspection programme. However, the policy is over two years past its review date.

Most staff understand the risk-targeting methodology. The brigade defines high-risk premises as any with risks associated with sleeping accommodation that also have a risk score of 5 or above. The risk score is calculated based on a range of factors, such as building use, previous fire safety interventions, property type, and so on. Hospitals, care homes, purpose-built flats over four storeys high, hostels and houses converted to flats are the types of building with sleeping risks.

The information on the brigade's database of high-risk buildings changes every day. It doesn't hold a history of risk scores given to a building and when they changed. Nor does the data show the number of premises that have been visited more than once. So it can't accurately measure how many high-risk premises have been audited each year, to meet the requirements of the brigade's risk-based inspection programme. This problem needs to be resolved.

In the year to 31 March 2016, the service audited 8,314 high-risk premises. That figure steadily declined to 5,680 in the year to 31 March 2018. Actions that could improve this figure have a low uptake (a shortened audit process) or are still being trialled (firefighters doing low-risk audits).

The brigade expects that at least half an inspection officer's time should focus on audit work on high-risk premises. But many inspectors reported spending most of their time on reactive work – for example, responding to reported fire risks or dealing with building regulation and other consultations.

Building regulation consultation targets aren't being met because of internal administration delays and a lack of experienced staff. The brigade received requests to participate in 17,454 building regulation consultations in the year to 31 March 2019. Of these, only 25 percent were done on time. The brigade's performance has declined every year for the past three years and is well below the average for England (71 percent).

Compared with 2011/12, the brigade has over one-third fewer competent fire safety staff who are dedicated to protection activity. At 31 March 2019, it had 106 competent staff, with 33 more being trained. However, staff are well trained and supported by a workplace development process. Inspectors progress from supervised work on simple premises to unsupervised work on complex premises. The brigade can respond at any time to dangerous conditions and issue prohibition notices because it has out-of-hours cover in place. There is also a dedicated team for out-of-hours audits.

The brigade uses a standard and consistent methodology in most audits. It also does specialist, more complex audits, for example at petroleum sites and London Underground sites. An internal fire safety audit team assesses the quality, consistency and proportionality of auditing. The first yearly review of all audit teams includes areas for improvement and delivery plans.

Enforcement

The brigade has clear policies for enforcement, investigation and prosecution, and for exchanging risk information with other enforcement agencies. It has successfully used its policies to protect people and take joint enforcement action.

In the year to 31 March 2018, the brigade issued 2,129 informal notifications, 382 enforcement notices, 63 prohibition notices and eight prosecutions. Most prosecutions were successful and well reported, which serves to educate and warn other premises' owners.

The brigade uses most of its enforcement powers. But it is surprising that no alteration notices have been issued since the year to 31 March 2011, given the amount of complex and innovatively engineered building work in London.

Senior officers attend the National Fire Investigation Forum to share information about risk and fire safety issues. We also heard of some good examples of work with local authorities, the Care Quality Commission, Border Force, immigration services, TfL and Heathrow Airport. This work involves, for example, referring cases of modern slavery and making sure fire safety is effectively regulated. But there is an inconsistent approach across London.

Working with others

The brigade has committed resources to national work including the Hackitt review and subsequent work with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC). This includes developing guidance (under the banner of NFCC) for owners of buildings with aluminium composite material cladding.

The brigade could do far more to reduce the burden of unwanted fire signals (false alarms). In the year to 31 March 2019, it received 40,804 automatic fire alarm requests for assistance. Only 3.7 percent (1,516) of these requests weren't attended, which is surprisingly low when compared with the average of 30 percent for England. Some automatic fire alarm calls from commercial premises are filtered, and emergency response is reduced in some situations. But the brigade's approach is mainly reactive and there is limited evidence of visits to problem premises. Charging for false alarms has been suspended and there is no desire to start it again, or to identify circumstances in which the brigade can stop attending alarms.

There is no comprehensive approach to supporting businesses to understand and comply with the law by educating them in how they are expected to meet fire safety regulations.

The brigade has national responsibility for fire safety auditing and advising 35 organisations with multiple UK sites. These are mainly either registered social landlords, sites in the leisure sector or food retail chains.

Fire safety inspectors are encouraged to be supportive and positive with businesses in their local boroughs. However, we found they aren't working in partnership with the British Chambers of Commerce or similar groups, or within national programmes, such as Better Business for All, that bring together regulators and businesses to identify the issues facing local businesses and to provide support to them. The brigade is aware of

this shortcoming. A new central post will dedicate 50 percent of one job to business engagement, but this work has been delayed by other priorities.

Responding to fires and other emergencies

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Requires improvement

> **Areas for improvement**
> - The brigade should make sure it puts in place and delivers a plan to adopt national operational guidance.
> - The brigade should make sure staff accurately record risk assessments and control measures implemented at an incident, to alert commanders to workplace risks and help put safety control measures in place at the incident ground.
> - The brigade should make sure its system for learning from operational debriefs is effective and that staff understand how to record learning from operational incidents.

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

Managing assets and resources

The brigade has a comprehensive set of response policies for the risks outlined in its London Safety Plan. All London residents have what is called an equity of entitlement to a broadly similar response, and resources are matched to incident type and complexity. The brigade is well resourced and has a wide range of specialist equipment and skills.

In the year to 31 December 2018, the brigade attended 105,864 incidents, which is 11.9 per 1,000 population and an increase of 2.3 percent from the previous year. The England rate for the same period is 10.4.

London has enough fire engines available thanks to the work of a dedicated team and detailed guiding policy. This system manages resources so firefighters can do some planned work without having to stop to attend emergency calls. Firefighters can be recalled later if needed. In the year to 31 March 2019, the overall average monthly fire engine availability ranged from 93.6 percent to 96.9 percent.

The brigade's pre-planning gives firefighters time for operational training and exercises. However, the frequency of exercises varies across London.

Control room staff move resources (such as fire engines and firefighters) around depending on the risks identified and the availability of resources throughout each day.

Response

The brigade's average response time is quicker than most predominantly urban services. In the year to 31 March 2018, its average response time to [primary fires](#) was 6 minutes and 39 seconds. This was down from 7 minutes 14 seconds in the year ending 31 March 2011.

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

The brigade's response standards include:

- first fire engine to arrive in 10 minutes or less for incidents 90 percent of the time; and
- first fire engine to arrive in 12 minutes or less for incidents 95 percent of the time.

In the year to 31 March 2019, the first standard was met in 96.5 percent of cases; the second in 98.4 percent of cases. Both targets are broadly similar to the previous year. The brigade consistently exceeds the response standards it has agreed with the public.

NOG is the foundation for all fire and rescue services in developing operational policies, procedures and training for firefighters to deal with incidents effectively and safely. It is based on current technical expertise. The brigade has assessed how its policies reflect NOG.

While the brigade has a comprehensive set of operational policies and procedures, we are concerned that they don't fully reflect NOG. This means that brigade operational practice in risk-critical areas doesn't reflect good practice and could therefore affect how well and how safely firefighters can respond to incidents. Progress is checked by an NOG implementation board, but this is slow to make changes.

For example, not all firefighters we interviewed understood the national format for giving messages at an incident ground. The brigade recognises this and is taking steps to resolve it.

The brigade is the only service not to use the national incident command decision control process. A review of the process, before a decision to adopt it was made, was suspended by the brigade. This situation is worrying, especially when it is seen alongside the brigade's lack of assurance over the ongoing competence of its incident commanders (outlined later in 'How well does the service look after its people?', see page 34). This situation needs immediate attention.

Incident commanders should also be aware of the immediate hazards at an incident ground, which is the workplace for firefighters – that is, who is at risk and the safety control measures needed to protect them. This risk assessment, called a dynamic risk assessment, should determine the reasonably practicable measures that commanders should take to control the risk. A more detailed written risk assessment, the analytical risk assessment, should be completed as soon as practicably possible.

In London, commanders have a process for recording their decisions at incidents. However, there is no record of risk assessments and control measures implemented. Some staff complete them when working outside London but not for London incidents.

Command

The brigade doesn't have regular assessments of command skills, which limits its ability to assure itself that all incident commanders have maintained their competence. We see this as an organisational failing, not one of individual commanders. This is an area for improvement that we return to this later in the report (see page 37).

While incident command training was up to date for some supervisory and middle managers we interviewed, this isn't the case across the brigade. And internal reports confirmed this. Moreover, the command model used by the brigade differs from the decision control process outlined in NOG and used by all other fire and rescue services.

NOG states that most situations faced by incident commanders aren't unique. But incident commanders may occasionally be presented with a situation that is extremely unusual and not reasonably foreseeable. In this circumstance, they may have to make decisions using their professional judgment, which is referred to as operational discretion. In such rare or exceptional situations, following an operational procedure strictly would be a barrier to resolving an incident, or there may not be a procedure that deals adequately with the incident.

The brigade policy does allow commanders to adapt or deviate from operational policy when necessary, in line with NOG. However, while staff understand this policy, only six cases were reported in two years, which is strikingly low. Because of these low returns, the brigade acknowledged in July 2018 that the declaration and recording of operational discretion needed to improve.

We were told that organisational culture inhibits commanders from using operational discretion. Incident commanders aren't confident that the brigade would support them in using operational discretion. Moreover, not all staff feel that the tone of the brigade's post-incident debrief meetings, which review such decisions, supports a learning environment.

By contrast, we found that control room staff are confident in using their discretion to manage incidents. They can add or remove resources from the selection recommended by the computer system.

Keeping the public informed

The brigade communicates effectively with the public about incidents. The public can also see information online about risk levels and emergency incidents in their area.

We saw good examples of Twitter being used by borough commanders to let the public know about incidents. There is a clear social media policy and training in media skills is available. Six press officers give out-of-hours telephone support on a rota.

The communications systems of the London resilience group (LRG) and brigade are inextricably linked. They work together on communications for major incidents, sharing social media platforms and agreeing messages to the public.

Guidance for the public about fire survival in an emergency can be accessed manually through several software and paper-based systems. The guidance was planned to be reviewed but this work has been delayed. Also, some staff would benefit from refresher training on this guidance and recent changes to the brigade's policies.

Evaluating operational performance

Despite the brigade having a good technological system and processes, the quality of staff commentary from incident monitoring and operational debriefs is inconsistent. This limits internal analysis and reporting, which in turn hinders opportunities for the brigade to learn from incidents, and to improve its arrangements for responding to fires and other emergencies. The brigade recognises this and plans to train staff.

The brigade introduced a new operational improvement process and reporting structure in December 2018. Operational learning is considered by an operational professionalism board, with meetings held or scheduled throughout 2019. This board is supported by an improvement and oversight panel. The new structure considers national learning, coroners' recommendations and NOG, as well as lessons from brigade incidents, including the Grenfell Tower fire.

Any new lessons and training deemed necessary by the board is published in a six-monthly newsletter, Operational News, which is widely read by staff. It reports positive experiences as well as areas for improvement. Online quizzes are used to test and record staff knowledge. This is good work.

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry, an independent public inquiry, is scrutinising the brigade's operational performance in its response on 14 June 2017 to the Grenfell Tower fire. This incident is also under criminal investigation by the Metropolitan Police Service. Phase one of the inquiry was reported after our inspection was completed – that is, on 30 October 2019 – and the second phase starts in 2020. The findings of the police investigation aren't anticipated until after proceedings close, which will be 2021 at the earliest.

The London Fire Brigade has clearly learned lessons from the Grenfell Tower incident. However, it has been slow to implement the changes needed, which is typical of the brigade's approach to organisational change.

The brigade has set up a Grenfell Tower investigation and review team. This standalone group gives updates to the brigade, operating outside the established organisational structures but within the parameters of the terms of reference agreed by the commissioner. Its work also helps the brigade to support the independent public inquiry, the Metropolitan Police Service investigation and any subsequent inquest proceedings.

The brigade has also learned lessons from multi-agency working, which it shares nationally with fire and rescue services and other agencies. It has a single point of contact for national and joint operational learning. All actions from joint operational learning are held on the LRG database and are checked by the LRG for progress.

After the Grenfell Tower fire, there was an independent multi-agency debrief. Findings were recorded on the LRG database and actions were allocated and managed by the LRG. We heard about examples of lessons learned being passed on by the brigade about water rescue and firefighting in high-rise premises.

Responding to national risks

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Good

The London Fire Brigade is good at responding to national risks. But we found the following areas in which it needs to improve:

Areas for improvement

- The brigade should make sure cross-border risks are made known to crews. It should run a programme of over-the-border exercises, passing on the lessons learned from these exercises.

- The brigade should make sure all frontline staff, and not just specialist response teams, are well protected and well prepared for being part of a multi-agency response to a community risk identified by the local resilience forum, including a marauding terrorist attack. It should make sure that all staff understand its procedures for responding to terrorist-related 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 brigade's performance in this area.

Preparedness

The brigade's local arrangements broadly comply with and support the requirements of the national co-ordination and advisory framework. Operational responsibility for London-wide resilience sits with the brigade, and the Greater London Authority retains strategic oversight for resilience in the capital. Partners recognise the benefits of the brigade hosting this function.

Specialist vehicles, equipment and staff are used by the brigade to co-ordinate its response to a range of serious, significant or catastrophic incidents that have an impact nationally.

The brigade has responded to several terrorist-related incidents in recent years. The coroner's report after the 2017 Westminster Bridge terrorist attack identified no areas for improvement relating to the brigade's preparedness and response.

We found control operators were knowledgeable and confident to mobilise national assets. Incident commanders trained to level 2 and above understood Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP) and when to apply them. Because of the speed and weight of resources in London, all JESIP-related incidents can be allocated to level 2 commanders, when they would normally have level 1 in other fire and rescue services.

The brigade develops and tests site-specific plans so that they are prepared for responding to high-risk premises and national incidents. The register of sites is being reviewed.

Working with other services

Mutual aid agreements are in place with all neighbouring fire and rescue services. The brigade regularly sends resources to incidents or to give standby cover over the border in surrounding counties. Joint exercising, however, is limited. Staff told us that over-border working isn't intra-operable. It isn't clear how the brigade's return to a rank-based structure, away from the national role-based model this year, will affect over-border working (see page 42).

The brigade should do more to share risk information to improve intra-operability with other fire and rescue services. The brigade gives risk information to neighbouring fire and rescue services about premises in London through the control room only. This information isn't made available to put on other fire and rescue services' fire engine-mounted MDTs because it is thought it would take up too much capacity. While the brigade gets risk information from other fire and rescue services, it doesn't share this with crews on its MDTs.

Working with other agencies

Multi-agency exercises are managed at both borough and all-London level. There is a clear policy outlining responsibilities. Borough commanders work with borough resilience forums and practise desk-based multi-agency scenarios. We heard about full exercises at national infrastructure sites, government buildings, heritage sites and so on, although across London these exercises are inconsistent and don't happen often.

Of the 253 firefighters and specialist support staff who undertook our staff survey, 46 percent felt the brigade had undertaken enough joint training and exercises to be able to respond effectively to major incidents in the past 12 months.[1]

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[1] As part of our inspection, we carried out a survey of London Fire Brigade staff to get their views of the brigade. The staff survey is an important tool in understanding the views of staff whom we may not have spoken to during fieldwork. However, the results aren't representative of the opinions and attitudes of a service's whole workforce. The survey was self-selecting, with a total response rate in London of 377 respondents, which is 7 percent of the workforce. We put some questions only to people in specific roles. For example, we only asked firefighters and specialist staff the question on joint training and exercises (253 of the total 377 respondents). Any findings should be considered alongside this information (see Annex A for more details).

The brigade has a team of staff who volunteer to deal with the emergencies arising from the terrorist threats to London, but it isn't fully staffed. This work is not supported by the Fire Brigades Union and is subject to national discussions. There is a mix of on-duty specialist staff and others available on recall to duty to maintain staffing levels. They are well trained, exercise regularly, have specific personal protective equipment and are led by a group of specialist officers. This group also leads a national team of inter-agency liaison officers who are senior managers trained to command and liaise between agencies at complex incidents.

Given the nature of the risks and the previous incidents experienced in London, the brigade should do more to train and protect frontline firefighters. These are the brigade's employees who are highly likely to respond to a marauding terrorist attack before it is declared as such. Firefighters have received some initial training and there is some video-based learning. But there is no systematic training programme and many frontline firefighters confirm that they lack the confidence to respond, and don't carry suitable personal protective equipment for these incidents.

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. The London Fire Brigade's overall efficiency requires improvement.

The London Fire Brigade is well resourced. Yet we found evidence of it being wasteful with its resources. It should review how it allocates its resources to activities, based on the risks set out in the London Safety Plan. We found many important projects had stalled, meaning that planned improvements agreed with the public haven't happened.

While planning assumptions are sound, the current reliance on reserves agreed with the Mayor of London to bridge the funding gap is unsustainable. The brigade needs to make sure that it has strong enough plans in place to address financial challenges beyond 2020. These plans should secure an affordable way of managing fire and other risks.

A lack of detailed consideration of the contracts it has entered into has had a negative effect across the brigade. However, it is now actively renegotiating some contracts to try to improve the services provided and outcomes.

There is no alternative to the current staffing system that applies to all stations. The brigade addresses this by allowing individual staff flexible working arrangements, but this is at a cost.

The brigade has several business continuity plans to deal with factors that could affect its ability to provide an effective service. But staff are less knowledgeable in business continuity planning in operational areas of the organisation than staff in its support departments.

There has been some good work with other organisations to procure uniforms and equipment. There are several shared service arrangements with the Greater London Authority. This has helped improve efficiency. The brigade plans to do more collaborative work with other blue light services. But it should make sure that it effectively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and outcomes of joint working.

Making best use of resources

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Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The brigade should make sure it reviews how it allocates its resources to activities, based on the risks set out in the London Safety Plan.
- The brigade should make sure it effectively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and outcomes of any contractual arrangements, collaboration, or other improvement projects.
- The brigade should make sure it has good business continuity arrangements in place across the whole organisation, which are understood by all staff, that take account of all foreseeable threats and risks.

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

How plans support objectives

The brigade's strategic plans are well developed and documented. Strategic plans are subject to scrutiny by the Mayor of London's office, and by internal and external audit. Planning assumptions are sound and are agreed with the Mayor. But organisational change and individual performance aren't effectively managed, which has led staff to believe that performance isn't valued.

There is no longer a clear link between the brigade's strategic direction and the London Safety Plan. Important projects are either stalled or behind schedule. We were told that the desire and capacity for change had slowed.

Projects that have been affected include reviews of alternative staffing arrangements at fire stations and emergency response arrangements that use specialist equipment and staff. The London Safety Plan therefore no longer fulfils the brigade's commitment to the public. The brigade hasn't updated it, or communicated the divergence from the London Safety Plan to the public.

Several reasons were given for these delays, including political challenge, the possible need to respond to any recommendations from the Grenfell Tower independent public inquiry, the cost of change because of the size of the organisation and trade union opposition.

Most boroughs have local plans with priorities to address local risks, but there is no structured approach to their development or effective oversight of performance management. Managers tell us they have software, a range of meetings and methods to help them check station performance to make sure that work is completed. However, we saw backlogs of tasks in station work logs.

The brigade's budget for 2019/20 is £391.3m. It has made relatively modest savings over the past decade totalling £100m. At 31 March 2019, although the final figures weren't available, total reserves were expected to amount to £56m. The two largest elements are the general reserve staying at £21m (that is, £7m more than the minimum) and a budget flexibility reserve of £23m. With many important projects stalled, the budget flexibility reserve is being used to maintain the existing level of service to the public, without adequate plans in place to address the shortfall. The financial forecast suggested that by 2023, other than the general reserve and a small balance for initiatives – that is, a total of £23.6m, the reserves will have been used up. This is unsustainable.

Productivity and ways of working

The London Fire Brigade is, in general, well resourced. However, we found evidence of it being wasteful with its resources. Resource allocation is based on largely historical decisions rather than the risks in the London Safety Plan.

The response standards have largely stayed the same over the past decade, and there is a policy for the public to have equal entitlement to emergency response regardless of differences in assessed risks between different communities.

The brigade reports that availability of fire engines always outstrips demand, yet the resource management centre spends two to three hours each day making sure that all fire engines are staffed and available. During this time, most of the firefighters are restricted to work on station unless attending incidents. They can't do prevention and protection work, such as home fire safety checks or risk visits, while waiting.

Incident numbers could reduce further and create capacity if there was a drive to reduce false alarms. In the year to 31 December 2018, there were 51,186 false alarms – 48 percent of all incidents attended. The average rate for England is 40 percent.

The fire safety department, which is responsible for protecting the public, has introduced efficiencies such as a shortened audit process to increase capacity. However, this isn't used much. An organisational initiative for firefighters to do fire safety checks in lower-risk premises began in August 2016, but wider implementation has been delayed until April 2020.

The brigade has halted reviews of working patterns to improve productivity and make savings. Firefighters continue to work on the historical wholetime duty system. The brigade has allowed some people to work flexibly, but at an increased cost, because it has failed to provide more cost-efficient organisation-wide alternatives.

It also needs effective performance management arrangements for implementing plans in line with its strategic priorities, and should make sure that the expected benefits are fully realised. This includes the commitments to the public outlined in the London Safety Plan.

Collaboration

The brigade collaborates well with some partners and has several shared services arrangements. These include for internal audit (Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime), firefighters' pension services (London Pensions Fund Authority, sub-contracted to London Pensions Partnership), treasury management (City Hall), and procurement and data warehousing services (TfL). The brigade provides payroll services to the Greater London Authority. They also actively collaborate on prevention and protection with partners in local boroughs. Evaluation of benefits realised, or lessons learned, however, has been limited.

Strategic leaders say there is a desire for more blue light collaboration across Greater London. A collaboration board has been established that includes fire, police and ambulance services, with a statement of intent agreed by their strategic leaders. The London Safety Plan refers to plans to develop a single call handling service, and to jointly support and develop shared back office services including information technology (IT), legal and the sharing of estates. Most of these collaboration projects have stopped or stalled. However, there is limited sharing of estates.

Continuity arrangements

The brigade has measures for continuing to operate during a disaster or an unplanned interruption of service, and to recover normal services as quickly as possible. These present a mixed picture. There are business continuity plans for several support departments including IT. There is a plan for complete shutdown of the software system for mobilising fire engines. This was recently tested and found to need improvement in some areas. The brigade is also investing in improvements to its cyber defence systems. This isn't replicated in operational areas of the brigade, where we saw limited understanding of business continuity planning.

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

Requires improvement

> **Areas for improvement**
> - The brigade should make sure it has strong enough plans in place to address financial challenges beyond 2020, and secure an affordable way of managing fire and other risks.

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

Improving value for money

The brigade has made some savings in recent years. Two main areas of operational savings were closing 10 fire stations in 2014/15 (leaving 103) and reducing fire engine numbers in 2016/17. Despite this, in the year to 31 March 2018, the firefighter cost per head of population was £28.33. This is the second highest in England – the average rate is £22.38.

The brigade needs to give greater consideration to the contracts it signs. Its failure to do so has had a negative effect across the brigade. We heard of several instances of suppliers' contracts not giving the quality of service expected. Examples came from property and facilities management, training and development, and IT, including the control room system that mobilises emergency resources. We were told that business cases are strong, decisions are taken for all the right reasons and contracts are managed effectively. But the number of occasions of contractual failure gives a different picture. We did see, though, some recent examples of active contract renegotiation in these areas to try to improve the benefits and outcomes.

There were examples of working with others to improve value for money through procurement, with firefighter protective clothing procured through the Fire and Rescue National Framework. This generated £300,000 savings for the brigade. Also, staff uniform was procured through a framework agreement developed by the Metropolitan Police Service. There was joint procurement for a service helpdesk IT system with the London Ambulance Service.

The medium-term financial plan in November 2018 forecast a budget gap that would steadily increase to £24.5m by 2022/23. This is considerably more than the £10.2m forecast a year earlier for the same period.

Since November 2018, additional funding has been agreed with the Mayor of London: just under £30m over the period 2018/19 to 2022/23. This increase in funding, along with some other minor changes and the use of around £23m from a budget flexibility reserve generated from earlier efficiencies, reduces the recurring budget gap to £15m over that period.

This approach is inefficient. It reflects the political will to maintain the service to the public in its present form, irrespective of whether this provides value for money. Contributory growth factors include additional costs arising from the Firefighter Pension Scheme and from the review of lessons from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, which will widen the budget gap.

The brigade and the Mayor's office are aware of this position and have agreed the use of reserves to bridge the gap. This is a short-term expedient. The brigade regularly does scenario planning for staffing levels, the number, availability and location of fire stations and fire engines, etc. It is ready and able to recommend alternatives whenever the appetite for reform is greater.

Innovation

In recent years, innovation has been stifled. There is no track record of service redesign or finding efficiencies in operational areas, because the Mayor of London has given extra funding to maintain levels of spending. Staff report a lack of organisational desire for change and we found many improvement projects had been stalled or, in some instances, reversed.

Cost savings are being made in non-operational departments. There are IT, fleet and estates strategies, and the brigade is investing in new technology – for example, extended aerial ladder platforms to increase reach to high-rise premises; smoke hoods for the public when escaping from buildings; and drones to improve operational awareness at incidents.

However, the software to mobilise fire engines doesn't yet work as planned, and there is a large backlog of property maintenance in the brigade's ageing building stock.

Future investment and working with others

The brigade has collaborated on procurement, provision of some back office services, sharing estates and joint work with partners. Scope for further collaboration on the back office is being considered. We weren't convinced, though, that there is a real enthusiasm for collaboration, with a tendency for staff to offer reasons why it isn't feasible or hasn't worked.

Few options for income generation are in place. Income from other fire and rescue services has stayed relatively consistent over the past few years. However, in 2018/19, this increased to £420,000. The brigade's trading arm, London Fire Brigade Enterprises, was established in 2015. It entered a 'dormant phase' from 2019/20 and the income budget was removed. Revenue had been decreasing. In the year to 31 March 2018, £117,000 was reported, following a high of £276,000 in the previous year.

The brigade has been active in securing funding from other sources for initiatives as well as for its principal budget gap. This extra funding increased to £51m in the year to 31 March 2018 (compared with £34m in the year to 31 March 2017). This included Metropolitan Fire Brigade Act income (£26.4m), government grants (£14.0m), commercial rental income (£3.6m) and telecoms income (£2.0m).

The brigade is innovative in redirecting resources to meet emerging risks. For example, acid attacks at tourist sites have become increasingly prevalent, and the brigade has provided training to hotels and restaurants in these locations to enable them to help victims of such attacks. The brigade is also doing 2,000 home fire safety checks to houseboats with funding from Gas Safe.

The brigade has granted £2m from previous efficiencies to housing associations to fit fire prevention equipment in their properties.

The capital programme is between £14m and £40m each year. Plans include a new training centre at Croydon, low emission fleet replacement, and fire station improvements or replacements.

The capital programme is planned to be funded mainly by the sale of brigade properties and Mayor of London funding, with some borrowing forecast in the later years. There is a risk that the revenue from the sales of properties may not materialise at the level or time needed, and the brigade recognises that this would result in more borrowing.

People
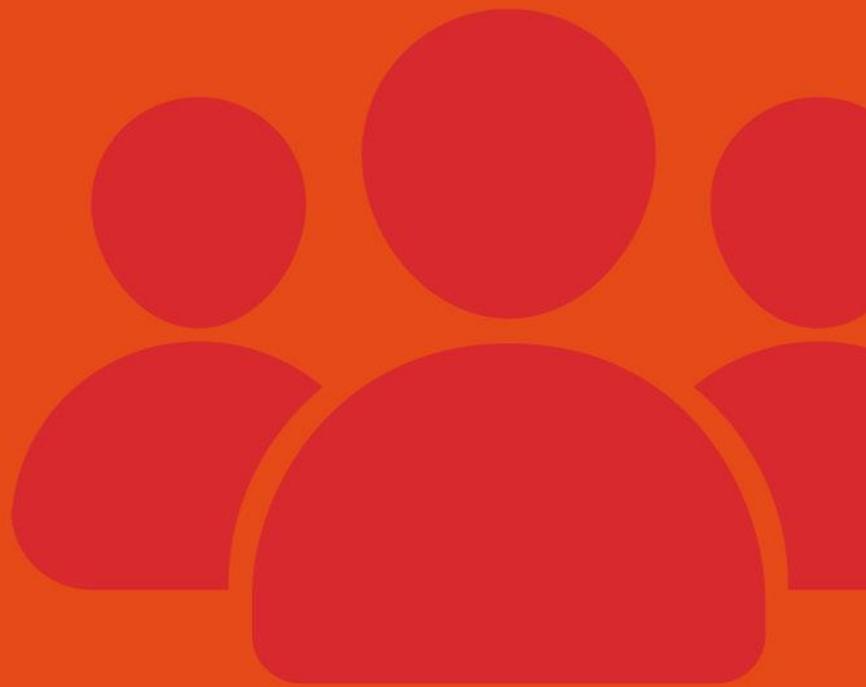
How well does the service look after its people?

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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, London Fire Brigade requires improvement at looking after its people.

Staff don't feel that all managers are good role models of the expected values and behaviours. The brigade should do more to make sure that these are understood and shown by all staff.

The brigade has increased its resources to improve how it looks after staff health and wellbeing. It should now make sure that all staff understand and know how to get support, especially after traumatic incidents.

There is no single corporate overview of workforce skills and capabilities. There hasn't been enough progress in developing all levels of leadership and management competence, or the planned new corporate appraisal scheme. The brigade has a new programme to assess the ongoing competence of firefighters, with extension to all operational groups of staff planned. It should make sure that this programme can assure the brigade of the competencies held by staff.

We are concerned about the backlog of staff training in risk-critical skills such as incident command and emergency fire engine driving. Some staff have had no continuing training in these skills for many years. Also, there is no individual reassessment of incident command skills. Staff can't fail incident command training for poor performance and will therefore return from training to command actual incidents. This is worrying: there needs to be a fundamental review of the contract with the external contractor to ensure that it is fit for purpose. This will help the brigade assure itself that all its incident commanders maintain their competence.

The brigade actively seeks feedback from staff but needs to make sure that problems identified by staff are appropriately and quickly addressed.

To identify and remove barriers to equal opportunity so that its workforce represents its community, the brigade has invested in resources and changed its approach to recruitment. It also has a range of staff support networks. To its credit, the brigade's workforce is one of the most diverse in the country but it doesn't yet reflect London's diverse communities.

The brigade needs to make sure that staff understand the value of positive action and having a diverse workforce. It should also make sure that all its fire stations provide suitable privacy and facilities for women.

Processes for selecting, developing and promoting middle and senior managers lack effective recording and openness. Staff don't have confidence in them. Nor is there a process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders.

Promoting the right values and culture

Requires improvement

Areas for improvement
- The brigade should make sure its values and behaviours are understood and demonstrated by all staff.
- The brigade should make sure all staff understand and know how to get support after a traumatic incident.

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

Workforce wellbeing

The London Fire Brigade offers a range of wellbeing services for staff, although their effectiveness is mixed. Staff can use a self-help portal online, as well as other occupational health and counselling services. These facilities are located at two separate sites in central London, which limits ease of access, particularly when staff can often be off duty. Support is also available for staff through a 24-hour telephone contact number, 7 days a week.

There are voluntary workplace mental health champions but wider provision is inconsistent. There are plans to give mental health awareness training to managers.

There is no wellbeing strategy in place and, although occupational health staff monitor sickness rates, the brigade is significantly behind its targets.

The brigade has enlarged its staff counselling and trauma service team because of increased demand after the Grenfell Tower fire.

The brigade doesn't contact staff immediately after an incident. It aims to contact them within three days of a referral. After Grenfell, demand far outstripped counselling availability. But availability has improved significantly this year, despite there still being over 400 referrals each year. People who have used the service were positive about it, though not all staff knew how to access it and some are still waiting to be called by the team.

The team saw 60 people who had been affected by the Grenfell Tower fire in the year to 31 March 2019. In 2017/18, it saw 138 people, some of whom had post-traumatic stress disorder. There has been a rise in service uptake by control staff in 2018/19, with 47 percent of those using the service affected by the Grenfell Tower fire. Staff witnesses at the independent public inquiry had a total of 49 days' counselling support.

Health and safety

The brigade has health and safety policies and supporting arrangements in place. Of the 377 respondents to our staff survey, 89 percent said they were encouraged to report all accidents, near misses and dangerous occurrences in the past 12 months, and 93 percent of staff said they know how to report these incidents.

However, the brigade doesn't do written risk assessments at the incident ground, which is the workplace for firefighters.

The brigade manages overtime well for wholetime staff through its establishment and performance team. It ensures that most employees' working time is within safe limits. Overtime in control and support staff posts, however, is higher, which mirrors concerns raised in brigade staff surveys.

Most operational staff have had a three-yearly medical and fitness assessment, but fitness isn't assessed every year in line with national guidance. The brigade should assure itself that all operational staff are fit enough for their role.

An independent report in November 2018 outlined health and safety concerns to do with brigade property and facilities management. The brigade is working to resolve these problems.

Culture and values

The brigade's values aren't clear to see and aren't well understood by staff. We didn't see any evidence that work to develop a behavioural framework linked to the values had so far produced any results. It is positive that staff recognise that the senior leadership team wants to promote a people-focused approach to improve the culture. Staff based at headquarters feel that most leaders are often available. Staff talked about positive initiatives such as regular breakfast meetings with managers. However, beyond the headquarters, there is a strong perception of a gap between senior leaders and the rest of the workforce.

Some staff we spoke to don't believe that all senior and middle managers behave according to the brigade's values at work. Some were described as lacking empathy or being disengaged from the workforce. Station-based staff spoke of not seeing senior leaders, other than local borough commanders, for many years. This situation

seems worse the further staff are from headquarters. In other areas of the brigade, we found a belief that senior leaders are too focused on operational staff and don't value other staff groups in the same way.

The 2018 brigade staff survey reported that about one-third of staff are negative about senior leadership in terms of their availability and openness. The brigade should continue to promote its people-focused approach and assure itself that staff at all levels behave at work according to the brigade's values.

Getting the right people with the right skills

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Inadequate

Areas for improvement

- The brigade needs to train all staff properly for their roles, including developing all levels of leadership and management competence.
- The brigade should extend its new maintenance of competence programme to all operational staff groups as intended. It should make sure this programme can assure the brigade of the competencies held by staff.

Cause of concern

The brigade has a significant backlog of training for staff in risk-critical skills such as incident command and emergency fire engine driving. Some staff haven't had continuation training in these skills for many years. There is no individual reassessment of competence for incident command. The brigade should act immediately to address this.

Recommendations

By 28 February 2020, the brigade should:

- develop a plan to remove gaps in all risk-critical skills training; and
- develop a plan to reassess incident command competence at all levels in line with national guidance, and to determine what arrangements it will put in place when staff fail to achieve the standard set by the brigade.

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

Workforce planning

The brigade's training and development plans aren't realistic and can't assure the public that the brigade gives adequate priority to risk-critical training.

Every year, the brigade uses information from several sources to decide the priorities for its training plan. There is no single overview of workforce skills and competencies. There is limited succession planning, and the brigade acknowledges that its forecasts of when people will retire have been consistently inaccurate.

Staff skills and capabilities don't fully align with the London Safety Plan. Most training was contracted to an external provider in 2012, which put welcome investment into training facilities. But this contracted training isn't enough to meet the brigade's needs. This, along with inertia by the brigade in setting their training needs and detailed processes, means that any change takes a long time (around 12 to 18 months). There needs to be a fundamental review of the contract to make sure it is fit for purpose. The brigade recognises that it needs to change how it works with the contractor but change calls for significant investment. At the time of inspection, no funds were set aside.

There are several areas of concern arising from this situation – emergency driving and incident command in particular. Some fire engine drivers hadn't had refresher training for up to 20 years before 1 April 2018. National guidance recommends refresher training every five years. The brigade has started to address this, but we have been told it will take until January 2022 for all drivers' refresher training to be current, in line with this guidance. Accidents involving employees have fallen significantly, but road traffic collisions involving brigade vehicles haven't. This is another concern when combined with the backlog of driver training.

All incident commanders must pass a command assessment as part of the promotion process. However, training to gain initial incident command skills isn't given until after they have taken on the role and begun to command incidents. We found that, in some level 1 commander cases (crew manager and watch manager), this was up to a year afterwards. We also found examples of firefighters acting up as level 1 incident commanders having had neither training nor assessment.

Services should provide continuing training and reassessment for staff. This assures them that staff knowledge, skills and understanding are current, and that they are commanding competently and safely.

In London, refresher training is only available for level 1 (crew manager and watch manager) and level 2 (station manager and group manager) commanders, and it isn't a formal reassessment of command competence – that is, staff can't fail for poor performance and will therefore return to command incidents.

Training for level 3 commanders (deputy assistant commissioner and assistant commissioner) isn't consistently in place. The brigade is developing a training package to address this. No work has begun for level 4 commanders (deputy commissioner and above). Most level 3 and 4 commanders we spoke to confirmed they hadn't had training for several years.

While the brigade has recognised the risk of this situation and has developed a formal process for level 1 command assessment, it isn't being piloted until 2020. Nor has work begun on developing assessments for other levels of command. The brigade has identified that this work will need extra funds, but has none currently allocated.

Given the scale and complexity of incidents that these managers have to deal with, we encourage the brigade to address these training problems as a matter of utmost urgency, including determining what arrangements it will put in place when staff fail to meet the standard it has set. This will help it assure itself and the public of the command competence of all its incident commanders.

Training and development for control room staff and middle managers are also inconsistent. We found that training and recording was extremely limited, and often left to individual members of staff to provide. Support staff also feel that development is hampered by posts being filled by retired operational officers.

Learning and improvement

The brigade's approach to staff training and competence is inconsistent, but it is in the process of being improved.

Stations produce an annual training plan, which is uploaded to the electronic station diary three months before training dates to meet core skills gaps. This plan is supported by a borough training and exercising plan.

The brigade has a system to check the competence of operational firefighters and has introduced improvements since 1 July 2019. They plan to extend the system to other operational staff next year.

In the revised process, staff train for 20 core competencies (previously four) known as the 'wheel of competence'. Staff must refresh these skills at set intervals. Some training, such as emergency driving and breathing apparatus, is given centrally by the contractor. Other training is given locally by line managers. These local managers are supported by e-learning packages, but some were reported to be significantly out of date. Many of these managers aren't trained to train or assess their staff, which makes it difficult to assure the quality and consistency of local training.

Training is recorded in individual training records and station diaries. But this record only shows that a member of staff attended, not that they are competent in all necessary skills. To be sure that staff are competent, the brigade relies on other measures, such as operational assurance officers doing station inspections, monitoring at borough exercises and online quizzes after e-learning.

Under this new system, all local training attended for core competencies will be monitored over two years through an online dashboard. So, it will be 2021 before there is a complete overview.

There are examples of organisational lessons learned from operational incidents, including detailed reports after the Grenfell Tower fire, that will rely on staff development to improve. However, the rate of change is slow.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity

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Requires improvement

> **Areas for improvement**
> - The brigade should make sure issues identified though its staff survey are addressed on time and that actions are communicated to staff.
> - The brigade should identify and overcome barriers to equal opportunity, so that its workforce better represents its community. This includes making sure staff understand the value of positive action and having a diverse workforce.
> - The brigade should make sure that all fire stations have suitable facilities for women.

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

Seeking and acting on staff feedback

The brigade gets feedback from staff in different ways, such as staff surveys online, a staff suggestion scheme and the commissioner's blog. The value of feedback mechanisms is diminished by the limited evidence that changes ever result from the feedback. Many staff don't feel confident in expressing their views or challenging the current situation without fear of reprisal. Nor do they believe that their ideas or suggestions will be listened to. We heard about actions from brigade surveys being put into departmental plans but not progressing or being completed.

Of the 377 respondents to our staff survey, 64 percent felt unable to challenge ideas without any detriment as to how they will be treated afterwards, and 28 percent reported feeling bullied or harassed in the past 12 months, with the highest response for what it was related to being role, rank or level in the service.

The brigade has an extensive representative body engagement framework. It shows this commitment by including feedback from representative bodies in the London Safety Plan. The representative bodies acknowledged this commitment.

However, we heard frequent references to the disproportionate influence of the Fire Brigades Union and operational staff relative to other groups. People working in mixed teams described being treated differently from operational colleagues because of inconsistent management decisions. People felt that staff discipline and management are inconsistent and unfair. There is a consistent view that projects only progress if they are first endorsed by the Fire Brigades Union.

The brigade has effective procedures for employees to raise concerns. This is supported by an online reporting system that is open, accessible and consistent. Managers can read guidance online. The brigade is introducing training, in 2019, in the handling of disciplinary and grievance cases. We found that grievance cases are

handled in line with the procedures. However, the brigade should better communicate with employees about their welfare when they are engaged in the process.

Since the new online grievance reporting system was introduced in July 2018, the people services department has overseen cases. This has allowed the brigade to assure itself that outcomes are fair and consistent, and that lessons are learned from any trends.

Diversity

The London Fire Brigade is more diverse than many services but far from truly representing its community. As at 31 March 2018, only 13.4 percent of firefighters were from a black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) background, compared with 40 percent of London residents. And only 7.2 percent of firefighters were women.

An inclusion strategy and action plan were implemented in 2016. The brigade acknowledges that they aren't fit for purpose and that it intends to develop alternatives. Work to embed equality into corporate policy and practice is at an early stage and hasn't yet had any meaningful results.

The brigade engages with under-represented groups in the workforce and works to resolve concerns through various staff forums.

Early steps have been taken to increase workforce diversity. The brigade has recently invested in reinstating an outreach team, responsible for recruitment and community engagement. There has been investment in a campaign to promote the variety of the role of firefighter. However, brigade evaluation shows the campaign hasn't been as effective as anticipated.

Not all staff understand and value the benefits of the brigade's approach to making the workforce more diverse. There is no corporate equality, diversity and inclusion training. We were troubled to hear that staff from a BAME background, those with a disability and female uniformed staff need to use counselling and trauma services more often than other colleagues.

Not all stations have facilities that staff and HMICFRS consider suitable. For example, not all offer staff the privacy they need. Of the 377 respondents to our staff survey, 28 percent reported feeling discriminated against at work in the past 12 months, with the highest response for what it was related to being role, rank or level in the service, and the second highest being gender.

Managing performance and developing leaders

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Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The brigade should make sure it has an effective system in place to review individual staff performance and development.
- The brigade should make sure that it selects, develops and promotes staff in an open, accessible and fair way, including temporary promotions.
- The brigade 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 brigade's performance in this area.

Managing performance

The link between performance and staff development needs is limited. Other than a few inconsistent local examples, there is no corporate process for assessing performance. The previous process has fallen into disuse.

At the time of inspection, most staff hadn't had a recent meaningful performance review, and therefore weren't aware of any personal objectives. In the year to 31 March 2019, only 25 percent of wholetime staff had one, and this was lower for other staff groups – that is,17.4 percent of support staff and 5.4 percent of control room staff. Because of this, staff lack confidence in how managers manage performance, and believe that access to development opportunities isn't open or fair. There is little training for managers or staff in using feedback effectively, and therefore learning opportunities are potentially stifled.

The brigade's significant change to its operational command structure in October 2019 moves it away from nationally agreed role descriptors and back to a historical rank-based structure. It is hoped that a performance review process setting out clear expectations for each rank will be developed. This will also allow managers and staff to measure success against objective criteria. A specialist consultant has been hired to advise but at the time of our inspection there had been little progress.

However the brigade chooses to progress this issue, it should make sure that it has a system in place for staff to have regular meaningful conversations about performance, development, career aspirations and wellbeing.

The brigade doesn't have a full picture of the talent available and how well this matches the needs of the London Safety Plan. Corporate management development programmes are only available to supervisory managers and are under review. There are few opportunities for staff to develop leadership capabilities, and staff career pathways aren't actively managed.

Developing leaders

The brigade has no apparent process for identifying or developing staff with high potential to be senior leaders of the future.

During inspection, we sampled records from recent promotion processes at all levels of management. At supervisory level, processes were fair, open and accessible, and staff described recent improvements.

This wasn't always the case at middle and senior manager level. Here we found that record keeping was often poor or inaccurate, and the rationale for making selections wasn't clear and was sometimes unavailable. This echoes strong staff feelings of unfairness and a lack of openness in selection at this level. There is also little independent oversight of selections for employees temporarily acting up into roles, leading to a lack of consistency.

There are few opportunities for staff with specialist skills to transfer or progress, owing to their lack of development or a lack of other staff developed enough to replace them.

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.

Metropolitan FRA

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