

Fire & Rescue Service 2021/22

Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of London Fire Brigade



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About this inspection

This is our fourth inspection of London Fire Brigade. We first inspected the brigade in July 2019, publishing a report with our findings in December 2019 on its effectiveness and efficiency and how it looks after its people. Our second inspection, published in January 2021, considered how the brigade was responding to the pandemic. Our third inspection was to inspect London Fire Brigade's progress on implementing the recommendations from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. It was published in February 2021. This inspection considers for a second time the brigade's effectiveness, efficiency and people.

In this round of inspections of all 44 fire and rescue services in England, we answer three main questions:

1. How effective is the fire and rescue service at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?
2. How efficient is the fire and rescue service at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?
3. How well does the fire and rescue service look after its people?

This report sets out our inspection findings for London Fire Brigade.

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 there are serious, critical or systemic failings of policy, practice or performance of the fire and rescue service, then consideration will be given to a graded judgment of inadequate.

Overview

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

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

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

HM Inspector's summary

It was a pleasure to revisit London Fire Brigade, and I am grateful for the positive and constructive way that the brigade engaged with our inspection.

Following our initial inspection of London Fire Brigade published in December 2019, we identified several areas where the brigade needed to make improvements. In February 2021, we also published our report into London Fire Brigade's progress on implementing the findings from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 report. This report doesn't specifically look at each of those recommendations, but the brigade continues to provide regular updates on progress.

I do not underestimate the significant work which is required to make the improvements identified.

However, I have concerns about the performance of London Fire Brigade in keeping people safe and secure from fires and other risks. In many areas, the strategic intent has yet to lead to demonstrable change in the service provided to the public of London. The brigade needs to improve how it prevents fires and other risks.

There are other areas where we haven't seen the progress we would have expected since our 2019 inspection. For example:

- the brigade's prevention activity is still not routinely evaluated;
- the brigade hasn't maintained a risk-based inspection programme (RBIP);
- responding staff are still not all trained to respond to terrorist incidents;
- brigade values and behaviours aren't displayed by all staff; and
- the brigade has made slow progress on providing facilities for women in fire stations.

My principal findings from our assessments of the service over the past year are as follows:

In our 2019 inspection we issued a cause of concern around training for staff in risk-critical skills, such as incident command and emergency fire engine driving. Some staff hadn't had continuation training in these skills for many years, and there was no individual reassessment of competence for incident command.

We recognise that considerable work has been carried out to support improvements in risk-critical training. Given the progress the brigade has made in these areas, we consider enough action has been taken to close the cause of concern.

The brigade isn't doing enough to prioritise its [home fire safety visits](#) based on individual level of risk. Staff are prioritising referrals based on their judgment, rather than using a systematic prioritisation process. The brigade doesn't have set timescales for when it will respond to referrals. This means those who are most at risk aren't always being seen the quickest.

Some behaviour in the brigade isn't in line with the standards the brigade expects. Staff described behaviour inconsistent with the service's values. There were limited examples of staff being confident to report their concerns. Often staff do not report concerns for fear of detrimental treatment by others.

The brigade is committed to developing a more diverse workforce, but we were disappointed to find not all staff understood the benefits of this. Staff described examples of discriminatory behaviour directed towards them or others. Staff have limited confidence in challenging unacceptable behaviour or raising concerns, as they feel nothing will happen as a result.

Overall, the brigade leadership have demonstrated a clear intent to addressing the problems identified during our previous inspection; however, we are yet to see any clear indication that this has translated into the improvements required.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Parr', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Matt Parr

HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Service in numbers



Response

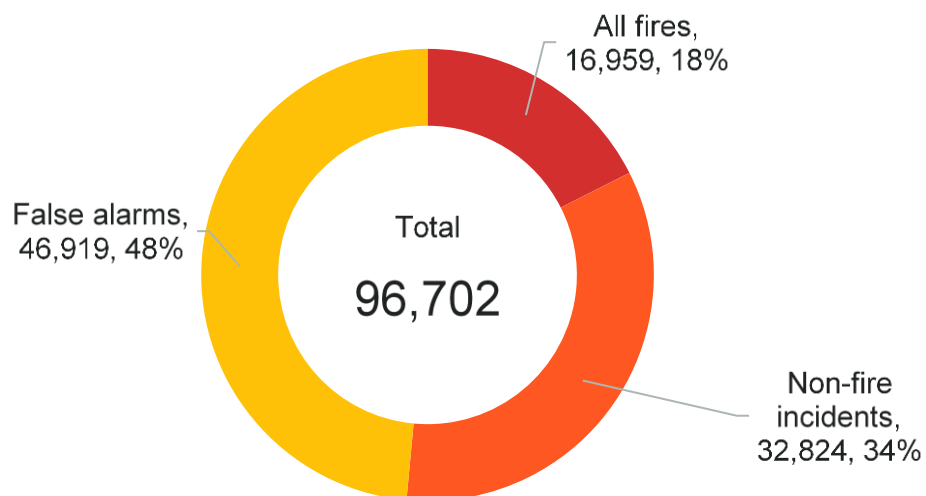
	London	England
Incidents attended per 1,000 population Year ending 30 June 2021	11.15	9.36
Home fire safety checks carried out by fire and rescue service per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	2.59	4.47
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises Year ending 31 March 2021	4.13	1.70
Average availability of pumps Year ending 31 March 2021	95.1%	86.4%



Cost

Firefighter cost per person Year ending 31 March 2021	£31.29	£23.73
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Incidents attended in the year to 30 June 2021

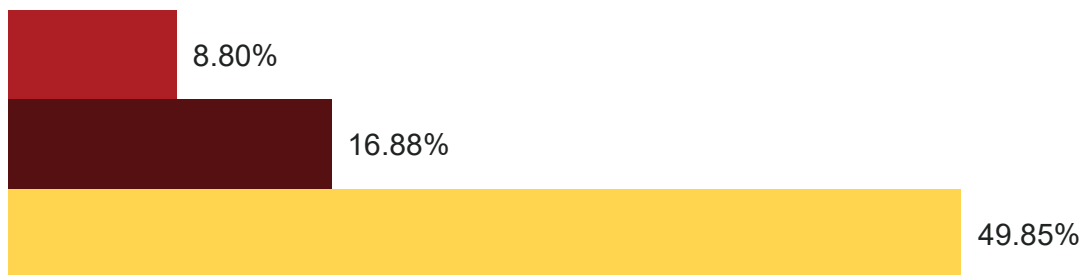




Five-year change in total workforce 2016 to 2021	0.89%	-1.60%
Number of firefighters per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	0.53	0.62
Percentage of firefighters who are wholetime Year ending 31 March 2021	100.0%	64.4%

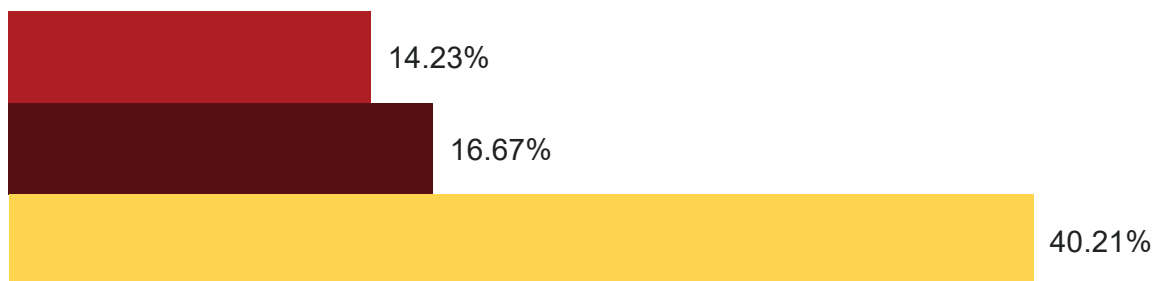
Percentage of population, firefighters and workforce who are female as at 31 March 2021

■ Firefighters ■ Workforce ■ Local population



Percentage of population, firefighters and workforce who are from ethnic minority backgrounds as at 31 March 2021

■ Firefighters ■ Workforce ■ Local population



For more information on data and analysis throughout this report, please view the [‘About the data’ section of our website](#).

Effectiveness



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



Requires improvement

Summary

An effective fire and rescue service will identify and assess the full range of foreseeable fire and rescue risks its community faces. It should target its fire prevention and protection activities to those who are at greatest risk from fire and make sure fire safety legislation is being enforced. And when the public calls for help, it should respond promptly with the right skills and equipment to deal with the incident effectively. London Fire Brigade's overall effectiveness requires improvement.

We found some areas have progressed since our inspection in 2019, but overall London Fire Brigade's effectiveness hasn't improved as we would have expected. We were disappointed to find the brigade hasn't updated its [integrated risk management plan \(IRMP\)](#), which is called the London Safety Plan (LSP). The brigade has made good progress against the Grenfell Tower Inquiry findings but has been slow to complete some actions.

We were concerned to find that the brigade hasn't developed a system to make sure its [home fire safety visits \(HFSVs\)](#) are prioritised by level of individual risk. The brigade is still not evaluating its prevention activity, so it doesn't know how effective this work is.

We found the brigade has focused resources on inspecting high-risk, high-rise premises. However, this has been at the expense of maintaining its RBIP.

The brigade uses its enforcement powers well, but it can be slow to do this.

Not enough has been done to reduce unwanted fire signals, and more still needs to be done to improve the time the brigade takes to respond to statutory consultations.

The brigade is quick to respond to fires and has improved the way it manages casualty data from fire survival guidance calls. Also, firefighters' access to up-to-date risk information for London has improved. But we found that since our last inspection progress in adopting [national operational guidance](#) has been slow.

Incident commanders are still not recording risks at incidents in line with this guidance and learning from operational activity isn't being shared quickly enough.

The brigade is prepared to respond to major incidents, but we found its response to terrorist incidents is limited, as it still hasn't trained all its responding staff to respond to this incident type. The brigade needs to carry out more exercises, particularly with other services, to make sure it can work effectively with them and other partners.

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies



Requires improvement (2019: Good)

London Fire Brigade requires improvement at understanding risk.

Each fire and rescue service should identify and assess all foreseeable fire and rescue-related risks that could affect its communities. Arrangements should be put in place through the service's prevention, protection and response capabilities to prevent or mitigate these risks for the public.

Areas for improvement

- The brigade should update and publish its IRMP, the London Safety Plan (LSP), so it can outline to the public current and future risks and how the brigade will mitigate them.
- The brigade should make sure that the aims and objectives of prevention, protection and response activity are clearly outlined in its IRMP, the LSP.

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

Use of local level data needs to improve

The brigade has assessed an appropriate range of risks and threats to develop its IRMP 2017–21. This is called the London Safety Plan (LSP). But the information in the LSP is out of date and doesn't clearly direct prevention, protection and response activity.

This is disappointing because when the brigade assesses risk, it considers relevant information collected from a broad range of internal and external sources and data sets. This includes the use of computer-based modelling, social data and information from operational incidents.

It uses borough plans to identify and manage local risk in each of the 32 London boroughs plus the City of London, but these plans are also not clearly linked to the LSP and data from them isn't used to inform the brigade's risk profile.

When appropriate, the brigade has consulted and undertaken constructive dialogue with communities and others such as MPs, Transport for London (TfL)

and brigade staff to both understand the risk and explain how it intends to mitigate it. For example, the LSP proposes relocating Kingston fire station's second fire engine. Following public consultation, the brigade delayed this move. In 2018, the brigade carried out a review which found response times had improved for the second fire engine, so it was kept at Kingston.

Strategic commitments to manage risk are out of date

In 2021, the LSP wasn't refreshed as intended. Instead, it was extended to 2023. This means its underpinning assumptions and data are more than four years old, so the brigade's plans and direction aren't aligned with the LSP. For example:

- commitments for a new training centre with high-rise training have been discontinued;
- London Fire Brigade Enterprises is no longer trading; and
- the brigade's prevention and protection plans aren't aligned to the LSP.

Information about the LSP and the reasons for its extension, isn't communicated to the public well enough, so it is difficult for the public, brigade staff, and other interested parties to understand what the current risks are in London, and how the brigade is using its prevention, protection and response resources to mitigate risks, both now and in the future.

The brigade has started work on a new community risk management plan (CRMP), which will replace the LSP, but progress has been too slow.

Assessment of premises' risk has improved

The brigade routinely collects and updates the information it has about the people, places and threats it has identified as being at greatest risk. This includes tall buildings that the brigade has assessed as high risk (for example, those with combustibile cladding).

We are reassured to find the brigade has worked to improve its approach in identifying and assessing premises' risk. It has identified 7,575 addresses (such as high-rise residential buildings) that meet the requirements for an electronic premises information plate (EPIP). The EPIP is a risk record containing important information such as building layout drawings and details of lift locations. The brigade told us that every high-rise building in London has an EPIP in place.

We found premises' risk information is well-managed through a central team. When new building risks are identified, crews must assess the level of risk by completing a premises' risk assessment. Operational crews have been trained to do these assessments.

The brigade uses the risk score from a premise's previous visit to establish when it should be reassessed. However, we found some of these reassessment visits aren't always completed within the set timescales. Some staff we spoke to said they struggle to maintain their schedules due to the high number of high-risk premises in their area. We do not underestimate the significant work required to maintain these scheduled visits. Figures provided by the brigade state that approximately 8,500 of the country's 12,000 residential high-rises are located in the brigade's operating area.

Risk information is quickly updated

The brigade has made good progress in the area for improvement we identified in our previous inspection in 2019, which was to make sure all its firefighters have good access to relevant and up-to-date risk information.

After a fire safety audit, the fire safety audit software automatically updates stations on any changes to risk information. Changes in premises' risk information can also be immediately updated on the brigade's [mobile data terminals](#) and the quality of the information is checked by station commanders. Firefighters we spoke to told us that most mobile data terminals have now been upgraded, although connectivity is sometimes a problem.

We reviewed some risk files as part of our inspection. Firefighters can access these through the mobile data terminals. We found files were up to date and completed to a good standard. This means firefighters have access to accurate risk information to keep the public and themselves safe.

Routine sharing of risk information needs to improve

The brigade has some processes for sharing risk information, including station notification forms and monthly operational news bulletins. Despite these processes more work is needed so staff in prevention, protection and response roles can access the information they need.

For example, we found that information shared through station notification forms isn't routinely shared with prevention staff. Relevant information relating to HFSVs isn't always shared with the protection team. Some staff told us that the distribution of risk information relies on ad-hoc email and verbal updates.

The brigade is developing an IT system that will make all of its premises' risk information accessible in one place. But this isn't due to be in place until 2024, and currently risk information is stored on several separate systems. The brigade should update its processes to improve the routine sharing of risk information between staff in prevention, protection and response roles.

The brigade needs to share learning from incidents more quickly

We found some evidence that the brigade learns and acts on feedback from either local or national operational activity. For example, the brigade identified lithium-ion battery storage as an increasing area of risk. It worked with TfL and, as a result, e-scooters have been banned from TfL's buses and trains.

During our inspection we inspected incident debrief records. Among the files we reviewed, we found significant learning was recorded for a major high-rise incident that happened six months ago. Worryingly, we found this learning had still not been shared with firefighters.

The brigade has made good progress on Grenfell Tower Inquiry recommendations

During this round of inspections, we sampled how each fire and rescue service has responded to the recommendations and learning from Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower fire inquiry.

London Fire Brigade has responded positively and proactively to learning from this tragedy. At the time of our inspection, the brigade had assessed the risk of every high-rise building in its area.

It has carried out a fire safety audit and collected and passed relevant risk information to its prevention, protection and response teams about buildings identified as high risk and all high-rise buildings that have cladding similar to the cladding installed on Grenfell Tower.

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 report made 46 recommendations, with 29 of them aimed solely at the brigade or other fire and emergency services. The brigade put together a comprehensive action plan to address these recommendations.

In February 2021, we published our report into the progress the brigade had made against these 29 recommendations. We found the brigade had completed action on only four of the 29 recommendations. This has now progressed and at the end of our inspection the brigade reported it had completed 26 out of 29 actions.

The brigade has been slow to make progress on some of the actions identified in our 2021 report. For example, a programme of large-scale high-rise exercises was due to start in April 2021, but we found they hadn't begun until September 2021.

At the time of this inspection, three of five planned high-rise exercises were cancelled due to increased risk from the COVID-19 Omicron variant. The brigade should make sure it prioritises this work for completion.

Preventing fires and other risks



Requires improvement (2019: Good)

London Fire Brigade requires improvement at preventing fires and other risks.

Fire and rescue services must promote fire safety, including giving fire safety advice. To identify people at greatest risk from fire, services should work closely with other organisations in the public and voluntary sector, and with the police and ambulance services. They should provide [intelligence](#) and risk information with these other organisations when they identify vulnerability or exploitation.

Cause of concern

The brigade doesn't adequately prioritise HFSVs on the basis of risk. It doesn't have a system in place that allows for the consistent assessment of risk levels among those people it has already identified as being at greatest risk from fire.

Recommendation

By 31 May 2022, the brigade should develop an action plan to:

- develop a prevention strategy that clearly details how it will implement its prevention activity;
- develop an effective system that assesses levels of risk among those people it has already identified as being at greatest risk from fire;
- make sure it prioritises HFSVs for those people it has identified as being at greatest risk from fire; and
- develop a plan that addresses the HFSV backlog in a way that is both timely and prioritised on the basis of risk.

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.
- The brigade should make sure it quality assures its prevention activity, so staff carry out HFSVs to an appropriate standard.
- The brigade should improve its use of communications to provide fire prevention information and to promote community safety.
- The brigade should ensure [safeguarding](#) training is undertaken by all staff.

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

The prevention plan is out of date

At the time of our inspection, the brigade had no prevention plan in place for 2021/22. Because of this we couldn't see how prevention resources were being used to support the objectives in its LSP.

The brigade has identified factors relating to people, such as age and mobility, and place, such as living in a deprived area, that put individuals at greater risk from fire and other emergencies. However, apart from setting targets for how many HFSVs should be completed, we found little evidence of meaningful evaluation to show how successful the brigade's activity is at targeting activity and reducing risk.

Those most at risk aren't always prioritised

The brigade relies on referrals from other organisations to identify people and premises that would benefit from HFSVs. Factors such as age, mobility and whether a person uses oxygen are used to identify people who are at greater risk from fire.

However, we are concerned to find that there is no system in place to establish which individuals are at greatest need among those classed as high risk. Prevention staff told us there is no risk scoring process to determine how high-risk referrals are prioritised. Staff in the brigade's four separate call centres are prioritising referrals based on their judgment, rather than following a systematic prioritisation process. This means the highest-risk individuals aren't getting the fastest response.

We are also concerned that there are no set risk-based timescales to make sure those most at risk are seen the quickest. This was evident among the HFSVs files we reviewed as part of our inspection. For example, an elderly person with hearing problems and without good smoke detection in their home was referred for an HFSV, but the visit took five weeks to complete.

The pandemic has had a negative effect on the brigade's prevention activity

We considered how the brigade had adapted its prevention work during our COVID-19 specific inspection between September and October 2020. At that time, we found it had adapted its public prevention work appropriately.

In 2019/20 the brigade carried out 76,846 HFSVs. This decreased to 23,339 HFSVs in 2020/21. Fewer HFSVs have been completed because the brigade's working practices changed during lockdown to focus on the most [vulnerable people](#), who needed urgent visits. But firefighters told us that some people didn't want to see the brigade due to COVID-19 concerns. Some firefighters told us that competing demands on their time also meant they were struggling to achieve HFSV targets.

As of 31 March 2021, the brigade had a backlog of 6,724 HFSVs. The brigade is aware of this and is putting a plan in place to reduce this. However, we have concerns about how these visits will be prioritised. We found the brigade doesn't have a robust system in place to identify individual risk level and make sure those at highest risk will receive the fastest response.

The brigade still carries out some HFSVs by phone. It has also developed a home fire safety check app. The brigade should continue to develop alternative methods to support its HFSV work.

Staff training and quality checks need improvement

Most staff told us they have the right skills and confidence to make HFSVs. These checks cover an appropriate range of hazards that can put vulnerable people at greater risk from fire and other emergencies.

Not all staff who carry out HFSVs have had training. Some firefighters told us they learned by watching others. This means HFSVs could be being carried out to different standards. The brigade should make sure all staff who carry out HFSVs receive appropriate training.

The brigade doesn't routinely check the quality of its HFSV work. Most staff we spoke to weren't aware of any quality assurance of HFSVs. This means the brigade can't assure itself that HFSVs are being completed to a consistent standard. Learning opportunities which could improve the brigade's services to the public are being missed.

In our first inspection, we were told that the brigade was piloting [safe and well visits](#) in five London boroughs. We were disappointed to find that, despite the success of the trials, the brigade has decided not to offer this enhanced service to the public.

All staff should receive safeguarding training

Staff we interviewed told us about occasions when they had identified [safeguarding](#) problems. They told us they feel confident to act appropriately and promptly. Some staff we spoke to had received safeguarding training.

We found safeguarding training is made available to staff, including operational crews. However, in our review of staff competence files, we found that some staff with responsibility for safeguarding issues had no record of any safeguarding training.

The brigade collaborates effectively with other organisations and volunteers

The brigade works well with a range of other organisations such as other emergency services and TfL to prevent fires and other emergencies. For example, a major supplier of oxygen cylinders sends the brigade a monthly list of its oxygen users. This means the brigade can update its risk database to show which premises may have oxygen cylinders.

We were pleased to see the brigade's cadets programme is available in all 32 London boroughs plus the City of London. The programme is run by brigade staff and a team of trained volunteers. The brigade collects feedback from those who attend the programme. We found this feedback to be extremely positive.

The brigade routinely exchanges information with other public sector organisations about people and groups at greatest risk. It uses the information to challenge planning assumptions and target prevention activity. For example, the brigade is working with Thames Water Safety Partnership to install more throwlines at waterside locations where greater risk of drowning has been identified.

The service is good at tackling fire-setting behaviour

The brigade has effective interventions to target and educate people of different ages who show signs of fire-setting behaviour. This includes a fire setters' intervention scheme, in which a small team gives tailored support to young people on a one-to-one basis, to address fire-setting behaviour.

We found the brigade does prioritise HFSV referrals where there is an arson risk. Staff aim to carry out visits within 24 hours of receiving arson-risk referrals, and fit equipment such as arson-proof letter boxes. The brigade also has arson prevention information available on its website.

Improved evaluation of prevention activity is needed

We found little evidence that the brigade evaluates how effective its activity is or makes sure all its communities get equal access to prevention activity that meets their needs. The brigade has worked with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents to improve its evaluation, but the results of this work had not yet been applied at the time of this inspection. Prevention staff told us that evaluation is still not part of most prevention activity.

Without evaluation, the brigade can't be sure its prevention resources are being used in the best ways to reduce risk and make people safer. As a result, the brigade is missing opportunities to improve what it provides the public.

The brigade has made limited progress in addressing the following area for improvement identified in 2019. As such, the area for improvement remains. 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.

The brigade's safety campaigns need better co-ordination

We saw examples of London-wide campaigns which the brigade has run to raise awareness of safety issues. A recent example is the Balcony Barbecue Campaign. This was introduced in response to increased barbecues on balconies during COVID-19 lockdowns.

Information about these campaigns isn't communicated well enough with staff. When we spoke to staff who attend community events, they told us that they had stopped receiving updates about which campaigns are running. This means they couldn't co-ordinate campaign messages with the communities they work with.

There is also limited tailoring of campaign communication towards vulnerable groups. The brigade should make sure that its campaign messages are accessible, and that they meet the diverse needs of its communities.

Protecting the public through fire regulation



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

London Fire Brigade requires improvement at protecting the public through fire regulation.

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

Areas for improvement

- The brigade needs to be able to measure that it is meeting the targets set out in its RBIP to be assured it is effectively protecting the public from fires.
- The brigade should make sure it addresses effectively the burden of false alarms.
- The brigade should make sure it responds in time to building regulation consultations.
- The brigade should develop a protection strategy that demonstrates how protection resource will be used to protect the public from fire both now and in the future.
- The brigade should make sure it allocates enough resources to a prioritised RBIP.
- The brigade should make sure it puts in place measures so it can meet its planned schedule of fire safety audits.
- The brigade should make sure it works with local businesses and large organisations to share information and expectations on compliance with fire safety regulations.

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

Protection plans are not effectively managed

We were disappointed to find the brigade doesn't have an up-to-date protection plan. This means we couldn't tell how its fire safety work is aligned to its LSP objectives. We found the protection team's work plan was last reviewed in 2018.

The LSP is based on information from 2017. This is when the brigade outlined its main fire safety risks. Even if its fire safety work was aligned to its LSP objectives, the brigade can't assure itself that the fire safety risks identified in the LSP accurately reflect London's current risks.

The brigade has focused on inspecting high-risk, high-rise buildings

The Building Risk Review (BRR) identified 8,517 high-rise addresses in London, which is significantly more than any other fire and rescue service in England. The brigade had to inspect each one. The purpose of this inspection was to identify high-rise buildings that have aluminium composite material cladding, and to assess how the buildings are managed and what fire safety measures they have in place.

We were impressed to find the brigade has carried out audits at all 8,517 addresses. This includes high-rise buildings the brigade had identified as using cladding that is similar to the cladding installed on Grenfell Tower. The brigade told us it had completed this work by the end of October 2021, ahead of the December 2021 target set by government.

Information gathered during these audits is made available to response teams and control operators, enabling them to respond more effectively in an emergency. Brigade resources are committed to regularly monitoring its highest-risk high-rise buildings.

The brigade isn't maintaining its RBIP

The brigade has an RBIP. It uses several methods to decide how high risk a building is, and how often to visit. Premises with sleeping risk, such as care homes, are classed as high risk.

We are concerned the brigade isn't maintaining its RBIP. We found a backlog of audits among the files we inspected. Many premises, including those classed as high risk, were overdue for inspection. Some staff told us they don't routinely carry out audits on premises identified by the RBIP. Some of the files we reviewed supported this.

Protection staff told us that they were focused on completing BRR work. We heard that the volume and scale of this work, combined with a lack of competent staff, were the main reasons why the RBIP hadn't been maintained. We were told that the database used to manage the RBIP wasn't fit for purpose. The brigade plans to replace this system.

Due to prioritising its BRR work, the brigade has made limited progress in addressing the following area for improvement identified in 2019. As such, the area for improvement remains. The brigade needs to be able to check it is meeting the targets set out in its RBIP, to make sure it is effectively protecting the public from fires.

The brigade carries out good quality audits

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

The audits we reviewed were completed to a high standard in a consistent, systematic way, and in line with the brigade's policies. Relevant information from the audits is made available to operational teams and control room operators.

The quality assurance of the brigade's audits is good

Quality assurance of protection activity takes place in a proportionate way. The brigade has a team that quality assures its protection work, including making annual quality assurance visits to protection teams. Protection managers told us they check the quality of the audits completed by their inspecting officers. Among the audit files we reviewed as part of our inspection we found clear examples of quality assurance.

The brigade makes good use of enforcement powers

The brigade consistently uses most of its enforcement powers, and when appropriate, prosecutes those who don't comply with fire safety regulations. The brigade has a comprehensive enforcement policy and a dedicated enforcement team.

In the year to 31 March 2021, the brigade issued:

- 2 alteration notices;
- 1,654 informal notifications;
- 276 enforcement notices; and
- 57 prohibition notices.

The brigade completed 19 prosecutions from 2016/17 to 2019/20. However, we were surprised to see it hadn't completed any in 2020/21. Protection staff told us that COVID-19 delays had caused a backlog in the court system which may have affected a number of prosecutions carried out in 2020/21.

We were encouraged to see evidence of 5 prosecutions completed in 2021/22. This included prosecuting a major care services provider for failing in its fire safety duties. As a result, the provider was fined £937,500.

The brigade is slow to carry out enforcement action

The brigade isn't always effectively managing its enforcement action. We were told that the enforcement team should check and authorise enforcement notices within 28 days. However, some notices were still waiting authorisation after five weeks. We reviewed two files that showed it had taken three months to issue enforcement notices after the initial inspection.

Some inspecting officers we spoke to told us that the enforcement process was slow, because of a lack of resource in the enforcement team. The brigade should make sure enforcement action is carried out within the timescales it has set itself, and that it is efficiently managed.

The brigade hasn't had enough staff to carry out all its planned work

The brigade doesn't have enough qualified protection staff to support its audit and enforcement activity.

Protection staff told us they couldn't maintain the RBIP due to lack of competent protection staff and the significant demands of its BRR work. We reviewed files from the brigade's RBIP which showed audit backlogs and reinspection deadlines being missed. The brigade has also cancelled its [primary authority](#) work due to lack of resource.

The brigade is taking steps to increase levels of competent protection staff. Its competent protection staff numbers grew from 118 in 2019/20 to 135 in 2020/21 (an increase of 17). However, over the same time, there were fewer staff in development, with 24 in development in 2020/21 compared to 28 in 2019/20.

The brigade has now set up a dedicated training facility to increase the amount of qualified protection staff. It is investing in its station commanders by training them to a Level 3 certificate in fire safety. We were encouraged to find operational crews were being trained to complete fire safety checks on low and medium-risk premises.

The brigade could work more with other organisations

The brigade works closely with other enforcement bodies to regulate fire safety. It routinely exchanges risk information with them.

During inspection we saw evidence of the brigade working with other organisations, such as building control and local councils. However, some of the organisations it works with told us they felt the brigade could support their work better.

The brigade needs to do more to respond to building consultations on time

The brigade doesn't always respond to building consultations on time, so doesn't consistently meet its statutory responsibility to comment on fire safety arrangements at new and altered buildings. In 2020/21 the brigade responded to 61.9 percent of all building regulation consultations and 52.0 percent of all licencing consultations in the expected time.

To improve its response to statutory consultations, the brigade has set up a centralised building control hub. This takes consultation work away from area fire safety teams and makes it the responsibility of a specialist central team. At the time of this inspection the hub was completing statutory consultations for 14 London boroughs.

Figures from the brigade show that as of October 2021 the hub had returned all 360 consultations it received on time. The brigade plans to increase resource in the hub so it can cover more London boroughs. We look forward to seeing how this work progresses.

While the brigade has made some progress, the following area for improvement identified in 2019 remains. The brigade should make sure it responds in time to building regulation consultations.

The brigade does limited engagement with businesses

The brigade could do more to engage with local businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation. During our inspection we found the brigade had suspended its primary authority relationships with other organisations.

Other than publishing fire safety information for businesses on its website, we found little evidence of direct work with businesses. This means the brigade is missing opportunities to promote to businesses the benefits of compliance with fire safety legislation.

The brigade needs to do more to reduce unwanted fire signals

The brigade hasn't done enough to reduce the number of unwanted fire signals. In 2020/21, the brigade attended 96,702 incidents, of which 46,919 (48.5 percent) were false alarms. Out of the 46,919 false alarms attended, 34,597 (73.7 percent) were automated fire alarms.

Brigade figures show an increase in the number of false alarms and automated fire alarms in 2021 compared to 2020. This means that engines may be unavailable to respond to genuine incidents because they are attending false alarms. It also creates a risk to the public if more fire engines travel at high speed on roads to respond to these incidents.

The brigade established an unwanted fire signal team to improve brigade policy on false alarm management. At the time of our inspection, we found much of the team's work had yet to be put into practice. The brigade should quickly introduce any improvements that will effectively reduce false alarms.

The brigade has made little progress in addressing the following area for improvement identified in 2019. As such, the area for improvement remains. The brigade should make sure it addresses effectively the burden of false alarms.

Responding to fires and other emergencies



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

London Fire Brigade requires improvement at responding to fires and other emergencies.

Fire and rescue services must be able to respond to a range of incidents such as fires, road traffic collisions and other emergencies in their area.

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.
- The brigade should make sure its response strategy provides the most appropriate response for the public in line with its IRMP, the LSP.
- The brigade should make sure its operational staff have good access to relevant and up-to-date cross-border risk information.

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

The brigade responds quickly to fires

There are no national response standards of performance for the public. Home Office data on response times measures the time as being between a call being made and the first fire engine arriving at the scene. In the year to 31 March 2021, the brigade's average response time to [primary fires](#) by Home Office standards was 6 minutes and 24 seconds. This is faster than the average for predominantly urban services, and the second fastest response time compared to other fire and rescue services in England.

Some services measure their own response standards in different ways to the Home Office. The brigade has set its response standards in the LSP. These are:

- first fire engine anywhere in London within an average time of 6 minutes;
- second fire engine anywhere in London within an average time of 8 minutes;
- a fire engine anywhere in London within 10 minutes on 90 percent of occasions; and
- a fire engine anywhere in London within 12 minutes on 95 percent of occasions.

The brigade consistently exceeds its own standards. For the year 2020/21 the average attendance time of its first fire engine was 4 minutes and 59 seconds. The average attendance time of its second fire engine was 6 minutes and 11 seconds. A fire engine attended anywhere in London within 10 minutes 97.8 percent of the time, and within 12 minutes 99.0 percent of the time.

The brigade's response standards are based on equal entitlement

The brigade's response standards are based on a guiding principle of equal access. This means that according to the principle, even if someone lives in an area where the likelihood of a fire is lower, they should not have a slower response time. These standards are based on historical data and haven't changed since 2005. The brigade should review its response standards to make sure they are proportionate to current and future risks.

To maintain this principle, there has been little change to fire station locations and working patterns. In the LSP, the brigade committed to exploring alternative working patterns so that it can offer a more flexible response using appropriate resources. Despite this, crews continue to work the same shift patterns.

We found that the brigade's average response times are significantly quicker than the ones it has set under its guiding principle. Some staff told us the brigade keeps more operational staff than it would ordinarily need, in case it has to respond to large-scale incidents such as flooding. The brigade should review how it allocates its resources, to make sure it can respond to incidents in an efficient and effective way.

The brigade has high levels of fire engine availability but doesn't meet its own target

To support its response model, the brigade has set itself a challenging target of having 100 percent of fire engines available on 100 percent of occasions. This is because all of the brigade's 102 fire stations are covered by.

Although fire engine availability is high, the brigade doesn't meet this standard. In 2020/21, overall fire engine availability was 95.1 percent, compared to 96.9 percent in 2019/20. Despite fire engines being available over 90 percent of the time throughout all stations, none of them met the brigade's target of 100 percent availability.

The brigade has been slow to implement national operational guidance

National operational guidance is guidance for all fire and rescue services on developing policies, procedures and training based on nationally recognised standards.

The brigade has a dedicated resource to apply national operational guidance to its policies, procedures and training. However, progress has been slow. We were told this was due to the large number of policies that need to be reviewed and consulted on with representative bodies.

While the brigade has made some progress, the following area for improvement identified in 2019 remains. The brigade should make sure it puts in place and delivers a plan to adopt national operational guidance.

Incident commanders are trained and assessed in the management of incidents

In our first inspection in 2019 we had concerns that the brigade wasn't training and assessing the competence of its incident commanders in line with national guidance.

Since our previous inspection, we were pleased to find that the brigade has developed a process to train and re-assess its incident commanders at all levels. Each incident commander, once they have received their incident command training, is reassessed every two years. This follows national operational guidance and will enable the brigade to safely, assertively and effectively manage the whole range of incidents that it could face, from small and routine ones to complex multi-agency incidents. This is an improvement from our previous inspection.

Incident commanders don't always follow national guidance

As part of this inspection, we interviewed incident commanders throughout the brigade. We were disappointed to find that not all of them were confident explaining how they complete risk assessments, make decisions and record information at incidents in line with national guidance.

The brigade has been slow to adopt national operational guidance, including the use of analytical risk assessments and decision-making models. This means that its systems work in different ways to surrounding services. We also found some Level 1 commanders were unfamiliar with the [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles \(JESIP\)](#).

The incident commanders we spoke to understand the use of [operational discretion](#). Of the respondents to our staff survey, 63 percent (303 out of 478) felt they would be supported by the brigade in the use of operational discretion. At the time of our inspection, we were surprised to be told that use of operational discretion by the brigade had only been recorded 5 times since 2019/20.

The brigade has made no progress in addressing the following area for improvement identified in 2019. As such, the area for improvement remains. 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.

Control staff should have more opportunities to be involved in major exercises

Control staff are integrated into the brigade's command, training, exercise, debrief and assurance activity. For example, a member of [fire control](#) staff told us they acted as an observer at an exercise, to give feedback on fire survival guidance.

But some control staff we spoke to said they hadn't been involved in major exercises due to lack of staff to cover control. The brigade should make sure that control staff have the opportunity to contribute to brigade exercises.

The brigade has improved how fire survival calls are handled

The control room staff we interviewed are confident they could provide fire survival guidance to many callers simultaneously. We found control staff were well-trained to deal with fire survival guidance. This was confirmed by the training files we reviewed as part of our inspection. Control operators must take part in a regular programme of fire survival training to maintain their operational competence.

We were encouraged to find the brigade has taken steps to revise and update its fire survival guidance policy. A new evacuation and rescue policy has been introduced. This was identified as learning for fire services after the Grenfell Tower fire.

Fire control has developed a system to exchange real-time risk information with incident commanders, responding partners and other supporting fire and rescue services. A single point of contact at the incident ground and a single point of contact in control relay information, including fire survival guidance, using a dedicated radio channel.

Existing control software has been adapted to allow the recording of fire survival information, such as if a person has been evacuated or still needs rescuing. This information can then be relayed to the incident ground. Maintaining good situational awareness helps the brigade to communicate effectively with the public, providing them with accurate and tailored advice.

Another positive development is that the brigade has developed a fire survival guidance app to improve fire survival communications.

Arrangements are in place with North West Fire Control, which will take calls for the brigade if needed. However, some control staff we spoke to aren't confident in the process for taking calls from other services.

Risk information for London is good

We were pleased to find the brigade has carried out significant work to improve its approach to assessing premises' risk. EIPs are created for the highest-risk buildings. Changes in risk can be immediately updated by firefighters through mobile data terminals carried on fire engines.

We sampled a range of risk information from the brigade's operational risk database and from fire stations. This included information about high-rise premises and a hospital. The information we reviewed was up to date and detailed. It could be easily accessed and understood by staff. Information included what is in place for firefighters responding to incidents at high-risk, high-rise buildings and what information is held by fire control.

But we were disappointed to find the brigade doesn't hold cross-border risk information on its computer systems. We found operational and control staff couldn't access cross-border risk information when asked.

We found good arrangements in place to manage temporary risks. Control staff can put temporary risk information onto the computer system. This will then show on a station's information sheet, should a crew be called to an incident. Control use technology that allows callers to securely send incident footage from mobile phones.

The brigade needs to share operational learning more quickly

The brigade has taken steps to improve its debriefing process. We found that it is recording learning from incidents in more detail, including identifying individual and organisational learning. We found the size of debrief depends on the number of fire appliances involved at the incident. Learning is distributed to operational staff through a newsletter.

We were disappointed to find that the new process wasn't yet fully introduced throughout the brigade. Consultations about the new debrief policy with representative bodies weren't finished, and operational staff we spoke to still referred to the old debrief system. We were told that [hot debriefs](#) weren't being recorded. This isn't consistent with the brigade's new debrief process. This means opportunities for learning are being missed.

As part of the inspection, we reviewed a range of emergency incidents and training events. These include fires at commercial premises and high-rise buildings.

We were concerned to find the brigade doesn't always act on learning it has, or should have, identified from incidents. This means it isn't routinely improving its service to the public. For example, on 7 May 2021, a fire took place at New Providence Wharf, which is a high-rise building. This was declared as a major incident. We found learning from this incident had still not been shared six months after the fire. The brigade needs to take immediate action to address this.

The brigade contributes to and acts on learning from other fire and rescue services, or operational learning gathered from other emergency service partners. This includes a review of operational guidance after a fire appliance was used to transport a casualty to hospital when an ambulance wasn't available.

While the brigade has made some progress, the following area for improvement identified in 2019 remains. 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.

The brigade has good arrangements for keeping the public informed

The brigade has good systems in place to inform the public about continuing incidents and help keep them safe during and after incidents. Systems include the brigade's website and social media.

We found brigade communications staff were part of the [London Resilience Forum \(LRF\)](#) communication group. This makes sure communication about significant multi-agency incidents is co-ordinated effectively between agencies.

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents



Requires improvement (2019: Good)

London Fire Brigade requires improvement at responding to major and multi-agency incidents.

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

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.
- The brigade should make sure it is well-prepared to form part of a multi-agency response to an incident and all relevant staff know how to apply JESIP.

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

The brigade is well prepared for major and multi-agency incidents in London

The brigade has effectively anticipated and considered the reasonably foreseeable risks and threats it may face. This includes dealing with the pandemic and wide-area flooding.

All responses are informed by the London Risk Assessment, which details protocols, so all agencies understand their role when responding to major incidents. Each of the 32 London boroughs plus the City of London has a resilience group, and each group has an emergency planning function.

The brigade is familiar with some of the significant risks in neighbouring fire and rescue services, which it might reasonably be asked to respond to in an emergency. However, the brigade's computer system doesn't hold information for cross-border risks. This means control operators and responding crews are reliant on information being provided by neighbouring services. The brigade should act quickly to address this.

Good understanding of major incident procedures

We reviewed the arrangements the brigade has in place to respond to different major incidents, including responding to terrorist attacks and fires in high-risk, high-rise buildings.

The brigade has good arrangements in place, which are well understood by staff. It has a range of specialist resources available to respond to major incidents. These include high-volume pumps, and [urban search and rescue](#) teams.

Control staff we spoke to knew how to respond to a major incident and how to request [national resilience assets](#) if needed. Incident commanders knew what to do when faced with a major incident. One example of this knowledge was the brigade's response to a high-rise fire at New Providence Wharf.

The brigade has limited resource to respond to terrorist incidents

The brigade has a well-trained specialist team who respond to terrorist incidents. But we were concerned that, at the time of inspection, the brigade hadn't trained its non-specialist firefighters to respond to marauding terrorist attacks. This could affect how its firefighters work alongside other blue light responders. If they aren't following the same procedures, public safety could be compromised. This means the brigade has a limited response to terrorist incidents.

The brigade has made no progress in addressing the following area for improvement identified in 2019. As such, the area for improvement remains. 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.

The way the brigade works with other fire services could be improved

The brigade supports other fire and rescue services responding to emergency incidents. For example, it deployed assets, including national incident liaison officers, to a terrorist-related incident in West Sussex. It has mutual aid agreements in place with bordering services such as Kent and Essex.

It could do more to improve the way it works with other services and forms part of a multi-agency response. For example, we found incident commanders aren't using the nationally recognised processes for decision-making and recording risk that all other services use. However, the brigade uses cross-border liaison officers to help maintain safe systems of work with other services.

The brigade needs to do more cross-border exercises

The brigade has cross-border exercise plans with neighbouring fire and rescue services. This enables them to work more effectively together to keep the public safe. However, we found the level of detail in the plans for each of the four geographic areas to be inconsistent.

In 2020/21, the brigade carried out 1.9 exercises with neighbouring services per 1,000 firefighters. This is below the England rate of 7.2 exercises. Fifty-eight percent (413 out of 707) of respondents to our survey hadn't participated in exercising or training with neighbouring services in the past 12 months. The pandemic has restricted the number of cross-border exercises.

Operational crews can't access cross-border risk information. Some firefighters we spoke to said learning from these exercises wasn't always shared. The brigade has acknowledged it has more work to do to improve its cross-border work.

The brigade has made limited progress in addressing the following area for improvement identified in 2019. As such, the area for improvement remains. The brigade should make sure cross-border risks are made known to crews. It should run a programme of over-the-border exercises and pass on the lessons learned from these exercises.

The brigade needs to do more work to improve interoperability

The brigade has a comprehensive strategic response plan to respond to major incidents. The plan clearly outlines structures, roles and the main response actions. It also details the need for all officers to understand the JESIP. These principles make sure other emergency services and partners work together effectively during emergencies.

Not all of the incident commanders we interviewed as part of our inspection had been trained in or were familiar with JESIP. We were concerned to be told by some that they chose to use the brigade decision-making model or relied on their own experience, rather than apply JESIP.

The brigade works well with resilience forum partners

The brigade has good arrangements in place to respond to emergencies with other partners that make up the LRF. These arrangements include hosting the LRF secretariat.

The brigade is a valued partner and either chairs or is represented at all strategic or tactical LRF groups. The brigade takes part in regular training events with other members of the LRF and uses the learning to develop planning assumptions about responding to major and multi-agency incidents.

For example, the brigade has led the development of multi-agency, high-rise exercises. This development involved borough council emergency planning teams, who added elements of their major incident response, such as structural risk, to the exercises.

During the pandemic, the brigade formed part of a pandemic multi-agency response team. This was to help with transporting the deceased. The brigade supported London Ambulance Service by driving ambulances.

The brigade is good at sharing learning among blue light partners

The brigade keeps itself up to date with [national operational learning](#) updates from other fire services and [joint organisational learning](#) from other emergency service organisations such as the police service and ambulance trusts. This learning is used to inform planning assumptions that have been made with other partners. During our inspection, the brigade gave examples of where it had contributed to national and joint organisational learning, such as one occasion when it had to transport a casualty on a fire appliance when an ambulance wasn't available.

Efficiency



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



Requires improvement

Summary

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

We were disappointed to find that London Fire Brigade's overall efficiency at keeping people safe and secure hasn't improved as we would have expected since our 2019 inspection.

Without an up-to-date CRMP, it isn't clear how the brigade's budget, finance and staffing plans will meet identified risks. Because of this, plans for the efficient and effective use of estates and fleet haven't been developed.

There is a good level of scrutiny applied to the brigade's finances, but it needs to do more to reduce costs, especially the way it uses overtime, to make sure it can respond to incidents.

The brigade is aware of its future financial challenges but doesn't have plans in place to meet all of them.

The brigade has made some improvement in how it collaborates with others but is still not evaluating the benefits of these arrangements, meaning it can't show how effective this work is. We also found that the brigade's IT systems don't always help staff do their work efficiently.

The brigade is changing how it operates as an organisation, but it acknowledges it doesn't have all the skills or resource to carry out its plans.

Making best use of resources



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

London Fire Brigade requires improvement at making best use of its resources.

Fire and rescue services should manage their resources properly and appropriately, aligning them with the services' risks and statutory responsibilities. Services should make best possible use of resources to achieve the best results for the public.

The brigade's budget for 2021/22 is £405.4m. This is a 1 percent increase on the previous financial year.

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 LSP.
- 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.
- The brigade needs to show a clear rationale for the resources allocated between prevention, protection, and response activities. This should reflect, and be consistent with, the risks and priorities set out in its IRMP, the LSP.
- The brigade should make sure that it is taking action to reduce non-pay costs and can demonstrate how it is achieving value for money.

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

The brigade's resourcing plans need more work

The brigade sometimes uses its resources well to manage risk, but there are several areas that need addressing.

The brigade's IRMP, the LSP, hasn't been updated since 2017. The new CRMP hasn't been fully developed.

We are concerned that without a CRMP, the brigade doesn't have enough information to determine what level of resource it needs to meet future risk. Departmental plans for areas such as estates and IT were not in place or updated because of this.

Our first inspection in 2019 found the brigade's strategic direction wasn't aligned to the LSP. We are disappointed to find this hasn't changed. It was not clear how prevention, protection and response resources are allocated to the risks in the LSP.

The brigade has done some work to understand what skills and resource it needs, but it needs to do more to turn this into a clear workforce plan.

The brigade has made little progress in addressing the following area for improvement identified in 2019. As such, the area for improvement remains. The brigade should make sure it reviews how it allocates its resources to activities, based on the risks set out in the LSP.

The brigade has a good level of financial scrutiny

We found a good level of scrutiny over the brigade's finances. The brigade has used financial scenario planning. It has outlined different options for meeting budget challenges through its medium-term financial plan. Scrutiny is provided by the Mayor of London through the Fire and Resilience Board. This makes sure budgets are based on sound planning assumptions before they are approved.

Further scrutiny of financial controls is carried out by the brigade's audit committee. This helps make sure the brigade has long-term financial stability which is underpinned by financial controls that reduce the risk of misusing public money.

Performance monitoring is in place but there is too much reliance on overtime

Arrangements for managing performance are linked to the brigade's Transformation Delivery Plan (TDP). This plan details how the brigade will change and improve its operations. The brigade has recently set up a performance board, which scrutinises its performance and progress against the plan's most important and long-term aims. Performance against the TDP is also reported quarterly to the Fire and Resilience Board.

The brigade is taking some steps to make sure its workforce's time is as productive as possible. For example, firefighters carry out business fire safety visits. Targets are in place for operational crews to complete a set number of [home fire safety visits \(HFSVs\)](#) each month.

The brigade had to adapt its working practices as a result of the pandemic, and these are still part of its day-to-day activity. These include the use of hybrid working and virtual meetings. This helps staff to work in a more flexible way.

But the brigade relies on overtime to maintain its operational response. Figures for 2019/20 show that £4.48m was spent on overtime. This increased in 2020/21 to £8.12m. Eighty-nine percent of this was spent on [wholtime firefighters](#).

Worryingly, casual overtime continues to increase. This type of overtime is usually more expensive than other overtime types. In 2019/20, £2.86m was spent on casual overtime. This increased to £3.49m in 2020/21. The brigade spends £605.30 on casual overtime per head of workforce. This is above the England rate, and is the highest amount compared to other predominantly urban services.

When the LSP was published in 2017, the brigade committed to exploring alternative crewing models. Almost five years later, we found firefighters continue to work the same shift pattern. The brigade should review its crewing arrangements to determine the most effective and efficient way of addressing risks faced in London.

The brigade is improving its focus on collaboration

We are encouraged to see improved focus on exploring opportunities to collaborate. For example, the brigade told us that:

- a police safer neighbourhoods team is based at Purley Fire Station;
- the Greater London Authority now shares two floors of London Fire Brigade's headquarters;
- a trial has been completed for a single call-handling centre for emergency services; and
- operational staff supported London Ambulance Service by driving ambulances throughout the pandemic.

Despite this improvement, the brigade has been slow to progress some collaboration work. For example, a single call-handling service for fire, police and ambulance was referred to in the 2017 LSP. At the time of this inspection, the trial had only just been completed. The brigade told us that COVID-19 had delayed some progress.

We found the results of collaborations aren't always evaluated. This means it is difficult to show the effectiveness and efficiency gains of collaborative work.

While the brigade has made some progress, the following area for improvement identified in 2019 remains. The brigade should make sure it effectively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and outcomes of any contractual arrangements, collaboration, or other improvement projects.

Staff need better understanding of continuity plans

There are continuity arrangements in place for areas where threats and risks are considered high. We found good continuity plans in place for the brigade's estate and in the event of loss of the [fire control](#) room.

We were disappointed to find that most staff we spoke to at fire stations were not aware of continuity arrangements or their associated roles and responsibilities. We found that control operates from the fallback control centre when IT work is being carried out on the control system. But this isn't classed as a test of continuity plans and no debrief takes place. Control would benefit from regular testing of its continuity arrangements and being fully debriefed to share learning from these tests.

While the brigade has made some progress, the following area for improvement identified in 2019 remains. 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.

More work is needed to reduce costs

Though the brigade has taken some actions to reduce non-pay costs, they are limited. Without plans in place for fleet and estates, we couldn't see how costs would be reduced in these areas.

Some of the savings and efficiencies made have had a disproportionate effect on operational performance and the service to the public. For example, the brigade

introduced a recruitment freeze for 2021/22, to address budget gaps. This has contributed to the brigade having a high level of vacancies, and to difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff, especially in the protection department.

We found more evidence of the effect of the savings and efficiencies during our inspection. Overtime spend is increasing, especially for operational staff, to cover shortfalls in staffing. Departments like protection don't have enough staff, so can't provide the full range of services available to the public. The brigade is now investing in more protection staff.

We were encouraged to find improvements being made to procurement processes. The brigade has introduced a new contract management approach to manage its contracts more efficiently. Some collaborative procurement work has taken place with Kent Fire and Rescue Service on national PPE contracts. The brigade should continue to develop its procurement work to achieve greater efficiencies through national initiatives and contracts.

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



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

London Fire Brigade requires improvement at making the service affordable now and in the future.

Fire and rescue services should continuously look for ways to improve their effectiveness and efficiency. This includes transforming how they work and improving their value for money. Services should have robust spending plans that reflect future financial challenges and efficiency opportunities, and they should invest in better services for the public.

Areas for improvement

- The brigade should make sure it has strong enough plans in place to address financial challenges beyond 2023 and secure an affordable way of managing fire and other risks.
- The brigade should make sure it has the right skills and capacity in place to successfully manage change across the organisation.
- The brigade should make sure that it develops fleet and estates management programmes that are linked to the new CRMP, and it understands the impact future changes to those programmes may have on its service to the public.
- The brigade needs to assure itself that it is maximising opportunities to improve workforce productivity and develop future capacity through use of innovation, including the use of technology.
- The brigade should make sure that it takes full advantage of opportunities to secure external funding and generate income to improve services and increase efficiency.

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

Plans to meet future financial challenges aren't clear

The brigade understands its future financial challenges. These challenges are recorded in its risk register. They include reductions in future government funding and additional costs resulting from a court ruling in a dispute over firefighter pension costs.

At the time of our inspection, a financial plan had been set until 2022/23. However, until costs arising from future financial challenges like the pensions dispute are made clear, then long-term plans to mitigate such challenges are difficult to put into place.

The brigade hasn't developed a new CRMP. Because of this, strategic plans such as those for fleet and estates haven't been developed. The brigade has yet to develop a clear workforce plan. This means the brigade has limited understanding of what its future needs will be. It also affects budgeting decisions and weakens the brigade's ability to mitigate any significant financial risks.

The brigade has secured additional grant income to cover pandemic-related costs. It also hasn't recruited for several staff vacancies. This has helped to achieve an underspend of 2.1 percent (£9.37m) in its 2020/21 revenue budget. Some other modest savings have been achieved through staff restructuring.

On 28 September 2021, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector [wrote a letter to the Commissioner of London Fire Brigade](#). This was to express concern that firefighters were being offered a pay increase to compensate them for performing fire and rescue duties in the case of a marauding terrorist attack, in effect paying them twice. We are yet to be satisfied that these funding proposals are an efficient use of public money.

The brigade has made limited progress in addressing the following area for improvement identified in 2019. As such, the area for improvement remains. The brigade should make sure it has strong plans in place to address financial challenges and secure an affordable way of managing fire and other risks.

The brigade has a medium-term plan in place for use of reserves

The brigade sets its minimum general [reserves](#) requirements at 3.5 percent of its annual budget. The level of general reserves is risk assessed every year against exposure to unbudgeted losses. The reserves held by the brigade have been assessed as being adequate by auditors.

The brigade has some plans for the use of its reserves. For example, at the end of 2021/22 it held £31.4m in a budget flexibility reserve to meet future budget gaps and fund organisational change. It also intends to use reserves to support the development of projects and activities when the new CRMP is in place.

Fleet and estate strategic plans haven't been developed

The brigade has yet to develop strategic plans for its estate and fleet. Without these it isn't clear how the brigade will exploit any opportunities presented by changes in fleet and estate provision to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

We found fleet replacement is based on demand and the age of the appliances. As the brigade's arrangements mean a third party runs its engineering workshops, it has limited opportunities to collaborate to improve efficiency.

During our inspection we found that some of the brigade's estate was in a state of disrepair. Staff we spoke to told us that this was because a strategic view of estates couldn't be taken until the condition of the building stock was assessed. A £50m capital receipt from the sale of the brigade's old headquarters has been budgeted for in its financial plans, but this sale will not be completed.

We found the brigade has significantly underspent on its capital budget. The brigade has subsequently told us that the underspend was anticipated and is partly due to external factors, including the impact of COVID-19 on work schedules and prices rising, which have required projects to be rescope.

The brigade has limited capability to make future change

The brigade has a plan in place to change the way it operates. This work is detailed in its TDP. A director of transformation has been employed to manage this. The brigade's transformation board provides governance and scrutiny of change programmes and their end results. A framework has been developed to make sure the project work is being managed properly.

The brigade still has much work to do to meet its plans for change. We were disappointed to find that it still acknowledges it doesn't have the skills or capacity to achieve the level of change needed. It doesn't know how many projects are running throughout the organisation, nor understand what the benefits are. This means the brigade can't effectively co-ordinate its project work to support its plans.

Some staff we spoke to said change was slow. Some of the reasons given for this included bureaucracy and lack of training in project management.

IT systems don't support productivity

We found that the brigade has an IT plan, but a review and update of this plan hasn't been completed. This is because the future IT requirements of the new CRMP aren't clear.

The brigade has some major IT projects underway. For example, it is working on a new database that will allow staff to access all premises' risk information in one place. However, this and other IT projects are behind schedule.

During our inspection we found IT systems that didn't support productive working. For example:

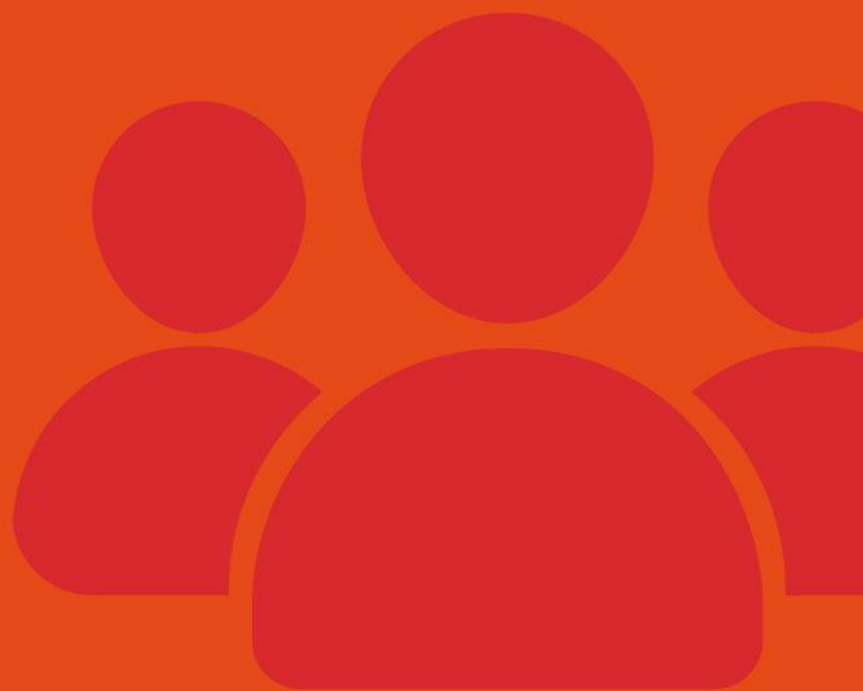
- the brigade's protection database frequently crashes;
- systems to run the brigade's finances were out of date; and
- paper-based systems are still in use, including the recording of HFSVs.
This means staff have to transfer information from paper onto computer systems.

The brigade has limited plans to generate income

Outside obtaining funding through grants and leasing space at its headquarters to the Greater London Authority, the brigade has limited plans to generate extra income.

For example, the brigade's arrangements mean a third party runs its engineering workshops, so it has less opportunity to collaborate. The brigade did set up a trading company to generate income, but the company is no longer trading.

People



How well does the service look after its people?



Requires improvement

Summary

A well-led fire and rescue service develops and maintains a workforce that is supported, professional, resilient, skilled, flexible and diverse. The service's leaders should be positive role models, and this should be reflected in the behaviour of staff at all levels. All staff should feel supported and be given opportunities to develop. Equality, diversity and inclusion are part of everything the service does and its staff understand their role in promoting it. Overall, London Fire Brigade requires improvement at looking after its people.

We have found progress in some areas since our inspection in 2019 but, overall, the way London Fire Brigade looks after its people hasn't improved as we would have expected.

Since our 2019 inspection the brigade has made good progress in training its incident commanders. It has also improved its systems for maintaining critical operational skills, although management training has been slow. There is good support for staff's mental and physical health, and absence is well managed.

The brigade knows its needs to improve its workforce planning. Currently, it doesn't have enough staff to fill roles in critical areas, such as on the protection team or driving fire engines.

The brigade has introduced a clear set of values and behaviours which it has communicated to staff. We were concerned to still find some behaviour that wasn't in line with the standards the brigade expects. Not all staff are confident in reporting concerns, for fear of detrimental treatment by others.

We found the brigade is clearly committed to recruiting a more diverse workforce, but it has more work to do. We were disappointed to find not all staff understood the benefits of a diverse workforce. It was concerning to hear examples of racial and gender-based discriminatory behaviour which is clearly not in line with the values of the brigade.

Since our last inspection, the brigade has made limited progress towards providing suitable facilities for women at fire stations.

We found that since our last inspection the brigade hasn't done enough to manage the individual performance of its staff. Although it is introducing a new performance and development system, many of the staff we spoke to hadn't had a performance review in the past 12 months. The brigade still doesn't have a process to identify and develop high-potential staff.

Promoting the right values and culture



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

London Fire Brigade requires improvement at promoting the right values and culture.

Fire and rescue services should have positive and inclusive cultures, modelled by the behaviours of their senior leaders. Health and safety should be promoted effectively, and staff should have access to a range of wellbeing support that can be tailored to their individual needs.

Cause of concern

The brigade has shown a clear intent to improve the culture of the brigade, with some staff reporting improvements under the new commissioner. However, more needs to be done. We found evidence of behaviours that are not in line with brigade values, including discrimination and bullying. Brigade values and behaviours are not always demonstrated by senior leaders.

Recommendation

By 31 August 2022, the brigade should develop an action plan to:

- communicate brigade values to staff effectively, making sure that they understand and can demonstrate acceptable behaviours at all times;
- ensure it communicates with managers at all levels, so they demonstrate brigade values through their positive workplace behaviours and are trained to identify and deal with non-compliance; and
- undertake a review of brigade processes designed to deal with behaviour such as bullying and discrimination and implement improvements that build trust and confidence among staff.

Area for improvement

The brigade should monitor secondary contracts to make sure working hours are not exceeded.

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

Work carried out by the brigade has resulted in some improvement in culture

Since our last inspection in 2019, the brigade has introduced a set of values and behaviours. It has communicated these to staff. We found that 86 percent (1,136 out of 1,319) of those who responded to our survey were aware of them. A small cultural change team is now in place to maintain the brigade's cultural change work. During our inspection some staff told us they recognised the commissioner's commitment to improving culture and said they felt things were improving.

The brigade has commissioned an independent review of culture across all levels of the organisation. This review is expected to conclude November 2022.

But we were concerned to find that the culture of the brigade still didn't always align to the values and behaviours expected. For example, 43 percent (487 out of 1,137) of respondents to our staff survey stated that senior managers didn't consistently model and maintain brigade values.

Some staff told us that a them-and-us culture exists between staff and senior managers, and brigade culture was described to us by some staff as "toxic" and "pack-like".

During our inspection, we saw and were told about several worrying examples of poor behaviour. Some operational staff told us that a big part of the culture is based on how long they have worked for the brigade. This determines how much say they have at some stations. We were also told by some operational staff that new recruits are given a tough time and given jobs that are seen as less desirable by staff who have been in the brigade longer.

We were also concerned that some staff we spoke to were not confident in speaking up about poor behaviour. Some of the reasons given for this lack of confidence were that they did not want to be seen as a troublemaker or to be given detrimental treatment by others. The brigade is aware of this and has introduced Safe to Speak Up champions to try and improve confidence in reporting concerns.

Staff are well supported for both mental and physical health

We were pleased to find progress has been made in an area we identified for improvement from our 2019 inspection. We said that the brigade should make sure all staff understand and know how to get support after a traumatic incident.

At the time of this inspection the brigade didn't have a wellbeing plan to inform wellbeing activity. Despite this, we found there are good provisions in place to promote staff wellbeing. These include staff having access to:

- trained mental-health first aiders;
- counselling and occupational health services; and
- advisory and counselling support following traumatic incidents.

Staff can self-refer to counselling services. Operational staff are automatically contacted, where appropriate, by advisory and counselling services following a traumatic incident. Most operational staff we spoke to were positive about the support they had received. Some staff told us they felt support had improved since Grenfell Tower.

Most staff have confidence in the wellbeing support processes available. Of the respondents to our staff survey, 92 percent (1,217 out of 1,319) said they could access services to support their mental wellbeing. Eighty-eight percent (1,159 out of 1,319) felt they would be offered wellbeing services after an incident if appropriate.

The brigade needs to improve how it records risk assessments

The brigade has a comprehensive health and safety policy. We found good governance in place, with quarterly reporting on health and safety incidents. Of those who responded to our staff survey, 87 percent (1,145 out of 1,319) felt their personal safety and welfare was treated seriously at work.

The monitoring of trends is used to identify emerging issues and take action to reduce risks. For example, a trend emerged of staff being assaulted by members of the public and sustaining injuries as a result. The brigade acted on this and produced an awareness package for staff.

However, at incidents, operational staff don't always record the risk and control measures that were taken. We found that there was no central storage for risk assessments, including locally created risk assessments for incidents or training. This makes it difficult to audit or quality assure the risk assessments. The brigade should make sure that risk assessments are recorded and stored in a way that makes them easy to access.

The brigade hasn't maintained a regular programme of fitness testing. Fitness testing restarted on 14 June 2021, over a year after being suspended due to COVID-19. The brigade suspended fitness testing again on 13 December 2021 due to the Omicron variant. At the time of this inspection, it hadn't yet resumed.

The brigade should restart fitness testing to make sure its operational staff are meeting the minimum fitness requirements to perform their role.

Secondary employment isn't monitored effectively

The brigade has a high number of wholetime operational staff who have secondary employment. In 2020/21, 46.4 percent of [wholetime firefighters](#) had external secondary employment, and 4.6 percent had a dual contract with another fire service. Both figures are the third highest in England compared to other services.

However, the brigade doesn't effectively monitor staff who have secondary employment or dual contracts to make sure they comply with the secondary employment policy and don't work excessive hours. Most staff we spoke to said they had to obtain permission to have secondary employment, but they also told us there was no formal monitoring of them or the hours they worked.

Absence is well-managed

As part of our inspection, we reviewed some case files to consider how the brigade manages and supports staff through absence including sickness, parental and special leave.

We found there are clear processes in place to manage absences for all staff. There is clear guidance for managers, who are confident in the process. Absences are managed well and in accordance with policy. We found good communication between managers and employees. In one case we found contact had been maintained over a three-year period with an employee who was absent from the workplace.

Overall, the brigade has seen a decrease in short-term staff absences between 2019/20 and 2020/21. In terms of shifts lost, short-term absences for control staff decreased by 21.4 percent, non-operational staff by 47.3 percent and wholtime firefighters by 18.9 percent.

The brigade has seen a decrease in long-term staff absences over the same period. In terms of shifts lost, long-term absences for non-operational staff decreased by 18.6 percent and wholtime firefighters by 3.5 percent. But control room staff long-term absences increased by 18.8 percent.

Staff told us that absence management policy training was made available through workshops. However, the brigade doesn't keep a record of who has completed the training. It should make sure that all managers are trained to manage absence effectively, and that this training is recorded.

Getting the right people with the right skills



Requires improvement (2019: Inadequate)

London Fire Brigade requires improvement at getting the right people with the right skills.

Fire and rescue services should have a workforce plan in place that is linked to their [integrated risk management plans \(IRMPs\)](#), sets out their current and future skills requirements and addresses capability gaps. They should supplement this with a culture of continuous improvement that includes appropriate learning and development throughout the service.

Areas for improvement

- The brigade should make sure its workforce plan takes full account of the necessary skills and capabilities to carry out the IRMP, the LSP.
- The brigade should review its succession planning to make sure that it has effective arrangements in place to manage staff turnover while continuing to provide its core service to the public.
- The brigade needs to review its reliance on overtime to consider whether there are more effective arrangements to provide its core service.
- The brigade needs to train all staff properly for their roles, including developing all levels of leadership and management competence.

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

Workforce planning needs to improve

The brigade acknowledges it needs to improve its workforce planning. It has identified workforce planning as a corporate risk and has recorded this in its risk register. The brigade has created an establishment board to carry out improvements. It has taken some action to mitigate some of the losses of skilled operational staff. This includes using a transferee programme to attract staff from other fire and rescue services who have the skills and experience needed by the brigade.

We spoke to staff who told us that the brigade didn't have a workforce plan that covered all areas of the organisation. Any planning relates to maintaining existing operational numbers by rank. This doesn't consider the wider skills the brigade needs.

Training needs that are identified through performance reviews aren't centrally recorded. This means the brigade can't clearly see what skills staff have or need, which means it cannot fully formulate training plans.

Overall, the brigade doesn't have a full account of the skills and capabilities needed to effectively meet the needs of the LSP or the future CRMP. The LSP doesn't detail the level of resource needed or how it is aligned to identified risks, and this information isn't available in departmental plans, because prevention, protection and response don't have these in place.

The brigade doesn't have enough staff with the right skills in several areas. For example, the brigade has an increasing shortage of staff who can drive fire engines. We also found a shortage of qualified protection staff was affecting the level of service it could offer to the public. A recent recruitment freeze has increased vacancy levels across other areas of the brigade.

The brigade also needs to do more to improve how it considers its future needs and succession planning. It increasingly relies on overtime and temporary promotions to cover shortages among operational managers. As of 31 March 2020, there were 283 temporary promotions. By 31 March 2021 this had increased to 411. The brigade is running a promotion process to fill gaps, but it has agreed with representative bodies

that only firefighters can drive fire engines. This means if more staff are promoted from the level of firefighter into operational management roles there will be fewer staff who can drive fire engines.

There has been good progress in risk-critical training for incident commanders

In our 2019 inspection we identified a cause of concern. We found a backlog of training for staff in risk-critical skills such as incident command and emergency fire engine driving. Also, we found no individual reassessment of competence for incident command. We re-inspected the brigade's progress in this area in 2020. Despite some improvements, not enough progress had been made so the cause of concern remained.

During this inspection we were pleased to find that risk-critical training has been a high priority for the brigade. The brigade has put in place a clear process for training its incident commanders. This includes individual commanders having to revalidate their command competence every two years, in line with national guidance.

All of the incident commanders we spoke to told us they had received incident command training. This was supported by the incident commander training records we reviewed as part of our inspection.

As of 6 January 2022, the brigade had trained all 24 of its Level 3 incident commanders and all 13 of its Level 4 incident commanders. Ninety-three percent (1,099 of 1186) of Level 1 and 90 percent (177 of 196) of Level 2 commanders had also received training. This is a clear improvement since our last inspection.

The brigade should put processes in place to make sure it maintains its schedule of incident command training. Also, the brigade needs to assure itself that training is improving operational practice and that staff are competent and safe to effectively carry out operational activity.

We were encouraged to find processes in place for those who don't meet the required standards for incident command. The brigade is also developing a licence to operate. This means staff will have to show all-round competency to an expected level. Staff who can't do this will be removed from performing operational duties.

We are satisfied that the brigade has made enough progress for this cause of concern to be discharged.

Processes for maintaining competencies have improved, but more can be done

In our first inspection in 2019 we identified that the brigade should extend its new maintenance of competence programme to all operational staff groups as intended. We also said it should make sure this programme can assure the brigade of its staff's competencies. The brigade has made good progress against this area for improvement.

We were pleased to find that the brigade has put a system in place to manage and record competency of all operational and control staff.

The Development and Maintenance of Operational Professionalism (DAMOP) programme is a mix of e-learning and practical training that operational and control staff need to complete to maintain operational competence. Training in areas like pumps and ladders and fire survival guidance is given on a cyclical basis. Managers can view individual DAMOP records to see how much training has been completed.

Most operational staff we spoke to were positive about DAMOP and the training they receive. Some staff told us they found it difficult to find time to complete the additional training. The brigade should make sure staff are given enough time to complete DAMOP competency requirements.

Unfortunately, some non-operational brigade staff we spoke to felt they had less opportunity to develop than their operational peers. This view was also reflected in our staff survey findings where 46 percent (604 out of 1,319) of respondents said they were not satisfied with the level of learning and development available to them.

Our inspection in 2019 identified that improvement was needed in developing leadership and management competence. We are encouraged to find that the brigade has started to give management training to its staff, but at the time of our inspection, this training had only just started and so this remains an area for improvement.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

London Fire Brigade requires improvement at ensuring fairness and promoting diversity.

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

Areas for improvement

- The brigade should make sure it has effective grievance procedures. It should identify and implement ways to improve staff confidence in the grievance process.
- The brigade should identify and overcome barriers to equal opportunity, so 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 it has robust processes in place to undertake equality impact assessments and review any actions agreed as a result.
- The brigade should make sure it takes timely action in response to staff feedback or concerns and that actions are communicated to staff.
- The brigade should make sure all fire stations have suitable facilities for women.

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

Not all staff have confidence in feedback mechanisms

The brigade is making significant changes to the way it operates, which it accounts for in its TDP. Progress is regularly reported to senior leaders and the Mayor of London. However, some staff we spoke to felt there was too much change, and that it is sometimes not well communicated. The brigade should make sure it clearly communicates the changes it is making, so staff are kept up to date.

The brigade uses several methods to gather feedback from staff. These include using news bulletins and holding staff briefings chaired by the commissioner. Staff can submit anonymous feedback through a brigade social media channel.

Staff have limited confidence in the brigade's feedback mechanisms and don't think they are effective. This was reflected in our survey with 57 percent (756 out of 1,319) of respondents not confident in the mechanisms for providing feedback at all levels of the brigade. We were surprised to find the brigade hasn't carried out a staff survey since 2018. Staff we spoke to couldn't give an example of any changes made as a result of the last survey.

In our 2019 inspection almost two thirds of those who responded to our survey were not confident to speak up and raise concerns. It was worrying to find some staff we spoke to were still not confident raising concerns. Fifty-one percent (679 out of 1,319) of respondents to our survey felt they couldn't challenge ideas without detriment as to how they would be treated. This was mainly out of fear of reprisal or because they felt they would not be listened to.

The brigade has introduced a Safe to Speak Up scheme. Staff can raise concerns with Safe to Speak Up champions in confidence and without fear of reprisal. The brigade should put measures in place to evaluate whether this is effective.

Effective action is needed to tackle bullying, harassment and discrimination

We found the brigade has some policies and procedures in place, including harassment and whistleblowing, although its grievance policy is out of date.

Staff have limited confidence in the brigade's ability to deal effectively with cases of bullying, harassment, discrimination, grievances and discipline. Staff told us the grievance process was inconsistent and sometimes took too long. Informal solutions to grievances are tried in the first instance. Informal grievances aren't recorded. This means the brigade doesn't know how many informal grievances it has, what they are about, or how they are being dealt with.

The brigade should improve staff understanding of bullying, harassment and discrimination, including their duty to eliminate them. In our staff survey, 15 percent (198 out of 1,319) of staff told us they had been subject to bullying or harassment and 18 percent (238 out of 1,319) to discrimination over the past 12 months. These figures in our 2019 inspection were both 28 percent.

During our inspection we spoke to staff throughout the brigade. We were concerned to hear examples of discriminatory behaviour and bullying. Some staff we spoke to lacked confidence in challenging unacceptable behaviour or raising concerns, as they felt nothing would happen.

Our staff survey showed that more than half of those who experienced bullying, harassment and discrimination in the last 12 months hadn't reported it. The two primary reasons for not reporting are the belief that nothing will happen and concern about being seen as a troublemaker.

The brigade is committed to recruiting a more diverse workforce

We are pleased to find the brigade has taken action to improve the recruitment of under-represented groups into the brigade. Positive action is used in recruitment campaigns. There is a dedicated outreach team which works with minority groups in the community and holds outreach days. This is to encourage more individuals from these groups into the brigade.

It is encouraging to see that recent trainee intakes have seen an increase in individuals from under-represented groups. In 2019/20 16.7 percent (46 out of 275) of trainees identified as female and 13.5 percent (37 out of 275) were from ethnic minority backgrounds. In 2020/21 22.8 percent (54 out of 237) of trainees identified as female and 33.3 percent (79 out of 237) were from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Not all staff we spoke to understand the benefits of having a more diverse workforce. For example, some staff told us that positive action hadn't been welcomed at all stations and some staff incorrectly thought that standards were being lowered. The brigade should clearly explain positive action and its benefits to staff.

Since 2017/18, the number of new joiners to the brigade self-declared as being from an ethnic minority background has increased from 22.2 percent to 30.3 percent in 2020/21. For women it has increased from 25.3 percent to 28.9 percent in the same period. For the whole workforce, as of 31 March 2021, 16.7 percent are from ethnic minority backgrounds, and 16.9 percent are women.

For firefighter recruitment, the percentage of women has increased from 10.7 percent in 2017/18 to 20.4 percent in 2020/21, and in the same period the percentage of new firefighters self-declared as being from an ethnic minority background has increased from 15.3 percent to 31.8 percent.

But the brigade has more work to do, as it is still not representative of the communities it serves. In 2020/21, 16.7 percent of the brigade's overall workforce identifies as being from an ethnic minority background, compared to 40.2 percent of the local population.

While the brigade has made some progress, the following area for improvement identified in 2019 remains. 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.

More work is needed to develop a culture that supports EDI

The brigade introduced its Togetherness Strategy in 2020. This details the brigade's commitment to inclusion and diversity both within the brigade and the community. We welcome this clear strategic commitment from the brigade.

There are several groups within the brigade that provide support and guidance to diverse communities within the brigade. These groups include Women in the Fire Service and LGBTQ+. We were encouraged to find the views of these groups were used to develop the Togetherness Strategy. The brigade should continue to support these groups so they can continue to influence change and improve practice.

Despite the brigade's commitment to EDI, its communication and the work it is doing with staff isn't having the desired effect.

We were concerned to hear examples of discriminatory and unacceptable behaviour and language that staff had witnessed or experienced. Worryingly, some examples of this behaviour were directed at people because of their gender or race. We were also concerned to find that these incidences were often left unchallenged for fear of repercussion.

Not all staff we spoke to understand the importance of EDI, and we found EDI training isn't consistently given to all staff groups. The brigade has developed an EDI learning package, but at the time of our inspection, it hadn't yet been made available to all staff.

Although the brigade has a process in place to assess equality impact, we were disappointed to find the equality impact assessment files we inspected were not consistent. Actions that needed to be taken as a result of an assessment aren't monitored.

There has been limited progress in providing suitable facilities at fire stations

We were encouraged to find the brigade has funded a Privacy for All programme. This is a long-term programme to develop suitable facilities for all of its fire stations. Since our last inspection in 2019, the brigade has allocated £10m in funding to commence this work with a 5-year plan to deliver Privacy for All across all 103 stations.

It was disappointing to find that since our last inspection in 2019 only 1 fire station has been refurbished under this programme. The brigade told us the main reason for this was that contractors were not allowed on fire stations during the pandemic. However, feedback from staff at this station was positive about the improvements made.

Due to these delays, the brigade has made limited progress in addressing the following area for improvement identified in 2019. As such, the area for improvement remains. The brigade should make sure that all fire stations have suitable facilities for women.

Managing performance and developing leaders



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

London Fire Brigade requires improvement at managing performance and developing leaders.

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

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 service's performance in this area.

There isn't enough management of individual performance

We were disappointed to find many of the staff we spoke to during our inspection hadn't recently had a personal development review (PDR). This was reflected by the responses to our survey, where 50 percent (660 out of 1,319) of respondents said that they hadn't had a PDR in the last 12 months. Not all staff have been set individual objectives. We found limited recording of objectives or training needs. This limits the brigade's understanding of staff performance and training requirements.

The brigade is developing a new PDR process for all staff, but progress has been slow. The brigade didn't complete any PDRs in 2019/20 and 2020/21. It has introduced an interim PDR process for senior and middle managers, but there is little in the way of a formal PDR process for other staff.

The brigade has made some progress in addressing the following area for improvement identified in 2019. As such, the area for improvement remains. The brigade should make sure it has an effective system in place to review individual staff performance and development.

The brigade needs to build staff confidence in the promotion process

The brigade has a promotion policy in place for non-operational and control staff. However, at the time of our inspection, it didn't have one for operational staff. Without this we couldn't clearly see if the brigade is consistent in how it promotes operational staff.

This lack of clarity was reflected by some operational staff we spoke to. They told us that the promotion process wasn't always clear to them. Sixty percent (794 out of 1,319) of staff responding to our survey disagreed that the promotion process was fair, and 60 percent (480 out of 794) of those who disagreed that the promotion process was fair were firefighters. The need for a consistent promotion framework was also highlighted by an internal audit report in 2020/21. The brigade should develop and implement an operational promotions policy. It should do this quickly.

During our inspection we reviewed a range of promotion files. We were pleased to find these were well-managed, comprehensive records. Files showed an independent person was present at interviews and interview questions are aligned to the brigade's behavioural framework. The brigade needs to communicate this detail to staff to build trust and understanding in the promotion process.

Temporary promotions aren't well-managed. We found evidence of them being in place for longer than appropriate. For example, our data shows one staff member has been in a temporary post for more than four years.

The brigade has made no progress in addressing the following area for improvement identified in 2019. As such, the area for improvement remains. The brigade should make sure that it selects, develops and promotes staff in an open, accessible and fair way, including temporary promotions.

The brigade needs to identify and develop high-potential staff at all levels

The brigade is developing a talent management framework to develop leaders and high-potential staff. However, this has yet to be introduced across the organisation. This was an area we identified for improvement from our first inspection.

The brigade needs to improve how it actively manages the career pathways of both operational and non-operational staff, including those with specialist skills and for leadership roles.

The brigade should consider putting in place more formal arrangements to identify and support members of staff to become senior leaders. There is a significant gap in its succession planning.

The brigade has made some progress in addressing the following area for improvement identified in 2019. As such, the area for improvement remains. The brigade should put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders.

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