

Fire & Rescue Service 2021/22

Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service



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About this inspection

This is our third inspection of fire and rescue services across England. We first inspected Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service in December 2018, publishing a report with our findings in June 2019 on the service's effectiveness and efficiency and how it looks after its people. Our second inspection, in autumn 2020, considered how the service was responding to the pandemic. This inspection considers for a second time the service's effectiveness, efficiency and people.

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

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

This report sets out our inspection findings for Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service.

What inspection judgments mean

Our categories of graded judgment are:

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

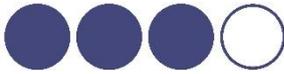
Good is our expected graded judgment for all fire and rescue services. It is based on policy, practice or performance that meet pre-defined grading criteria, which are informed by any relevant [national operational guidance](#) or standards.

If the service exceeds what we expect for good, we will judge it as outstanding.

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

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

Overview

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

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

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

HMI summary

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

We judged Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service as good at our last inspection in 2018. There were six areas for improvement, which the service is working on. It continues to make progress and the direction of travel is most definitely forward, and I am pleased that the service is outstanding in three areas.

An area for improvement from our last inspection was for the service to allocate enough resources to a prioritised, risk-based inspection programme. We are pleased to see that it now has enough qualified protection staff to meet the requirements of its risk-based inspection programme.

Staff now know how to command fire assets assertively, effectively and safely at all incidents. This was previously an area for improvement. Since then, the service has trained and accredited incident commanders who are assessed regularly and appropriately. The service has improved its workforce planning but, there is still more to do, since it is only effective for operational roles.

The changes it has made to contracts and shift patterns mean more staff are on duty during the day when demand is higher. There is still resilience at night. It is a good example of a public sector organisation using its money and resources to get the best return for the public. Most staff are positive about the changes.

Merseyside is an effective fire and rescue service. It uses a range of information to identify, assess and prevent risk and to review its response standards. Staffing and location of fire stations have also changed to better serve the communities of Merseyside. It is doing its statutory responsibility in all areas, and even more in some. Its prevention work around high-rise buildings is a notable example.

The pandemic restricted some activities but has been good for rapidly introducing technology and flexible working, as well as making the service less reliant on paper-based systems. Its investment in technology is now motivated by the ability to make risk information more readily available and increasing efficiency.

The service makes innovative use of its resources. For example, it has used [reserves](#) to clear debts and reinvest in frontline services.

There is a positive working culture. Its values are understood and reflected in the behaviour of most staff, except some middle managers. Staff have access to an excellent range of services to support their physical and mental wellbeing. There are effective and well understood health and safety policies and procedures in place.

It has introduced a new command strategy with processes to train, develop and assess competence every two years. Training records show that the service adequately records training and competence in core skills. But fire control room staff don't do practical training in fire survival guidance, which is a risk-critical area. This should be addressed.

The service recently introduced network groups for BAME, gender equality and LGBT. This is to understand the needs and experience of people with protected characteristics, and to promote equality, diversity and inclusion throughout the organisation. This focus should continue.

Finally, the service has made significant progress on an area for improvement to create an open process to identify, develop and support high potential staff and aspiring leaders. Gateway, a development process, has been built to help staff access opportunities for development and learning, and to gain qualifications.

We very much look forward to seeing further improvements at our next inspection.



Andy Cooke

HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Service in numbers



Response

Merseyside

England

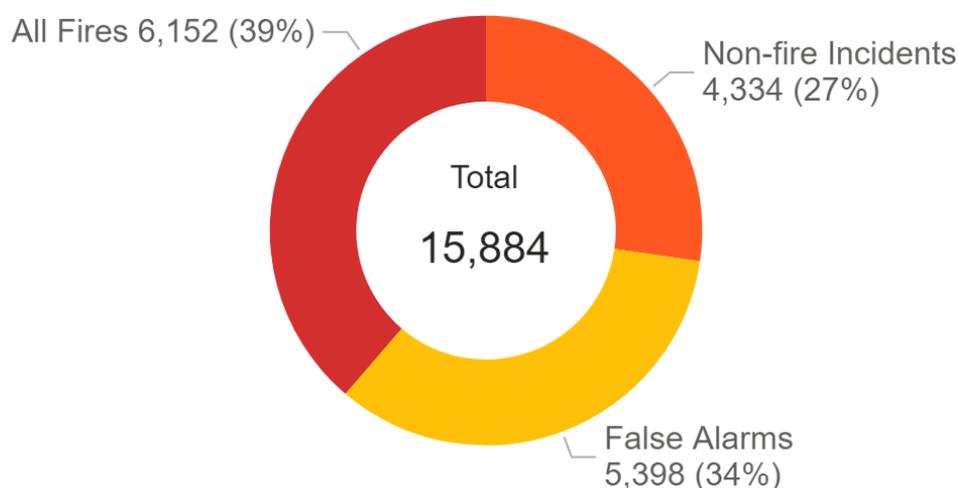
Incidents attended per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	11.07	9.16
Home fire safety checks carried out by fire and rescue service per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	7.98	4.47
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises Year ending 31 March 2020	3.85	2.55
Average availability of pumps Year ending 31 March 2020	95.33%	83.07%



Cost

Firefighter cost per person per year Year ending 31 March 2020	£24.54	£23.82
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Incidents attended in the year to 31 March 2021

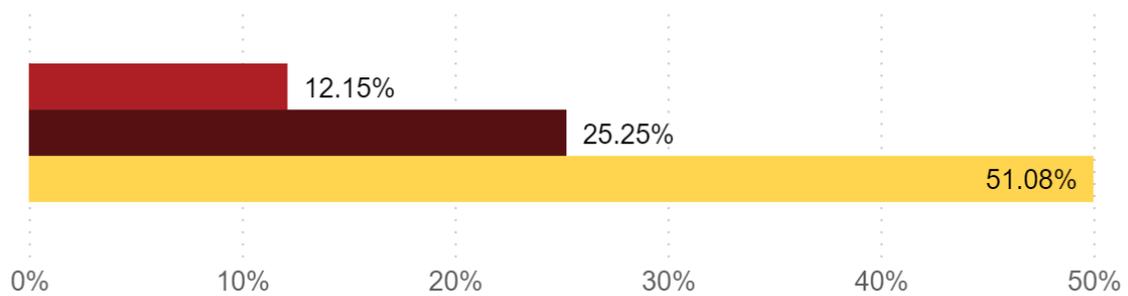




Five-year change in total workforce 2015 to 2020	0.50%	-5.30%
Number of firefighters per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2020	0.56	0.63
Percentage of firefighters who are wholetime Year ending 31 March 2020	76.06%	65.10%

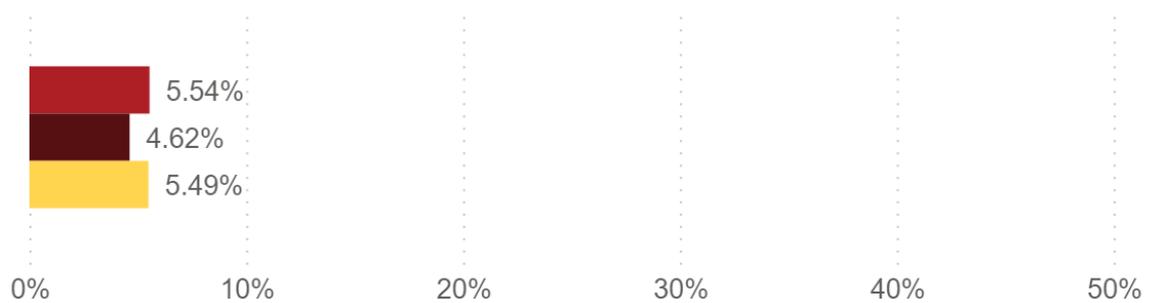
Percentage population, firefighters and workforce who are female as at 31 March 2020

Female ● Firefighters ● Workforce ● Local population



Percentage of population, firefighters, and workforce who are Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) as at 31 March 2020

BAME ● Firefighters ● Workforce ● Local population



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

Effectiveness



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



Good

Summary

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

The service has identified and assessed a range of fire and rescue-related risks that could affect its communities. It has used a range of information, and consulted widely, to produce a comprehensive [integrated risk management plan](#). The information in the plan has enabled the service to review its response standards, as well as change the staffing and location of fire stations to better serve its communities.

Staff from the service's prevention, protection and response teams can readily access this information to prevent or mitigate risks for the public. They also contribute regular updates as they complete visits, inspections and audits.

The service has taken learnings from the Grenfell Tower fire inquiry to reduce risk. It is on track to have assessed the risk of each high-rise building in its service area by the end of 2021 and has completed a fire safety audit for all high-rise, high-risk buildings in its area. It is good that the service has also reviewed how many fire engines are sent to fires in high-rise buildings to determine the right level of response. (There are 256 high-rise buildings in Merseyside.)

The service works closely with other organisations in the public and voluntary sector, as well as with the police and ambulance services, to identify people at greatest risk from fire. For example, a recent study with Liverpool John Moores University.

It is good at sharing risk information with other organisations when it identifies vulnerability. However, it doesn't review the number of referrals to other organisations

generated by [home fire safety visits](#). This means it is missing opportunities to review how it targets this activity.

In 2018, we gave the service an area for improvement to ensure that it allocates enough resources to a prioritised, risk-based inspection programme. We are encouraged to see that it now has enough qualified protection staff to meet the requirements of its (risk-based inspection) programme.

The service consistently uses its full range of enforcement powers and, when appropriate, prosecutes those who fail to comply with fire safety regulations.

It has prioritised resources to be able to respond to a range of incidents in its area. It also trains and works closely with other fire and rescue and emergency services so that it can respond effectively to multi-agency and cross-border incidents. We are impressed with the service's approach to maintaining staff skills and competency in this area, particularly its innovative Sunday Six training plan.

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies



Good (2019: Good)

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service is good at understanding risk.

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

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

The service is effective at identifying risks within its communities

The service has assessed an appropriate range of risks and threats after a thorough integrated risk management planning process. When assessing risk, it has considered relevant information collected from a range of internal and external sources and data sets. Such information includes:

- incident data over one, five and ten years, which is analysed to determine whether certain types of incident are increasing or decreasing;
- performance data, which is used to measure performance against key (performance) indicators;
- types of incident are reviewed and linked to risk factors such as social deprivation, mapping, time of day and other trends; and
- community mapping with Liverpool John Moores University.

When appropriate, the service has consulted and undertaken constructive dialogue with communities and others. In 2019 it hired an independent research company to work with the public on its integrated risk management plan.

The company made sure the public panel includes representative members of Merseyside communities – that is, a good mix of age, ethnicity and gender. The last panel included 14 members of the community who have a limiting, long-term illness. Some of the panel members had taken part in previous panels and some were new.

The service also consults with staff and representative bodies.

The service has an effective integrated risk management plan

After assessing relevant risks, the service has recorded its findings in an easily understood integrated risk management plan. This plan describes how prevention, protection and response activity is being or will be effectively resourced to mitigate or reduce the risks and threats its communities face, now and in the future.

The latest version of the plan includes actions to:

- improve the home fire safety strategy by including deprivation;
- increase the number of available fire engines in the day and at night;
- increase the number of protection officers; and
- review the capability of the fleet.

The service has used its integrated risk management plan to review response standards. It has also used it to change the staffing and location of fire stations to better serve its communities.

The service has good processes in place to share risk information across the organisation

The service routinely collects and updates risk information about people, places and threats it has identified as being the highest risk. For example, operational crews gather risk information such as hoarding and oxygen use as they carry out [safe and well visits](#). They complete and submit a risk information form which is shared with prevention, protection and response staff. This information enables them to identify, reduce and mitigate risk effectively.

Another example of how the service shares risk information is from the protection team. They notify [fire control](#) when they serve formal notices so that the information is entered in the mobilising system and available to operational staff attending incidents.

Where appropriate, the service exchanges risk and ongoing incident information with other organisations. For example, at the [Resilience Direct](#) national fire group, a national group that includes other FRSs, partner agencies and [local resilience forums](#), that it chairs.

The service uses local and national operational activity to inform its understanding of risk

The service captures and communicates risk information effectively. It also routinely updates risk assessments and uses feedback from local and national operational activity to challenge its planning assumptions.

The service has an operational intelligence and planning team that works with its operational improvement group to review and update pre-determined attendance parameters for fire control. This helps ensure that it can respond to fires and other emergencies with the appropriate resources.

The service has responded positively and proactively to learning from the Grenfell Tower fire inquiry

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

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service has responded to learning from this tragedy positively and proactively. It is on track to have assessed the risk of each high-rise building in its service area by the end of 2021.

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

In addition, the service has reviewed how many fire engines are sent to fires in high-rise buildings. (There are many high-rise buildings in Merseyside.) This is to determine the right level of response and assure the public.

Preventing fires and other risks



Outstanding (2019: Outstanding)

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service is outstanding at preventing fires and other risks.

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

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

The service's prevention strategy is clearly linked to its integrated risk management plan

The service's prevention strategy is clearly linked to the risks identified in its integrated risk management plan. It is based on internal and external data and intelligence.

Prevention work doesn't take place in isolation, with risk information sent to other relevant teams across the service. Risk information is used to adjust planning assumptions and direct activity between the service's prevention, protection and response functions. For example, when these functions share information

about hoarding and oxygen users and update the mobilising system to reflect operational risks.

The impact of COVID-19 on prevention activities

We considered how the service had adapted its prevention work during our COVID-19 specific inspection between 28 September and 2 October 2020. At that time, we found it had adapted its public prevention work appropriately.

We were pleased to see the service continued to adapt its prevention activities during the first waves of the pandemic. For example, prevention staff and operational crews posted home fire safety leaflets where they would have done in-person campaigns. This includes day, winter warmth, older persons day and Christmas campaigns. Staff continued to visit high risk individuals and support mass vaccination and test centres.

The service effectively targets its prevention activities

The service's strategy outlines their commitment to making every contact count and the person-centred approach. We saw evidence of this with the high number of visits completed. This has been maintained since our first inspection. In addition, the service undertakes evaluation of its prevention activities to ensure they are consistently targeting the most at risk.

Prevention activity is clearly prioritised using a risk-based approach towards [vulnerable individuals](#) and groups most at risk from fire and other emergencies. The service uses past incident data, [index of multiple deprivation](#), and health data to target its home fire safety activities. It provides specialist equipment such as fire-retardant bedding, oil filled radiators and letter box blanking plates to reduce fire risks in higher risk properties.

The service also proactively targets its activities to reduce anti-social behaviour, arson and violence, and improve water safety. We saw positive examples of its community work to increase awareness and reduce the risk of fire and other emergencies.

Staff are competent to carry out home fire safety and safe and well checks

Firefighters told us they have the right skills and confidence to do home fire safety visits.

Dedicated prevention staff receive extra training that covers a range of hazards that can put vulnerable people at greater risk from fire and other emergencies.

The service regularly checks how staff conduct visits through observation and feedback.

Staff understand vulnerability and have the confidence to respond to safeguarding concerns

The service has an eLearning [safeguarding](#) training package for all staff and separate training for staff with extra safeguarding responsibilities such as working with young, vulnerable people and/or out of hours.

Staff we interviewed told us they feel confident and have been trained to act appropriately and promptly.

We saw good examples of safeguarding referrals being made after fire-related incidents and home fire safety visits. The service reviews all safeguarding referrals made.

The service works well with others to reduce the number of fires and other emergencies

The service works with a range of partners such as Merseyside Police, NHS, Public Health England and local authorities to prevent fires and other emergencies.

We found good evidence that it routinely refers people at greatest risk to other organisations that may be better able to meet their needs. Arrangements are in place to receive referrals from others such as adult social care, hospitals, police and youth workers. The service acts appropriately on the referrals it receives. For example, it assesses all referrals to consider the risks and best course of action.

The service routinely exchanges information with other public sector organisations about people and groups at greatest risk. It uses the information to challenge planning assumptions and target prevention activity. For example, the service works with Merseyside Police and local authorities to target anti-social behaviour and arson. It also works with young people through the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership.

The service proactively addresses fire-setting behaviour

The service has a range of suitable and effective interventions to target and educate people of different ages who show signs of fire-setting behaviour. A team of dedicated arson prevention officers work in the community to target anti-social behaviour and engage with communities. And trained staff work with young people aged between 4 and 18 years to provide one-to-one intervention.

The service receives referrals from other organisations, as well as after fire-related incidents. It uses information gathered during fire investigations to work with the police to prosecute arsonists.

The service quality assures and evaluates some prevention activities

The service has good evaluation tools in place for its home fire safety activities. These tools measure how effective its work is so that it knows what works, and that its communities get prevention activity that meets their needs. There is a quality assurance process in place to check how staff undertake visits.

In September 2018, academics from Liverpool John Moores University worked with the service and Public Health England to review the content of safe and well visits. The study found that the service wasn't targeting the people most at risk from dying in a fire, so it evaluated and readjusted its targets. (It has stopped bowel cancer screening and now focuses on social isolation, alcohol, smoking, falls and blood pressure.)

However, we found that the service does not review the number of referrals to other organisations generated by home fire safety visits. This means it is missing opportunities to review how it targets this activity.

During the inspection, other organisations were evaluating some of the service's activities. For example, the winter warmth campaign and the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership. However, the service has not evaluated its prevention partnerships, to understand their effectiveness and benefit to the public.

Protecting the public through fire regulation



Good (2019: Good)

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

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

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

The service's protection strategy is clearly linked to its integrated risk management plan

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

Staff from across the service are involved in protection work, with information effectively exchanged as needed. For example, the operational crews who undertake checks on low-risk properties for familiarisation and to identify potential further risk and then forward to protection team where necessary.

We are encouraged to see the outcomes of fire safety audits are fed into prevention and response activities.

The service's risk-based inspection programme aligns activity to risk

The service's risk-based inspection programme is focused on its highest risk buildings.

Since our last inspection, the service continues to adjust the definition of high-risk premises in its risk-based inspection programme. It has also increased the number of performance indicators to have better oversight of protection activity and ensure it remains a priority.

The service has carried out fire safety audits at high-rise buildings

The service has carried out fire safety audits at all the high-rise buildings it has identified as having cladding like that at Grenfell Tower. Information gathered during these audits is made available to response teams and control operators to enable them to respond more effectively in an emergency.

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

The service completes audits in line with its policies

We reviewed a range of audits carried out at different premises across the service including:

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

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

The service's current system doesn't log the dates that audits are due for completion. This means it cannot assure itself that audits have been completed on time and within their targets. It has purchased a new system to address this.

The service undertakes some quality assurance of protection activity

The service has good evaluation tools in place to measure the effectiveness of its protection activity and make sure that all sections of its communities get appropriate access to the protection services that meet their needs.

We are encouraged that the service undertakes quality assurance of all visits that result in a formal outcome, such as an enforcement notice. However, the service should consider sampling a wider range of visits.

The service is proactive in its enforcement activity

The service consistently uses its full range of enforcement powers and, when appropriate, prosecutes those who fail to comply with fire safety regulations.

In the year to 31 March 2020 the service issued:

- no alteration notices;
- 41 enforcement notices; and
- 28 prohibition notices.

It undertook two prosecutions.

The service has expanded its protection team to meet the requirements of its risk-based inspection programme

Following our 2018 inspection, we gave the service an area for improvement to ensure that it allocates enough resources to a prioritised, risk-based inspection programme. We are encouraged to see that the service has enough qualified protection staff to meet the requirements of its (risk-based inspection) programme.

The service has addressed the risk of losing green book (civilian) staff to the private sector by including more grey book (operational) roles in the team. (Staff employed under grey book terms and conditions tend to stay with the service for longer; green book terms and conditions don't tend to be competitive with the private sector.)

It has also employed a fire engineer, which enables it to provide the appropriate range of audit and enforcement activity needed.

Staff are trained in line with the national competency framework.

The service is proactive in establishing partnerships to regulate fire safety

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

A member of the building risk review team has the role of authority liaison officer. The service benefits from this single point of contact, whose responsibilities/involvement with other agencies includes:

- co-ordinating joint activity such as high-rise visits;
- organising data sharing more efficiently;
- organising joint inspections, for example, inspecting takeaways with the local authority; and
- organising joint actions, for example speaking to landlords about fire protection after an inspection.

The service responds well to building consultations

The service responds to all building consultations on time, so consistently meets its statutory responsibility to comment on fire safety arrangements at new and altered buildings.

We are encouraged to see the protection department using technology to manage building consultations. It can now receive all initial building control applications from the five local authorities in its area online, rather than through the paper copies previously used.

A central team in Liverpool carries out the majority of consultations. It is well resourced and has access to a qualified fire engineer.

The service could be more proactive in its approach to local businesses

The service could do more to engage with local businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation. This is partly due to the restrictions imposed by COVID-19. However, the service has missed opportunities to engage with local business and promote fire safety. It is aware of this and has a plan to address it.

The service's unwanted fire signal policy is effective

The service has an effective risk-based process to reduce the number of unwanted fire signals (UWFS). It supports this by taking a consistent, robust approach with the worst offenders.

Fewer UWFS make fire engines available to respond to a genuine incident (rather than responding to a false one), as well as reducing the risk to the public with fewer fire engines travelling at high speed on the road.

In the year ending 31 March 2021, there were 3,849 automatic fire alarm (AFA) requests in the service area. This is a reduction of 34 percent from the previous year. The service did not attend 52 percent of these AFAs (please see [our 'About the data' webpage](#) for more details).

Responding to fires and other emergencies



Good (2019: Good)

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service is good at responding to fires and other emergencies.

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

Area for improvement

The service should assure itself that it has procedures in place to record important operational decisions made at incidents, and that these procedures are well understood by staff.

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

The service models risk to understand demand and vulnerability

The service's response strategy is linked to the risks identified in its integrated risk management plan. Its fire engines and response staff, as well as its working patterns, are designed and located to enable the service to respond flexibly to fires and other emergencies with the appropriate resources.

The service uses [risk modelling](#) to understand demand and vulnerability in its area. This has enabled it to make efficiencies that do not negatively affect its response standards and availability. For example, in October 2020 the service merged Eccleston and Parr Stocks stations to create St Helens station. And it varies its shift systems by area to best serve their communities.

The service consistently meets its response standard

There are no national response standards of performance for the public. But the service has set out its own response standards in its integrated risk management plan, including a ten-minute response standard to all life-risk incidents. It consistently meets that standard.

Home Office data show that in the year to 31 March 2020, the service's response time to [primary fires](#) was 7 minutes and 19 seconds. This is in line with the average for predominantly urban services.

The availability of fire appliances (engines) supports the response standard

To support its response strategy, the service aims to have 100 percent of fire engines available on 100 percent of occasions. As a wholetime only service, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service has the resources to consistently meet this aim.

Incident commanders are trained to the appropriate command level

Following our 2018 inspection, we gave the service an area for improvement to ensure that staff know how to command fire service assets assertively, effectively and safely at incidents. This should include regular assessment of command competence.

Since then, the service has trained and accredited incident commanders who are assessed regularly and appropriately. Ongoing assessment includes reflective logs, incident assessments and assessments at the training and development academy . This enables the service to safely, assertively and effectively manage the whole range of incidents that it could face, from small and routine ones to complex multi-agency incidents.

As part of our inspection, we interviewed incident commanders from across the service. Those we interviewed are familiar with risk assessing, decision making and recording information at incidents in line with national best practice, as well as the [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles \(JESIP\)](#).

Fire control is involved in service training, debriefing and assurance activity

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

In our 2018 inspection, we found that fire control staff did not have the same high quality of training received by firefighters. We are encouraged to find that since then fire control has been brought in line with the rest of the service in terms of training, recording training and debriefing.

Fire control can provide fire survival guidance to multiple callers

The fire control room staff we interviewed were confident they could provide fire survival guidance to many callers simultaneously. This was identified as a learning for fire services after the Grenfell Tower fire.

The service has created a compulsory eLearning package on fire survival guidance for fire control staff. However, we are concerned that it may be too theoretical and has not been sufficiently tested through practical training.

Fire control has good systems in place to exchange real time risk information with incident commanders, other responding partners and other supporting fire and rescue services. For example, a dedicated radio channel. Maintaining good situational awareness enables the service to communicate effectively with the public, providing them accurate and tailored advice.

Risk information is easily accessible to staff

We sampled a range of risk information associated with several properties involving short and long-term risks. The sample included what is in place for firefighters responding to incidents at high-risk, high-rise buildings and what information is held by fire control.

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

The service has a system in place to evaluate its operational performance

As part of the inspection, we reviewed a range of training events to help the service respond to emergency domestic, commercial and road traffic collision incidents.

We are pleased that the service routinely follows its policies to assure itself that staff command incidents in line with operational guidance. Internal risk information is updated when new information is received.

The service has an operational improvement group that considers significant incident reports, and reviews case studies and national or joint operational learning. This information is exchanged with other interested partners such as local authorities.

The service has responded to learning from incidents to improve its service for the public. We are encouraged that since our last inspection the service has improved its debrief process. All the staff we spoke to have a good understanding of the process and the value of capturing learning.

We are also encouraged to see the service contributing to, and acting on, learning from other fire and rescue services, as well as operational learning gathered from other emergency service partners. For example, we reviewed documents that the service has produced to capture learning that it has shared with other fire and rescue services.

During the inspection we found that the service closely monitors its [national operational guidance](#) action plan. It has a team in place to ensure that relevant policies and procedures are updated or adapted as necessary. However, during reality testing, understanding of [operational discretion](#) (this allows incident commanders to use their professional judgment to make decisions in an unforeseen situation at an incident) and use of decision-logging varied.

The service is good at communicating incident-related information to the public

The service has good systems in place to inform the public about ongoing incidents and help keep them safe during and after incidents. It uses social media (Twitter) to provide regular updates regarding incidents. The website is used less so but is updated with information about significant incidents. (A significant incident is anything that could affect public safety, firefighter safety or improve organisational understanding.)

The service is also part of the local resilience warn and inform group.

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents



Outstanding (2019: Outstanding)

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service is outstanding 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).

Innovative practice

The service's preparedness team has developed a Sunday Six training programme to address six local and national risks: flooding, high-rise buildings, marine, wildfire, terrorism, and recycling and waste incident types. Topics are rotated every eight weeks to ensure that every [watch](#) (team) receives the training, which was adapted and provided virtually during the pandemic.

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

The service is well prepared for major and multi-agency incidents

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

We are impressed with the service's approach to maintaining staff skills and competency in this area. Its Sunday Six training plan covers six subjects: flooding, high-rise, marine, wildfire, terrorism, and recycling and waste. Subjects are rotated every eight weeks to ensure that every watch (team) receives the training, which was adapted and provided virtually during the pandemic.

The service is also familiar with the significant risks that could be faced by neighbouring fire and rescue services that it might reasonably be asked to respond to in an emergency. These include marauding terrorist attacks (MTAs) and large fires. Firefighters have sufficient access to risk information from neighbouring services to effectively support over border incidents. The service increased its capacity to respond to MTAs after the tragic incident in Manchester Arena in 2017.

The service has the capability to respond to major and multi-agency incidents

We reviewed the arrangements the service has in place to respond to different major incidents. These include counter terrorism and COMAH (control of major accident hazards) exercises, and high-rise training. Staff we spoke to felt prepared for such incidents. This is reflected in an extensive multi-agency, major and over border training record, which shows the service's commitment to training and testing.

Additionally, the processes in fire control include consistent action plans (processes) for major incidents. Operational staff told us they had received additional training in high-rise incidents.

The service works well with other fire services

The service is the lead authority for national resilience. It also hosts the national resilience fire control.

The service is well-versed in JESIP and how to deploy local and national assets across the country. It uses interoperable radio channels, that it tests regularly, to ensure that staff can communicate across borders should they send (or receive) a fire engine over a border.

The service exercises with other services

In 2019/20, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service undertook:

- eleven multi-agency training exercises;
- seven national resilience exercises; and
- four cross-border exercises.

The service has a cross-border exercise plan with neighbouring fire and rescue services so that they can work together effectively to keep the public safe. The plan includes the risks associated with major events that the service might be asked to respond to, or request assistance from neighbouring services.

We are encouraged to see that feedback from these exercises is used to inform risk information and service plans.

Managers across the service have a good understanding of JESIP

The incident commanders we interviewed had been trained in and were familiar with JESIP. These are national principles which support all emergency services in working together at incidents.

The service could provide us with strong evidence that it consistently follows these principles. The principles are frequently the subject of training for all levels of staff. They are also included in the service's incident command procedures (those relating to operational assurance).

The service has good arrangements in place to work with partners

The service has good arrangements in place to respond to emergencies with other partners that make up the Merseyside resilience forum.

The forum was established in 2005. It is a multi-agency partnership that includes all the organisations needed to prepare for and respond to an emergency within the county and bordering areas. Its role is to prepare, test and review emergency plans to ensure they are fit for purpose.

The service is represented at all levels in the local resilience forum:

- executive: the deputy chief fire officer is on the executive group;
- strategic: an area manager and a group manager are on the business management group; and
- tactical: there is representation from all levels of the service on the forum's five working groups.

In terms of specific roles:

- the group manager leads on preparedness and response;
- the service chairs the risk working group; and
- the service is represented on the transport and telecommunications working groups.

During the first waves of the pandemic, the service was able to maintain its statutory functions while supporting the national effort. The chief fire officer led the support for the pandemic and the deputy chief supported the local resilience forum.

The service uses national learning to inform its plans

The service keeps itself up to date with national operational learning updates from other fire services and joint organisational learning from other blue light partners, such as the police service and ambulance trusts. This learning is used to inform planning assumptions that have been made with other partners.

Efficiency



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



Outstanding

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](#). It should try to achieve value for money and keep costs down without compromising public safety. It should make the best possible use of its resources to achieve better outcomes for the public. Plans should be based on robust and realistic assumptions about income and costs. Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service's overall efficiency is outstanding.

The service's medium-term financial plan shows how it will finance the priorities in its integrated risk management plan. Priorities include:

- recruiting firefighters to improve fire cover; and
- changing shift patterns to increase capacity.

It is unusual for a service to recruit to increase establishment in such austere times. And it is innovative, some might say bold, to change traditional shift patterns. It is clear the service plans and uses its resources effectively to reduce risk and meet its statutory responsibilities.

The service has worked/partnered with a range of external organisations since long before emergency services were obliged to do so. Some collaborations generate revenue, some make savings. An ambitious capital programme is currently underway to develop a new training and development academy with the North West Ambulance Service (NWAS), which, the service anticipate, will contribute £3m to the facility.

Technology is another significant part of the service's capital programme, which strikes a good balance between replacing obsolete systems and digitalising frontline services. Our last inspection found the service to be over reliant on paper-based systems. It is positive that this has been addressed through the issue of digital devices such as mobiles and tablets.

The service continuously looks for ways to improve its effectiveness and efficiency, including transforming the way it works and improving value for money. It has:

- a good understanding of future financial challenges and makes good use of its [reserves](#); and
- a good track record of making savings and efficiencies without compromising front line services.

Additionally, its buildings programme and fleet management are linked to the priorities in its integrated risk management plan.

The service's response to COVID-19 has created lasting flexible and agile working benefits for staff. It has been a valued partner in the regional response, helping co-ordinate mass and surge testing. Volunteers from the service have vaccinated over 10,000 people.

Making best use of resources



Outstanding (2019: Good)

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service is outstanding at making best use of its resources.

Fire and rescue services should manage their resources properly and appropriately, aligning those resources to meet the services' risks and statutory responsibilities. They should make best possible use of their resources to achieve better outcomes for the public.

The service's budget for 2021/22 is £59.25m. This is a 4.4 percent decrease from the previous financial year, according to information provided by the service.

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

The service has clear priorities for 2021/24 and is investing in frontline services

The service presented the *Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority budget and financial plan 2021/22 to 2025/26* (its medium-term financial plan) to the [fire authority](#) in February 2021. The plan will finance the priorities in the service's integrated risk management plan 2021/24 which was due for publication at the time of our inspection.

The service's priorities include:

- recruitment, increasing the number of firefighters (after a re-appraisal of minimum fire cover) and fire protection specialists (to support the government's Building Risk Review Programme);
- changing shift patterns to increase capacity;
- strengthening the fire safety inspection programme by increasing the use of operational members of staff;

- digitalising front line services to move away from paper-based systems; and
- making efficiencies so that money saved can be re-invested in service improvements.

The service is also investing in additional professional qualifications for fire protection staff.

The service has good performance management arrangements

We are pleased that the performance management arrangements in departmental and station plans clearly link to the strategic priorities in the integrated risk management plan. They reflect the plan's themes (demand, risk and vulnerability) and explain how individuals should contribute to and respond to them.

Each fire station is expected to complete activities including:

- [home fire safety checks](#);
- working with children in schools; and
- site specific risk inspections.

Station and [watch](#) managers monitor progress on a dashboard, which is part of the service's performance management system. It allows them to track their teams' progress, as well as compare it against other teams in the organisation.

The service has changed traditional shift patterns to make staff time as productive as possible without compromising minimum levels of fire cover. The original two-two-four arrangement has on some stations been replaced with other shift systems, this is managed by the new time and resource management team.

The new arrangements make more staff available during the day, which means that all shifts can be organised by activity. Activities are primarily focused on the priorities in the integrated risk management plan, but also include staff training and community activities such as home fire safety checks and premises audits.

The new arrangements, which include retained contracts for [wholetime firefighters](#), also give the service more flexibility to recall staff for out of hours cover.

The service is making similar adjustments to shift patterns in the [fire control](#) room. Contracts for new joiners include more dayshifts, which is in line with demand. A retainer gives the service flexibility to recall them to work out of hours if there is a large scale operational incident or unforeseen demand.

We are encouraged that the service's response to COVID-19 has created lasting benefits. For example, the accelerated issue of digital tablets for better compliance with Public Health England workplace guidance. Also, the introduction of flexible and agile working.

The service has a long-standing commitment to partnership working and can clearly define the benefits of its joint ventures

The service has worked/partnered with a range of external organisations since long before emergency services were legally obliged to consider collaboration arrangements in 2017.

The Blue Light Collaboration Programme Board oversees the service's partnership activity. The deputy chief fire officer represents the service. Each business case for collaboration is considered under the categories shared estate, operations, and support services. Cases are methodically screened for efficiency, effectiveness, public safety and savings benefits in line with the integrated risk management plan.

The service shares premises with other emergency services at multiple locations including Croxteth, Birkenhead and Formby. The flagship joint command and control centre at headquarters is jointly funded by the fire and police and crime commissioners' capital programmes. As well as realising a recurring £340,000 saving to both organisations, it hosts state-of-the-art command facilities for the emergency services and the [local resilience forum](#).

An ambitious capital programme is currently underway to develop a new training and development academy with the NWAS. NWAS plans to base its [hazardous area response team](#) at the site.

The service has a long-standing commitment to the region's health priorities, which are defined in Merseyside's joint strategic needs assessment. It has been a valued partner in the regional response to the pandemic, helping to co-ordinate mass and surge testing. Volunteers from the service have vaccinated 10,000 people.

The service has good continuity arrangements in place

The service has good continuity arrangements in place to address risks to its services. These are set out in the service's business continuity management service policy, which was last reviewed in March 2021.

For the highest risk activities, such as 999 call handling in fire control, plans are routinely tested to examine how the service would recover from technology or electrical supply failings. These include an evacuation to alternative sites. Should there be a surge in demand on the service, fall-back call handling facilities are in place with another service.

The service has taken learning from the experience and used it to make improvements. For example, it introduced annual resilience contracts that make enhancements (a lump sum) available to front line staff who provide resilience cover to the service.

The service is good at making savings, which it plans to reinvest this year

The service has a good track record of making savings and efficiencies without compromising front line services. (In this report, we class making savings as saving money, and making efficiencies as working for less money.)

Since 2010/11, HM Government's grant has reduced from £46.3m to £30.8m, a 50 percent overall reduction in real terms. A previous establishment of 1,000 firefighters has been reduced to the current budgeted figure of just over 600 and the number of fire stations has been reduced.

Budget setting is subject to scrutiny by the fire authority and expenditure is reviewed quarterly. Proposals for investment must be linked to the priorities in the integrated risk management plan.

The medium-term financial plan was approved by the authority in February 2021. It strikes a good balance between making savings and making investments to support the service's ambitions. For example, the service's capital programme will enable it to modernise its estate. The new crewing model will provide revenue generation opportunities and fund the new training and development academy.

We found good examples of how savings are being re-invested in service improvements. A combination of the re-design of the operating model, modernising contracts and cumulative savings have led to a £1m investment in additional firefighters. This will increase the establishment from 620 to 642. It has also enabled the service to recruit additional fire safety personnel in the protection team.

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



Good (2019: Good)

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service is good at making itself affordable now and in the future.

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

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

The service has robust plans to address financial challenges

The service has a good understanding of its future financial challenges. In common with other fire and rescue services, uncertainties stem from the government limiting future funding to an in-year settlement for 2021/22. The settlement reflects an uplift of 0.2 percent of government funding instead of the expected 1 percent.

The service has identified £500,000 savings in support functions and technical adjustments to the medium-term financial plan, which is balanced. However, this is predicated on annual savings being realised – these are £760,000 in 2022/23, rising to £1.49m in 2024/25.

These calculations are based on a range of assumptions including pay freezes, precept increase, business rate and employer pension contributions. The underpinning assumptions are as robust as they can be. The service has agreement from the fire authority that, following the spending review, future savings requirements will be re-appraised.

In the interest of value for money, the service has outsourced (that is, contracted external organisations to provide) its mainstream support services in estates management, information technology, fleet services and pension administration. As part of an internal audit programme, it is working with Liverpool City Council to [benchmark](#) non-pay costs with other fire and rescue services.

The use of reserves supports financial security and future ambition

The service is making a sustainable and constructive use of its reserves. It maintains £3m (5 percent of its net operating expenditure) in general reserves to provide security in the event of unforeseeable financial pressure. This is in line with the advice of its external auditors and the [Fire and Rescue National Framework](#).

Reserves have also been set aside to address known or predictable liabilities. We are encouraged to see these reserves could be used to address recurring risks. For example, the need to pay insurance excesses. They will also pay for improvements. The service has a modernisation reserve of £1.6m for recruitment and associated training, and continued restructuring.

The service links its fleet and estate activity to the integrated risk management plan

The service's buildings programme and fleet management are linked to the priorities in its integrated risk management plan, as well as its ambition to transform services. Previously, the disposal and acquisition of new buildings had more to do with the budgetary restraints of austerity than a desire to improve.

The Property Asset Management Plan 2021-2026 reflects the importance of maintaining ten key fire stations at all times as part of its response model.

Other important aspects of the plan include:

- A project to modernise buildings at Prescott, Saughall Massie and St Helens that will realise savings, better align front line staff to demand and better accommodate the needs of a modern workforce.
- Plans to build a new training and development academy, including an option for a new fire station to replace ageing facilities at Croxteth and Aintree.
- Developments at community fire stations to promote the service's prevent agenda. For example, Toxteth will increase its youth provision and work with Safe Havens, which provides places of safety for vulnerable people.

The service's fleet strategy is an integral part of its capital programme. Fleet managers are responsible for in-house functions including design, procurement, maintenance, engineering and technical support. There is a strong approach to environmental considerations such as emissions and the viability of emerging technology for the future fleet.

The service invests in technology to improve ways of working

Investment in technology is a significant part of the service's capital programme. It strikes a good balance between replacing obsolete systems and digitalising frontline services (to improve efficiency). Recent investments include:

- a new call handling and mobilising system has been introduced in fire control;
- [mobile data terminals](#) have been upgraded; and
- software to support routinely used applications is being installed.

Our last inspection found the service to be over reliant on paper-based systems. It is positive that this has been addressed through the issue of digital devices such as mobiles and tablets. This makes important data, such as site-specific risk information more readily available to crews attending incidents.

The service has issued 460 devices since our last inspection. They are transforming routine activity. For example:

- Home fire safety checks. Double keying (that is, when staff enter the same information twice) is being eradicated and multiple processes have been automated.
- Post-incident debriefing. Now the procedure has been digitalised, good practice and learning points are instantly available to service staff via an intranet programme.

Technology transformations are often difficult to achieve. Some staff we spoke to are still adapting to the new ways of working and there are clearly snags that need ironing out. We are interested to review progress in this area in our next inspection.

Other areas where we found the service's commitment to modern, progressive ways of working include:

- financial reserves set aside for modernisation, including invest-to-save projects that examine how new apps might save staff time; and
- an academic partnership with the University of Liverpool to improve front line procedures.

The service takes advantage of opportunities to secure external funding and generate income

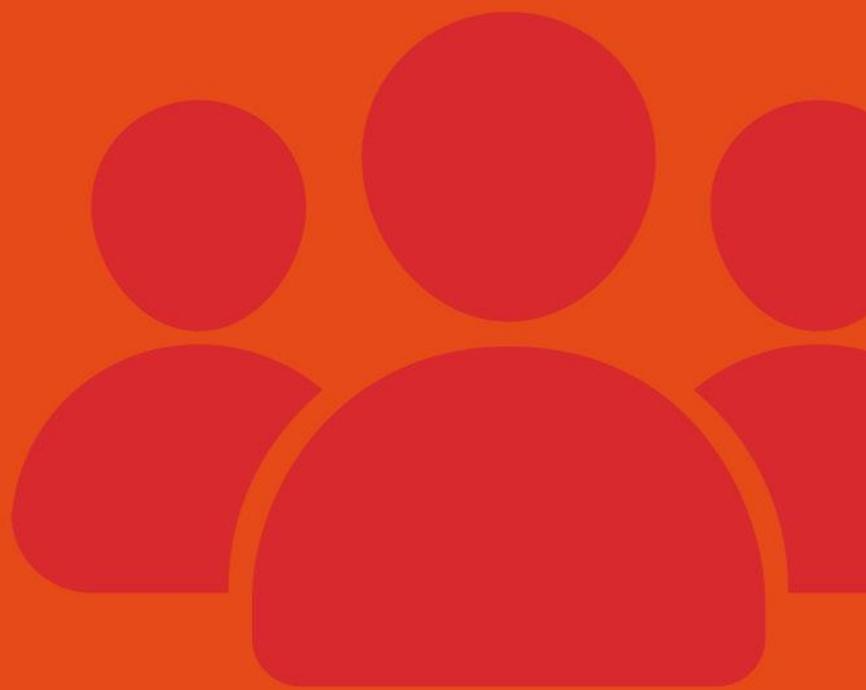
The service actively considers opportunities to generate income when they support its goals.

The benefits register of the Blue Light Collaboration Programme Board identifies revenue streams associated with joint venture projects. Much of this income comes from hosting other emergency services. For example, the proposal for a new training and development academy includes an anticipated contribution of £3m from the North West Ambulance Service.

Other income comes from the service's work with the public sector:

- last winter (2020), the service partnered with an energy company and Wirral Council on their warm winter campaigns to generate £60,000;
- a venture with the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership, which provides support for domestic abuse victims, secured similar funding; and
- work with CitySafe, a multi-agency partnership that supports young people who are likely to become involved in anti-social behaviour.

People



How well does the service look after its people?



Good

Summary

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

The service has a positive working culture. Its values are understood and reflected in the behaviour of most staff, except some middle managers. Staff have access to an excellent range of services to support their physical and mental wellbeing. Effective and well understood health and safety policies and procedures are in place. They are readily available and promoted to all staff.

Since our last inspection, the service has improved its workforce planning. However, there is still more to do, as it is only effective for operational roles. Additionally, there is an outstanding action in the people strategy to create a succession planning policy.

The service has introduced a new command strategy with processes to train, develop and assess competence every two years. Training records show that it accurately records training and competence in core skills. However, [fire control](#) room staff do not do practical training in fire survival guidance, which is a risk-critical area. This should be addressed.

A culture of continuous improvement is promoted across the service where staff are encouraged to identify areas for learning and development. Most are satisfied with the provision. The service has made significant investments in a new training and development academy, which will further enhance the service's ability to train its staff.

The service is improving its approach to equality, diversity and inclusion. For example, it has introduced staff network groups for BAME staff, gender equality and LGBT inclusion to help identify issues that affect people with protected characteristics. However, only some staff have received equalities training. This was due to restrictions caused by the pandemic.

At the time of inspection, the service did not have a live recruitment and positive action strategy or equality impact assessment. However, the service is doing more to increase the diversity of its workforce, as it has only taken limited positive action during the pandemic.

The service has a good performance management system in place to effectively develop and assess individual performance. Since our last inspection, it has reduced the number of staff in temporary promotions through permanent recruitment processes. It has a consistent, fair recruitment process.

Promoting the right values and culture



Good (2019: Good)

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service is good at promoting the right values and culture.

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

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

Staff at all levels understand and demonstrate the service's values

We are pleased the service has responded to the area for improvement identified in our 2018/19 inspection (ensuring its values and behaviours are understood and demonstrated by all staff). We found the service has well-defined values that are understood by staff.

Since our last inspection, the service has worked with staff to update its values. 99 percent of respondents to our staff survey said they are aware of the service's values (215 of 218 respondents).

The service uses its values in recruitment, promotion and appraisal processes. Staff we spoke to said they see behaviours reflective of the values at all levels across the service, except by some middle managers.

The service has started to implement the [new national code of ethics](#) but should do more work to ensure that all leaders behave in line with its values.

There is a positive working culture across the service, with staff engaged in decisions that affect them. We heard examples of how senior leaders talk to and listen to staff, give feedback and act on decisions. Staff told us that senior leaders are visible, approachable and act as positive role models. 82 percent of respondents to our staff survey said that senior leaders consistently model and maintain the service's values (178 of 218 respondents).

Staff have access to a range of services to support their mental and physical health

The service has well understood and effective wellbeing policies in place. Since our last inspection, it has introduced a wellbeing charter.

Staff have access to a range of services to support their physical and mental wellbeing. Services include occupational health, fitness advisers, counselling, physiotherapy, a nutritionist, fast track appointments for health assessments, a 24/7 employee assistance programme, [critical incident](#) diffusing and Blue Light Champions. The service continues to adapt its provision in response to COVID-19, offering staff access to online and telephone services.

The majority of the staff we spoke to know how to access these services. They have confidence in the service's wellbeing support:

- 96 percent of respondents (210 of 218) to our staff survey told us they were able to access services to support their mental wellbeing; and
- 81 percent (176 of 218) told us they have had a conversation about their health and wellbeing with their manager.

Staff understand and have confidence in health and safety policies

The service has effective and well understood health and safety policies and procedures in place. They are readily available and effectively promoted to all staff through notice boards and the intranet.

Staff undertake various health and safety training including first aid, risk assessment and manual handling as part of their induction and through online learning.

The service monitors health and safety trends in various ways, including through local performance monitoring, audits, reporting tools and debriefs.

Our survey showed that 94 percent (204 of 218) of respondents feel their personal safety and welfare is treated seriously at work. And representative bodies told us they are involved in health and safety matters.

The service has proactive absence management processes

The human resources (HR) and occupational health team proactively manage sickness absence through regular monitoring and case reviews. They consider interventions, review trends and ensure the completion of return-to-work interviews.

The service altered the triggers for formal absence monitoring in response to the pandemic. Most staff we spoke to knew how to report absence and spoke positively about the support provided.

As part of our inspection, we reviewed some case files to consider how the service manages and supports staff through sickness absence. We found that the service has processes in place to manage absences for all staff as per policy.

Overall, the service has seen a decrease in staff absences over the 12 months between 2019/20 and 2020/21.

Getting the right people with the right skills



Good (2019: Good)

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service is good at getting the right people with the right skills.

Fire and rescue services should have workforce plans in place that are linked to their [integrated risk management plans](#), set out their current and future skills requirements, and address capability gaps. This should be supplemented by a culture of continuous improvement that includes appropriate learning and development across the service.

Area for improvement

The service should assure itself that it has an effective succession planning mechanism in place for all roles.

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

The service has some workforce planning arrangements in place

At the time of inspection, the service did not have a succession planning policy in place for all roles. It is an outstanding action in the people strategy. Its workforce planning policy covers staff on grey book (operational staff) terms and conditions and considers duty systems, retirement profile, station mergers and drivers.

The service training plan considers the skills and capabilities it needs to effectively meet the needs of its integrated risk management plan. However, this is only for operational and fire control room roles.

The service has good workforce planning for some roles. Since our last inspection, the service has reviewed and increased the number of qualified protection officers. More recently, it has undertaken extensive workforce planning for the control room, including considering future retirement and maternity cover.

Also, since our last inspection, the service has introduced a new command strategy with processes to train, develop and assess competence every two years. This is in response to the area for improvement. The service needs to assure itself that all staff are appropriately trained for their role).

We reviewed the training records for some staff and found the service has accurate methods to record training and competence in core skills. However, we found control room staff only undertake eLearning – not practical training – in fire survival guidance, which is a risk-critical area.

Most staff told us that they could access the training they need. 87 percent of respondents to our staff survey (190 of 218) said they have received sufficient training to effectively do their role. The service's training plans ensure they can maintain competence and capability. Plans include:

- Station-based staff told us they regularly undertake safe person assessments and competency-based training for local risks.
- Prevention staff have regular continuous professional development days.
- Protection staff use a competency framework to ensure consistent, professional training of staff.

The service monitors staff competence by planning and tracking activities in a central system. It regularly updates its understanding of staff skills and risk-critical safety capabilities through the service's performance management meeting, this approach means the service can identify gaps in workforce capabilities and resilience, and can make sound and financially sustainable decisions about current and future needs.

The service has a range of learning and development resources for staff

We are pleased to see that the service has a range of resources in place to develop staff. These include coaching, eLearning, educational funding, and practical and written courses. 80 percent of respondents to our staff survey (175 of 218) told us that they were satisfied with the level of learning and development available to them.

A culture of continuous improvement is promoted across the service where, through value-based appraisals, staff are encouraged to identify areas for learning and development. For example, staff can take part in national projects and share learning with their colleagues. A recent national project was the creation and review of policies during the first waves of the pandemic.

The service has reviewed and changed the firefighter trainee course from NVQ to apprenticeship. This enables it to incorporate its values and [national operational guidance](#), as well as use the apprenticeship levy. Apprenticeship provision is independently evaluated and reviewed by external organisations such as Skills for Justice and OFSTED.

The service has also made significant investments (funding and resources) in a new training and development academy.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

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

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

Area for improvement

The service should ensure it has robust processes in place to undertake equality impact assessments and review any actions agreed as a result.

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

The service has improved its approach to equality, diversity and inclusion

Since our 2018 inspection, the service has improved its approach to equality, diversity and inclusion, to be able to offer the right services to communities and support staff with protected characteristics. However, it does not have an equalities action plan with timescales. Instead, it includes five equality objectives in its service delivery and departmental plans. It reports progress in an annual equality report.

In response to the area for improvement to in our last inspection, the service has introduced staff network groups for BAME staff, gender equality and LGBT inclusion. Through them, it hopes to identify issues that affect different people. The chair of each network group is a member of the strategic equality, diversity and inclusion board, which is led by the chief fire officer. Senior managers act as lead champions for each protected characteristic.

We found that only some staff have received equalities training. The service has given face to face equality, diversity and inclusion training to more than 50 percent of the workforce but paused during the first waves of the pandemic. In addition, it recently created an eLearning training package. Some staff received unconscious bias training in 2020.

Information to build staff awareness of equality, diversity and inclusion can be found on the intranet, in the staff newsletter, on faith and religion handouts and through online events. Such information includes Ramadan, Black History Month, Pride, the

menopause and Black Lives Matter. However, some staff we spoke to said that while there have been some improvements in internal communication and awareness, there is a lack of information on how to engage with diverse communities.

In March 2021, the service commissioned an external review of its approach to equality, diversity, and inclusion. It is also reviewing the equality impact assessment process and guidance. However, it could do more. For example:

- consider more internal and external data;
- engage with internal and external networks; and
- improve organisational learning by examining the impact of actions taken in response to an impact assessment.

The service has improved how it seeks and acts on staff feedback and challenge

We heard positive examples of how leaders actively engage with staff to give information and receive feedback. This includes station and departmental visits, virtual briefings and online forums. The service also uses the intranet and staff newsletter to share information.

The service does a staff survey every two years. The last one was in 2020. 73 percent (159 of 218) of respondents to our staff survey said they feel confident in the mechanisms for providing feedback to all levels. They have recently formally been asked for feedback on:

- ground rules;
- the new integrated risk management plan; and
- local issues such as facilities on stations.

Engagement with representative bodies is positive. But we found there have been delays and an impact on some activities, such as approval of policies, because there isn't a trade union official in post. The service should consider this.

The service does not use information from exit interviews to inform itself on areas for improvement because they are not compulsory and completion rates are low.

The service should do more to improve the diversity of its workforce

The service has made some improvements to increase staff diversity.

In 2017/18, 4.2 percent of all staff self-declared as being from a BAME group and 22.8 percent are women. In 2019/20 this increased to 4.6 percent for BAME and 25.3 percent for women.

In 2019/20 there was an increase in female staff in operational roles: 12.4 percent, from 7.9 percent in 2017/18. BAME staff in operational roles rose from 4.8 percent in 2017/18 to 5.4 percent in 2019/20.

The service has systems to understand and remove the risk of disproportionality in recruitment processes. These include:

- using candidate numbers instead of names to remove bias;
- including someone from HR on all recruitment panels; and
- inviting independent panel members (to recruitment panels) to improve diversity.

The service makes reasonable adjustments, for example for dyslexia.

At the time of the inspection, the service did not have a live recruitment and positive strategy or equality impact assessment.

The service knows that it should do more to increase the diversity of its workforce. It has taken limited positive action in recent years, for example asking staff network groups to help with community engagement.

The service should encourage applicants from diverse backgrounds into middle and senior level positions.

Tackling bullying, harassment and discrimination

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

Through our staff survey conducted as part of this inspection, of the 218 staff that responded:

- 21 respondents told us they had been subject to harassment; and
- 29 respondents told us they had been subject to discrimination over the past 12 months.

Most staff are confident in the service's approach to tackling bullying, harassment and discrimination, grievances and disciplinary matters.

We were told of examples where the staff felt the service was taking an unreasonable time to hear grievances.

We heard from staff that some managers do not understand or promote equality, diversity and inclusion, and that they act inappropriately. The service should address this.

Managing performance and developing leaders



Good (2019: Good)

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service is good at managing performance and developing leaders.

Fire and rescue services should have robust and meaningful performance management arrangements in place for their staff. All staff should be supported to

meet their potential and there should be a focus on developing high-potential staff and improving diversity in leadership roles.

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

The service has procedures to manage individual performance

The service has a good performance management system in place to effectively develop and assess the individual performance of all staff. It has a values-based appraisal system to review performance, training needs, and role-specific and aspirational development.

87 percent (190 of 218) of respondents to our staff survey said that they had had an appraisal in the last 12 months. The service's appraisal policy says that each staff member should have individual goals and objectives, and regular performance assessments. We found that staff have confidence in the performance and development arrangements that are in place.

The service has processes to develop leadership and high-potential staff at all levels

Following our previous inspection, we gave the service an area for improvement to put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders.

We found the service has made significant progress with the introduction of Gateway, a development programme. Staff apply for access to Gateway, which offers opportunities for development and learning, and to gain qualifications:

- staff on temporary promotion receive development plans and support;
- supervisory and middle manager operational roles have defined pathways; and
- other roles have bespoke development plans.

However, support staff were not clear if they can access Gateway. The service should review how it communicates the process with them.

The service has taken steps to reduce the number of staff on temporary promotions through permanent recruitment processes. The service advertises roles externally and internally. During the inspection, we reviewed supervisory, middle, and strategic level roles advertised in the last 12 months. We found the service has a consistent, fair process. It gives feedback to all candidates, as well as development plans to high-performing candidates.

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