Fire & Rescue Service 2021/22

Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service

Contents

About this inspection

This is our third inspection of fire and rescue services in England. We first inspected Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service in July 2019, publishing a report with our findings in December 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 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 Staffordshire 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.
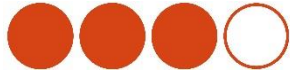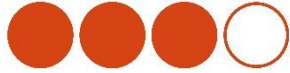
If we find shortcomings in the service, we will judge it as requires improvement.

If 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**	●●●○ **Good**	**Good**
Understanding fires and other risks	●●●○ Good	Good
Preventing fires and other risks	●●●○ Good	Good
Protecting the public through fire regulation	●●○○ Requires improvement	Good
Responding to fires and other emergencies	●●○○ Requires improvement	Good
Responding to major and multi-agency incidents	●●●○ Good	Good

Question	This inspection	2018/19
£ **Efficiency**	●●○○ **Requires improvement**	**Good**
Making best use of resources	●●○○ Requires improvement	Good
Future affordability	●●●○ Good	Good

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

HM Inspector's summary

It was a pleasure to revisit Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service, and I am grateful for the positive and constructive way that the service engaged with our inspection.

I am satisfied with some aspects of the performance of Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service in how effectively it keeps people safe and secure from fires and other risks, but there are areas where the service needs to improve and performance in some areas of the service has deteriorated since our 2019 inspection.

These are the findings I consider most important from our assessments of the service over the last year.

The service is good at how it identifies risks in its communities and puts appropriate measures in place to mitigate those risks. And it is good at how it identifies those people in its communities who are most at risk from fire and works with its partners to good effect to reduce this risk.

The service also has good financial management and collaboration arrangements in place.

But there are some behaviours in the service which are not in line with the service's values which is having a detrimental effect on staff. And the service isn't sufficiently prioritising work to improve inclusion and diversity.

Response standards and the availability of its fire engines have got worse and the service isn't sure it has identified all its high-risk premises. The service also doesn't use its workforce in the most efficient way to make sure that work is appropriately directed to the risks and priorities identified in the integrated risk management plan (IRMP).

Overall, while there are some good aspects of the performance of Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service, there are a number of areas where performance has declined since the last inspection and I expect to see progress made against these. We will continue to monitor progress through our usual monitoring arrangements.

Wendy Williams

HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Service in numbers

Response	Staffordshire	England
Incidents attended per 1,000 population Year ending 30 June 2021	6.80	9.36
Home fire safety checks carried out by fire and rescue service per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	5.02	4.47
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises Year ending 31 March 2021	1.44	1.70
Average availability of pumps Year ending 31 March 2021	80.0%	86.4%

Cost	Staffordshire	England
Firefighter cost per person Year ending 31 March 2021	£19.95	£23.73

Incidents attended in the year to 30 June 2021

False alarms, 2,862, 37%

All fires, 3,027, 39%

Total 7,754

Non-fire incidents, 1,865, 24%

Workforce
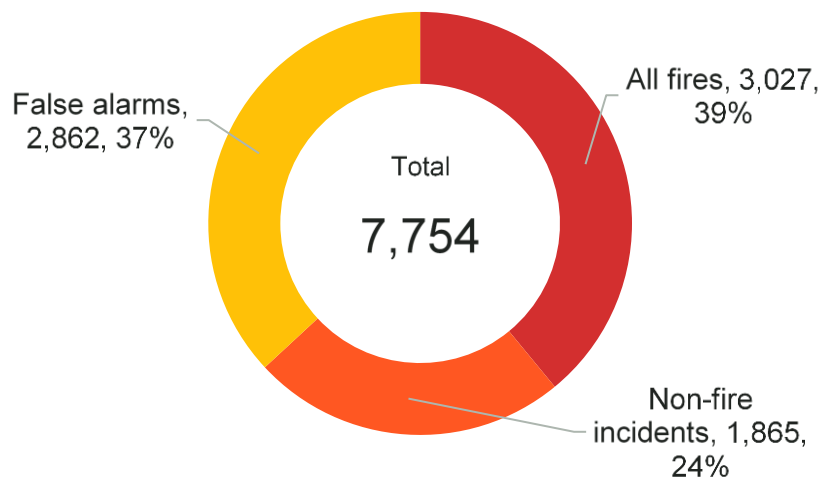
	Staffordshire	England
Five-year change in total workforce 2016 to 2021	-23.16%	-1.60%
Number of firefighters per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	0.52	0.62
Percentage of firefighters who are wholetime Year ending 31 March 2021	40.7%	64.4%

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

Legend: ■ Firefighters ■ Workforce ■ Local population

- Firefighters: 8.46%
- Workforce: 17.95%
- Local population: 50.17%
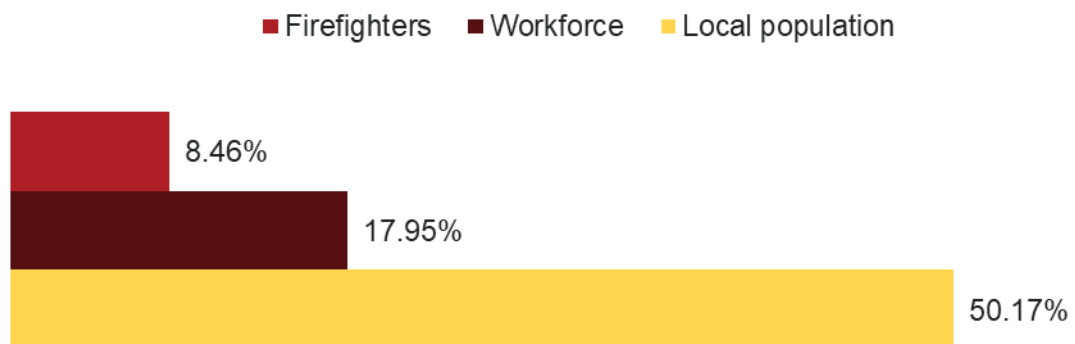
Percentage of population, firefighters and workforce who are from ethnic minority backgrounds as at 31 March 2021

Legend: ■ Firefighters ■ Workforce ■ Local population

- Firefighters: 2.77%
- Workforce: 2.50%
- Local population: 5.94%
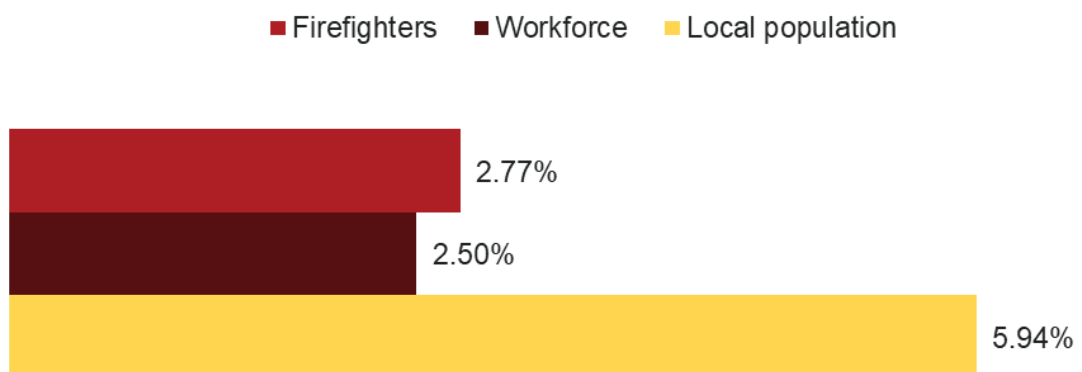
For more information on data and analysis throughout this report, please view the 'About the data' section of our website.

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, it should respond promptly with the right skills and equipment to deal with the incident effectively. Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service's overall effectiveness is good.

We found Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service to be good at how it identifies risks in its communities and puts appropriate measures in place to mitigate those risks. For example, it quickly identified all of its high-risk, high-rise buildings and carried out audits on them.

We also found the service to be good at how it identifies those people in its communities who are most at risk from fire and works with its partners to good effect to reduce this risk. Although the number of safe and well visits it carried out during the pandemic reduced, it still carries out more than the rate for services in England and makes sure that these are better targeted at those who need them most.

We were disappointed to find that, since our last inspection, the service can't be sure that it has identified all of its high-risk premises or that it is carrying out enough audits compared to its own annual target. But it has improved its use of enforcement powers against those businesses that don't comply with fire safety regulations.

We were also disappointed to see a deterioration since our last inspection in the service's performance against its own response standards and the number of fire engines it has available. But we did find that the service is well prepared to respond to major and multi-agency incidents.

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies

●●●○

Good (2019: Good)

Staffordshire 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.

Areas for improvement

- The service should make sure that firefighters are confident and suitably trained in gathering risk information.
- The service needs to improve how it engages with seldom-heard people and groups in its local community to build a comprehensive profile of risk in its service area.

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 good at identifying risk

The service has assessed an appropriate range of risks and threats after a thorough IRMP planning process. When assessing risk, it has considered relevant information collected from a broad range of internal and external sources and data sets. It gathers information from other emergency services, the Staffordshire local resilience forum (LRF), local authorities, the NHS, and several other public and business sector partners.

It uses this information to identify and focus on the most vulnerable people and local premises to help them with fire safety procedures. It has a close working relationship with the Environment Agency. Together, they help prevent organised crime groups creating fuel from residual waste, which poses a significant fire risk.

The service uses Staffordshire County Council's data observatory along with other data sources such as Experian and Exeter data to build its risk profile. It also looks at socio-economic factors and quality assures data to make sure it is accurate. The service uses a case management system that allows it to exchange information on risk and vulnerability with partners through a data-sharing agreement.

When appropriate, the service has consulted and undertaken constructive dialogue with communities and others such as local authorities and other partner agencies to both understand the risk and explain how it intends to mitigate it. It received 1,400 responses to its IRMP consultation. Because of the restrictions that were in place due to the pandemic, the consultation exercise with the public took place mainly through the service's website and social media channels, although copies of the consultation

document were put in GP surgeries. The service also carried out a consultation exercise with staff which included focus groups and a staff survey. The service should consider how it communicates with members of the community who don't use social media.

The service has taken action to mitigate the risks identified

The service has recorded its findings on risk in an easily understood IRMP. This plan describes how prevention, protection and response activity is to be effectively resourced to mitigate or reduce the risks and threats the community faces, both now and in the future. For example, the service has identified changes to the future risk profile in the county with the development of HS2, the high-speed rail network. This will affect operational capability with the need for heavy lifting equipment, and training for working at height and in rail tunnels. It has also identified waste and wildfires as a growing area of risk and has developed specially trained waste and wildfire tactical advisors. It has bought high-volume pumping fire engines and enhanced logistical support vehicles to deal with wide-scale flooding and has put physical and cyber security measures in place to mitigate the risk of terrorist attacks.

The service should make sure that risk information is always readily available to crews

The service routinely collects and updates the information it has about the people, places and threats it has identified as being at greatest risk. This includes new and updated risk information as well as urgent and temporary risks. For example, it holds mass evacuation plans for sites such as Alton Towers and holds information where there has been a temporary change to premises, such as somewhere becoming a COVID-19 testing centre.

This information is readily available for the service's prevention, protection and response staff, which enables it to identify, reduce and mitigate risk effectively. For example, the service frequently sends out newsflashes to stations to update them on risk information.

We were told that the quality of risk information has improved but that mobile data terminals on fire engines, which is how crews access risk information on their way to incidents, aren't always reliable. This means that staff may not always have access to risk information when they need it. Not all staff were confident in assessing and recording risk information. Where appropriate, risk information is shared with other organisations, for example the service works with Trading Standards to identify premises that house fireworks.

The service builds its understanding of risk from operational activity and shares information appropriately with partners

The service records and communicates risk information effectively. It also routinely updates risk assessments and uses feedback from local and national operational activity to inform its planning assumptions. For example, after a significant waste fire, the service recognised that this type of incident needs a multi-agency response, so the service now includes this incident type in its work with the Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU).

The service has completed a review of high-risk, high-rise buildings

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 Inquiry.

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service has responded positively and proactively to learning from this tragedy. The service has completed its building risk review and assessed the risk of each high-rise building in its service area ahead of schedule.

The service identified 53 buildings as high risk, high rise. It has carried out a fire safety audit and collected and passed relevant risk information to its prevention, protection and response teams. This work was completed by the end of 2020. It identified that it doesn't have any high-rise buildings with cladding similar to the cladding installed on Grenfell Tower.

Preventing fires and other risks

Good (2019: Good)

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service is good 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.

> **Area for improvement**
>
> The service should make sure it puts in place measures to catch up on the backlog of safe and well visits.

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 a prevention strategy that is targeted at its highest risks

The service's prevention strategy is clearly linked to the risks identified in its IRMP. The prevention strategy identifies those people who are most at risk from fire and the service targets its resources at these risks. The service has recently reviewed its prevention strategy to make sure that people who are identified as most at risk are prioritised for a physical safe and well visit. It offers others who are less at risk a range of options such as telephone advice or information on the service's website. The service is developing an online tool to enable members of the public to self-assess their home for risk. A high-risk score will automatically be picked up by the contact centre to arrange a visit.

The service works well with its teams and other organisations on prevention and it passes on relevant information when needed. Information is used to adjust planning assumptions and direct activity between the service's prevention, protection and response functions. For example, the service uses incident data to review its prevention strategy. It works with a wide range of partner agencies, like the Canal and River Trust to promote water safety and Western Power to identify people who may be vulnerable. We also saw good examples of the service communicating information on [vulnerable people](#) with other teams in the service and with its partners after a safe and well check.

Since the start of the pandemic the service has reduced its physical prevention activity but is introducing different intervention methods

We considered how the service had adapted its prevention work during our COVID-19 specific inspection in October 2019. At that time, we found it had adapted its public prevention work appropriately. It had continued to visit those people who are most at risk from fire and had continued its school education programme virtually.

Since then, we were pleased to find that, although the service makes fewer safe and well visits it remains above the England rate. In the year ending 31 March 2021, the service carried out 5,717 safe and well visits, a reduction from 26,908 that it carried out in the previous year. In the year ending 31 March 2021 the rate of safe and well visits it carried out was 5.02 per 1,000 of the population compared to the England rate of 2.79 per 1,000 of the population. The review of the prevention strategy will mean that the service still engages with the same number of people but in different ways. But we found that the service had a backlog of 600 prevention visits at 31 March 2021. The service should assure itself, with the reduction in safe and well visits and this backlog, that it is engaging with those people who are most vulnerable and at risk of fire.

Since the start of the pandemic the service mostly stopped using its operational staff to support prevention work. It intends to restart this when it puts in place the revised prevention strategy, but at the time of our visit this hadn't restarted.

The service is effective at targeting its prevention activity

Prevention activity is clearly prioritised using a risk-based approach towards people most at risk from fire and other emergencies. For example, the service has identified that people older than 80 or older than 45 and living alone, and have other risk factors such as smoking, alcohol or mobility problems, are most at risk from fires. The service uses a questionnaire that helps to determine if a safe and well visit is needed.

The service takes account of a broad range of information and data to target its prevention activity at vulnerable individuals and groups. It uses Experian and Exeter data and information from incidents to produce risk maps. It also uses information provided by partners through referrals.

It provides a range of interventions that it adapts to the level of risk in its communities. In the year ending 31 March 2020 it made nearly 27,000 safe and well visits, equivalent to a rate of 23.7 visits per 1,000 population, more than 4 times the England rate of 6.13. But it found that some of these visits weren't targeted at those people

who were most at risk. So, following a review the service has improved how it prioritises people for a range of prevention interventions. These include smoke alarm replacement, a standard safe and well visit and an enhanced safe and well visit. We saw that the service consistently made an enhanced visit when it identified extra vulnerabilities, such as hoarding.

The service also aligns its campaign activity with its prevention strategy. For example, having identified that people living alone are at greater risk from fire it is focusing a campaign on those people.

The service works well with Staffordshire Police to give joint safety information to university students in their first week, as some of the student accommodation is high rise. The service doesn't routinely do prevention work in high-rise premises. But the service uses its prioritisation approach, so would visit vulnerable people living in high-rise premises who may be more at risk if a fire occurred.

Staff are competent at carrying out safe and well checks

The service uses specially trained technicians to make safe and well visits at high-risk premises. Operational staff told us they have the right skills and confidence to make safe and well visits and that they used to carry out many visits before the pandemic. We saw how staff regularly recognise extra vulnerabilities and risks during visits and act appropriately to improve people's safety. This included escalating the matter to a more qualified person or making a referral to a partner agency.

Staff can respond appropriately to safeguarding concerns

Staff told us about occasions when they had identified safeguarding problems. Most said they feel confident and trained to act appropriately and promptly and could describe safeguarding referrals that they had made.

The service is good at collaborating with others

The service works with a wide range of other organisations, such as local authority adult safeguarding boards, NHS clinical commissioning groups and the Staffordshire Safer Roads Partnership to prevent fires and other emergencies.

The service has several data-sharing agreements with other agencies so it can exchange information about vulnerability. We found good evidence that the service routinely refers people at greatest risk to organisations that may be better able to meet their needs, such as adult social care. Arrangements are in place to receive referrals from other organisations, including West Midlands Ambulance Service, University NHS Foundation Trust, Staffordshire Police and housing associations. The service also has an arrangement with Western Power Distribution, which offers vulnerable customers a safe and well visit from the service during an annual welfare call. The service acts appropriately on the referrals it receives. For example, the prevention team prioritises referrals from partner agencies and through the contact centre.

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, after a fire death, the service

identified that homelessness didn't meet the normal risk profile, which led to a joint review of risks with partner agencies.

The service should do more to tackle fire-setting behaviour

The service has only limited involvement in targeting and educating people who show signs of fire-setting behaviour. But it does run the national Flames Aren't Games campaign to raise awareness of the effect of deliberate fire setting. Operational staff don't routinely work with partners around fire setting, although they complete referrals from the police.

The service evaluates some prevention activity

The service evaluates some of its prevention work but doesn't formally evaluate its main prevention functions.

The service uses some data to measure the effectiveness of its campaigns. It looks at the number of interventions or safe and well visits and the number of properties with a working smoke detector. It also reviews the number of accidental dwelling fires and people seriously injured or killed and trends for deliberate fire setting.

We were pleased to see that the service has acted on feedback from staff about the effectiveness of its safe and well visits to make changes. It asks people to complete a questionnaire after a safe and well visit.

After a fire that has resulted in death or serious injury, the service carries out a review with partner organisations. It also evaluates high-risk referrals from partners to see if the service's involvement was effective.

The service routinely evaluates the Safe+Sound schools' education initiative. But it doesn't have any means for evaluating the effectiveness of its other partnerships.

Protecting the public through fire regulation

Requires improvement (2019: Good)

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at protecting the public through fire regulation.

All fire and rescue services should assess fire risks in certain buildings and, when necessary, require building owners to comply with fire safety legislation. Each service decides how many assessments it does each year. But it must have a locally determined, risk-based inspection programme (RBIP) 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 intentions set out in the IRMP aren't effectively put into practice

The service's protection strategy is clearly linked to the risks it has identified in its IRMP. It clearly defines high-risk premises and explains how it uses risk to inform and prioritise its RBIP to target businesses most at risk from accidental fire.

But we found that the data used to inform the RBIP isn't clear. Protection staff in the service delivery teams work independently from the central protection team, and work is planned around available resources rather than risk and demand.

The service hasn't caught up with protection work since the pandemic

We considered how the service had adapted its protection activity during our COVID-19 specific inspection in October 2019. At that time, we found it had adapted its protection work well. It continued to carry out inspection audits by telephone. But we found that the service had no plan in place for inspecting 80 high-risk premises that it identified as needing a follow-up visit.

Although the service had identified new and emerging risks during the pandemic, such as re-opening hotels and refugee accommodation, by August 2021 it had completed 202 out of a target of 880 audits for the financial year.

The service's protection activity doesn't align with its strategy

The service has a RBIP, but it is limited in scope and not up to date. The service uses Experian data, but this doesn't match the data provided by the government department so the service can't be sure that it has identified all of its high-risk premises. It was also unclear whether local knowledge of risk was used to inform the RBIP.

The service doesn't have a clear plan to audit all its high-risk premises. Premises are often prioritised for inspection based on available skills and resources rather than risk. Staff in the district-based teams work independently of each other so the service doesn't have a consistent approach to its audits. We were told that the service has an inspection schedule of 2 years for high-risk premises and has a target to audit 880 premises each year. It had carried out 202 audits in the first 5 months of the year so isn't making enough progress to meet its own targets. In the year ending 31 March 2021, the service carried out 400 audits, which is equivalent to 1.4 audits per 100 known premises, slightly below the England rate of 1.7. And it carried out telephone audits. Of the audits, 91 percent were satisfactory, meaning that the service may not be effectively targeting its audit activity at risk.

The service has audited all its high-rise buildings

The service doesn't have any high-rise buildings with cladding similar to the cladding installed on Grenfell Tower. It has audited all high-rise buildings it has identified. Information gathered during these audits is made available to response teams and control operators, enabling them to respond more effectively in an emergency.

It has completed a full revisit programme for all the high-rise, high-risk buildings it has identified in its service area.

The service also has an effective strategy to fit sprinkler systems to all high-rise premises by 2026. It is making good progress with this and has completed the work on properties in Stoke-on-Trent. This will improve the safety of residents in high-rise buildings and make it safer for firefighters responding to incidents in those buildings.

The quality of audits is inconsistent

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

Not all the audits we reviewed were completed in a consistent, systematic way, or in line with the service's policies.

Quality assurance isn't routine

The service quality assures very little of its protection activity. In one case, the quality assurance was undertaken by the same person who did the audit.

The service doesn't have good evaluation tools in place to measure its effectiveness or to make sure all sections of its communities get equal access to protection services that meet their needs.

The service has improved its use of enforcement powers

The service has improved the way it uses its enforcement powers, and when appropriate, prosecutes those who don't comply with fire safety regulations.
The service is currently progressing two prosecutions.

In the year to 31 March 2021, the service issued no alteration notices, 29 informal notifications, 6 enforcement notices, 7 prohibition notices and is prosecuting 2 cases. There were no prosecutions between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2021.

The service doesn't effectively resource protection activity

The service has a resourcing plan for all its inspections of buildings over a two-year period. But the plan depends on having a full complement of qualified protection staff supported by trained operational staff. Although the service has three new members of protection staff, some staff who have left haven't yet been replaced. At the time of our inspection, of a total of 18 protection staff, 10 staff weren't qualified.

The service has just started training operational staff to carry out audits. So, it doesn't have enough trained and qualified staff to support its audit and enforcement activity. But as staff are trained and qualified they will be able to help with audits, which will benefit the public in the long term.

The service works well with other agencies in regulating fire safety

The service works closely with other enforcement agencies to regulate fire safety and routinely exchanges risk information with them. It is an active member of Staffordshire County Council Safety Advisory Group. It has worked closely with the council's planning department to share information on high-rise premises.

The service also has risk data-sharing agreements with other agencies, such as Trading Standards, UK Visas and Immigration, and the Environment Agency, and collaborates with them to regulate fire safety.

The service responds appropriately to building consultations

The service responds to most building consultations on time, so it usually meets its statutory responsibility to comment on fire safety arrangements at new and altered buildings. In the year ending 31 March 2021, it responded on time to 94.8 percent of those received.

The service works well with businesses to support them to comply with fire safety regulation

The service has a dedicated business support team who proactively engage with local businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation. They engage with businesses after a fire to help them to continue trading or reopen their business. They have delivered training to business owners and actively engage with the Chamber of Commerce and the Housing Fire Strategy Group.

There is also clear information on the service's website for businesses to comply with fire safety.

There is an effective strategy to reduce unwanted fire signals

An effective risk-based approach is in place to manage the number of unwanted fire signals. The service engages with businesses to provide training and information on reducing and investigating false alarms. Staff in the control room challenge the caller to make sure they only send out fire engines when needed. The service doesn't attend properties that don't have a sleeping risk if there is a person on site who can inspect the premises for signs of fire. If a fire is confirmed then the service will send appropriate resources.

The service gets fewer calls because of this work. The number of automatic fire alarms has reduced over the last 4 years from 4,241 in 2017/18 to 3,469 in 2020/21. And it doesn't attend 54 percent of these compared to the England rate of 37 percent. Having fewer unwanted calls and attending less automatic fire alarms means that fire engines are available to respond to a genuine incident rather than responding to a false one. It also reduces the risk to the public if fewer fire engines travel at high speed on the roads.

Responding to fires and other emergencies

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Requires improvement (2019: Good)

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at responding to fires and other emergencies.

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

Areas for improvement

- The service should make sure that it has effective systems in place to reliably understand resource availability.
- The service should improve the availability of its fire engines to respond to incidents in line with its IRMP.
- The service should make sure that it improves the way in which it captures and shares learning from operational incidents.

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

The response strategy is linked to the risks identified in the IRMP

The service's response strategy is linked to the risks identified in its IRMP. 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. For example, it looks at historical demand and risks and plans for future scenarios if it changed the location of stations or working patterns, so it can assess the impact of any changes on the ability to respond to incidents. But the service's response activity isn't meeting its strategic intent.

The service doesn't meet its response standards

There are no national response standards of performance for the public. The service has set out its own response standards in its IRMP, but these aren't publicly available. The response standards for the first engine are as follows: 8 minutes in high-risk areas, 10 minutes in medium risk areas and 18 minutes in low-risk areas.

Service performance against its standards has deteriorated. We were told that in the first quarter of 2021 performance against the standards had dropped by nearly 4 percent compared to the previous year. Home Office data shows that in the year to 31 March 2021, the service's response time to primary fires was 10 minutes and 28 seconds, which is slower than the average for significantly rural services, which is 9 minutes and 44 seconds. This is affected by the time it takes to drive to incidents in rural areas.

The service doesn't always have enough fire engines available

To support its response strategy, the service has set itself a challenging target to have all of its fire engines available on 100 percent of occasions. The service doesn't always meet this standard. In the year ending 31 March 2021, its availability was 80 percent. We were told the service has a manual process in the control room for updating on-call availability which means there can be a delay of up to 30 minutes for changes in availability to show on the system. This means a fire engine may be showing as unavailable when there are actually enough staff available.

The service has a plan which sets out how it will respond to incidents as fire engines become unavailable in certain circumstances such as prolonged periods of activity or industrial action. We were told the service is using this plan constantly and as a result, there is a risk that the service will not be able to get to some incidents quickly enough.

In the year ending 31 March 2021, in 29 percent of all incidents a crew was moved to another station because there weren't enough crews available in the area. This is significantly higher than the England rate of 7 percent and is the second highest rate of all services in England. This means that the service doesn't have enough staff available to meet its response strategy.

We noted that the service is taking some action to improve the availability of its on-call stations. This includes using a small team of full-time staff to cover shortages and providing more local training and recruitment so on-call staff don't need to leave their area to attend courses. We look forward to seeing the improvements this will make.

The service commands incidents well

The service has trained incident commanders who are assessed regularly and properly. Their competence is re-assessed every two years and accredited by an external company. This enables the service to safely, assertively and effectively manage the whole range of incidents that it could face, from the small and routine to complex multi-agency incidents.

As part of our inspection, we interviewed incident commanders from across the service. The incident commanders 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).

The service doesn't fully involve control staff in learning activity

For some years the service's control room function has been provided by West Midlands Fire Service. There is a good working relationship between the service and the control room. But we are disappointed to find that the control staff aren't always included in the service's command, training, exercise, debrief and assurance activity. The staff are told to read updates that are attached to their training plan and occasionally receive case studies with learning points from incidents. Staff in the control room carry out their own debriefing following incidents and send any relevant information to the service.

The service hasn't yet implemented its procedures to handle multiple fire survival guidance calls

The service hasn't reviewed its ability to provide fire survival guidance to many callers simultaneously, which we would have expected. This was identified as learning for fire services after the Grenfell Tower fire. The service hasn't yet implemented its operational guidance for managing simultaneous evacuation and firefighting at high-rise buildings. This means staff in the control room and operational crews aren't clear on the procedures to be followed.

Although the control room staff communicate directly with the incident commander, the tool they have to exchange live information and record multiple fire survival calls hasn't yet been adopted by the service although we were told the service is looking to do this. This means they have to rely on emails. Staff in the control room were unclear on the procedures for sharing information on high-rise incidents with the incident ground.

Firefighters can access up-to-date risk information

We sampled a range of risk information for sites including hospitals, care homes and high-risk, high-rise buildings and what information is held by fire control.

The information we reviewed was mostly up to date and detailed. It could be easily accessed and understood by staff, but in some cases we were told that the mobile data terminals weren't always reliable so staff had to print the risk information.

Encouragingly, some of the risk information at high-rise premises had been completed with support from the service's protection staff.

The service doesn't routinely evaluate operational performance

As part of the inspection, we reviewed a range of emergency incidents and training events. These include fires at domestic and commercial premises, rescues where a person was killed or seriously injured and large-scale training exercises carried out with other agencies.

We are disappointed to find that the service doesn't consistently follow its policies to assure itself that staff command incidents in line with operational guidance. The service sends a tactical advisor to monitor every incident where there are two or more appliances, but we found the service isn't effectively using this resource to gather information to inform learning and improve.

The service has an officers' forum where learning is shared and cascaded to staff but there isn't a clear link between the outcome of incidents and the learning that is discussed at the forum.

The service rarely carries out formal debriefs with all staff involved following significant incidents. So, the service can't be confident that it always acts on learning it has, or should have, identified from incidents. This means it isn't routinely looking at ways that it can improve to provide a better service to the public.

We are encouraged to see the service is contributing towards, and acting on, learning from other fire and rescue services or operational learning gathered from other emergency service partners. It participates in the structured debriefs led by the CCC. These debriefs include other emergency services and agencies and share information on national and joint operational learning. We were told about an example of a multi-agency debrief that the service was involved in following a fire at a high-rise residential property.

The service is good at keeping the public informed

The service has good systems in place to inform the public about ongoing incidents and help keep them safe during and after incidents. The tactical advisors who attend every incident have specific media responsibility and receive training. At larger incidents there is a dedicated media officer. These staff are responsible for keeping the public informed through social media and the website and through briefing the press.

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents

Good (2019: Good)

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service is good at responding to major and multi-agency incidents.

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

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

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

The service has 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 IRMP planning. For example, it has plans for specific high-risk sites and it contributes to the community risk register held by the LRF.

It 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. But it has more to do. For example, information on risks in bordering services was not always available to firefighters.

The service is able to respond to major and multi-agency incidents

We reviewed the arrangements the service has in place to respond to different major incidents, including flooding and terrorist-related incidents.

The service mostly has good arrangements in place, which are well understood by staff. For example, staff are well trained and were confident to respond to terrorist incidents. But we did find that staff did not feel confident in responding to a high-rise fire requiring the evacuation of residents.

The service works well with other fire services

The service supports other fire and rescue services responding to emergency incidents. For example, it regularly attends incidents in bordering services. It is intraoperable with these services and can form part of a multi-agency response.

The service has successfully deployed to other services and has used national assets as such. Incident commanders were clear on the process for requesting additional assets.

The service has plans to carry out exercises over its border

The service has a cross-border exercise plan with some neighbouring fire and rescue services so they can work together effectively to keep the public safe. The plan includes the risks of major events at which the service could foreseeably provide support or request assistance from neighbouring services. During the pandemic the service stopped training and exercising with neighbouring services, but we are pleased to see that this has resumed.

Incident commanders understand JESIP

The incident commanders we interviewed had been trained in and were familiar with JESIP.

The service could provide us with strong evidence that it consistently follows these principles. For example the commanders were able to effectively describe how they would use the principles to make sure there were effective command structures in place and sharing of information at incidents.

The service is a valued partner in the LRF and CCU

The service has good arrangements in place to respond to emergencies with other partners that make up the Staffordshire LRF. The service is also part of the CCU. These arrangements include clear information packs and lines of communication with the CCU in the event of major or multi-agency incidents.

The service is a valued partner and is a member of the Commonwealth Games, HS2 and risk assessment groups. It is also vice chair of the LRF and chair of the CCU funding group. Multi-agency plans are tested on a five-year cycle with each plan being tested every three years. The service 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. Although physical training and exercising was put on hold during the pandemic the service still took part in desktop exercises.

The service keeps up to date with national learning

The service keeps itself up to date with joint organisational learning updates from other blue light partners such as the police service and ambulance trusts, and national operational learning from other fire services. 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?

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. Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service's overall efficiency requires improvement.

We found the service to have good financial management arrangements in place so it can understand how it spends its money. And it has good plans in place for future reductions in its funding.

It collaborates well with the police which means it can be more efficient in the way it uses its fleet and buildings. But we did find that the technology it uses doesn't always help staff to do their jobs effectively.

We were disappointed to find since the last inspection that the service isn't using its workforce in the most productive way. It doesn't clearly understand whether the work they do is directed to the risks identified in its IRMP. The service's response model relies on the use of overtime. At the time of our inspection, a high level of vacancies meant this impacted on resource availability.

Making best use of resources

Requires improvement (2019: Good)

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at making best use of its resources.

Fire and rescue services should manage their resources properly and appropriately, aligning 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 service's budget for 2021/22 is £41.9m. This is a reduction from £42.4m in the previous financial year.

Area for improvement

The service should have effective measures in place to assure itself that its workforce is productive and that their time is used as efficiently and effectively as possible to meet the priorities in the IRMP.

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 plans support its objectives, but the service should make sure it has enough resources to meet its objectives

The service's financial plans are built on sound scenarios. For example, the service has calculated the resources it needs to deliver its prevention and protection activity and training requirements. This helps make sure the service is sustainable and is underpinned by financial controls that reduce the risk of misusing public money.

The service sometimes uses its resources well to manage risk, but there are some weaknesses that need to be addressed. The service has allocated enough resources to prevention, protection and response to deliver the risks and priorities identified in the IRMP. But we found that delays in recruitment and training, which may have been impacted by the pandemic, have affected the service's ability to have enough resources available. This has resulted in lower response standards and backlogs of work in prevention and protection.

The service doesn't use its workforce in the most productive way

The service's arrangements for managing performance are weak and don't clearly link resource use to the IRMP and the service's strategic priorities. Service delivery teams manage the performance of stations locally, but the stations aren't integrated with the three service delivery areas or with the central prevention and protection teams. The service doesn't set any performance targets for the central prevention and protection teams so it can't measure how well they are mitigating the risks identified in the IRMP. The service has a performance dashboard that measures service performance against six strategic measures on a quarterly basis, but these don't clearly link to the IRMP.

The service should make sure its workforce is as productive as possible. This includes considering new ways of working. We found that the service sends a level 2 commander to every incident with 2 or more fire engines in attendance, regardless of the severity of the incident. This means their time is often taken up on paperwork instead of more important work.

Technology isn't used to help staff be productive. Station-based staff told us that they can't take the mobile data terminals off the engines, so waste time printing out risk information. We also heard that service-issued mobile phones aren't smart phones, so crews can't use technology easily and quickly to locate an incident.

We also found that on-call staff don't routinely make risk familiarisation visits, and operational staff haven't restarted prevention work that stopped during the pandemic. We heard some stations with low demand have long periods of downtime that isn't used to support other important areas of work.

We noted that the service decided a few years ago to use its workforce more efficiently by reducing the number of posts and using single-rate overtime to supplement shortages. However, at the time of our inspection we found the service was relying too much on overtime and had a significant number of vacancies. This was affecting its ability to keep its fire engines available. This may have also been affected by the pandemic where staff may not have been available to carry out overtime.

In the year 2019/20, the service spent twice as much on overtime as similar fire and rescue services. While this has reduced slightly in the year ending 31 March 2021 it still remains significantly above the rate for England. But we did find that it has plans to fill these vacancies.

The service is good at collaborating with others

We are pleased to see the service meets its statutory duty to collaborate. It routinely considers opportunities to collaborate with other emergency responders and shares support functions with the police, such as finance and human resources. This saves the service money on staffing costs. The service has also redeveloped the stations at Hanley and Tamworth as shared sites with the police. Again, this saves the service money and helps police and fire colleagues to work more closely together for the benefit of the public.

The service works collaboratively with several partners to carry out prevention activity, like the Road Safety Partnership and the schools' Safe+Sound programme. It also plans to collaborate with other fire services to increase expertise in enforcement work. These activities are clearly linked to the IRMP priorities of preventing fires and protecting people, buildings and the environment.

The service comprehensively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and results of its collaborations. The police, fire and crime commissioner chairs a strategic collaboration board to which projects are presented for approval and scrutiny. There is a shared service operational management group that monitors the progress of collaboration projects. The service also evaluates specific collaboration work such as the Safe+Sound programme.

The service has good business continuity arrangements

The service has good continuity arrangements in place for areas where threats and risks are considered high. These threats and risks are regularly reviewed and tested so that staff are aware of the arrangements and their associated responsibilities. The continuity arrangements for the control room were tested in August 2021 and the service is following up on the learning points from this.

The service shows sound financial management

There are regular reviews of the service's expenditure, including costs such as goods, services, premises and fleet. This scrutiny makes sure the service gets value for money by, for example, monitoring the performance of contracts set up by the shared service procurement team.

The service has made savings and efficiencies that have caused minimal disruption to the service it provides to the public. This includes the services and sites it shares with the police. It has also been able to reinvest some of the savings it has made into its prevention work. But improvement is still needed in some areas of the shared service to make sure the efficiencies made are supporting the service to operate effectively. For example, the service needs to make sure the recruitment process enables it to fill vacancies on time.

The service is making sure important areas, including estates, fleet and procurement, are well placed to achieve efficiency gains through sound financial management and best working practices. But it should also make sure that it can effectively measure how much value for money these efficiencies make.

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

Good (2019: Good)

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service is good 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.

Area for improvement

The service should assure itself that its IT systems are resilient, reliable, accurate and accessible.

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 good at mitigating its financial risks

The service has a sound understanding of future financial challenges. It plans to mitigate its significant financial risks. The service has identified a budget shortfall of £2.9m by 2025 and has prepared a series of options to make savings to address this. The risk of each option has been evaluated and presented to the police, fire and crime commissioner. These include options to make further savings from the estate by selling land and buildings it no longer needs.

The underpinning assumptions are robust, realistic and prudent, and take account of the wider external environment. The assumptions include an analysis of the changing demand on the service because of fewer fires.

The service has a good reserves strategy

The service clearly understands its reserves. It has a general reserve that is within the government recommended limits. It also has other reserves of £7.5m to support specific areas including capital programmes. But these reserves are expected to reduce to around £4m by 2025/26. The reserves strategy is reviewed each year by the police and crime panel and more regularly by the finance director. The service should review its reserves strategy to make sure that the anticipated reduction in reserves is sustainable.

The service uses its fleet and estates strategies to drive efficiencies

The service shares its estate and fleet functions with the police. This has enabled the service to make efficiency savings by sharing premises and reducing purchasing costs for the fleet. The estate and fleet strategies have clear links to the IRMP. For example, the IRMP priorities inform the types of vehicles that the service needs to deliver its response capability. And co-location of police and fire staff is one of the priorities in the IRMP. Both strategies exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

The strategies are regularly reviewed so the service can properly assess the impact any changes to estate and fleet provision or future innovation have on risk. But we found the performance measures for both strategies don't help the service to fully understand the effectiveness of the strategies. We also found there have been delays

with some of the estates and fleet projects. For example, a delay in purchasing specialist vehicles for complex rescues is stopping the service from improving the way it responds to incidents. The service is starting to make progress with the delayed estates project at Stafford Fire Station.

The service should make sure that it makes best use of new technologies to transform the way it provides its services

The service actively considers how changes in technology and future innovation may affect risk. For example, it is investing in technology to provide an integrated platform for prevention and protection data. It has also invested in new technology to support staff working remotely. But there are other areas where it hasn't invested, such as smart mobile phone technology on appliances. This means that it can't use some of the control room tools such as 999Eye to improve incident management. The 999Eye tool enables the caller to stream live video footage of the incident to the control room, meaning that it can make better decisions about what resources it needs to send to the incident. We also found that some systems the service uses, like the mobile data terminals and the service network, aren't reliable.

The service is working effectively with the police in some areas such as communications to improve efficiency and provide better services in the future.

The service doesn't actively exploit opportunities to generate income

The service considers options for generating extra income, but this is limited mainly to income from shared premises. It gets some income from training provided to other fire services. The service has decided to wind down its community interest company.

People
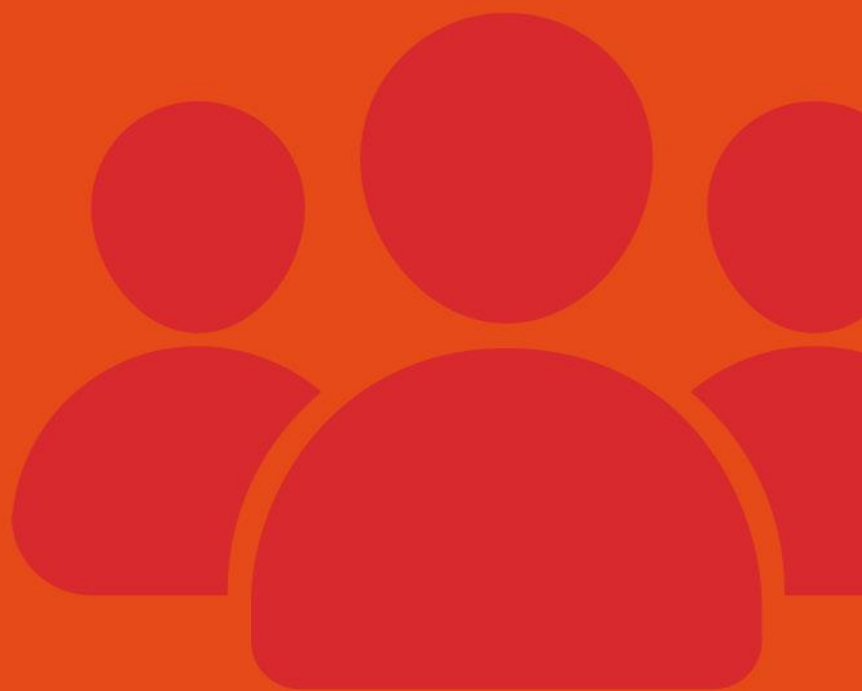
How well does the service look after its people?

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

We were disappointed to see a deterioration since our last inspection in the way the service looks after its people. We saw examples of behaviours that were inconsistent with the service's values and the service has not placed enough priority on making the service more inclusive and diverse.

The service isn't communicating effectively with staff on those things that matter to them. But it has recognised that it needs to improve and is working to identify where and how it needs to improve.

Although the service is good at identifying the skills its staff need, we found there aren't always enough training courses available. We also found the service doesn't fill vacancies quickly enough and doesn't have a clear plan for how it will deal with the large number of staff who are expected to leave the service in the next few years.

We did find the service to be good at how it looks after the health, safety and wellbeing of its staff and it has put in place arrangements to identify and support those staff who have the potential to develop into leadership roles.

Promoting the right values and culture

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Requires improvement (2019: Outstanding)

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service 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.

Areas for improvement

- The service should make sure all staff understand and demonstrate its values.
- The service should assure itself that senior managers are visible and demonstrate service values through their behaviours.
- The service should monitor secondary contracts and overtime 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.

There is evidence of behaviours that aren't in line with the service's culture and values

The service has a long-established cultural message and framework in place that explains what exceptional, expected, and inappropriate behaviours are. The service's values are grouped under the headings: Honesty, openness, and trust; Always wanting to get better; Wellbeing of our communities; and Treating each other with respect.

The service recently held a series of cultural workshops with all staff across the service, which was generally well received. We are pleased that it has also incorporated the new national Core Code of Ethics into its cultural framework.

Most staff we spoke to, and most of those who responded to the staff survey, knew about the values. And at a local level, teams support each other. But the culture of the organisation doesn't always align with its values.

We were told of several examples of behaviours that didn't meet the standards expected. For example, managers aren't always supported in tackling inappropriate behaviours. We were told about examples of discriminatory behaviour that had been reported but no action was taken. We also heard about several examples of bullying behaviour or inappropriate comments being made in front of managers but no action was taken. And some staff groups told us they don't feel respected or valued. During the inspection we heard language that was inappropriate or outdated

being used. We also heard about a level of complacency about the service's culture that means negative behaviours can be overlooked. Nearly half of the staff who responded to our survey didn't feel that they could challenge ideas without detriment and some staff told us they were scared to speak out.

Some of the staff we spoke to were positive about senior leaders and feel they are approachable. But half of those we spoke to don't feel that senior leaders are visible enough or model the service's values. We also found that staff aren't always involved in the decisions that affect them.

The service has good wellbeing provisions in place for the workforce

The service continues to have well understood and effective wellbeing arrangements in place for staff. There is a significant range of wellbeing support for both physical and mental health. For example, there is an occupational health service where managers can refer staff or staff can refer themselves; an employee assistance programme where staff can access support and information 24/7; and the service trains staff in mental health first aid.

The service offers good support for staff who have been involved in traumatic incidents. This includes specialist support, such as cognitive behavioural therapy and treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder.

The service carried out an audit in 2020 to better understand the wellbeing needs of staff. It also has a wellbeing group for physical and mental health and it reviews data and information on stress and wellbeing in the workplace monthly.

There are good provisions in place to promote staff wellbeing. This includes information on the service's website about managing stress and anxiety. At stations, we saw information about wellbeing on noticeboards and policies available for staff to access. Most staff survey respondents reported they understand and have confidence in the wellbeing support processes available. But nearly half of those staff who responded to the survey said that they had discussed health, safety and wellbeing with their manager only once a year or less.

The service manages health and safety well

The service has effective and well understood health and safety policies and procedures in place.

These policies and procedures are readily available and effectively promoted to all staff. All policies, procedures and risk assessments are available on the service's intranet, and changes or updates to policy are communicated to staff by safety flash notices. Station-based staff understand the procedures they need to follow for reporting defects to equipment, and these are quickly resolved.

We found that health and safety risk assessments are systematically conducted and reviewed across the service and there is a regular programme of station audits. The service investigates, records and monitors accidents and near misses.

We also found there is a good system in place to protect the safety of lone workers.

The service regularly tests the fitness of firefighters and there is good support for those who don't meet the standard.

But we found the service doesn't monitor the working hours of staff to make sure they aren't excessive.

Most staff who responded to our survey and the representative body survey consider that the service manages health, safety and welfare well.

The service manages staff absences well

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

We found there are clear processes in place to manage absences for all staff. There is clear guidance for managers, who have confidence in the process and consistently use it. Absences are managed well and in accordance with policy. Timescales are adhered to, individuals are well communicated with, and appropriate support is offered.

The service works with occupational health to support people to return to work after a period of absence. There is also a detailed return-to-work form to assess whether the individual needs any continuing support on their return to the workplace.

Most of the staff we spoke to were positive about their experiences during and after periods of absence.

But half of those who responded to the staff survey said the service doesn't offer reasonable adjustments or monitor those it puts in place.

Overall, in the year ending March 2021, the service has seen a decrease in short-term staff absences but an increase in long-term staff absences. Long-term absences account for around three quarters of total absences.

Getting the right people with the right skills

Good (2019: Good)

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service is good 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.

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 good at identifying what skills and capabilities it needs but should make sure it can deliver these

The service has good workforce planning in place. This makes sure skills and capabilities align with what is needed to effectively meet the IRMP. It has a learning and development strategy that aligns to the IRMP. The service considers the skills requirements that it needs annually, based on foreseeable risks identified in the IRMP. This information is used to forecast the training courses needed for the year.

But we heard that there aren't always enough training courses available. There aren't enough courses for drivers, which means sometimes an engine won't be available because there isn't a qualified driver available.

The service is changing the way it trains on-call staff by offering more training at local stations than at its headquarters. This is to make it easier for staff to attend courses and maintain their competence. It will also mean that on-call staff will be available to crew the engines more often. The service will need to make sure it maintains accurate records of locally delivered training.

We also found that the service doesn't fill vacancies quickly enough. But the service has plans for more firefighter recruitment to address this.

The service also needs to do more to improve how it considers future needs and succession planning. Although it has identified that around 50 operational staff will leave the service over the next 5 years, it isn't clear how the service is using this information to forecast its long-term skills and capabilities requirements.

Most staff told us they can access the training they need to be effective in their role. The service's training plans make sure they can maintain competence and capability effectively. But support staff told us that training opportunities for them are limited.

The service monitors staff competence. It has a system to record individual training records which show whether staff are up to date with their risk-critical training. As part of the inspection we reviewed several training records and found they were accurate and up to date.

The service trains its incident commanders well, including in dealing with marauding terrorist attacks. But we found the arrangements for strategic commanders to record their maintenance of competence need is not consistent with other commanders.

We found that staff haven't been trained in making risk familiarisation visits of buildings, or in dealing with fires in a high-rise building. We also found that the service's breathing apparatus training doesn't follow the timescales set out in national operational guidance.

The service promotes learning and improvement

The service has some good arrangements in place to promote a culture of continuous improvement. For example, the service identifies some themes from operational incidents which it uses as case studies for staff to learn from. The service also reviews organisational learning from health and safety events and shares them with staff to drive improvement. But the service should do more to engage staff in learning from operational incidents.

All staff can explore development opportunities through the annual appraisal process. But we found that the process was operationally focused with not enough consideration for non-risk-critical learning and development opportunities, such as work shadowing, mentoring and leadership development. And 40 percent of staff who responded to the staff survey don't think that the service allows opportunities for personal development.

We were pleased that 80 percent of respondents to the staff survey carried out by the service said that they use the cultural framework as a reference point for their appraisal discussion.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity

Requires improvement (2019: Good)

Staffordshire 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 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 service should assure itself that staff are confident using its feedback mechanisms.
- To identify and tackle barriers to equality of opportunity, and make its workforce more representative, the service should make sure diversity and inclusion are a priority and become important values of the service.
- The service should review how effective its policy on bullying, harassment and discrimination is in reducing unacceptable behaviour towards its staff.
- The service should make sure HR policy is consistently applied in the management of employment cases.

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

The service isn't effective at seeking and acting on staff feedback and challenge

Although the service has some means of gathering staff feedback, they aren't consistent or wide ranging.

At the time of our inspection the service had, for data security reasons, stopped on-call staff from accessing the weekly news bulletin on their mobile phones. This means that on-call staff may not be kept up to date with information about the service. We were told that the service intends to talk to on-call staff about the impact of this on them.

The service is taking action to improve the way it communicates with staff. It has introduced a tool called 'Say so' which allows staff to report concerns anonymously to senior management. But there were mixed views from staff on this. Some staff felt that it encouraged them to speak up; others felt it had been put in place because the culture didn't allow staff to speak up.

We heard examples of staff and managers not being consulted about decisions that affected them, or of their views not being listened to.

Managers have confidence in the service's feedback mechanisms, but non-managerial staff have less confidence and don't think the mechanisms are effective. More than half of staff survey respondents (112 of 216 staff that responded) don't feel confident in the mechanisms for feedback. And representative bodies and staff associations reported that they would like to see improved engagement from the service.

The service needs to improve its approach to EDI

The service hasn't given enough priority to EDI and there is a lack of direction in the service to make improvements.

The service doesn't use data about the diversity of its communities to make sure that it engages with them appropriately in its prevention and protection work. Nor does it

use data and information from its workforce, for example from exit interviews, to make improvements.

Staff we spoke to told us that EDI isn't understood in the service and that it should do more to promote it. The service has recently re-established network groups for staff who are under-represented in the workforce, but some staff are cynical about them.

The service has an effective process in place for assessing equality impact and acting on these assessments. The impact assessments we reviewed were detailed, comprehensive and had considered the service's duties under the Equality Act. But the service doesn't monitor the effect of the actions taken in response to the impact assessment, so it isn't learning from them.

The service needs to do more to increase the diversity of its workforce

More is needed to increase staff diversity. There has been limited progress to improve ethnic background and gender diversity across all staff in the service. In 2019/20, 1.4 percent of new joiners self-declared as being from ethnic minority backgrounds. For the whole workforce at 31 March 2020, 2.5 percent are from ethnic minority backgrounds, below the England rate of 5.1 percent. And 18.0 percent are women and 8.5 percent of firefighters at the service are women. This is slightly above the England rate of 7.0 percent.

The service needs to encourage applicants from diverse backgrounds into middle and senior level positions. These positions tend to be advertised and filled internally, meaning the service isn't making the most of opportunities to make its workforce more representative.

Although we heard about the service's plans to direct recruitment campaigns at under-represented groups, it isn't doing enough to increase the diversity of its workforce. Positive action has been limited and staff don't understand what it means. The service hasn't evaluated the outcomes of previous recruitment campaigns, so it doesn't know if there are any barriers to people from under-represented groups applying for roles in the service.

The service has robust policies and procedures in place to resolve workforce concerns, but these aren't applied consistently and staff don't have confidence in them

The service has appropriate policies and procedures in place to identify and resolve workforce concerns. But the grievance procedure hasn't been reviewed since it was issued in 2010 and there is no reference to any considerations related to EDI.

The service has had a significant number of workforce concerns. In the year ending 31 March 2021, it had 16 grievances and 38 disciplinary cases. As part of our inspection we reviewed some of the case files. We found that the service dealt well with poor behaviours where workplace concerns were reported. The cases we reviewed were fully investigated in line with service policy and processes and in most cases timescales were adhered to or, if not, there were explanations for delays.

The service has shown that in certain cases it is prepared to take firm action when necessary and to maintain appropriate standards of conduct and behaviour.

Despite this, managers told us they are reluctant to tackle poor performance or inappropriate behaviours. And some managers told us they feel unsupported in dealing with discipline and grievance cases, resulting in them being less likely to challenge staff.

Although the service has clear policies and procedures in place, staff have little confidence in the service's ability to deal effectively with cases of bullying, harassment and discrimination.

The service could go further to improve staff understanding of bullying, harassment and discrimination, including encouraging staff to take responsibility for eliminating it. Through our staff survey,16 percent of respondents (34 staff) told us they had been subject to bullying or harassment and 21 percent (45 staff) to discrimination over the past 12 months. Of these staff, over 80 percent didn't think that the action taken would make a difference.

Managing performance and developing leaders

Good (2019: Good)

Staffordshire 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 staff and improving diversity into leadership roles.

Area for improvement

The service should aim to diversify the pool of future and current leaders.

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

The service manages individuals' performance well

There is a good performance management system in place which allows the service to effectively develop and assess the individual performance of all staff. The service's appraisal policy is up to date and encourages managers to link personal objectives to organisational objectives.

Most respondents to our survey and staff we spoke to during the inspection reported that they have a regular and meaningful appraisal with their manager. Each staff member has goals and objectives and regular performance assessments. Most staff survey respondents feel confident in the performance and development arrangements that are in place, although some feel that it is a tick-box exercise.

The service is good at developing leadership and high potential staff at all levels

The service has effective processes in place which allows it to manage the career pathways of staff, including into leadership roles and roles requiring specialist skills.

We heard that there are mentoring arrangements in place to help staff with their development.

There is a structured, modular training programme for new supervisory managers.

The service has introduced two pathways for firefighter recruitment to better recognise the skills of recruits who already have some experience as a firefighter. This is also helping to speed up the process of new staff joining the service.

The service makes good use of apprenticeships to support the development of future leaders. It led the development of the firefighter apprenticeship standard and is also using leadership and management apprenticeships to give staff broad skills.

There are talent management schemes to develop staff. The service has introduced a high-potential programme for staff. Most staff spoke positively about this programme. It was advertised openly for all staff to apply but some staff we spoke to weren't aware of it.

The service acknowledges that it has a traditional approach for selecting into senior leadership roles and that it should consider direct entry into such roles to give the best chance of increasing the diversity of its leaders.

Managers involved in recruitment and promotion processes are trained and human resources staff support most interview panels.

But the service needs to do more to make sure its recruitment and promotion processes are fair. For example, there hasn't been any change in the pool of candidates eligible for promotion in nearly three years. This means staff who have developed in the meantime are excluded from applying for promotion. This isn't in line with the service's own policy. Staff told us they feel the promotion panels operate inconsistently. And less than half of the staff who responded to the staff survey (127 of 216 staff who responded) feel the promotion process is fair.