



HMICFRS

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary
and Fire & Rescue Services

State of Fire and Rescue

The Annual Assessment of
Fire and Rescue Services in England

2022

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of
Fire and Rescue Services

**His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and
Fire & Rescue Services**

**State of Fire and Rescue:
The Annual Assessment of
Fire and Rescue Services in
England 2022**

**Presented to Parliament pursuant to section 28B of the Fire and Rescue Services
Act 2004**



© Crown copyright 2023

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3

Where we have identified any third party copyright information, you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at: www.gov.uk/official-documents

This document is also available from our website at: www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmicfrs

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at: HMICFRS, 8th Floor, 23 Stephenson Street, Birmingham B2 4BH

ISBN 978-1-5286-3827-2

E02837660 01/23

Printed on paper containing 40% recycled fibre content minimum

Printed in the UK by HH Associates Ltd. on behalf of the Controller of His Majesty's Stationery Office

Cover image © Durham and Darlington FRS

Contents

Foreword	1
Chapter 1: His Majesty's Chief Inspector's assessment	2
Chapter 2: Our inspections	13
Our judgments	14
The operating context	15
Summary of Tranche 3 grades	16
Effectiveness	33
Efficiency	41
People	48
Conclusion	57
Annex A: Our national recommendations	58
Annex B: Our reports – August 2021 to September 2022	63
Annex C: Our revisit letters	65
Annex D: About us	66

Foreword

It was an honour to be appointed HM Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services on 1 April 2022.

I take my responsibility to help keep communities safe extremely seriously. I come from a long career in policing, and it has been a privilege to extend my responsibilities to work with the fire and rescue sector since starting at the inspectorate.

This is my first report to the Secretary of State under [section 28B of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#). It contains my assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of fire and rescue services in England during our second full round of inspections, which we carried out between February 2021 and August 2022.

As we have now inspected all services twice, I will reflect on the progress made by all 44 fire and rescue services in England since our first inspections in 2018.

To form my assessment, I wrote to chief fire officers and other interested parties in the sector to seek their views on the state of fire and rescue in England. I extend my thanks to everyone who replied and offered their valuable insights.

I am also grateful to everyone who has contributed to our inspections. This includes members of service staff, and our staff who have tirelessly collected the vital evidence we need to form our judgments.

On 31 March 2022, Sir Thomas Winsor's term as HM Chief Inspector ended. Over the past five years, the inspectorate under his leadership has made a material difference to the sector.

My predecessor made it clear that the sector needs reform; I am pleased that the inspectorate's work has played such an important role in this respect. I thank him for his dedication to HMICFRS and for his contributions to improving the sector.



Andy Cooke QPM DL

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services



Chapter 1: His Majesty's Chief Inspector's assessment

Services and their staff are dedicated to serving the public

Since joining the inspectorate, I have been struck by the dedication of services and their staff. They are committed to their work and to keeping communities safe. It is clear what enormous assets they are to our communities.

Our 2022 public perceptions survey showed the public feel the same way. Of the 1,798 respondents, 84 percent said they valued the work that services carry out and 82 percent said they respected people who have a career in the sector.

The past few years have presented various challenges for services. And 2022 was no exception. Some services faced additional difficulties caused by tragic incidents, such as wildfires. In 2021/22, services attended 15,960 flooding incidents, 7 percent more than the previous year. I wish to express my appreciation to all those who work in the sector.

Reform is still urgently needed

There is a compelling case for reform of our fire and rescue services. Society is constantly changing and public services should adapt accordingly. In too many respects, the fire service hasn't.

Since we started inspecting fire and rescue services in 2018, we have identified obstacles that have stood in the way of the sector's progress. As a result, we have previously issued six national recommendations to bring about improvements.

In last year's annual report, my predecessor expressed his frustration, on behalf of the public, at the lack of progress being made. This year I am expressing mine. A year later on it is extremely disappointing that still only two of these are complete. The four remaining recommendations are:

- the Home Office should precisely determine the role of fire and rescue services, to remove any ambiguity;
- the sector should remove unjustifiable variation, including in how they define risk;
- the sector should review how effectively pay and conditions are determined; and

- the Home Office should invest chief fire officers with operational independence, whether through primary legislation or in some other manner.

These recommendations and their current statuses are detailed in [Annex A: Our national recommendations](#).

I am aware that the sector is contending with other challenges. For example, it is addressing the findings from the inquiries following the Grenfell Tower fire and the Manchester Arena attack. The sector must continue to learn from these terrible tragedies. What is more, I am mindful that many services have been considering the implications of the current financial climate and potential industrial action.

The challenges of the months ahead might be seen by some as a reason not to risk further change. On the contrary, I believe our recommendations are crucial to making sure that services can continue to protect their communities.

The Government needs to implement our national recommendations as a matter of urgency

On 18 May 2022, the Government published its [White Paper on Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service](#). I welcomed it as a landmark moment in fire and rescue reform. It contains the right proposals to make a material difference to the sector, including addressing three out of our four remaining recommendations. These include our recommendations on:

- determining the role of services and firefighters;
- reviewing the machinery determining terms and conditions; and
- providing operational independence for chief fire officers.

On 26 July 2022, the White Paper consultation closed; the Government hasn't yet published its response but former Fire Minister Lord Greenhalgh publicly said that it has an "oven-ready blueprint for reform". Six months on, I support the [comment from Lord Greenhalgh](#): "Now is the time to implement it [the White Paper] in full and without delay."

I expect to see these changes and firmer commitments – including anticipated timescales for their completion – very soon. Until all our national recommendations are addressed in full, fire and rescue services won't be able to provide the best possible service to the public. Both the public and fire and rescue services deserve better.

In many respects, the sector has made progress on national policies, standards and fire safety

Despite my frustration at progress on our national recommendations, there has been some good national work. For example, the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) has continued its work to develop national fire and rescue policy on a range of important topics, including leadership. It has also continued to work with National Employers and the Local Government Association on the [Fit for the Future](#) initiative.

I also am pleased to see the continuous development of [fire standards](#) by the Fire Standards Board. Our inspection framework is designed to have due regard to the standards as part of our inspections.

We have welcomed the [Fire Safety Act 2021](#), sections 1 and 3 of which commenced on 16 May 2022. I hope it will better protect those living in England and Wales from fire risks by reducing the risks posed by external wall systems and making sure those responsible for multi-occupied residential buildings consider fire safety appropriately. I also welcome the [Building Safety Act 2022](#). I hope its provisions establishing how high-rise residential buildings should be built and maintained will reduce the risk of fire.

The Building Safety Act 2022 also established the [building safety regulator](#), which is part of the Health and Safety Executive. The regulator will:

- oversee the safety and standards of all buildings;
- help and encourage the built environment industry and building control professionals to improve their competence; and
- lead implementation of the new regulatory framework for high-rise buildings.

I look forward to seeing the regulator carry out these functions once it is up and running and to seeing representatives from services contributing to this work by being part of multi-disciplinary teams. I also await with interest the next phase of the [Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1](#), which examined what happened on the night of the fire. Phase 2 will investigate the wider context, including:

- the nature and application of building regulations;
- the way in which local and central government responded to the fire; and
- the handling of concerns raised by tenants over many years.

I hope that the Phase 2 report will lead to a greater understanding of what happened and why, so lessons can be learned throughout the sector.

Our inspections have helped services to better serve their communities

Our inspections have played a crucial role in promoting improvements in the sector. Some of England's 44 fire and rescue services had more than three years to make improvements since their last inspections. Many have made material efforts during this time, resulting in a general improvement in our graded judgments.

But in some services, not enough action has been taken to remedy the problems we highlighted in our first round of inspections. And since our first round of inspections, efficiency grades have worsened in some services – while this isn't a principal theme throughout Round 2 overall, it is in our third tranche of inspections, where grades worsened in 6 out of 16 services – this is covered in our [section on efficiency](#). We will give particular focus to these areas in our third round of inspections, which will take place in 2023 and 2024.

Our detailed findings are covered in [Chapter 2: Our inspections](#). However, there are several trends from our second round of inspections that are worth highlighting.

Most services are improving their focus on fire protection

Protection was a concern in our first round of inspections. It is therefore encouraging to continue to see a generally positive shift in the way most services prioritise protection.

Successes in this area are partly due to Home Office funding, which needs to be sustained if the sector is to have enough competent fire protection staff in the long term. Since our first round of inspections in 2018/19 there has been an overall 11 percent increase in fire protection staff. But as at 31 March 2022, there was a 5 percent decrease compared to the previous year. When the new building safety regulator starts carrying out its functions, it will be particularly important for services to have the right number of fire protection staff.

Fire prevention needs to improve if services are to keep some of society's most vulnerable people safe

We have continued to find some services didn't always prioritise prevention activity enough. This is an area in which almost half of services need to significantly improve if they are to keep their communities safe. We have issued a total of 19 requires improvement grades and 2 inadequate grades throughout the 44 services in our second round of inspections.

Services are generally responding well to emergency incidents

We have also continued to find that the sector is generally well-prepared to respond to routine and major emergency incidents.

We inspected 43 out of the 44 fire and rescue services in England in relation to how they respond to national risks; 38 received a good or outstanding grade (we don't inspect the Isles of Scilly in this area). But 14 of 44 services could do more to improve how they respond to routine incidents.

The health and safety and well-being of staff continue to be a strength for almost all services

Staff continue to have confidence in services' well-being and health and safety arrangements. All but three services in our second round of inspections have good well-being provisions in place. This continues to be an area of strength.

Some services can't assure themselves that staff aren't working excessive hours. This is because those services are still monitoring working hours inconsistently.

Resources aren't always being directed to where they are most needed

Some services can't show that they are appropriately allocating resources to risks. We issued 21 requires improvement grades and 2 inadequate grades throughout the 44 services that relate to how well services use resources to manage risk.

Many services need to improve how they promote their values and culture

While we found most services had improved the way they promoted values and a positive professional culture, 17 services were issued a requires improvement or inadequate grade in this respect.

We previously recommended that the sector would benefit from a code of ethics. In May 2021 the NFCC, the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners and the Local Government Association established the [Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services](#). I am encouraged by the progress many have made in implementing this.

We were deeply concerned by some of our findings. And we are still seeing some unacceptable levels of bullying, harassment and discrimination. We currently have five causes of concern in place in relation to values and culture. Our findings in relation to values and culture and fairness and diversity from our Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) inspection were serious enough to warrant the service being placed into our 'engage' process (explained in more detail in the section [Some services need targeted support](#)).

The findings from our [London Fire Brigade inspection](#) were covered in detail in the service report we published on 27 July 2022. Our findings relating to values and culture were consistent with those established in the [London Fire Brigade Independent Culture Review report](#), published on 28 November 2022. We issued a cause of concern in this respect to London Fire Brigade at the time of our inspection. We will continue to monitor values and culture and other issues within the brigade. As a result

of the cumulative evidence we found in our last inspection and afterwards, we have placed the brigade into our 'engage' process.

Most services should do more to improve equality, diversity and inclusion

Some services haven't taken enough meaningful steps to promote and improve equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). Although many services have a comprehensive EDI plan, they often don't lead to tangible changes in the diversity of their staff. And in many services, staff understanding of EDI is still poor. We have issued 26 requires improvement or inadequate grades throughout the 44 services for fairness and diversity.

In their letters, a few chief fire officers said that our description of diversity in fire and rescue services in previous annual reports as "woeful" can create a further barrier to recruiting a more diverse workforce. While I appreciate this view, we must report on our inspection findings in line with our observations.

However, recruitment is just one way of improving workforce diversity. As a bare minimum, everyone has the right to work in an environment where they feel respected and valued. An inclusive workplace is fundamental to retaining a diverse workforce.

Some services need targeted support

In 2022, we formalised our performance monitoring approach, which is now closely aligned with that used for police forces. The process is intended to establish services that need further support to overcome difficult problems and make improvements.

Our fire monitoring group reviews services of concern. After doing so, it decides whether a service needs to be moved from our 'scan' to our 'engage' phase. Placing a service into engage is a significant step. It occurs, for example, if a service isn't addressing a [cause of concern](#), or if it isn't succeeding in managing, mitigating or eradicating the cause of concern. Services moved to the engage phase are invited to attend our Fire Performance Oversight Group.

At the time of publication, Gloucestershire FRS and London Fire Brigade had entered our engage phase.

Gloucestershire FRS entered engage for the following reasons:

"The service hasn't done enough since the last inspection to embed its values and associated behaviours and promote a positive workplace culture.

The service hasn't done enough since the last inspection to improve understanding and awareness of the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and remove barriers to embedding EDI in the service."

London Fire Brigade entered engage for the following reason:

“There is cumulative evidence from our last inspection and afterwards of unacceptable behaviour within the brigade, including discrimination and bullying. The values and behaviours the brigade aspires to are not always demonstrated by senior leaders. The brigade needs to do more to demonstrate progress in improving its culture.”

Alongside the NFCC, the Home Office and other organisations, we work closely with those services in our engage phase to support them to make progress in problem areas. Although it is still in its early stages, this approach has already raised the profile and process of improvement in fire and rescue services.

Services face a difficult year ahead

Of the 31 chief fire officers who wrote to me, 29 expressed concerns about current and likely future financial and cost-of-living pressures and how they could affect the service they provide. Some services have reported problems with recruiting and retaining staff. This particularly applies to competent fire protection staff. It is expensive and time-consuming to train new staff, and the private sector can offer higher pay.

At the time of publication, the Fire Brigades Union has rejected a 5 percent pay increase and is currently balloting its members for industrial action. Unions play an important role in protecting workers’ rights and, of course, I believe that firefighters deserve fair pay as do all public sector workers. Many people throughout England are feeling the effects of the cost-of-living crisis and are facing a period of financial difficulty.

Against the background of industrial action, services must continue to keep their communities safe. This will be a challenge. Many services have told us that the threat of industrial action can have a tangible effect on how well they can respond to incidents. Many also said it is costly to provide contingency arrangements, particularly when, in some cases, resources are already scarce.

A pay increase above the level services have planned for adds to the challenging financial environment they currently face, which includes non-pay inflationary pressures. In 2022/23, services are likely to use their reserves to cover the pay award for the short term. The recently announced provisional local government finance settlement should help (explained in more detail in the section [Funding and governance arrangements continue to hinder some services](#)). But from the 2023/24 financial year onwards, services may need to find additional savings so they can afford these extra costs and set a balanced budget. In some services, this may affect the services they provide to the public.

In the current circumstances of increased financial pressure, unions and employers must act responsibly to keep communities safe and make sure the public isn't put at risk.

Our inspections continue to be valuable

All safety-critical, essential public services benefit from the scrutiny of inspection and reporting. HMICFRS plays a crucial role in both the fire and rescue and policing sectors. Some services have made considerable improvements since our first round of inspections. They have addressed our recommendations and are better serving their communities as a result. Many of the chief fire officers who wrote to me said how beneficial they have found our inspections in improving the service they provide.

In early 2023 our third round of inspections will start, for which we now have a very clear benchmark. We have continued to seek the sector's views when designing our third round of inspections. From 9 May to 6 June 2022, we ran our fire and rescue service 2023 inspection programme consultation. It contained nine principal questions to determine how different our third full round of inspections should be, compared to our second. It was open to the public and we received 45 responses, although most were from the sector. I am grateful to all those who participated. Your input has been enormously useful and helped shape our future inspections.

Much will be similar in our third round of inspections. Round 3 will be another rounded assessment of all services in England. The inspection questions will remain the same, relating to services' effectiveness and efficiency, as well as how well they look after their people.

We will maintain our hybrid approach, with on-site inspection and remote activity. We will use the same fundamental types of evidence-collection methods, including interviews, reality testing and desktop reviews. We have no plans for thematic inspection.

There will be a few differences from Round 2. We will move from four gradings to five. This means that 'adequate' will now be included as a grade between 'good' and 'requires improvement'. We will use the following grades in our inspections:

- inadequate
- requires improvement
- adequate
- good
- outstanding.

We will no longer use pillar judgments. Instead, we will focus on the individual 11 questions that we ask during inspections. Some people have raised concerns about whether removing pillar grades will make the assessment less clear for the public. We believe that our assessments will be clearer; sometimes services will have a pillar grade of 'good' that masks an important area that 'requires improvement'.

We are also changing our approach to tranches of inspection. We will no longer assess in tranches and instead we will publish service reports as soon as they are ready. This means that, for most services, the time between inspection and publication should be shorter.

We will examine more closely how the sector has responded to the recommendations from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1. Our second round of inspections focused on the collection of risk information and protection activity surrounding the building risk review. But our third round of inspections will focus on systems that should now be in place to manage similar incidents.

We have made improvements to how we will assess FRS staff productivity in Round 3. This includes more targeted inspection activity that assesses the choices services make about shift systems and how firefighters spend their time.

Given the poor grades we have seen in respect of EDI, we have increased the scrutiny of this area throughout our methodology. We will pay particularly close attention to how a service conducts its recruitment to improve diversity at all levels, including at the most senior levels of the organisation.

We will continue to focus in detail on how well services' values are accepted and understood, and how they are demonstrated in the service's culture and behaviours of senior leaders. As part of this, we will continue to consider how well services have adopted the [Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services](#) and demonstrate it in their cultures in our third round of inspections.

We will also consider the findings and recommendations from the [London Fire Brigade Independent Culture Review report](#) in our inspections. Following the findings from this report, the Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire has asked us to produce a spotlight report setting out our findings related to values and culture, based on the evidence we collected during our second full round of fire and rescue service inspections. We aim to produce this by the end of March 2023.

Learning from the Manchester Arena Inquiry

On 3 November 2022, the [Manchester Arena Inquiry Volume Two: Emergency Response](#) report was published. It concluded that at least one of the 22 lives lost during the horrific attack on 22 May 2017 could have been saved if the emergency services had worked better together and the [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles \(JESIP\)](#) had worked. This tragedy could have been avoided and it is unacceptable that it happened.

As the inquiry chairman, Sir John Saunders said:

“JESIP is designed to ensure that any rescue attempt involving more than one of the emergency services is co-ordinated, so that all follow the same plan and share information so that well-informed decisions can be taken.”

Had JESIP worked, he said: “things could and should have been very different.”

The report provides detail on why various errors were made. We have considered the recommendations in detail to establish when it is appropriate for us to be involved. I urge services to read the report findings and consider how they can play their part in learning from this tragedy.

We currently assess each service’s preparedness and ability to respond to a major or multi-agency incident as part of our inspection methodology and approach. Our current fire and rescue service inspection process already gives due consideration to the most important aspect of the Manchester Arena Inquiry report: how well a service is able to form part of a multi-agency response in line with JESIP. In our third round of inspections, we will continue to assess services’ abilities to form part of a multi-agency response, in line with JESIP.

However, we can’t be fully assured of how the JESIP principles might be applied in practice due to the low number of significant major incidents. A joint specific inspection between HMICFRS, Care Quality Commission and other agencies may be appropriate if the Government would support this. This could be as a result of a specific commission from the Home Secretary. We would require additional resources to carry out this work.

Most fire services are well-placed to respond to marauding terrorist attacks

Fire services are well-placed to provide a marauding terrorist attack (MTA) capability, as they can send a large number of trained staff to an incident in a relatively short timeframe. Some services have faced difficulties forming teams to respond to MTAs because there is no national agreement on the matter. This led to two services (Greater Manchester FRS and London Fire Brigade) holding lengthy negotiations with the Fire Brigades Union to make sure that both services provide this essential capability. The outcome has led to these services providing a contractual 2 percent pay increase to all firefighters in return for a specialist MTA capability.

Providing an MTA capability is already part of a firefighter’s role; this is in effect paying them twice for a service they are already paid to provide. As part of our next inspections, we will consider whether services are providing this capability in a way that is effective and makes efficient use of public money.

Of all the 44 fire and rescue services we inspected in 2021 and 2022 as part of our second round of inspections, we were satisfied with the MTA capability arrangements in 33. But we issued [areas for improvement](#) to ten services. We don't inspect the Isles of Scilly FRS in this area.

We know that those ten services would respond to an MTA. But we found that the information, instructions and training they had given to their firefighters weren't good enough to make sure they are fully familiar with the role they would be expected to perform. This would affect how well they could support the work carried out by the ambulance service and the police.

Chapter 2: Our inspections

Between February 2021 and August 2022, we carried out our second full cycle of all 44 fire and rescue service (FRS) inspections in England, known as our Round 2 inspections. We have divided all 44 inspections into 3 phases of inspection, known as ‘tranches’.

In December 2021, we published the findings from our 13 Tranche 1 inspections. My predecessor also covered our Tranche 1 inspections in his report [State of Fire and Rescue 2021](#). In July 2022, we published our findings from the [second tranche of 15 service inspections](#) and HM Inspector Roy Wilsher’s [Fire and Rescue Service inspections 2021/22 – Summary of findings from Round 2, Tranche 2 report](#).

Between March and August 2022, we carried out our third and final tranche of 16 service inspections. We have now inspected all 44 services in England. We are publishing the reports on our Tranche 3 inspections alongside this report.

Since we have already published our findings on Tranches 1 and 2, this chapter focuses on the principal findings from Tranche 3. In our commentary, we build on the findings from the first two phases of our second round of inspections to form an overall view.

We use a range of methods to gather information to inform our assessments, including:

- document and data analysis;
- reviews of operational incidents;
- public and FRS staff surveys;
- interviews;
- focus groups; and
- observations of FRS practice.

As part of our FRS inspection programme, we assessed and made graded judgments on three principal areas, known as ‘pillars’. For each FRS, we assessed:

- its effectiveness;
- its efficiency; and
- how well it looks after its people.

The principal questions of our inspection programme are set out below, alongside their corresponding questions:

How *effective* is the fire and rescue service at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?

How well the fire and rescue service understands its current and future risks, works to prevent fires and other risks, protects the public through the regulation of fire safety, and responds to fires and other emergencies, including major and multi-agency incidents.

How *efficient* is the fire and rescue service at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?

How well the fire and rescue service uses its resources to manage risk and secures an affordable way of providing its service, now and in the future.

How well does the fire and rescue service look after its *people*?

How well the fire and rescue service promotes its values and culture, trains its staff and makes sure they have the necessary skills, ensures fairness and diversity for its workforce, and develops leaders.

Our assessments are designed to help the public to see each FRS's performance. As we have now completed two full rounds of inspection, the public will also be able to see how services and the sector are progressing.

Our judgments

In answer to each of these questions, we issued the following grades to services in our Round 2 inspections:

- outstanding
- good
- requires improvement
- inadequate.

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

If the policy, practice or performance exceeds what is expected for good, then consideration will be given to a graded judgment of outstanding.

If there are shortcomings in the policy, practice or performance of the FRS, then consideration will be given to a graded judgment of requires improvement.

If there are serious, critical or systemic failings of policy, practice or performance in the FRS, then consideration will be given to a graded judgment of inadequate.

In our third round of inspections, which will begin in 2023, we will use a fifth grade of 'adequate', between 'good' and 'requires improvement'. But in our second round of inspections, we only have four grades.

The operating context

When considering FRSs' grades, we remember their differences. Geography, demographics and funding models are just a few areas of variation. We don't pitch services against each other. And there are no winners or losers in our inspection findings.

To understand the judgments services receive, we must consider the factors affecting services and the context they operate in when providing a service to their communities. We therefore strive to include relevant background information to reflect these factors in our reports.

Causes of concern and areas for improvement

The context of each service is reflected in the causes of concern and areas for improvement we issue to them.

If our inspection establishes a serious, critical or systemic shortcoming in an FRS's practice, policy or performance, it will be reported as a cause of concern. A cause of concern will always be accompanied by one or more recommendations. We will recommend that the FRS (and sometimes other bodies) make changes to alleviate or eradicate it.

Due to the serious nature of these shortcomings, we will regularly review FRSs' progress (and the progress of other bodies, where appropriate) in alleviating or eradicating a cause of concern. The method and timing of this review will be determined by the precise nature of the cause of concern.

If our inspection establishes an aspect of an FRS's practice, policy or performance that falls short of the expected standard, it will be reported as one or more area(s) for improvement.

Area(s) for improvement won't be accompanied by a recommendation.

The [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England](#) requires services that receive a recommendation to prepare, update and regularly publish an action plan.

We revisit services with causes of concern relating to a potential risk to public safety to assess if they have taken enough action to address the potential risk. We only issued two causes of concern to the Tranche 3 services in our Round 1 inspections. These have now been discharged.

But we have issued 4 new causes of concern to 2 of the 16 services we inspected in Tranche 3. These relate to:

- how well one service uses resources to manage risk;
- how well another service secures an affordable way of managing the risk of fire and other risks now and in the future; and
- training and skills, including workforce planning in both services.

We issued 11 causes of concern in Tranche 1 and 9 in Tranche 2, giving a total of 24 throughout Round 2.

Some of these causes of concern pose a direct risk to public safety. In these instances, we wrote to the services shortly after our inspection to notify them. However, we issued far fewer causes of concern in our third tranche of inspections than in either of the first two tranches.

The grades for the 16 Tranche 3 services are contained in the following pages. We have included the grades for each question we inspect against, as well as a summary of the report findings. These grades provide a benchmark against which we can measure improvement throughout the sector.

Summary of Tranche 3 grades

For effectiveness, we graded one service as outstanding overall, and we didn't grade any as inadequate overall. We graded 12 as good and 3 as requiring improvement.

For efficiency, we graded two services as outstanding overall, and two as inadequate overall. We graded six as good and six as requiring improvement.

For people, we graded one service as inadequate overall, and we didn't grade any as outstanding overall. We graded 11 as good and 4 as requiring improvement.

Our findings

These grades are generally more positive than our findings from both Tranches 1 and 2. The grades show the efforts services have made to improve since our first round of inspections.

We have summarised our findings from every inspection from March to August 2022 below. This summary is divided into our three pillars: effectiveness, efficiency and people.

Effectiveness

Service	Effectiveness	How well does the FRS understand the risk of fire and other emergencies?	How effective is the FRS at preventing fires and other risks?	How effective is the FRS at protecting the public through the regulation of fire safety?	How effective is the FRS at responding to fires and other emergencies?	How well prepared is the FRS to respond to major and multi-agency incidents?
Avon	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Good
Bedfordshire	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Good
Buckinghamshire	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Good
Cambridgeshire	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Cheshire	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Cleveland	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Cornwall	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good

Service	Effectiveness	How well does the FRS understand the risk of fire and other emergencies?	How effective is the FRS at preventing fires and other risks?	How effective is the FRS at protecting the public through the regulation of fire safety?	How effective is the FRS at responding to fires and other emergencies?	How well prepared is the FRS to respond to major and multi-agency incidents?
County Durham & Darlington	Good	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Good
Cumbria	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Good
Derbyshire	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Devon & Somerset	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Dorset & Wiltshire	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
East Sussex	Good	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Good
Essex	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Gloucestershire	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement

Service	Effectiveness	How well does the FRS understand the risk of fire and other emergencies?	How effective is the FRS at preventing fires and other risks?	How effective is the FRS at protecting the public through the regulation of fire safety?	How effective is the FRS at responding to fires and other emergencies?	How well prepared is the FRS to respond to major and multi-agency incidents?
Greater Manchester	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement
Hampshire & Isle of Wight	Good	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Good
Hereford & Worcester	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Good
Hertfordshire	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Good	Good
Humberside	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Isles of Scilly	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Not inspected
Kent	Good	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good	Good
Lancashire	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good

Service	Effectiveness	How well does the FRS understand the risk of fire and other emergencies?	How effective is the FRS at preventing fires and other risks?	How effective is the FRS at protecting the public through the regulation of fire safety?	How effective is the FRS at responding to fires and other emergencies?	How well prepared is the FRS to respond to major and multi-agency incidents?
Leicestershire	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Good	Good
Lincolnshire	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Good
London	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Merseyside	Good	Good	Outstanding	Good	Good	Outstanding
Norfolk	Requires improvement	Good	Inadequate	Good	Good	Good
North Yorkshire	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good
Northamptonshire	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Northumberland	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Good

Service	Effectiveness	How well does the FRS understand the risk of fire and other emergencies?	How effective is the FRS at preventing fires and other risks?	How effective is the FRS at protecting the public through the regulation of fire safety?	How effective is the FRS at responding to fires and other emergencies?	How well prepared is the FRS to respond to major and multi-agency incidents?
Nottinghamshire	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Oxfordshire	Good	Good	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Good
Royal Berkshire	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Shropshire	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
South Yorkshire	Requires improvement	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good
Staffordshire	Good	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good
Suffolk	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Good	Good
Surrey	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement

Service	Effectiveness	How well does the FRS understand the risk of fire and other emergencies?	How effective is the FRS at preventing fires and other risks?	How effective is the FRS at protecting the public through the regulation of fire safety?	How effective is the FRS at responding to fires and other emergencies?	How well prepared is the FRS to respond to major and multi-agency incidents?
Tyne & Wear	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Warwickshire	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good
West Midlands	Outstanding	Outstanding	Good	Good	Outstanding	Good
West Sussex	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement
West Yorkshire	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Good

Efficiency

Service	Efficiency	How well does the FRS use resources to manage risk?	How well is the FRS securing an affordable way of managing the risk of fire and other risks now and in the future?
Avon	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good
Bedfordshire	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good
Buckinghamshire	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Cambridgeshire	Good	Good	Requires improvement
Cheshire	Good	Good	Good
Cleveland	Good	Good	Good
Cornwall	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
County Durham & Darlington	Good	Good	Good
Cumbria	Inadequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate

Service	Efficiency	How well does the FRS use resources to manage risk?	How well is the FRS securing an affordable way of managing the risk of fire and other risks now and in the future?
Derbyshire	Good	Good	Good
Devon & Somerset	Good	Good	Requires improvement
Dorset & Wiltshire	Outstanding	Outstanding	Good
East Sussex	Good	Good	Good
Essex	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Gloucestershire	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Greater Manchester	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good
Hampshire & Isle of Wight	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good
Hereford & Worcester	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Hertfordshire	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement

Service	Efficiency	How well does the FRS use resources to manage risk?	How well is the FRS securing an affordable way of managing the risk of fire and other risks now and in the future?
Humberside	Good	Good	Good
Isles of Scilly	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good
Kent	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Lancashire	Good	Good	Good
Leicestershire	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good
Lincolnshire	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good
London	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Merseyside	Outstanding	Outstanding	Good
Norfolk	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
North Yorkshire	Inadequate	Inadequate	Requires improvement

Service	Efficiency	How well does the FRS use resources to manage risk?	How well is the FRS securing an affordable way of managing the risk of fire and other risks now and in the future?
Northamptonshire	Good	Good	Good
Northumberland	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Nottinghamshire	Good	Good	Good
Oxfordshire	Good	Good	Good
Royal Berkshire	Good	Good	Good
Shropshire	Good	Good	Good
South Yorkshire	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good
Staffordshire	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good
Suffolk	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good
Surrey	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good

Service	Efficiency	How well does the FRS use resources to manage risk?	How well is the FRS securing an affordable way of managing the risk of fire and other risks now and in the future?
Tyne & Wear	Good	Good	Good
Warwickshire	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
West Midlands	Good	Good	Good
West Sussex	Good	Good	Good
West Yorkshire	Good	Good	Good

People

Service	People	How well does the FRS promote its values and culture?	How well trained and skilled are FRS staff?	How well does the FRS ensure fairness and diversity?	How well does the FRS develop leadership and capability?
Avon	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Bedfordshire	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Buckinghamshire	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Cambridgeshire	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Cheshire	Good	Good	Good	Good	Requires improvement
Cleveland	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Cornwall	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
County Durham & Darlington	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Cumbria	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Requires improvement	Requires improvement

Service	People	How well does the FRS promote its values and culture?	How well trained and skilled are FRS staff?	How well does the FRS ensure fairness and diversity?	How well does the FRS develop leadership and capability?
Derbyshire	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Devon & Somerset	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Dorset & Wiltshire	Good	Good	Outstanding	Good	Good
East Sussex	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Good
Essex	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Gloucestershire	Inadequate	Inadequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Requires improvement
Greater Manchester	Good	Good	Good	Good	Requires improvement
Hampshire & Isle of Wight	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Hereford & Worcester	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Hertfordshire	Good	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Good

Service	People	How well does the FRS promote its values and culture?	How well trained and skilled are FRS staff?	How well does the FRS ensure fairness and diversity?	How well does the FRS develop leadership and capability?
Humberside	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Isles of Scilly	Good	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Kent	Good	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good
Lancashire	Good	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good
Leicestershire	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Lincolnshire	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
London	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Merseyside	Good	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Good
Norfolk	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
North Yorkshire	Inadequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Requires improvement	Requires improvement

Service	People	How well does the FRS promote its values and culture?	How well trained and skilled are FRS staff?	How well does the FRS ensure fairness and diversity?	How well does the FRS develop leadership and capability?
Northamptonshire	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Northumberland	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Nottinghamshire	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Oxfordshire	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement
Royal Berkshire	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Shropshire	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
South Yorkshire	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Good	Good
Staffordshire	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Good
Suffolk	Good	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Surrey	Requires improvement	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement

Service	People	How well does the FRS promote its values and culture?	How well trained and skilled are FRS staff?	How well does the FRS ensure fairness and diversity?	How well does the FRS develop leadership and capability?
Tyne & Wear	Good	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Warwickshire	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
West Midlands	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
West Sussex	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
West Yorkshire	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good

Effectiveness

How effective are the services at keeping people safe and secure?

In this pillar, we ask five questions:

1. How well does the FRS understand the risk of fire and other emergencies?
2. How effective is the FRS at preventing fire and other risks?
3. How effective is the FRS at protecting the public through the regulation of fire safety?
4. How effective is the FRS at responding to fires and other emergencies?
5. How well-prepared is the FRS to respond to major and multi-agency incidents?

We have outlined our findings below.

Services aren't always directing their activities according to risk

As part of the [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England](#), each fire and rescue authority must produce an integrated risk management plan (IRMP), which is available to the public. An IRMP should show how a service has considered its local risks and how it intends to mitigate these using its protection, prevention and response functions.

We expect to see a clear link between services' IRMPs, strategies and their work on a daily basis. But in Round 2, we haven't been able to establish a clear link between these three aspects in many services.

In the year ending March 2022, we saw a 15 percent increase in fire-related fatalities since the previous year. Many services could strengthen how they understand local risk, detail this in their IRMPs and use their resources to mitigate fire risks.

Kent FRS has been innovative in developing a process called 'Response Assessment Visits – Intelligence' to improve the way it gathers and communicates risk information with those who need it. Firefighters can visit premises and upload risk information on portable devices that are carried on fire engines (companion devices). They can make immediate referrals for building safety matters, risk intelligence and safeguarding and vulnerability matters. Information is efficiently managed and shared throughout the organisation by a central risk information team.

We found services to be inconsistent in their approaches to identifying, assessing and mitigating risks in their IRMPs. There needs to be greater consistency throughout England in this respect to address and reduce the risks of fire, particularly for those most vulnerable in our communities.

While there is variation in how services identify and mitigate risk, services are generally directing their resources to the right places. Of the 16 Tranche 3 services, 13 services' IRMPs clearly show how they intend to use their prevention, protection and response resources to mitigate or reduce the risks faced by the communities they serve.

In Round 2, we found overall that 18 services could improve their risk management by holding more meaningful consultations with the public when creating and adjusting their IRMPs. We have therefore seen little evidence of changes being made to IRMPs as a result of public engagement. Public engagement is part of services' public duties to explain to the public how they intend to mitigate risk.

Royal Berkshire FRS has consulted with communities, its own staff, the six local authorities, third-sector organisations and other emergency services to understand local risks and explain how it intends to mitigate them. In its consultations, the service provides the public with information and a range of options it can choose from. It has also enabled the service to have constructive conversations with the public about the decision to close a station. The service has also collated the data from all its public consultations and uses this to inform decision-making.

The National Fire Chiefs Council's (NFCC's) community risk programme will give services a set of standardised tools to help them consistently identify, assess and mitigate community risks. This includes an outline of how services can carry out meaningful consultations with their communities. The products developed so far through this programme are available on the [NFCC website](#).

We continue to see general improvements in fire protection

When services carry out protection work, they should comply with the provisions established in the [Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005](#), which is concerned with the safety of premises in relation to fire risk. This includes working with businesses to educate and support them in connection with the risks of fire in their buildings. If necessary, they use enforcement powers to require that premises are made compliant with fire safety legislation.

The NFCC has issued interim guidance on how services should build a risk-based inspection programme, ahead of more detailed guidance that we hope to see in 2023.

In the past, many services have neglected the functions of fire protection and prevention in comparison to response. The findings from our first round of inspections reflected this, showing that most services needed to improve their work on fire protection and risk planning.

In our Tranche 1 and Tranche 2 inspections, we were encouraged to find that many services had prioritised this area. This finding was reflected and detailed in our 2021 [State of Fire and Rescue](#) and [Fire and Rescue Service inspections 2021/22 – Round 2, Tranche 2](#) reports.

This positive trend has continued into our Tranche 3 inspection findings. Of the 16 services we inspected in Tranche 3:

- 12 have good-quality risk-based fire inspection processes;
- all work well with partners such as building control and safety advisory groups; and
- 12 carry out audits to a high standard.

This shows that services are improving the way they prioritise fire protection activities. We hope they can see the economic benefits of this proactive work to prevent fires from occurring, rather than just reacting through their response functions.

However, protection has always been a specialist area. This is leading to difficulties in some services. The NFCC has issued guidance on how services should structure their building risk review programmes and classify risk. But we continued to find that some services' protection strategies aren't always clearly linked to the risk identified in their IRMPs. And some don't have robust risk-based inspection programmes that identify what their highest risks are and how they should focus their audit activities.

In many services, the approach to identifying the highest-risk premises in their areas isn't sophisticated enough. This means those services can't always target audit activity effectively. As a result, they need to do more to improve protection. Although many services have improved since our Round 1 inspections, progress is too slow.

Hertfordshire FRS makes good use of opportunities to engage with others about its protection work. The service has strong links and engages well with regulatory partners and local businesses. It promotes and contributes to a 'better business for all' model as part of the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership. This has led to a charter between Hertfordshire regulatory teams and businesses enabling them to provide regulatory services in a more efficient way and promote business growth. The service recently consulted with businesses in the partnership before successfully carrying out a trial to reduce the number of unwanted fire signals that it attends. It contributes to improving local business productivity with guidance and advice.

Services have more fire safety inspection staff, but they are struggling to recruit and retain them

Some of the successes we have seen in fire protection have been a result of government investment in this area. This funding needs to be sustained so services and the public can feel the long-term benefits.

One of the reasons the sector is generally doing well in this area is because of increased numbers of competent fire safety inspection staff. They have the necessary knowledge and skills to carry out this work. This means many services are improving their capabilities to carry out fire safety audits at a higher risk level.

Of the 16 Tranche 3 services, half have increased their competent protection staff, therefore increasing their capability to carry out high-risk fire safety audits. But four Tranche 3 services have had no change and four have decreased their protection staff numbers.

Despite the increases in many services, not all services have enough fire safety inspectors to meet local risk or the need to inspect the premises in their areas at the greatest risk of fire. Although more people are training to become fire safety inspection staff, it will take time for them to be fully trained. We found many services struggled to recruit and retain these members of staff. This is due to high demand and because the private sector often offers higher pay.

Reducing fire risks in high-rise residential buildings

Services throughout England continue to keep up to date with their building risk review work, which stems from a government programme. This means services are better at understanding and reducing fire risks in high-rise residential buildings as they are inspecting and reviewing those at least 18 metres or 7 storeys high.

The NFCC's Fire Protection Board aims to bring about a more standardised approach to fire protection throughout services. This approach should help services monitor the fire safety measures taken by staff responsible for reducing fire risk in high-rise residential buildings. Interim guidance on this subject from the NFCC's Protection Policy and Reform Unit suggests what services should offer to different risk groups.

Learning from protection activity

Some services aren't always carrying out meaningful quality assurance or evaluation of their protection activities. This work should inform future practice. We also found this problem when inspecting services' prevention and response functions.

Services aren't generally collecting data to make sure they are providing equality of access to the fire protection work they offer the public. They are required to do this (for all the services they offer) under the [Equality Act 2010](#).

National guidance to support services' evaluation of all their functions may help. The NFCC's Community Risk Programme has brought together a working group to consider this matter, but it is in its early stages. Services' general lack of evaluation and learning is a pressing problem that needs to be addressed.

Fire prevention needs to be a higher priority

Fire prevention work focuses on the people most at risk from fire. Preventing incidents in the first place is the best and most cost-effective outcome. Services carry out a range of prevention activities, such as [safe and well visits](#) in people's homes, and they educate the public on matters relating to road, water and fire safety.

Overall in Round 2, we found that many services haven't made sure their fire prevention strategies are linked to the risks established in their IRMPs. This means they sometimes carry out this work in isolation and not according to risk. It also means they aren't making sure the necessary resources, plans and leadership structures are in place to reduce the risk of fire for the people who are most vulnerable to it.

When carrying out prevention visits, we continued to find services are using a blended approach of in-person and virtual activities. In 2020/21, 36 percent of all prevention visits were virtual. In 2021/22, this has decreased to 6 percent of visits. This shows that services are mainly returning to in-person prevention visits, but keeping a mixed approach. This appears to be working well as it allows them to carry out more [home fire safety checks](#) and safe and well visits.

At least 22 services have already started using the NFCC's [online home fire safety check](#) tool, which is available free of charge to services in England. It is designed to be a self-assessment of fire risk for people at low or medium risk from fire. It supports the work of virtual and in-person home fire safety visits, serving as "a product available to households who may not reach the threshold for a physical visit, or to be used when and where physical visits are restricted or not possible".

Dorset and Wiltshire FRS has collaborated with Scotia Gas Network and Wales & West Utilities. This has enabled the service to secure 25,000 carbon monoxide detectors and 2,500 Wi-Fi carbon monoxide detectors over the next five years. In addition, the service has worked effectively with road safety partners who sponsor the service's road safety activities.

Services have a legislative duty under the [Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#) to promote fire safety, and the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England requires services to identify those most at risk from fire.

However, we have continued to find in Tranche 3 that some services aren't always using a risk-based approach to clearly identify those most at risk. This means they aren't always offering the right interventions or education to those who need them most.

Services now have detailed [guidance from the NFCC](#) on how they should classify risk. The guidance also suggests interventions that services should offer to people in different risk groups. We expect services will consider this guidance and use a more

person-centred approach. As they do this, we hope to see a more sophisticated approach to identifying and working with those most at risk from fire.

In the first two tranches of inspection, we found that some services relied too heavily on referrals from partners such as health and social care providers and charities that work with vulnerable people. Relying on partner organisations isn't always a bad thing. But we do expect to see services using a blended approach, identifying those most at risk from fire through both their own work and working with partners.

The data from 2021/22 shows that services throughout England are slightly improving the way they target their prevention work and relying less on referrals. Some 30 services are conducting more prevention visits through their own targeting, rather than as a result of agency referrals or requests from the public. We found this to be the case in 11 Tranche 3 services.

Learning from prevention activity

We found that some services didn't always meaningfully evaluate their prevention activities to inform their future work. Evaluation is generally lacking at both service and national levels.

Services continue to generally respond well to incidents

There has been an increase since last year in the total number of incidents attended by fire and rescue services in England. In the year ending June 2022, they attended 584,881 incidents, compared with 529,167 in the previous year.

We have also seen changes in the types of incidents they attended. In the year ending June 2022, there has been a 3 percent increase in fires attended and a 19 percent increase in non-fire incidents, compared to the previous year. Since 2017, we had been seeing a decline in non-fire incidents. Most notably, in the year ending June 2022, there was a 22 percent increase in collaborating incidents compared with the previous year. These incidents are where services have worked with others, such as police or ambulance services.

Suffolk FRS makes effective use of QR codes. It assigns every fire engine a QR code linked to relevant documents (operational assurance safe persons reports and operational monitoring forms) on SharePoint. By scanning the code, staff can get instant access to record and review lessons learned from operational incidents, training and exercises.

As we found in our earlier inspections, Tranche 3 services are generally responding well to both routine and major incidents. Although we found that they needed to improve in certain respects.

Some services aren't always meeting the availability or response standards they have set for themselves

In the year ending June 2022, the average response time to primary fires throughout England improved by 13 seconds, to 8 minutes and 52 seconds in comparison to the previous year. However, some Tranche 3 services are struggling to maintain a high level of availability among their on-call staff. This is a long-standing problem, which affects services throughout the sector. Several national working groups have focused on this problem, but no sustainable solutions have been put into place.

National response standards were removed following the [Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#), so services set their own. The broad range of standards services have put in place throughout England can vary widely. It means the public doesn't clearly understand what they can expect from their local services. And despite setting their own standards, services aren't always meeting them. Of the 37 services that have specific response standards, only 16 are meeting all of them, and 13 services aren't achieving any of their response standards. Response standards should be risk-based using the same methodology and measured consistently.

Services can learn more from incidents

Most services could do more to learn from their response work, in the same way that they can learn from their protection and prevention activities. They don't always have adequate debriefing systems in place to learn from incidents. These systems would help them adjust policies, plans and training. Despite incident numbers staying fairly stable over the past year, they have declined generally over the past few decades. Services should gather and share learning from incidents and use it to adjust planning assumptions.

There is long-established guidance on carrying out incident debriefs using various methods. There are two platforms that are used to learn from emergencies and share learning widely. The joint operational learning platform is used by all emergency responder organisations, and the national operational learning platform is used by all fire and rescue services in the United Kingdom. National operational learning is widely used and valued by services. But we still aren't seeing enough systems in place that allow sufficient evaluation and learning from incidents, and services are using national operational learning and the joint operational learning platform inconsistently. Among those services that do have systems in place, some aren't even following their own policies.

In our Tranche 3 staff survey, 74 percent of firefighters who responded felt that their service listened to their feedback about operational incidents. On-call firefighters generally felt positive about this (78.1 percent), as did 71.8 percent of wholetime firefighters. Additionally, 77 percent of firefighters who responded our survey reported that they were confident that their service takes action as a result of learning from

operational incidents. At 83.2 percent, on-call firefighters felt the most positive about this, compared to 73.6 percent of wholetime firefighters.

Services aren't always up to date with their arrangements to respond to marauding terrorist attacks

Between our first and second rounds of inspection, the Joint Operational Procedure memorandum between fire, police and ambulance services was updated. It is now explicit that a fire and rescue service's role at a marauding terrorist attack (MTA) incident is to help the ambulance service with the difficult task of prioritising how they triage casualties. As a result, firefighters need to work in all zones of an incident. This is in addition to specialist teams that have additional ballistic protection.

Some services, including one Tranche 3 service, haven't given their firefighters the necessary information, instructions or training on this change. Although we only issued 1 area for improvement in this tranche, we are troubled that we have raised several concerns in 13 services over our second full round of inspections. Two services, which weren't part of our Tranche 3 inspections, will be equipping all their firefighters with ballistic protection and training to carry out this role.

We considered the findings from the Manchester Arena and Grenfell Tower inquiries when we reviewed our methodology for our third round of inspections. This will include reviewing services' MTA capabilities and Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP) awareness. Services apply JESIP arrangements when responding to an MTA. In order to understand how well these arrangements are working, we would need to be commissioned to work with others (such as Care Quality Commission) to assess the multiagency response in more detail.

Efficiency

How efficient are the services at keeping people safe and secure?

In this pillar, we ask two questions:

1. How well does the FRS use its resources to manage risk?
2. How well is the FRS securing an affordable way of managing the risk of fire and other risks, now and in the future?

We have outlined our findings below.

Some Tranche 3 services have become less efficient

In our first two tranches of inspection, we didn't issue any inadequate grades or causes of concern in respect of efficiency. But efficiency is unfortunately the area in which Tranche 3 services' grades have deteriorated the most. Six services received lower efficiency grades than they did in our first round of inspections. And two services received inadequate grades and causes of concern in this respect.

For one of these two services, a lack of pre-planning has meant the transition towards a collaborative arrangement with a local police force and the police fire and crime commissioner hasn't been as smooth as we would have expected. The anticipated efficiencies haven't been achieved either.

The other service received a cause of concern and an inadequate grade mainly in relation to its financial planning. While these serious problems relate to just 2 of the 16 services in Tranche 3, they are significant enough to warrant a mention.

Despite problems in some Tranche 3 services, others have shown innovative or promising practice in how they achieve value for money. We have issued outstanding pillar grades to two services.

Dorset and Wiltshire FRS has developed a comprehensive value-for-money dashboard, which is aligned to the strategic priorities. It outlines:

- cashable savings (money that can be reinvested);
- non-cashable savings (doing more with the same resources);
- cost avoidance savings (avoiding future costs); and
- savings to the wider public (saving to its partners).

Kent FRS is innovative with its procurement arrangements. We found that the service is innovative with its deep understanding and use of procurement arrangements, underpinned by strong leadership. It has a detailed and well-presented commercial and procurement strategy for the 2021-2025 period, which is aligned to its community risk management plan (known as its 'customer safety plan'). The strategy gives direction for procurement and commercial matters. This includes access to market intelligence for supporting business cases and decision-making. The service takes a category management approach to purchasing (grouping related products) to improve supplier performance, reduce risk and promote innovation and continuous improvement.

Most services have a sound understanding of future financial difficulties

As in our first two tranches of inspection, almost all Tranche 3 services have a sound understanding of what financial challenges they are likely to face. They have generally made realistic assumptions with budgets and considered different financial planning scenarios and potential risks.

Many services have made plans for responding to events that may affect their budgets. For example, services have set aside contingency funds to cover increases in costs that are greater than those forecast, such as high inflation for fuel and energy. Some 26 services have written to me expressing concerns that financial pressure could affect their effectiveness and efficiency.

Some services anticipate that they will face budget shortfalls. They have identified where they can make savings to address this deficit. But not all services have a fully developed savings plan. All services should make sure they establish what savings they need to make and have plans in place to achieve them.

One service's precarious financial situation could prevent it from making decisions to improve its efficiency in the future. For example, it may not be able to reinvest in frontline services.

We have issued a cause of concern and an inadequate grade for efficiency to another service, largely because it didn't have any financial plans in place after the current year. At the time of our inspection, local government reorganisation was taking place and the service was in an unprecedented situation regarding the certainty of its future governance arrangements. These unusual circumstances affected how the service could plan for the future. It also meant it couldn't be confident about its future assets and liabilities, and how it would provide its support functions.

Kent FRS is clear about what it wants to achieve and has a thorough understanding of risk. Its objectives are clearly explained in its strategies and are fully aligned with its customer safety plan. Its plans are built on sound planning assumptions and meet financial requirements. It understands the likely financial challenges it will face in future. The service also has a plan for using reserves efficiently and sustainably.

Many services have capacity problems

We have previously reported that many services have capacity problems in some areas of their operations. Four of the 16 Tranche 3 services didn't have enough competent fire protection staff. And three of these didn't have enough fire protection staff to carry out fire safety audits or other protection work. While these services do have a sufficient number of recruits to carry out this work, they aren't trained yet. It will take time for the service to train them and for them to become fully qualified. A fourth service has enough qualified protection staff to meet the requirements of its risk-based audit programme, but it isn't meeting its targets.

As covered in the [chapter on effectiveness](#), some services have reported difficulties in recruiting, developing and retaining competent protection staff. This is partly due to the high demand for their skills in the private sector. Services will also need to support the new building safety regulator with protection work related to the highest-risk residential buildings in England. As a result, they will need to recruit more technical staff. This means recruitment and retention problems may become more acute in future.

One Tranche 3 service doesn't always have the minimum number of fire engines it needs. Nor does it always have enough staff with the skills and capabilities needed. Another service doesn't have enough staff to crew the number of fire engines it says it needs available to maintain current levels of fire cover.

Three other Tranche 3 services rely too much on overtime to have enough firefighters to respond to incidents. All three services have a substantial number of vacancies for response staff. One of these services has plans in place to fill these vacancies. Another one of these services has a high number of members of staff in training, and it has to use more short-term contracts as a result.

Five services need to consider whether they have the right capacity and capability to achieve further change. This includes one service, in one of the most expensive areas of England to live in, which faces challenges in attracting staff who have the right skills.

Some services need to better allocate their resources according to risk

As we found in our first two tranches of inspection, some services in Tranche 3 couldn't show that they were appropriately allocating resources to risks. This problem was most pronounced in Tranche 3: we issued 6 requires improvement grades and 2 inadequate grades throughout the 16 services.

Therefore, half of the Tranche 3 services need to better align how they resource their prevention, protection and response functions to the risks outlined in their IRMPs. One service didn't effectively manage its resources throughout its functions, meaning it wasn't meeting its performance targets. Another two services allocated resources mainly on the basis of their previous funding allocations.

Five services hadn't allocated resources to their prevention work in a way that was consistent with the risks and priorities in their IRMPs. This included three services that have backlogs of home fire safety visits, which may have been avoided if it had better allocated its resources.

As at 31 March 2022, services told us they had a backlog of 20,040 prevention visits. This is less than what they had the previous year (29,648) and shows that work has been done to reduce the impact of a reduction in visits during COVID-19 restrictions. Some 61 percent of all prevention visits are targeted toward older (over 65) or disabled persons. Only 2 percent of visits throughout England are carried out by partner agencies such as health and social care providers.

Fire prevention work mitigates the risk of fire for those who are most vulnerable to it. Services therefore need to improve how they allocate resources to reduce these risks.

Funding and governance arrangements continue to hinder some services

In our previous *State of Fire and Rescue* reports and in our report [Fire and rescue service inspections 2021/22 – Summary of findings from Round 2, Tranche 2](#), we have covered the inconsistency of funding arrangements for services throughout England. The arrangements causing these differences include one-year funding settlements and county council arrangements. Short-term funding settlements continue to make medium and longer-term planning difficult. To be as efficient and effective as possible, services need to know how much money they will receive every year.

In their letters to me, some 29 chief fire officers said that the current funding arrangements were an urgent area for reform. Nine of these officers said that the fire funding formula should be reviewed so that services would receive funding that is more proportionate to their needs.

Some chief fire officers can make operational decisions more easily than others because of their governance arrangements. Eight services said that operational independence remains a pressing area for reform.

Fire and rescue authorities (FRAs) are restricted by how much they can increase council tax. The eight lowest-charging FRAs that receive direct funding from the Government received council tax precept flexibility for 2022/23, which includes four services in Tranche 3. FRAs in these areas have been able to increase council tax by up to £5 a year for band D properties. However, because governance and financial arrangements vary by service, this increase hasn't necessarily helped those services most in financial need.

Published in December 2022, the provisional local government finance settlement proposes that all FRAs that receive direct funding from the Government will receive precept flexibility for the 2023/24 financial year. It also proposes that the Revenue Support Grant from the Government will also increase in line with the consumer price index. This will help services as they face challenging financial circumstances.

Most services have scope to improve their productivity

Most Tranche 3 services have scope to improve their productivity. This includes services improving their performance management arrangements, using firefighters for more prevention and protection work, and making more efficient use of technology.

Some services' arrangements for managing performance clearly link how they use resources to their strategic priorities. For example, Royal Berkshire FRS realised the need to focus more prevention resources on the west of the county due to a backlog of safe and well visits following the pandemic. Cleveland Fire Brigade established there was a problem with deliberate fire-setting in the local area and has allocated resources to help tackle this problem.

However, we found that some services weren't managing performance well enough. For example, some services don't use station plans to direct firefighters' work or make sure staff are productive. One service carried out limited performance management of the specialist prevention and protection teams, which meant it couldn't adequately assess whether they were mitigating the risks in the service's risk management plan. Another service didn't use its system for managing performance consistently; some managers told us they didn't have time to use or assess the information as often as they should.

Many services use their wholetime and on-call staff well to carry out prevention activities. These activities include:

- giving advice on avoiding slips, trips and falls;
- giving advice on social welfare;
- making sure buildings are fitted with working smoke alarms;
- giving health advice;
- referring people for health screening and specialist support;
- identifying potential fire risks; and

- taking action to reduce fire risks.

In 39 services, wholetime staff are carrying out at least 4 of the above activities.

Kent FRS uses its capacity to respond jointly to life-threatening emergency incidents with the ambulance service. Of all the service's calls, 55.9 percent (10,337 of 18,629) are for non-fire incidents. In England, the average proportion of calls to non-fire incidents is 33 percent. The service told us it responds to more than 30 percent of total calls with the ambulance service. Using joint response means the service can attend to certain types of incidents more effectively.

Firefighters spend significantly less time at incidents compared to the police and ambulance service. Our 2022 public perceptions survey shows that some members of the public (38 percent of respondents) think that fire and rescue services should be carrying out medical responses when appropriate.

If services responded to more medical emergencies, they would provide extra support to an already overstretched ambulance service. They could use their capacity and fire engines more productively. This would be of enormous benefit to the public.

It is clear that services want to support their communities, as demonstrated during the pandemic when they provided support to health organisations. In their letters, 23 chief fire officers said there needed to be greater clarification on the role of firefighters and the fire and rescue service, and some thought that they should and could do more.

Some services are making more efficient use of technology. Cleveland Fire Brigade has a new digital platform that is designed to improve how it shares information throughout the brigade. And Dorset and Wiltshire FRS has digitalised most of its activities. For example, staff use a tablet to complete records of safe and well visits.

But some services continue to use paper-based systems, which are inefficient. And some services have inefficient IT systems. For example, in one Tranche 3 service, we found staff recording the same prevention, protection or response information twice in different systems. We also found that staff were carrying out manual audits to monitor staff overtime.

National productivity targets

As part of their request for funding during the 2021 spending review, the sector was committed to a productivity target by the NFCC and the Local Government Association. This target involves using an extra 3 percent of national wholetime firefighter capacity to carry out additional prevention and protection work.

Some services will be able to direct more than an extra 3 percent of wholetime firefighter capacity to prevention and protection work, but other services will provide less. Each service should be able to understand its own spare wholetime firefighter capacity when calculating its contribution.

Of the 13 Tranche 3 services we asked, 9 hadn't yet confirmed the contribution they will make towards the national productivity target. Some of these services were actively assessing how they can contribute. Other services are awaiting further guidance from the NFCC before committing to any specific targets.

Any increase in a service's activity needs to be targeted at local risk and aligned to the activities established in its IRMP. Cleveland Fire Brigade had decided on a targeted contribution that was based on spare wholetime firefighter capacity and local risk. The brigade had already achieved an 8 percent increase in time dedicated to prevention work and a 1 percent increase in fire protection work by carrying out a thorough analysis of wholetime firefighter productivity and capacity.

People

How well do the services look after their people?

In this pillar, we ask four questions:

1. How well does the FRS promote its values and culture?
2. How well-trained and skilled are the FRS staff?
3. How well does the FRS ensure fairness and diversity?
4. How well does the FRS develop leadership and capability?

We have outlined our findings below.

Most services have effective workforce planning arrangements in place but have to navigate difficult circumstances

We have issued a cause of concern in relation to workforce planning to one service in this tranche. This means that areas such as safety-critical training, succession planning, absence and work-time management don't support this service's current and future IRMP.

However, ten services in Tranche 3 do have effective workforce planning arrangements. This has previously been an area of concern. For example, Dorset and Wiltshire FRS has strong workforce planning for all roles. It prioritises workforce diversity and long-term and succession planning. It also reviews its approach to firefighter recruitment, improved retention of on-call firefighters, agility regarding future finance, and leadership development and progression.

There are, however, still some challenges facing the sector. Despite having good workforce planning in place, some services in close proximity to London are finding it difficult to recruit staff promptly to fill current skills gaps. This is a result of external factors, including people leaving unexpectedly following changes to the pension scheme, as well as the cost-of-living crisis and competitive external recruitment opportunities.

Most services prioritise training and skills

As we found in our earlier phases of inspection, most services in this tranche prioritise effectively training their staff in risk-critical skills. But this wasn't the case in one service in this tranche, which received a cause of concern in this area.

Encouragingly, we found services in this tranche also prioritised training in softer skills, such as management skills, health and safety, equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) or safeguarding. Staff in 14 services have good access to learning and development opportunities.

In Leicestershire FRS, retained firefighters have access to tablets, which they can take home to complete training. Staff also have access to a mentor or coach and to online learning resources and external learning providers. This is important as staff can develop in a well-rounded way, enhancing their soft skills in addition to their operational skills.

Some services need to get better at promoting values and positive professional cultures

While we have seen some services improve how they promote values and culture since our first round of inspections, others need to do more. We have issued inadequate or requires improvement grades to 17 services in relation to values and culture.

In our Round 2 staff survey, 94 percent of respondents said they are aware of their service's statement of values. However, only 67 percent of those respondents said they think senior leaders consistently model and maintain service values. What is more, only 52 percent of respondents thought their service was extremely or very effective at providing a positive culture that reflects the service's values.

In one Tranche 1 service and in four Tranche 2 services, we were so troubled by our findings relating to values and culture we issued three new causes of concern. We also sustained two pre-existing ones.

While we haven't issued any causes of concern about values and culture in Tranche 3, we were worried by what we found in two services. In these services, we found instances of poor behaviour from staff, including the senior leadership team, with some senior leaders failing to role model positive behaviours. Two other services have improved their approach to values, but this hasn't yet translated into a positive culture throughout those services. There are still too many cases of poor behaviour among some members of staff and some senior leaders.

Nevertheless, in Tranche 3 we generally found an improvement. In 11 services, we found well-defined values and positive cultures, with senior leadership teams showing behaviours that reflected services' values. We also found that senior leaders were visible in these services. Three services have improved their grades in this area. We also found several examples of innovative or promising practice.

In Tranche 1, we also found there had been an improvement in the way most services promoted values and a positive professional culture. Generally, we found that staff behaved consistently with their services' values and demonstrated respect for one another.

We previously recommended that the sector would benefit from a code of ethics. In May 2021, the NFCC, the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners and the Local Government Association established the [Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services](#). It was encouraging to find most services in Tranches 1 and 2 had

prioritised improving the way they promote values, and some were starting to consider how to integrate the code of ethics into their values and other policies.

All services in Tranche 3 are taking steps to implement the code of ethics, and approximately half have already fully implemented it. We expect to see further progress on this in our third round of inspections.

Royal Berkshire FRS has a culture that promotes positive behaviours and values. We are encouraged by the cultural improvements the service has made since our previous inspection in 2019. The service now has well-defined values that are understood by staff. Staff talked positively about the service's approach to values and the introduction of the behavioural competency framework. The main staff communications, including the intranet, staff magazine and manager information sheet, are based on the service values. The service sent the new behavioural competency framework and employee code of conduct to every employee. We saw behaviours that reflected the service's values at all levels of the service.

In Kent FRS the national *Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services* has been added to support the positive culture. The new code of ethics has been incorporated into the service's 'code of ethical conduct' which has been signed by all staff, and a 'Senior Code' which members of the senior leadership team have signed up to. A set of behavioural expectations are laid out in a 'Customer Promise' and 'Promise to Each Other'. The cohesion was apparent during our inspection and staff gave positive accounts such as people being respectful of each other and feeling looked after by the service.

Some groups of staff are more likely to experience bullying and harassment

Of the 11,486 staff survey respondents throughout England, 13 percent (1,450) reported experiencing bullying and harassment in the past 12 months. And 17 percent (1,920) have experienced discrimination. Of the Tranche 3 respondents, 12 percent reported being bullied or harassed and 16 percent reported being discriminated against.

Respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds felt more bullied or harassed in the past 12 months than White respondents. Of the respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds, 19 percent said they had been bullied or harassed, compared to 12 percent of White respondents. Of those who had experienced bullying or harassment, respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds were less likely to report it than White respondents. Of the respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds, 62 percent didn't report it, compared to 41 percent of White respondents.

Similarly, those that self-reported as disabled, neurodiverse or from the LGBTQ+ community were more likely to state that they had experienced bullying or harassment in the past 12 months.

Female and male respondents were equally likely to report bullying or harassment in the survey. However, of the 347 female respondents who reported bullying or harassment, 27 percent (93) believed gender was a factor, whereas of the 922 male respondents 2 percent (21) believed gender was a factor.

Many staff who didn't report it said this was because they believed nothing would be done. Services need to make sure they understand why some staff believe this.

Three Tranche 3 services reported a rise in the number of grievances. This may be because staff feel more confident about raising problems, but services can't provide evidence to show this. When services see a rise in the number of grievances, they should do more to understand why this is happening and make sure they track any trends.

Services should do more to improve equality, diversity and inclusion

As we found when we inspected the Tranche 1 and 2 services, some services in this tranche need to do more to promote and improve their EDI. However, unlike in the first two tranches, we haven't needed to issue any causes of concern about EDI in this tranche.

Every service throughout England can significantly improve its diversity. But services shouldn't just focus on improving their recruitment of diverse staff members. They should also make sure they are retaining staff from all walks of life by improving the inclusivity of their environments and cultures. At a very basic level, this includes encouraging staff to report discrimination, and then services should act on it.

Our public perceptions survey found diversity and inclusivity of a service were more prominent barriers to considering a career in fire and rescue for respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds compared to White respondents. This means that services need to promote EDI meaningfully.

Home Office research and analysis on [*Pathways and barriers to leadership in fire and rescue services*](#), published on 24 November 2022 and based on research carried out in 2020, found:

“Many (predominantly female) staff consider the workplace a very male-dominant, macho environment with some hostility towards women's place in the service. There were also a couple of reports of hostile comments towards the ethnicity of some staff; some participants, however, mentioned that the culture in their service had improved in recent years with the recruitment of new staff.”

Kent FRS has introduced a neurodiversity passport to reduce the burden on individuals who need reasonable adjustments. The service applies reasonable adjustments to all pre-planned learning and assessment processes using a neurodiversity passport. This means staff can access support without the need for the individual to make multiple requests. Staff feel more included now because of the adaptations the service has made.

In our Round 2 staff survey, we asked staff throughout England about their experiences in relation to discrimination. We found:

Of those survey respondents who had experienced discrimination in the past 12 months, more than half of the wholetime, on-call and support staff didn't report it. Support staff and other staff were slightly more likely than others to report it, but they generally did so informally.

Respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds felt more discriminated against in the past 12 months than White respondents. Of the respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds, 20 percent had experienced discrimination, compared to 16 percent of White respondents.

Of those who had experienced discrimination in the past 12 months, respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds were less likely to report it than White respondents. Of the respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds, 62 percent didn't report it, compared to 56 percent of White respondents.

Those that self-reported as disabled, neurodiverse or from the LGBTQ+ community were more likely to report that they had experienced discrimination in the last 12 months.

Proportionally, female respondents to the staff survey were slightly less likely to report experiencing discrimination than males. However, of the 437 females (14 percent of female respondents) that experienced discrimination, 41 percent (178) said gender was a factor. Of the 1,262 males (17 percent of male respondents), 16 percent (208) said gender was a factor.

Only 19 of 108 respondents to our Round 2 local representative survey said they were completely involved in the equality impact assessment processes. We found 50 said they were somewhat involved, and 39 either said they weren't involved at all with the equality impact assessments or answered that they didn't know.

While 13 services are completing equality impact assessments, their quality varies. By not involving their staff with the equality impact of their processes, services may exacerbate existing divisions relating to EDI. Staff should understand the effect their work has on those with protected characteristics, both in their communities and at work.

For staff to understand what is expected of them in relation to EDI, they should receive high-quality training. Only 51 of our Round 2 local representative survey respondents said their service sometimes offers EDI training to staff. We found 30 said their service offered it often and 17 said their service offered it rarely. Ten said it is never offered or they don't know how regularly it is offered. Often, the staff in services aren't representative of the communities they serve, so services need to make sure all staff are receiving EDI training.

More equality data is needed to better understand the challenges the sector faces

A lack of equality data in the fire and rescue sector presents a challenge, limiting our understanding of issues nationally as well as services' understanding locally. This might prevent services from identifying and remedying problems. Only 50 respondents to our Round 2 local representative survey said their service collected equality data somewhat well. Additionally, 27 said it is collected completely well and 31 said it isn't collected well at all, or they didn't know how well the service collects equality data.

Where data is available, services don't always use it to make sure staff have the support and provisions they need. While 60 local representative survey respondents thought that their service uses equality data to ensure it has the right support and provisions in place for staff, 26 disagreed and 22 didn't know.

Progression opportunities for staff are unequal

We have previously highlighted in our annual and national reports that progression opportunities aren't equally available for all staff in many fire and rescue services throughout England. This can lead to services failing to recognise and develop talent. It can also reduce services' opportunities to improve diversity in their senior leadership teams.

Many on-call and non-operational staff don't receive the same opportunities to develop and progress as their wholetime operational colleagues. Most female staff and staff from ethnic minority backgrounds work in non-operational roles, so this affects them disproportionately.

It is worrying that only 46 percent of all respondents to our Round 2 staff survey said their service is extremely or very effective at supporting their progression or development. For on-call and control staff, this was 49 percent and 42 percent respectively. Wholetime staff were least positive about this, with 40 percent saying their service is extremely or very effective at supporting their progression and development. This is despite our inspection findings, which show more promotion and progression opportunities are available to wholetime staff than to on-call and non-operational staff.

Only 51 percent of respondents agreed that promotion processes in their service are fair. Sixty-two percent of respondents said that they are given the same opportunities to develop as other staff in their service. Support staff answered the most positively (64 percent), followed by on-call staff (63 percent).

In its research and analysis [*Pathways and barriers to leadership in fire and rescue services*](#), the Home Office found that staff perceived a lack of opportunities for promotion. It found that non-operational staff who participated in the research “felt especially aggrieved by limited opportunities, citing no visible pathway within their specialism”. And it found that on-call staff and non-operational staff “believed they had fewer promotion opportunities compared with wholetime staff”.

It also found that: “Training schemes tend to be available in a higher proportion of FRSs for most managerial roles than non-managerial roles however, supervisory control staff do not appear to have the same opportunities available as the other managerial roles.”

We found that most services had a fair and transparent promotions process, but many staff perceived it as unfair. This is an area that some services have spent considerable time and effort improving. But when the career pathways for staff aren’t effective, combined with poor succession planning, it isn’t surprising that staff in these services don’t think the process is fair.

The Home Office also said that barriers to progression can include:

“Issues related to personal characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, family situation and age. Meanwhile, other wider barriers were linked to organisational cultures, such as issues related to perceived favouritism in leadership chains. These perceived barriers were typically considered to reflect the culture and attitudes within FRSs and leadership chains, and were often seen to impede staff progression.”

The Home Office points to several areas in which FRSs could further focus their attention regarding talent management and progression. These include:

“Providing greater levels of consistency in the delivery of development programmes, which may be fostered through nationally backed programmes to increase the consistency in delivery and access.”

The [*White Paper on Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service*](#) has proposed a college of fire and rescue. We hope that, once established, it will give greater support to services and a more consistent approach to developing staff and nurturing talent.

Some services are engaging with their staff and representative bodies, but others could do more

As in our first two tranches of inspection, we have continued to find that services enjoy good working relationships with local representative bodies, including trade unions. Of the 108 respondents to our Round 2 local representatives survey, 74 said that service leaders listen to and value their opinions and views. This number was similar in Tranche 3 (70 percent).

Five services have made improvements to the way they seek feedback and challenge from their workforce.

Leicestershire FRS has introduced a regular service-wide question-time session with senior leaders. Staff told us it is a two-way conversation. They also told us that senior leaders are now more visible.

But eight services still need to make improvements, as staff in some services are still reporting a reluctance to raise concerns.

Staff health, safety and well-being arrangements are effective in most services

As we found in previous tranches, staff in most services continue to have confidence in their services' well-being and health and safety arrangements. In our Tranche 3 survey, 92 percent of respondents said they were satisfied that their personal safety and welfare are treated seriously at work. At 95 percent, on-call staff answered the most positively, and control staff answered the least positively (88 percent).

We found that all but one service in Tranche 3 had good well-being provisions and this continues to be an area of real strength for the sector. The majority (94 percent) of respondents said their service would offer well-being services after an incident and 93 percent said they can access services to support their mental well-being. But only 52 percent think their service is extremely or very effective at managing sickness absence.

Durham and Darlington FRS has a new breathing apparatus washing facility that has been created in its training centre. The facility removes the products of combustion from the breathing apparatus equipment and is used alongside additional cleaning of firefighting personal protective equipment. This further supports the aim of keeping operational staff safe.

Some services are still monitoring working hours inconsistently. Approximately two thirds of Tranche 3 services don't monitor their staff's secondary employment or dual contracts effectively enough. This means they can't assure themselves that staff aren't working excessive hours. As at 31 March 2021, 5,514 wholtime firefighters had secondary employment outside fire and rescue services. There were more than 3,000

wholetime firefighters who were on dual contracts within their service, and 459 with a different service.

But we did see some good examples of effective monitoring of hours. South Yorkshire FRS has a system that prevents dual contract staff from booking themselves on duty unless they have a sufficient rest period in between shifts. West Midlands FRS monitors staff who work voluntary additional shifts to make sure they have breaks and don't work too many hours.

Performance management processes need to be more strategic

Most Tranche 3 services have formal performance management processes in place. In our Tranche 3 survey, we found 80 percent of respondents have had a performance development review in the past 12 months. The proportion was similar throughout all service roles.

However, we are still sometimes finding that performance management processes aren't clearly linked to services' IRMPs, or to staff progression and other important conversations such as health and well-being. Of the respondents to our Tranche 3 survey, 16 percent said they have never had a conversation about health and well-being with their manager. Additionally, 7 percent have never had a conversation about their learning and development, and 5 percent have never had a conversation about their performance with their managers.

Dorset and Wiltshire FRS has introduced a 'recognition button' which allows staff to recognise any good work that has taken place. We spoke to many staff who appreciated the recognition they either received or provided to colleagues.

Conclusion

The dedication, expertise and work of fire and rescue services provide invaluable sources of security to our communities. I extend my deep gratitude to everyone in the sector for all they do to keep our communities safe.

However, the sector urgently needs improvement and reform. Undoubtedly our inspections play an important part in that, but much more needs to be done. In particular, the Government should make sure it implements the White Paper proposals and our recommendations as soon as reasonably practicable.

In the face of industrial action, services must keep their communities safe. Many services have told us that the threat of industrial action can tangibly affect how well they can respond to incidents. This is a serious matter, which requires careful attention; the risk to the public is too great. Unions and employers should prioritise the safety of their communities above all else.

One of our outstanding recommendations stresses the need for a review of how effectively pay and conditions are determined. The current circumstances present just one reason for the need for urgent reform.

Annex A: Our national recommendations

Recommendation 1

As soon as is practicable the Home Office, National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and Local Government Association, in consultation with the Fire Standards Board and Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, should establish a programme of work that will result in consistency in the four priority areas (1. identifying and determining risk as part of the [integrated risk management plan \(IRMP\)](#) process; 2. identifying and measuring emergency response standards and approaches; 3. defining what are high-risk premises for the purposes of fire protection; and 4. setting an expectation for how frequently high-risk premises, and parts of those premises, should be audited for compliance with fire safety legislation).

There should be completion or significant progress in the four priority areas specified above, towards a common set of definitions and standards for fire and rescue services to adopt and apply as soon as reasonably practicable, for each of the four priority areas.

Completion date

The Community Risk programme has been running for some years. December 2020 was the original completion date; it was then revised to December 2021. The current completion date is July 2023, by which time I hope this recommendation will be fully complete.

Status

These projects are still in progress and the specific requirements of this recommendation must be met in their entirety for it to be considered complete. Although progress has been made, this recommendation is taking longer than anticipated to complete. I hope the majority of work will be complete by mid-2023, as planned. However, there is still work to be done on measuring response standards.

Risk-based intervention programmes have resource implications. They are currently being supported by Government through the FRS Protection Uplift Grant. It is essential this funding is maintained to make sure that improvements to protection functions and practices can continue to be implemented.

Identifying and determining risk as part of the integrated risk management plan process

The Home Office has funded the NFCC's Community Risk Programme, which is designed to develop a single method for services to use so they identify and assess risk in the same way. The programme has already published a suite of products to provide support to services so they can use this method successfully.

To support the project, the NFCC has provided guidance on the following topics on its website:

- defining scope;
- data and business intelligence;
- stakeholder and public engagement; and
- community risk management plan equality impact assessment.

The NFCC also continues to make progress through its projects and products, including:

- the [Definition of Risk](#) project, which has provided services with a [domestic dwelling fire methodology](#);
- new Definition of Risk methodologies for road traffic collisions and other building fires, which are on track to be completed by March 2023 and will mean methodologies are now provided for the most prevalent risk incidents services attend – an evaluation framework for FRS interventions is on track to be provided to services by mid-2023;
- the *Competencies for Risk Management Framework*, completed in December 2022; and
- its Autumn 2022 publication [Economic and Social Value of the UK FRS Project](#), which will issue supporting guidance and a digital tool to help services to use the accompanying methodology by March 2023.

By mid-2023, the NFCC plans to introduce several products, which I hope will assist with the completion of this part of the recommendation.

Identifying and measuring emergency response standards and approaches

The Fire Standards Board has now published [14 Fire Standards](#), which include:

- operational preparedness;
- operational learning;
- operational competence;
- prevention; and
- emergency response driving.

In February 2021, the Fire Standards Board published its standards for operational competence, operational learning and operational preparedness. In October 2022, an [Operational Response implementation guide](#) and other guidance documents were published in support of the standards.

Work to measure incident response standards will be considered as part of the NFCC operational planning process. I hope the Government will give this area the focus and resources it needs to improve standardisation in this area.

Defining what are high-risk premises for the purposes of fire protection and setting an expectation for how frequently high-risk premises, and parts of those premises, should be audited for compliance with fire safety legislation

In addition to its continued work on high-risk premises, the NFCC has continued to co-ordinate the building risk review programme. This programme provides the most up-to-date information on a subset of buildings that will be in the jurisdiction of the new building safety regulator.

In October 2021, the NFCC Protection Policy Reform Unit published its document [Preliminary Guidance Technical Note: Higher Risk Occupancies \(PDF\)](#) for national FRSs. The note was informed by national and local learning. It establishes a range of risk-influencing factors and categories of higher-risk occupancies and describes how they may feature among the relative priorities set out in risk-based inspection programmes and other protection activity.

Following publication of the preliminary guidance, the NFCC has continued to work with FRSs to support its implementation. The preliminary guidance note will be updated as the work on the community risk programme develops within the Definition of Risk Project, which is carried out jointly with the protection policy and reform unit. This work is seeking to determine whether there is enough national data available to recommend a single best practice methodology for ascertaining and determining risk within occupancies other than dwellings. This is nearing completion. In December 2022, a report was consulted on that will inform the finalisation of the Higher Risk Occupancies guidance.

Recommendation 2

As part of the next spending review, the Home Office, in consultation with the fire and rescue sector, should address the deficit in the fire sector's national capacity and capability to support change.

Completion date

Complete

Status

Complete

Recommendation 3

The Home Office, in consultation with the fire and rescue sector, should review and with precision determine the roles of: (a) fire and rescue services; and (b) those who work in them.

Status

The Home Office consulted on this matter in the White Paper on fire reform that was published on 18 May 2022. On 26 July 2022, the consultation closed. We are awaiting a response to this consultation.

By 1 March 2023, we expect the Home Office to have published a response to the FRS White Paper consultation. This should include detailed plans as to how it will complete this recommendation. Once published, I will review any progress made and will consider issuing a revised completion date.

Recommendation 4

The Home Office, the Local Government Association, the National Fire Chiefs Council and trade unions should consider whether the current pay negotiation machinery requires fundamental reform. If so, this should include the need for an independent pay review body and the future of the 'Grey Book'.

Status

The Home Office consulted on this matter in the White Paper on fire reform that was published on 18 May 2022. On 26 July 2022, the consultation closed. We are awaiting a response to this consultation.

By 1 March 2023, we expect the Home Office to have published a response to the FRS White Paper consultation. This should include detailed plans as to how it will complete this recommendation. Once published, I will review any progress made and will consider issuing a revised completion date.

Recommendation 5

The Home Office should consider the case for legislating to give chief fire officers operational independence. In the meantime, it should issue clear guidance, possibly through an amendment to the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, on the demarcation between those responsible for governance and operational decision-making by the chief fire officer.

Status

The Home Office consulted on this matter in the White Paper on fire reform that was published on 18 May 2022. On 26 July 2022, the consultation closed. We are awaiting a response to this consultation.

By 1 March 2023, we expect the Home Office to have published a response to the FRS White Paper consultation. This should include detailed plans as to how it will complete this recommendation. Once published, I will review any progress made and will consider issuing a revised completion date.

Recommendation 6

The NFCC, with the Local Government Association, should produce a code of ethics for fire and rescue services. The code should be adopted by every service in England and considered part of each employee's progression and annual performance appraisal.

Completion date

Complete

Status

Complete

Annex B: Our reports – December 2021 to January 2023

The reports we publish fulfil our statutory duty to inspect and report on the effectiveness and efficiency of fire and rescue authorities in England. Every report has been published in full on our website and given to the relevant fire and rescue service.

Tranche 1 – published on 15 December 2021

- [Avon](#)
- [Bedfordshire](#)
- [Buckinghamshire](#)
- [Cambridgeshire](#)
- [Cheshire](#)
- [Cornwall](#)
- [Greater Manchester](#)
- [Hereford and Worcester](#)
- [Lincolnshire](#)
- [Merseyside](#)
- [Northumberland](#)
- [Surrey](#)
- [Warwickshire](#) (published on 12 January 2022)

Tranche 2 – published on 27 July 2022

- [Devon and Somerset](#)
- [Essex](#)
- [Gloucestershire](#)
- [Humberside](#)
- [Lancashire](#)
- [London](#)
- [Norfolk](#)
- [Northamptonshire](#)
- [Nottinghamshire](#)
- [Oxfordshire](#)
- [Shropshire](#)
- [Staffordshire](#)
- [Tyne and Wear](#)
- [West Sussex](#)
- [West Yorkshire](#)

Tranche 3 – published on 20 January 2023

- [Cleveland](#)
- [County Durham and Darlington](#)
- [Cumbria](#)
- [Derbyshire](#)
- [Dorset and Wiltshire](#)
- [East Sussex](#)
- [Hampshire and Isle of Wight](#)
- [Hertfordshire](#)
- [Isles of Scilly](#)
- [Kent](#)
- [Leicestershire](#)
- [North Yorkshire](#)
- [Royal Berkshire](#)
- [South Yorkshire](#)
- [Suffolk](#)
- [West Midlands](#)

Annex C: Our revisit letters

When we identify a cause of concern, we require the service to produce an action plan to resolve it. We monitor progress against this plan. As for causes of concern relating to potential risks to public safety, we usually carry out a revisit – and further revisits if necessary – to assess progress against each plan. Following each revisit, the regional HM inspector provides written feedback to the chief fire officer. Each letter is published in full on our website. We sent and published revisit letters in respect of:

- [Buckinghamshire FRS](#);
- [Gloucestershire FRS](#);
- [Greater Manchester FRS](#);
- [Hereford and Worcester FRS](#);
- Lincolnshire FRS ([first revisit](#) and [second revisit](#));
- [Norfolk FRS](#);
- [Northumberland FRS](#); and
- Warwickshire FRS ([progress](#), [first revisit](#) and [second revisit](#)).

Annex D: About us



[Andy Cooke QPM DL](#)
**His Majesty's Chief Inspector of
Fire and Rescue Services**



[Roy Wilsher OBE QFSM](#)
**His Majesty's Inspector of
Fire and Rescue Services**



[Matt Parr CB](#)
**His Majesty's Inspector of
Fire and Rescue Services**



[Nicola Faulconbridge](#)
**Assistant Inspector of
Constabulary**



[Wendy Williams CBE](#)
**His Majesty's Inspector of
Fire and Rescue Services**

[Biographies for each of the Inspectors](#)
and [information about who we inspect](#)
are available on our website.

Finances and workforce

Our finances

We are funded mainly by the Home Office. We also receive funding for inspections commissioned by others (such as the National Crime Agency).

We spend 89 percent of our funding on our workforce, with the rest spent on ICT, surveys, accommodation and other expenses.

Expenditure breakdown 2021/22

Staffing costs including associates



Travel and subsistence



IT



Office expenses and other costs



Surveys and inspection services



Accommodation

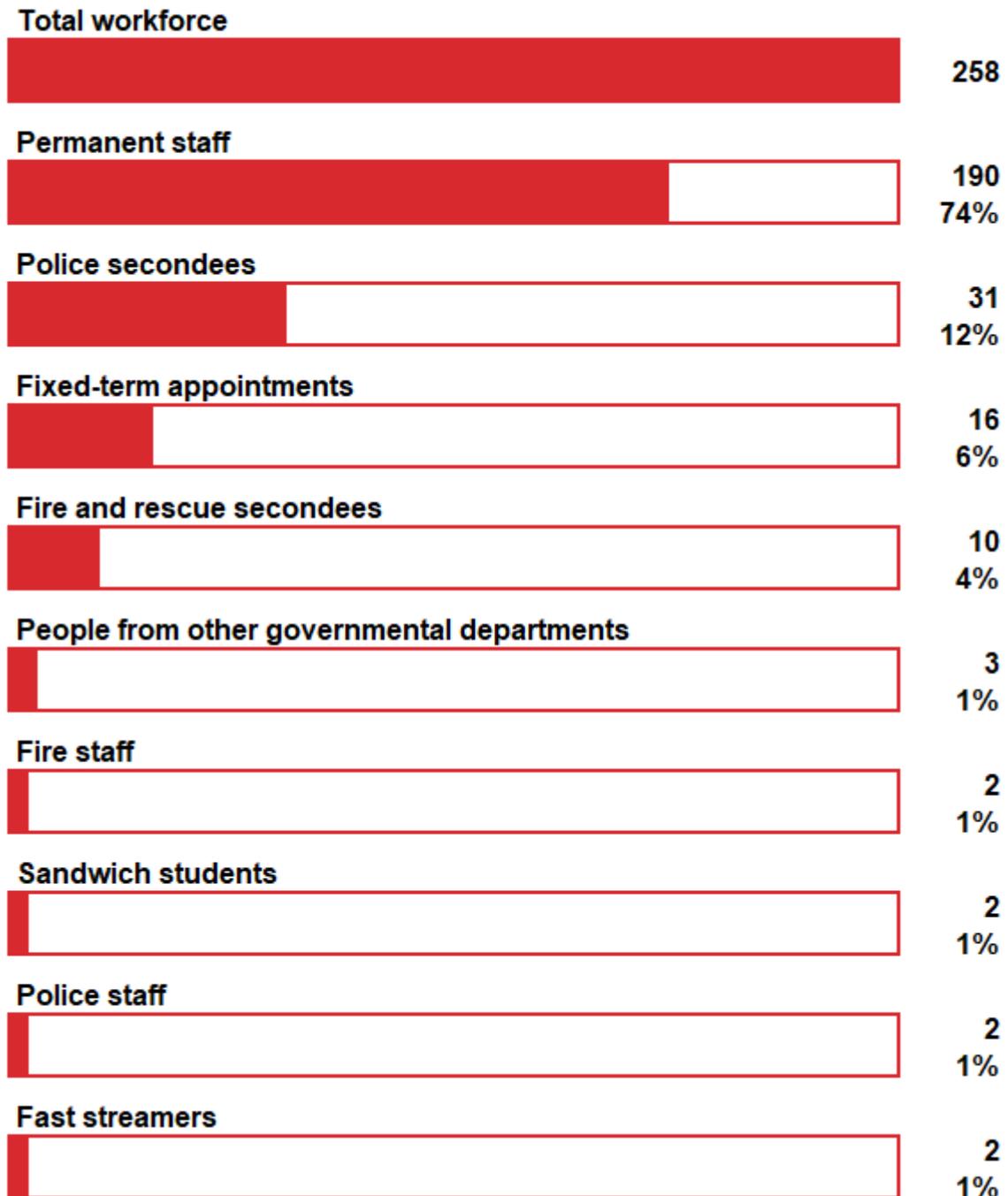


Note: numbers may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding

Our workforce

Our workforce comprises the inspectors of constabulary, civil servants, seconded police officers and staff, and secondees from fire and rescue services. We also have a register of associates who provide specialist resource and skills.

Staffing breakdown 2021/22



Note: numbers may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding

ISBN 978-1-5286-3827-2 | E02837660
© HMICFRS 2023
www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs