

Fire & Rescue Service

Effectiveness, efficiency and people 2018/19

An inspection of Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service



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About this inspection

This is the first time that HMICFRS has inspected fire and rescue services across England. Our focus is on the service they provide to the public, and the way they use the resources available. The inspection assesses how effectively and efficiently Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service prevents, protects the public against and responds to fires and other emergencies. We also assess how well it looks after the people who work for the service.

In carrying out our inspections of all 45 fire and rescue services in England, we answer three main questions:

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

This report sets out our inspection findings. After taking all the evidence into account, we apply a graded judgment for each of the three questions.

What inspection judgments mean

Our categories of graded judgment are:

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

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

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

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

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

Service in numbers



Public perceptions

Suffolk

England

Perceived effectiveness of service
Public perceptions survey (June/July 2018)

88%

86%



Response

Suffolk

England

Incidents attended per 1,000 population
12 months to 31 December 2018

7.0

10.4

Home fire risk checks carried out by FRS per 1,000 population
12 months to 31 March 2018

1.7

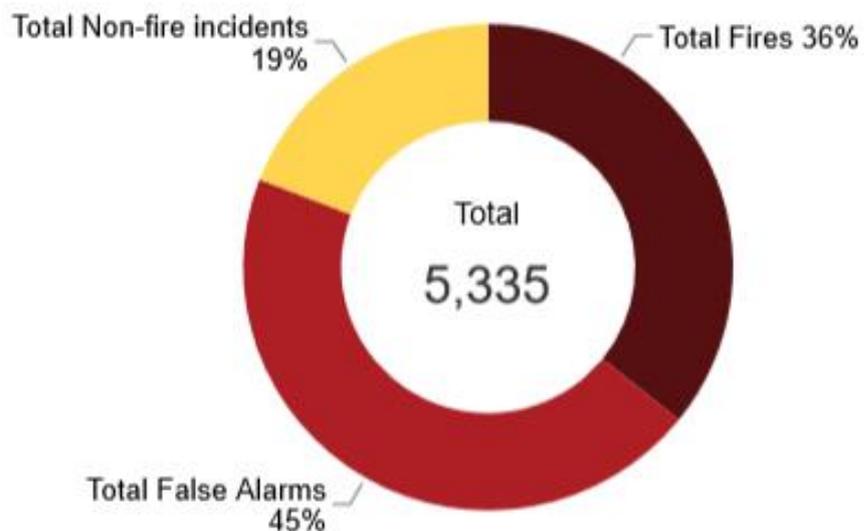
10.4

Fire safety audits per 100 known premises
12 months to 31 March 2018

0.6

3.0

Incidents attended in the 12 months to 31 December 2018





Cost

Suffolk

England

Firefighter cost per person per year
12 months to 31 March 2018

£17.73

£22.38



Workforce

Suffolk

England

Number of firefighters per 1,000 population
As at 31 March 2018

0.7

0.6

Five-year change in workforce
As at 31 March 2013 compared with 31 March 2018

-10%

-14%

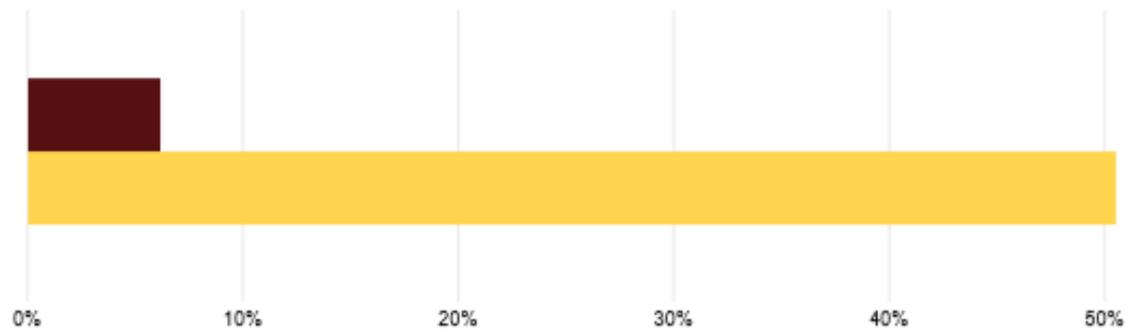
Percentage of wholetime firefighters
As at 31 March 2018

37%

70%

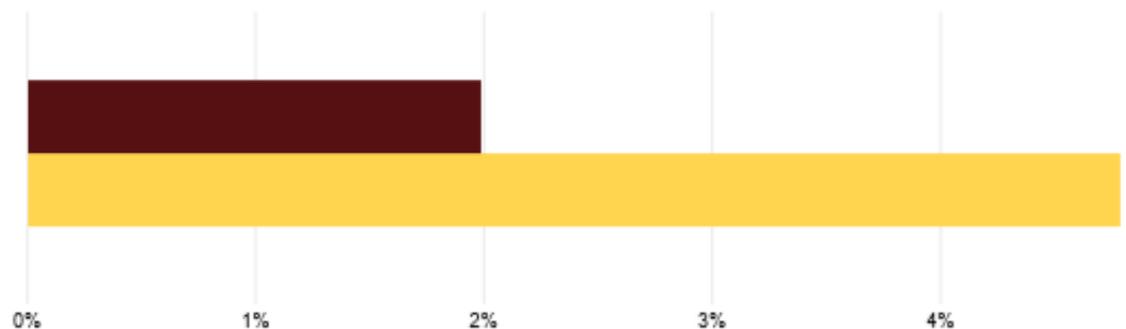
Percentage of female firefighters as at 31 March 2018

● Female firefighters ● Female residential population



Percentage of black, Asian and minority ethnic firefighters as at 31 March 2018

● BAME Firefighters ● BAME residential population



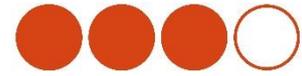
Please refer to annex A for full details on data used.

Overview

 Effectiveness	 Good
Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies	 Good
Preventing fires and other risks	 Requires improvement
Protecting the public through fire regulation	 Requires improvement
Responding to fires and other emergencies	 Good
Responding to national risks	 Good
 Efficiency	 Good
Making best use of resources	 Good
Making the fire and rescue service affordable now and in the future	 Good

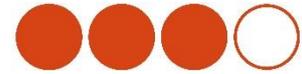


People



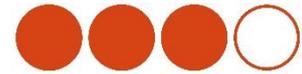
Good

Promoting the right values and culture



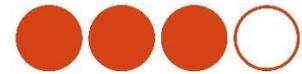
Good

Getting the right people with the right skills



Good

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity



Good

Managing performance and developing leaders



Requires improvement

Overall summary of inspection findings

We are pleased with the performance of Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) in keeping people safe and secure. But it needs to improve in some areas to give a consistently good service.

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service is good at providing an effective service to the public. It is good at:

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

But the service requires improvement to the way it:

- prevents fires and other risks; and
- protects the public through fire regulation.

The service is good in the efficiency of its services. We found it to be good at making the best use of resources. And it is good at making its services affordable now and in future.

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service is good at looking after its people. It is good at:

- promoting the right values and culture;
- getting the right people with the right skills; and
- ensuring fairness and promoting diversity.

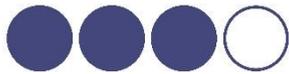
But it requires improvement at managing performance and developing leaders.

Overall, we commend Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service for its performance. This provides a good foundation for improvement in the year ahead.

Effectiveness



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



Good

Summary

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

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service is good at understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies in its area. It learns about risk using various methods. It works well with the public. It uses what it finds out to make an effective [integrated risk management plan](#) (IRMP). It effectively collects information about high-risk sites. But it needs to make sure that all operational staff are familiar with their local risk sites.

The service requires improvement to the way it prevents fires and other risks. It makes good use of volunteers and other organisations to promote community safety. But its operational staff do limited work in this area.

It also requires improvement to how it protects the public through fire regulation. The service approaches enforcement in a supportive way. It works well with enforcement partners. But it doesn't make full use of its enforcement powers.

Suffolk FRS is good in the way it responds to fires and other emergencies. It has a range of emergency response vehicles and trained firefighters to provide a flexible response to emergencies. It uses dynamic [mobilisation](#) to send the quickest resources to incidents. But the service isn't always achieving its response targets. The service uses its live incident mapping to effectively communicate with the public about incidents. [Fire control](#) staff give fire survival guidance to callers effectively.

The service is good at responding to national risks. During a major incident, staff know how to get national resources and additional resources from neighbouring services. But staff don't have access to up-to-date cross-border risk information. The service does a variety of exercises with other agencies. It is well prepared for terrorist incidents. It should conduct cross-border exercises with all of its neighbours.

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies



Good

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

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure that all operational staff are familiar with their local risk sites.

All fire and rescue services should identify and assess all foreseeable fire and rescue-related risks. They should also prevent and mitigate these risks.

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

Understanding local and community risk

The service has a good understanding of local and community risk. It makes effective use of a wide range of data to produce an accurate and clear risk profile. Most of its data comes from Suffolk Observatory, which provides a comprehensive and up-to-date collection of data from across the county. This includes data on crime and community safety, population, economy and employment, housing, environment, and deprivation. The service uses this data along with its own incident data, as well as data it obtains from other organisations (such as medical oxygen providers and care providers).

The service works closely with Suffolk County Council's knowledge and intelligence hub, and the council's adult social care, building control and housing teams. They all share data and information and carry out joint activity. In this way, they have a common understanding of risk, based on the most up-to-date information available.

The service uses modelling software to make sure that it has the right resources, in the right place. External consultants also help the service to map risk and demand. This ensures that the service can effectively respond to current risk. It can also adapt to respond to emerging future risks.

In April 2019, the service consulted on its new IRMP, which covers the period 2019–2022. It used a variety of ways to consult with the public. These included posting social media and online video messages, advertising in the local press, sending mail shots, and speaking to people at local supermarkets.

According to data given by the service, the video messages had more than 20,000 views; the social media posts generated more than 5,000 online interactions; and the events in retail centres resulted in 800 face-to-face conversations. In total, the service received 284 formal consultation responses. According to data given by the service, this was a reduction in responses from its previous IRMP consultation of 3,000. The service feels that this is because it carried out early consultation on broad proposals this time. It plans to consult further on detailed proposals in the coming months, to allow for implementation of its proposals in early 2020.

In addition to its formal consultations, the service also works well with its local community. This work includes regular contact with groups such as Ipswich & Suffolk Council for Racial Equality, and Ipswich & Suffolk Bangladeshi Community. The service also recruits volunteers from within the community. During our inspection, we saw how a volunteer from the Syrian community had helped to forge links with the service. Previously, this community had been hard to reach.

Having an effective risk management plan

The service's IRMP is developed in line with national guidance.

We were pleased to see how the service's 'golden thread' work (linking daily activity to strategic direction) has raised awareness among staff of how their daily activity contributes to its strategic direction, and how this is directed by the IRMP.

The service uses a five-step approach to its integrated risk management planning:

1. It assesses and understands local risk.
2. It reviews current fire service arrangements for managing risk.
3. It assesses the resources that are available to continue managing risk.
4. It resets arrangements to manage risk, and considers current arrangements and finance.
5. It monitors, audits and reviews the arrangements.

The service uses its clear understanding of local and community risk to produce the Suffolk Strategic Assessment of Risk. The current version covers the period 2018–2021. This document sets out the service's assessment of risk, and its arrangements for managing that risk. It identifies how it will respond to:

- national risks (identified in national risk assessment and register);
- county risks (identified in community risk register); and
- service-level risks.

The IRMP also clearly states how the service will use its people, equipment and resources to complete prevention, protection and response activities. Finally, the service's annual statement of assurance details how it is performing against its IRMP.

Maintaining risk information

The service has a programme of visits to high-risk sites. It visits these sites to make sure that firefighters have access to up-to-date risk information. A central risk information team assesses new and complex buildings. Firefighters carry out revisits and assessments of less complex buildings. Site-specific risk information (SSRI) is collected and then added to a database. Crews showed that they can access this information via [mobile data terminals](#) during an incident. We found SSRI information to be generally up to date and subject to regular review.

The service's system for collecting risk information is robust. But risk-site familiarisation by local crews was inconsistent. Many staff (particularly [on-call](#) staff) told us that they didn't carry out any familiarisation visits or training exercises at these sites. The service should make sure that all operational staff are familiar with their local risk sites.

The service has effective arrangements to collect and share information about local events. Members of fire service staff attend safety advisory groups. For example, during our inspection the service was planning for Latitude Festival, a national music festival held annually in Suffolk. Fire staff are involved in the planning stages of such events and are on site throughout them. They pass information that they receive to operational staff and officers who would attend if an incident occurred.

The service has an effective system for communicating general risk information. It gives this information to firefighters in a range of ways. They include face-to-face handovers between [watches](#), briefings at the start of shifts and drill sessions, and safety alerts and significant information notes. The service also uses handover folders at stations, so that staff who aren't present for a briefing in person have a single point of reference for risk information. Staff also confirmed that all risk information and outcomes from debriefs are available electronically and via a smartphone app.

Preventing fires and other risks



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure it allocates enough resources to target prevention work at people most at risk, and increase the number of home fire safety checks it carries out. It should also ensure that all prevention activities are monitored and quality assured.
- The service should better evaluate its prevention work, so it understands all the benefits more clearly.

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

Prevention strategy

The service effectively sets out its prevention strategy in its community risk management statement 2019–2022. It supports this with an up-to date action plan. The statement sets out a clear framework of how the service will carry out prevention activity, as well as protection and response, to “make communities safer” and support its aim of “living safely and ageing well in Suffolk”. The strategy is in line with national requirements.

The service aims to target activity to those most at risk. It has identified the following groups as being at the greatest risk from fire in the home:

- single adult households;
- lone parent households with dependent children;
- people with physical disabilities;
- people with mental health conditions;
- people who smoke or drink heavily; and
- people who face significant deprivation.

Operational wholetime staff carry out safer homes visits ([home fire safety checks](#)). These include fire safety activities such as identifying and reducing fire risks and fitting fire alarms. Specialist prevention staff and volunteers carry out enhanced safer home visits. These are known as [safe and well visits](#). These visits also include welfare-related activities, such as advising on health prevention, social welfare, home security, crime reduction, and how to avoid slips, trips and falls.

The service has a risk-based approach to safer homes visit requests. It only carries out visits to those who are at higher risk. It sends fire safety advice to those who aren't assessed as high risk and signposts them to other sources of information such as its website. The service makes effective use of referrals from the Suffolk Information Partnership (SIP), targeting the work of prevention teams to those most at risk. The service also makes referrals back to partners, for them to offer additional support.

In the year to 31 March 2018, the service carried out 1,310 safer homes visits. This equates to 1.7 visits per 1,000 population. This is much lower than the England rate of 10.4. It is a reduction from 2,987 over the same time period in 2017.

In the year to 31 March 2018, the service carried out 61.8 percent of its checks at households occupied by an elderly person, and 12.1 percent at households occupied by a person declaring a disability. This compares to the England rate of 54.1 percent and 24.7 percent respectively. As noted above, the service has identified people with disabilities as being among those who are at greatest risk from fire in the home. The service should make sure that it is targeting its safer homes visits (and other prevention activity) to all of its identified high-risk groups.

Staff told us that they don't have any specific targets for completion of prevention activity. Managers said that a lack of accurate and reliable information and data made it difficult for them to quality assure or performance manage prevention work.

The service hasn't done much evaluating of its prevention activity, although an externally commissioned evaluation of the #ItCanWait road safety initiative has been completed. This is detailed below. As a result, the service doesn't fully understand the benefits of its prevention activity.

Promoting community safety

The service is very successful at working with children and young people. It does this through initiatives such as Emergency Services Cadets and Fire Stars, as well as the work of school liaison officers. It runs a joint cadet scheme with Suffolk Constabulary. Fire Stars is a firefighting-related health, fitness and mentoring scheme.

School liaison officers are firefighters who work in schools in their spare time. They carry out prevention work, offer one-to-one mentoring, and are positive uniformed role models. Currently, three secondary schools fund school liaison officers. The service is looking to expand this offering to other schools.

The service also runs a fire-setter intervention scheme with 12 trained fire-setter counsellors. They work with children who have "an unhealthy fascination with fire" to try to tackle fire-setting behaviour.

Safeguarding is a clear priority for the service. Staff have been trained accordingly. Those who we interviewed showed a good understanding of how to identify vulnerability, and how to make safeguarding referrals. We saw evidence of these referrals being made. Staff consider the folders that are carried on all fire engines to be a good source of guidance and information in relation to vulnerability and safeguarding.

Operational staff told us that the prevention work they are involved in is limited to home fire risk checks, school visits and attending community events such as fetes.

Recently, the service issued local risk profiles to stations. It did this to help the stations target their prevention work. Also, each watch now has a prevention lead to help co-ordinate more prevention activity on stations. These initiatives aren't yet routine, and so they don't yet give evidence of any benefits or improvement. We look forward to seeing how this work progresses.

According to data given by the service, it has 20 active volunteers. They work with specialist prevention staff to support the service in carrying out safer home visits and prevention campaign events. By recruiting volunteers from diverse backgrounds, the service is able to better target the community's diverse needs.

The service offers a variety of accessibility tools on its website to make its information more accessible. These include translation services, bigger font sizes and colour filters.

In addition to working with other agencies through SIP, the service also works with a variety of other organisations and charities to help prevent fires and keep people safe. These include Lofty Heights (a not-for-profit social enterprise), The Royal British Legion Poppy Calls, and REACT (Reactive Emergency Assessment Community Team). The area's Rotary clubs support the service's prevention work.

Road safety

Partners spoke highly of the role that the service plays as part of the Suffolk RoadSafe Partnership Board with Suffolk Constabulary, Suffolk County Council, the East of England Ambulance Service, Highways England, and the police and crime commissioner. However, the operational crews we interviewed told us that they never get involved in road safety initiatives.

The aim of the RoadSafe Partnership is to make Suffolk's roads safer for all, and to reduce the number of people who are killed or seriously injured. It has identified its main groups of concern as motorcyclists; young drivers under the age of 24; and pedestrians (especially school-age children in deprived areas).

Road safety initiatives include the FireBike project, [Biker Down](#) training course and Braking Point. Braking Point is a project aimed at pre-drivers. It encourages good behaviour that is linked to the so-called 'Fatal Four' (inappropriate speed; using a mobile phone while driving; not wearing a seat belt; and drink driving).

The service has also developed its own road safety initiative, called #ItCanWait. As with the Braking Point project, it focuses on drivers' mobile phone use. The initiative aims to make young people (aged between 15 to 18 years) aware of the dangers of using a mobile phone while driving.

The service told us that the RoadSafe Partnership reached approximately 2,000 year 11 students in 2017/18. To date, it has offered two sessions of the #ItCanWait initiative and has commissioned an external evaluation before running any further sessions.

Protecting the public through fire regulation



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service should assure itself that its risk-based inspection programme prioritises the highest risks and includes proportionate activity to reduce risk. It should also include appropriate monitoring and evaluation.
- The service should assure itself that its use of enforcement powers prioritises the highest risks and includes proportionate activity to reduce risk.

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

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

Risk-based approach

All fire and rescue services must promote fire safety, which includes fire protection. They should assess fire risks in buildings and, where necessary, require landlords and building owners to comply with fire safety legislation. It is up to each fire and rescue service to decide how many assessments it carries out each year. But each must have a locally determined, risk-based inspection programme (RBIP). And each must have a management strategy for enforcing the regulations.

Suffolk FRS has a protection strategy. This is part of its community risk management statement 2019–2022. It is supported by a risk-based inspection policy, an enforcement policy and an up-to date action plan. These documents set out a clear framework as to how the service will offer its protection activity alongside prevention and response. The strategy and supporting policies are aligned to statutory guidelines such as the [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England](#), so that the service meets its obligations under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. The service uses them to prioritise its activities based on risk.

The number of audits that the service has carried out on known premises has reduced year on year since the year to 31 March 2014 (from 1,150 to 294 over the same time period in 2018). The rate of audits per 100 known premises in the year ending 31 March 2018 was 0.6. This is lower than the England rate of 3.0 over the same time period.

The service saw a reduction in competent dedicated inspectors from 21 as at 31 March 2013 to eight as at 31 March 2017. However, this figure has increased to 15 as at 31 March 2019. Currently, the service allocates only eight inspections to inspectors every month. This number of inspections, along with an increase in staffing, means that the service has some additional capacity to carry out more inspection activity. It has a plan in place to do so.

Recently, the service updated its definition of high-risk premises. As at 1 April 2019, the service defines 'high-risk premises' as "large premises (sleeping) with complex evacuation strategies and/or sleeping unfamiliar". The service uses a premises management system to collate building information (including risk score and risk rating). The system then generates audits by order of risk.

The system's data is inaccurate. These inaccuracies are leading to duplication and the manual allocation of inspections. Therefore, the service can't confirm that the audits it is carrying out are in line with its RBIP. The service is aware of this and has invested in improvements to its premises management system. The new system was undergoing user testing at the time of inspection.

The number of audits where the service deemed the premises to be unsatisfactory has increased to 29 percent in the year to 31 March 2018 but remains below the England average of 32 percent. This may suggest that the service isn't targeting its audit work at the highest-risk premises. The service should make sure that its premises management system is fit for purpose, and that it supports the RBIP in effectively targeting high-risk premises.

The service has set itself a target of auditing all of its high-risk premises over a three-year period. As at 31 March 2019, it has identified 683 high-risk premises. In the year to 31 March 2019, it had audited 218 high-risk premises. If the service continues to carry out a similar number of high-risk audits annually, it is likely that it will nearly reach its target.

The service received 587 building regulation consultations in the year to 31 March 2019. Of these, the service completed 96.3 percent within the required timeframe.

Suffolk FRS has a well-trained and qualified protection team. The service has a memorandum of understanding with Essex Fire and Rescue Service's fire engineering department to assist with complex cases. A member of the protection team is nearing completion of a fire engineering degree, which will allow them to offer this support internally in the future. Operational officers receive training and carry out compliance checks at lower-risk, less complex premises. This helps the service to identify any further areas of non-compliance, and to include them in its programme of audits.

Protection officers are available day and night. They will respond to fire safety concerns that are brought to the service's attention.

Enforcement

The service prefers to take a supportive approach, based on informal action, to seek compliance with fire safety legislation. Data suggests that the level of enforcement that the service takes is low: it has brought just three prosecutions since the year ending 31 March 2011.

In the year to 31 March 2018, the service issued:

- 81 informal notices;
- two enforcement notices (under article 30 of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005);
- nine [prohibition notices](#) (under article 31 of the Order);
- no alterations notices; and
- no prosecutions (under article 32 of the Order).

While we recognise the desire to promote compliance, we still expect services to use their formal enforcement powers where necessary. This applies particularly in cases where there is significant risk to life, or where building managers may be reluctant to work with services to improve building safety. When we interviewed staff during our inspection, some told us that they feel Suffolk FRS doesn't use its enforcement powers effectively.

The service gives regular training to make sure that inspectors' enforcement and prosecution skills are refreshed and remain current.

The service works closely with enforcement partners. These include Suffolk County Council's housing and environmental health departments, Suffolk Trading Standards and Suffolk Constabulary. They carry out joint visits and [enforcement action](#), and share risk information. An example of effective joint action is the service's 'impact days'. Inspecting officers from the service work with housing officers to carry

out joint inspections. They target high-risk sleeping accommodation located above commercial premises. During our inspection, we also saw evidence of the service's inspecting officers attending a police-led, multi-agency operation, in which several [vulnerable people](#) were identified and given support.

Working with others

The service has a call-challenge and non-attendance policy to automatic fire alarms. This is in line with national guidance. In the year ending 31 March 2019, the service received 2,578 unique automatic fire alarms. It didn't attend 881 (34.2 percent) of these. It will, of course, attend if it receives confirmation of a fire.

In addition, the service has a policy to work with those premises that generate the most unwanted fire signals. This is in order to reduce future call-outs. During our inspection, staff weren't applying this policy consistently.

The service uses its website to share information with businesses about fire safety regulations, enforcement and prosecution. The service is also a member of the New Anglia Better Business for All (BBfA) Steering Group, New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership, and New Anglia Growth Hub. These all offer opportunities for the service to talk to and work with local businesses.

The service has a dedicated business engagement officer. Most of their time is taken up with planning and running the impact days, and working with businesses through the service's [primary authority scheme](#). This leaves little time to carry out activities such as business seminars and other direct business engagement.

The chief fire officer is the chair of the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#)'s protection and business safety committee. The service is also a member of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's national trailblazer groups. It is involved in creating the institute's fire safety inspector and fire engineer apprenticeship standards, which are in development.

Responding to fires and other emergencies



Good

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

Managing assets and resources

The service's response strategy is outlined in its Response Statement 2019–2022. The statement sets out to give a proportionate response to the risk identified in the service's IRMP. The service does this by maintaining a range of emergency response vehicles and trained firefighters who can respond to its identified risk.

In the year to 31 December 2018, the service attended 5,335 incidents. This figure has remained relatively stable over the last three years. It equates to 7.0 incidents per 1,000 population. This is lower than the England rate of 10.4 over the same period.

The service has a combined fire control with Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service. This single fire control handles all 999 calls for both services. Its staff are well trained and knowledgeable.

Suffolk FRS uses dynamic mobilising. Its mobilising system identifies the quickest resource available to send to incidents. There is an effective system to update mobilisation times. It uses information about closed roads and other factors affecting response times to make sure that dynamic mobilising is accurate.

In the year to 31 March 2019, the overall on-call fire engine availability was 91.6 percent and the overall wholetime fire engine availability was 100 percent.

The service uses an on-call crewing reserve to support on-call availability. The service has allocated a group of nine wholetime staff to a 42-hour-week day duty shift pattern. This group can be sent to any station within Suffolk during the day (when need is greatest), to keep on-call fire engines available. The service also uses any surplus wholetime staff to supplement the on-call crewing reserve. It makes decisions about where to send staff in line with its pre-planned emergency response plan, and it plans three months in advance. Staff can react to changes daily, moving to different locations throughout the day if required. The service uses its degradation plan not only for exceptional circumstances, but also for day-to-day management of resources.

All new firefighters, both [wholetime](#) and on-call, attend the same training. The service offers training for wholetime firefighters in a single block. On-call firefighters attend the same courses as wholetime firefighters, but they take modules. This form of training offers more flexibility, given that on-call firefighters have other primary employment. The service gives all operational staff ongoing training according to the same training plan. And it gives wholetime firefighters additional training for specialist roles (for example, water rescue and boat training).

Response

The Home Office collects and publishes data on response times by measuring the time between a call being made and the first fire engine arriving at the scene. This offers consistent data across all 45 services. However, services measure their own response times in a range of different ways.

In the year to 31 March 2018, the service had the fourth slowest average response time to [primary fires](#) of all predominately rural services (11 minutes 0 seconds). However, this is an improvement from 11 minutes 30 seconds in the year ending 31 March 2017. The improvement is mainly as a result of a reduction in the average drive time to primary fires.

The service's IRMP contains time-based emergency response standards. The time is calculated from the time of alerting the fire engine. The service aims to respond as follows:

- It aims to have the first fire engine at a primary fire within 11 minutes, for 80 percent of incidents.
- It aims to have the secondary fire engine at a primary fire within 16 minutes, for 80 percent of incidents.

- It aims to have the first fire engine at a road traffic collision within 13 minutes, for 80 percent of incidents.

In the year ending 31 March 2019, the service wasn't achieving these standards. It met them in 66.9 percent, 72.9 percent and 73.3 percent of incidents respectively.

The service is reviewing these response standards as part of the latest IRMP consultation.

The service makes use of a flexible response to incidents. Its normal response is a standard fire engine with a crew of four or five. It also has a light rescue pump based at Wrentham, which can respond with a crew of two. The service uses reduced crewing at on-call stations, enabling the stations to mobilise an engine with a crew of three when necessary. Whenever a reduced crew is mobilised, the service sends additional resources to make sure that it has enough firefighters and commanders, in line with national guidance.

The service has carried out a gap analysis against [national operational guidance](#) (NOG). And it plays a leading regional role in the implementation of NOG across local services. The service has a plan in place to adopt NOG across the region by 2020. During reality testing at stations, firefighters showed good knowledge, understanding and practical application of breathing apparatus procedures in line with NOG.

Command

Staff at fire control allocate resources to incidents. They do this based on pre-determined attendances. During our inspection, fire control staff used their professional judgment to increase or decrease the pre-determined attendance, based on information they received from callers.

Incident commanders at all levels demonstrated the knowledge and understanding to enable them to command fire service assets assertively, effectively and safely. They had working knowledge of NOG and showed effective decision making, using the decision control process.

Incident commanders make effective use of the service's support materials. These include command packs, checklists, analytical risk assessments, safe person report forms, and message and decision logs.

The service has an effective system to make sure that incident commanders at all levels keep their command competence. As well as undergoing regular refresher training, they complete an incident command re-assessment every two years. The service carries out assessments for more senior level 3 and level 4 commanders regionally, at Essex Fire and Rescue Service.

Incident commanders told us they had the support of senior leaders to use [operational discretion](#) and step outside guidance where appropriate, and following a suitable risk assessment. Through its debrief process, the service has an arrangement to review incidents that involve the use of operational discretion.

Keeping the public informed

The service makes good use of live incident mapping on its website to communicate information about incidents to the public. The mapping is automatically populated from the service's mobilising system. Fire control or on-call crewing reserve staff then add updates, using information they receive from crews at an incident. Fire control staff can remove incidents from public view if an incident is deemed to be sensitive or confidential. The service also gives additional information to the public, including safety messages from incidents, through social media. Responding officers give this information 24 hours a day.

The service has a robust referral process. It can immediately refer urgent safeguarding issues that are identified at incidents. Staff showed a good understanding of how to identify vulnerability, and how to make a safeguarding referral. They could give examples of having done this at incidents.

During our inspection, fire control staff effectively communicated fire survival guidance to the public. Staff access this guidance from within the mobilising system. It is in line with national guidance, and tailored to specific premises, based on risk.

Evaluating operational performance

The service has an effective system for carrying out [hot debriefs](#) of small-scale incidents. Crews discuss what has gone well, and any learning, immediately after an incident, usually while still at the scene. Crews then complete a safe person report form or an operational assurance, monitoring and debrief form, and submit it to the operational assurance team. These forms were being completed and submitted. The service monitors the level of completion of these forms. It is seeing improvements in the numbers being submitted.

Larger-scale and more complex incidents are also subject to a more formal debrief. The operational assurance officer decides whether this is needed. The officer has a limited capacity to monitor incidents and arrange debriefs. As a result, it isn't clear whether the officer is identifying all incidents that need a formal debrief. The service should make sure that the operational assurance officer's improvements continue, and that there are systems in place to support them.

The service collates and shares learning from all incidents with staff. It does this through information notes on the service's intranet and a staff smartphone app. There are monthly operational assurance updates. The operational assurance officer completes and circulates incident debrief information notes for notable incidents. Recently, the service has added an operational assurance 'must read' section to its training record system. Staff must record when they have read this debrief information.

During our inspection, there was an example of an incident debrief information note for a silo incident in February 2019.

All learning from incidents (both internally and nationally) is discussed at the service's operational assurance board. The operational assurance manager allocates and tracks any actions that arise from these discussions. As the tracking is done manually, the service can't confirm how many of the actions have been completed and how

many are still outstanding. The service should make sure that all learning from operational incidents is being actioned, so that it leads to operational improvements.

During our inspection, there was an example of the service sharing learning from a high-bay racking warehouse incident through the [national operational learning](#) process.

Responding to national risks



Good

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service is good at responding to national risks. But we found the following areas in which it needs to improve:

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure its operational staff have good access to relevant and up-to-date risk information. This should include cross-border risk information.
- The service should make sure it participates in a programme of cross-border exercises, sharing the learning from these exercises.

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

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

Preparedness

The service has good arrangements to supplement resources in the event of a major incident or other extraordinary need, such as a flood. These include arrangements for the mobilisation of multi-agency resources and national assets. During our inspection, there was evidence of when this mobilising of national assets had been used, most recently in response to a large flood in Suffolk in 2017. The service set up an effective strategic holding area for incoming national resources.

Staff showed a good understanding of what would constitute a major incident. They also showed good understanding of their responsibilities, and how to request additional resources, including national assets, when needed.

The service has well established multi-agency response plans for high-risk premises, including [control of major accident hazards \(COMAH\) sites](#) and a nuclear establishment within the county.

Working with other services

The service has mutual aid arrangements with its neighbouring services to support an effective cross-border operational response. However, there was evidence that cross-border exercises were infrequent. The service should make sure that there is a programme of regular cross-border exercises.

Where a cross-border exercise has taken place, there was effective sharing of learning between services. This resulted in the updating of procedures in both services.

Staff could show how to access cross-border risk information on mobile data terminals. However, the majority of cross-border risk information that we sampled was found to be out of date. The service should work with its neighbouring services to make sure that cross-border risk information is up to date.

The service uses analogue radios, whereas some of its neighbouring services use digital radios. The two systems are incompatible, and this incompatibility hinders joint working. The services are aware of the impact this has on their ability to work together. They switch all radios to analogue as a short-term fix, and are exploring a longer-term solution.

Working with other agencies

The chief fire officer is the current chair of the Suffolk Resilience Forum. Other officers play active roles. This has resulted in effective working with multi-agency partners. It also ensures that the service plays a leading role in the planning and organising of joint training and exercises.

During our inspection, there was evidence of a variety of multi-agency exercises taking place. In the last 12 months, exercises have involved a COMAH site, a shopping complex, and a simulated collision involving a nuclear device. These have been both table-top and physical exercises and covered the emergency and recovery phases of incidents. The service and partners have also tested the setting up and running of strategic and tactical co-ordination groups.

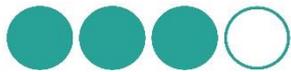
Incident commanders showed good knowledge and understanding of [Joint Emergency Service Interoperability Principles](#).

The service is well prepared to form part of a regional response to a marauding terrorist attack. During our inspection, there was evidence of the service having carried out a regional exercise in 2018 and having trained staff. Fire control staff were well prepared to deal with calls to this type of incident. They could show how they would give 'Run, Hide, Tell' safety advice to callers who reported such incidents.

Efficiency



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



Good

Summary

An efficient fire and rescue service will manage its budget and spend money properly and appropriately. It will align its resources to its risk. It should try to keep costs down without compromising public safety. Future budgets should be based on robust and realistic assumptions. Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service's overall efficiency is good.

Suffolk FRS is good at making best use of its resources. Its financial planning is linked to its [IRMP](#). But it needs to improve how it allocates resources.

Suffolk County Council reviews and challenges the service's plans regularly. Public scrutiny and challenge come from elected members within the council cabinet.

The service uses various working patterns effectively. This means that it can match resource to risk effectively. It manages performance well at a strategic level. But it needs to improve performance management at other levels.

The service collaborates within and outside the fire sector. Its collaborations save costs and improve capacity and resilience. They also strengthen links between the service and the organisations that it works with.

The service's business continuity arrangements are effective.

Suffolk FRS is also good at making its service affordable now and in the future. The service knows about the current financial climate. It understands short-term financial risks and mitigates their effects. But it needs to better understand its medium-term financial challenges.

The service invests in technology that will improve the service it gives to the public. However, it needs to improve its internal computer systems to better support staff to do their jobs.

The council holds the service's [reserves](#). The reserves strategy is sound. It allows the service to access additional funding when needed.

The service has successfully secured external funding from government grants and sponsorship. It uses this funding to support its spending on buildings and prevention activity.

Making best use of resources



Good

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service is good at making best use of resources. But we found the following areas in which it needs to improve:

Areas for improvement

- The service needs to show a clear rationale for the resources allocated between prevention, protection and response activities. This should be linked to risks and priorities set out in its new integrated risk management plan.
- The service should make sure its arrangements for managing performance ensure its workforce use their time in line with the priorities in its integrated risk management plan.

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

How plans support objectives

The service has a medium-term financial plan that is driven by its IRMP.

The service has an incremental approach to budgeting: it bases its annual budget on the previous year's, with minor increases or decreases that are usually based on changes to UK inflation. Because of this approach, the service hasn't shown a clear rationale for its allocation of resources to prevention, protection and response within its annual budget setting. Therefore, the service isn't showing how it is focusing on risk and demand in its financial planning. However, there is no evidence that this approach is adversely affecting the service that Suffolk FRS gives to the public, or its ability to meet its IRMP priorities.

Suffolk County Council monitors and reviews the service's financial planning process. The service's finances and performance are the subject of peer challenge from council officers. Elected members of the county council's cabinet also offer robust public scrutiny and challenge of the service's finances and performance.

The service has an annual budget of £21.5 million. As at 31 March 2018, the service had 43 operational fire engines, located at 35 stations across the county. It has a higher concentration of resources in the eastern coastal area, where it can't rely on the support of neighbouring services. This should ensure that it has enough resources where they are needed.

Productivity and ways of working

The service makes good use of a variety of working patterns to match resources to risk. It has a mix of [wholetime](#), day-crewed and [on-call](#) firefighters. As at 31 March 2018, the service had six mixed fire stations, and 29 on-call fire stations.

The service's on-call crewing reserve is an efficient method for improving on-call availability. By supplementing on-call crewing reserve with surplus wholetime staff, the service is making best use of its operational resources. The service makes sure that on-call crewing reserve staff spend their time productively while they are at the station. It allocates them routine equipment testing, and prevention activities such as [safe and well visits](#), in addition to their own personal development matters. The service is also training these staff in fire safety, so that they can start to carry out compliance checks.

In the year to 31 March 2018, the firefighter cost per head of population was £17.73. This compares to the England rate of £22.38.

As previously mentioned, at the time of our inspection the service had 20 active volunteers. They offer an efficient means of supporting the service's prevention activity.

As at 31 March 2018, the service had 57 full-time equivalent (FTE) support staff. This is a reduction of 27.8 percent when compared to 31 March 2011. As part of the county council, the service draws on support from other departments such as IT, human resources and communications. This is an efficient way for the service to supplement its back-office functions.

The service has an effective project and programme management structure. The structure supports performance management at a strategic level. However, performance management at other levels within the organisation is inconsistent. Staff told us that they are subject to very limited performance targets. For example, they weren't aware of any targets for the completion of safe and well visits. There also wasn't enough management data and information (and nor was the data and information accurate). The service has acknowledged the data issue. It has plans in place to improve its data collection, and to make data more accessible and useable by managers and staff. We have already seen the benefits of this action, with the service able to give more data in response to our requests. The service should make sure that it continues to make progress in this area to improve overall performance management.

Collaboration

The service is exploiting a wide range of opportunities to collaborate within and beyond the fire sector. The most notable of these is the combined [fire control](#) with Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service. This is resulting in ongoing efficiencies of £400,000 per year for each service.

The service shares 16 of its 35 stations with other blue-light partners. All parties have benefited financially from this arrangement. The service receives an income of approximately £200,000 annually to cover additional costs. The service told us that the projected combined savings of this estate sharing was originally £8m over 20 years. These savings were from the disposal of surplus buildings, as well as reduced maintenance, rates and utilities costs. As the collaboration has developed, the projected savings are now £12m over 20 years. Estate sharing has also led to further collaborations, such as multi-partner drones and a joint cadet scheme. Partners told us how beneficial this collaboration has been to all involved.

As part of Suffolk County Council, the service shares a range of back-office functions. And its headquarters are located in the county council's building.

Other collaborations include a special operations team collaboration with Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service, and joint incident command training and assessment with Essex Fire and Rescue Service. These collaborations have improved the service that Suffolk FRS gives to the public.

The service has an effective collaboration governance structure. A sponsors' board oversees this. All collaborations are subject to regular monitoring and evaluation, to make sure that the service is realising anticipated benefits and positive outcomes. During our inspection, there were examples of the service ending collaborations because they hadn't achieved what had been hoped.

Continuity arrangements

The service has robust business continuity arrangements. And it is supported by the county council's community risk management team. The service's plans include actions for when extraordinary events (such as industrial action or mass sickness) impact its ability to give an effective service to the public. It also has plans for incidents such as the temporary closure of the Orwell Bridge.

We saw evidence of regular testing of the plans in relation to information and communications technology (ICT), and the combined fire control. Staff train for, and exercise, the service's [fall-back](#) arrangements on a regular basis. This includes phased and immediate evacuation to a secondary fire control facility. Fire control staff who are involved in the testing record lessons learned from all activations. There was evidence of the service acting on recommendations for improvement. Staff put back-up arrangements in place due to loss of radios during inspection.

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



Good

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service is good at making its services affordable now and in the future. But we found the following areas in which it needs to improve:

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure it has sufficiently robust plans in place which fully consider the medium-term financial challenges beyond 2020 so it can prepare to secure the right level of savings.
- The service needs to ensure it makes the best use of technology to improve its efficiency and effectiveness.

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

Improving value for money

The service has a good understanding of the financial climate in which it currently operates. It understands the financial risks that it is facing in the short term. It is mitigating their effects with the county council's support. For example, the county council is supporting the service to cover the additional costs of fire service pension employers' contributions.

The service has started to consider the implication of funding changes beyond 2020. However, it hasn't yet carried out any detailed planning. The service should make sure that it has plans in place that are robust enough. The plans should fully consider the medium-term financial challenges beyond 2020, so that the service can aim for a balanced budget.

The service has consistently made revenue savings since 2010. Its annual budget has reduced by £2.4m in the past five years. The service told us that its latest savings are £1.3m through to 2020/21. It is forecasting a balanced budget for 2019/20. The service has also made savings to its capital spending. It did this by reducing its fleet, extending the life of its vehicles and investing in smaller vehicles.

The service secures efficiencies by jointly negotiating contracts with other county council departments that are linked to Suffolk County Council's commercial transformation programme. The service is part of the national personal protective equipment procurement project, and it uses national frameworks for vehicle and uniform procurement.

Innovation

The service has made some use of technology to improve efficiency and effectiveness. For example, it has developed and launched a new staff smartphone app to improve communication. Its drone collaboration also supports both firefighter safety and an enhanced response to incidents for the public.

During our inspection, many staff told us about their IT-related frustrations. The service needs to update many of its systems, to make them more efficient and effective. For example, the premises management system doesn't support RBIP. And data capture systems don't give enough accurate management data and information. Staff also told us about incompatibilities and duplications between the internal FireIT system and the county council's systems.

The service knows about these issues. In 2017, it carried out an IT review and prioritised updating its training record system. The update has now been done and is proving to be effective. The premises management system has had a rewrite and will be relaunched later in 2019, after it has been tested.

The service has secured £100,000 additional funding from the county council to continue to improve its IT systems, infrastructure and support. The service should make sure that it progresses its plans so that it makes better use of technology to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

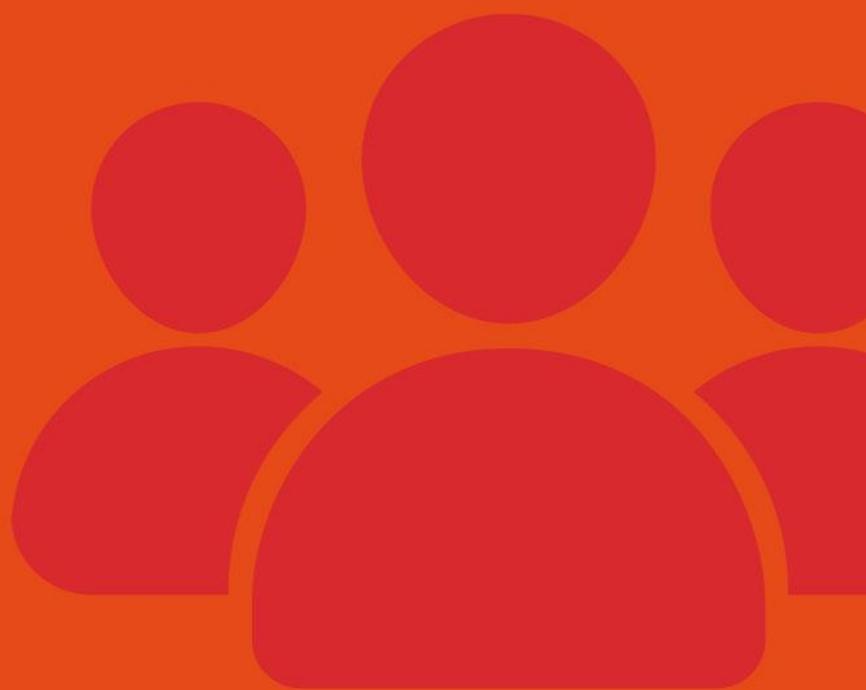
Future investment and working with others

The service has a sound reserves strategy. In the year to March 2018, the service had around £3.9m in earmarked reserves and around £1.5m in general reserves. However, following a restructure to capital and reserve funding in 2019/20, the council now holds reserves as part of a wider Suffolk County Council programme. The council has earmarked some of these reserves for Suffolk FRS. The service can access additional reserves through a bidding process. During our inspection, the service made successful bids for reserves (for example, securing the extra funding for IT mentioned above).

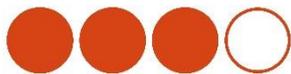
As the result of a successful bid, the service received a £5.4m [fire transformation fund](#) government grant. The service is using this grant for its shared estates capital programme. The service has a long-standing relationship with Rotary clubs. Rotary matches funding for smoke alarm purchases, and sponsors livery on the service's vehicles. The service has also secured funding from three secondary schools for school liaison posts within those schools. It is working to secure the funding of additional posts within other schools.

The service plans to continue (and expand) its estate sharing collaborations. It plans to have four further blue-light stations by 2020. It is a key partner in the One Public Estate programme. And it is looking to further share and consolidate the estate across the wider public sector in Suffolk.

People



How well does the service look after its people?



Good

Summary

A fire and rescue service that looks after its people should be able to provide an effective service to its community. It should offer a range of services to make its communities safer. This will include developing and maintaining a workforce that is professional, resilient, skilled, flexible and diverse. The service's leaders should be positive role models, and this should be reflected in the behaviour of the workforce. Overall, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service is good at looking after its people.

Suffolk FRS is good at promoting its values and culture. It offers a variety of wellbeing support to staff. But its current arrangements to support staff following a traumatic incident aren't effective. The service is addressing this.

The service shares health and safety information effectively with staff.

It is working to reinforce its values and make them common practice among the workforce.

The service doesn't carry out fitness testing in line with national recommendations, but it has started to introduce annual fitness testing for operational staff.

Suffolk FRS is good at getting the right people with the right skills. The service understands its workforce profile. It recruits and trains to avoid skill gaps. And it is working to recruit more [on-call](#) firefighters.

The service has an effective risk-critical training programme. Training is consistent for both [wholetime](#) and on-call staff. The updated training recording system is more accurate, reliable and easy to use.

The service is good at ensuring fairness and promoting diversity. It effectively seeks feedback from staff, and acts on it.

It needs to improve the effectiveness of its grievance procedure and has begun to do so. It is also working to overcome barriers to recruiting people from under-represented groups.

Suffolk FRS requires improvement at managing performance and developing leaders. It needs to improve its promotion processes, to ensure they are consistent and fair.

It has introduced a new appraisal system for station-based staff. And it is working to increase the number of staff who have clear and specific personal objectives.

Currently, the service doesn't have a talent management programme, but does offer a variety of leadership training.

Promoting the right values and culture



Good

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service is good at promoting the right values and culture. But we found the following areas in which it needs to improve:

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure that it has effective arrangements in place to support staff following a traumatic incident.
- The service should ensure its values and behaviours are understood and demonstrated at all levels of the organisation.

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

Workforce wellbeing

The service offers a variety of wellbeing support to staff. This support includes occupational health, physiotherapy and counselling services, which are offered externally.

The service has signed MIND's Blue Light Time to Change pledge. Mental health first aiders from across Suffolk County Council are available to offer support to staff. The service is also continuing to train more fire service staff to carry out this role. The service hopes that these actions will further raise awareness of mental health in the workplace, so that staff will feel more comfortable about asking for support if and when they need it.

Staff told us that the service's current process of offering support following a traumatic incident is slow. They also said that it doesn't give an appropriate level of support. The service has acknowledged this, and has a plan to introduce a [trauma risk management](#) process in the near future. The service should make sure that it progresses this plan.

Currently, the service carries out fitness testing for operational staff during medicals that take place every three years. This isn't in line with national guidance, which

recommends annual testing. Suffolk FRS is now trialling a new annual approach, with a view to introducing it across the service.

Staff told us that they don't feel there is enough support in place to help them to improve their fitness and prepare for the new tests.

The service should make sure that it introduces annual fitness tests for all operational staff, and that it gives staff enough support to enable them to maintain the necessary level of fitness.

Health and safety

The service has a clear health and safety policy, which is an extension of Suffolk County Council's policy. The service's policy includes a statement of commitment from the chief fire officer. The policy clearly defines the responsibilities of staff at all levels to promote health and safety.

The service has a recording and investigation process for all accidents and [near misses](#) that is well established. As part of our inspection, we carried out a survey of FRS staff to get their views of their service (please see Annex A for more details). Of the 191 respondents to our staff survey, 97.4 percent know how to report accidents, near misses and dangerous occurrences. And 92.7 percent stated that they were encouraged to report all accidents, near misses or dangerous occurrences.

During our inspection, there was evidence of a detailed investigation following an accident that occurred during training. The investigation report includes a series of recommendations that balance the risk of such training against the benefits that training provides.

The service gives staff health and safety information using a variety of methods including safety-critical bulletins, the staff mobile phone app, and regular health and safety performance reports. During our inspection, there was evidence of these. And staff were aware of the matters that the service had highlighted in its most recent communications.

Culture and values

As part of Suffolk County Council, the service works to the same values as the rest of the council, namely:

- Achieve – we are the best we can be;
- Support – we work as one team;
- Pride – we take pride in and are proud of what we do;
- Inspire – we model the ASPIRE values;
- Respect – we give and earn respect; and
- Empower – we empower, encourage and motivate people.

To try to make these values more relevant to fire service staff, the service's staff engagement group has developed ASPIRE 4 FIRE.

During our inspection, ASPIRE 4 FIRE was evident across the service, including on red noticeboards at all fire service sites. The senior team has also visited all stations and departments.

The visits by the senior team have been well received by most staff. They spoke very highly of how effectively the chief fire officer acts as a role model of the service's values and vision.

Staff suggested that not all senior and middle managers are as visible as the chief fire officer, and that this may be because of their workloads. They also stated that not all managers show the service's values as well as the chief fire officer. The service is aware of this issue; it is introducing training for all managers, as a way of building on the work it has done to make staff aware of the values. The training will give all managers the knowledge and skills to express an inclusive leadership approach, in line with service values.

The workforce's awareness of the values is high. But staff understanding and acceptance of them isn't yet routine across the service. The service has acknowledged that the launch of ASPIRE 4 FIRE is the first step, and that it needs to do more to reinforce the values and make them more accepted.

Of the 191 respondents to our staff survey, 16.2 percent reported feeling bullied or harassed, and 20.9 percent reported feeling discriminated against at work in the last 12 months. During our inspection, there was evidence that the service deals effectively with reported cases of bullying, harassment and discrimination.

Getting the right people with the right skills



Good

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

Workforce planning

The service has a good understanding of its workforce profile, and of current and future skills requirements. Every quarter, it reviews retirement profiles and any potential skills gaps. This review enables it to address any gaps in advance.

During our inspection, the service was doing succession planning at a local level. Local managers consider the skills that are needed at stations. They can then schedule risk-critical courses (such as driving and other specialist courses) in advance. That way, suitably trained staff can take up positions that become vacant as a result of retirements or promotions. Such planning also takes account of lead-in times for some of these courses.

The service makes effective use of its on-call crewing reserve staff to improve resilience. These staff keep a full range of skills and competencies including breathing apparatus, driving, and incident command. This ensures that they can supplement availability in the event of low numbers. They can also offer specific skills that are needed to keep a fire engine available to respond to incidents.

The service faces similar challenges to many other fire and rescue services in the recruitment and retention of on-call firefighters. As at 31 March 2018, 63.2 percent of FTE firefighters were on-call firefighters. The service is carrying out an ongoing recruitment campaign for on-call staff. It makes use of national on-call recruitment campaign resources and social media campaigns. An on-call liaison officer works with local stations to support local recruitment.

Learning and improvement

The service has an effective risk-critical training programme for both on-call and wholetime staff. It produces a three-year rolling training plan that covers all risk-critical and core competencies.

Wholetime staff attach themselves to an operational training group. Every year, they attend a training centre for three or four days to complete risk critical training. On-call staff attend a training centre for their breathing apparatus training. Staff from the training centre give them all other elements of risk-critical training at stations. This reduces the amount of time that on-call staff have to spend away from their primary employment. It also makes best use of the time available for training. And it makes sure that the service offers training to a consistent standard. The service carries out other core competence training locally, in line with the training planner. A similar system is in place for officers who attend risk-critical operational training days.

Following the accident investigation mentioned earlier in this report, the service has amended its fire behaviour training. As an interim measure, the service is giving practical demonstrations of the conditions that crews may experience when dealing with fires in buildings, without having to put them into a risk area. The service is procuring a new gas-powered breathing apparatus training facility. It aims to have this in place by 2021, to enable it to continue its cycle of giving practical fire behaviour training every two years.

Recently, the service updated its reduced crewing policy for on-call fire engines. According to the updated policy, the on-call fire engines can now attend all incident types with a crew of three (rather than the traditional crew of four or five). The service has issued relevant guidance to staff. The service would benefit from carrying out relevant training to assure itself that staff are confident and competent working within the guidance, as an initial crew of three.

The service has invested in improvements to its electronic training records system. This is a database for recording and monitoring competencies. A traffic light system allows supervisory officers to identify any gaps in competence. We sampled the core competencies of firefighters from across the service. Generally, they were up to date. There was also evidence that line managers sample and quality assure the records.

This also happens during station audits. Staff and managers told us that the improvements have made the system more accurate, reliable and easy to use.

During our inspection, there was evidence of staff receiving a variety of other training. This included training about [safeguarding](#), and equality, diversity and inclusion. Staff in specialist roles (such as fire safety and [fire control](#)) were also well trained.

Of the 191 respondents to our staff survey, 84.8 percent agreed that they have received sufficient training to enable them to do the things they are asked to do.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity



Good

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service is good at ensuring fairness and promoting diversity. But we found the following areas in which it needs to improve:

Areas for improvement

- The service should assure itself that it has effective grievance procedures for all staff.
- The service should improve the understanding of positive action and the benefits of having a diverse workforce, amongst staff.

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

Seeking and acting on staff feedback

The service seeks feedback from staff in a variety of ways. They include staff surveys and offering an open seat at the senior managers' fire strategy group. The open seat allows a member of staff to become a guest member of the senior team for the meeting. The staff member attends not only as an observer, but also as a contributor, allowing them to give feedback and to challenge. Following the meeting, the guest member gives feedback about their experience, which the service circulates to all staff.

The service has several groups that offer other opportunities for staff, including under-represented groups, to give feedback to the service. They also facilitate staff involvement in change and improvement. These include the staff engagement group, the equality, diversity and inclusion group and the Suffolk Women in Fire Together (SWIFT) network.

During our inspection, the service acted on feedback from the staff survey. For example, the staff working groups were developing a new personal development review process; the service values were being updated; and the staff smartphone app was launched to improve communication.

The service also works formally and informally with representative bodies. In recent months, planned formal engagement hasn't always taken place. Some staff expressed concerns about this to us. We look forward to seeing a return to the planned schedule of meetings.

The service makes use of Suffolk County Council's procedure to resolve staff grievances. While the procedure is relevant to all staff, its application is slightly different for uniformed staff, to take account of different conditions of service. The service encourages staff to resolve workforce concerns locally and informally, and to challenge unacceptable behaviour among peers.

The number of grievances being raised is very low between the year ending 31 March 2015 and year ending 31 March 2019. During our inspection, staff raised concerns about the grievance procedure. The majority of staff we spoke to said that they didn't feel the procedure was worthwhile. The perception is that grievances are never upheld.

In April 2019, the service began a review of its grievance procedure. It should use this review to assure itself that it has effective grievance procedures in place for all staff. It needs to identify and implement ways to improve staff confidence in the grievance process. And it should make sure that it has oversight of both formal and informal grievances. This will allow the service to be assured that it applies outcomes consistently and fairly, and that it learns from any trends that occur.

Diversity

The service is working hard to attract and recruit a more representative workforce. It has replaced educational qualifications with a test of ability at the point of entry, which is seen to be less discriminatory. It has changed its interview panels so that they are more inclusive. All interview panels now have a better gender balance, and they include firefighters and support staff. Panel members no longer wear rank markings. The service is also working with an external company to introduce an alternative to the traditional 'personal qualities and attributes' approach, which it has identified as being less favourable to some under-represented groups.

During its last wholetime recruitment campaign in 2018, the service ran several taster days. These highlighted all aspects of the modern firefighter's role and didn't only focus on the response element. While the taster days were open to all, the service focused on under-represented groups in its advertising.

This work hasn't yet translated into a large increase in recruitment from under-represented groups. As at 31 March 2018, 2.0 percent of firefighters were from a black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) background. This compares with a BAME residential population of 4.8 percent. Over the same period, 6.1 percent of firefighters were female.

Recently, Suffolk FRS has carried out equality, diversity and inclusion training across the service. Staff were very positive about this training, but the benefits of it are yet to be fully realised. There is a lack of understanding among staff about the benefits of having a diverse workforce and the use of positive action.

As at 31 March 2018, a high percentage of firefighters (24.9 percent) didn't state their ethnicity. The service would benefit from working with staff to understand why such a large proportion of firefighters chose not to state their ethnicity. This will allow the service to better understand its workforce profile and to meet its public-sector equality duty.

The chief fire officer has been appointed as the lead for equality, diversity and inclusion within Suffolk County Council as a result of the work that has been done within Suffolk FRS.

Managing performance and developing leaders



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure its selection, development and promotion of staff is open, transparent and fair.
- The service should put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders.

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

Managing performance

The service uses two different appraisal processes. Support staff and managers (from station commander to brigade commander level) use Suffolk County Council's performance development review (PDR) process. Until recently, operational staff (from firefighter to [watch](#) commander level) used a training needs assessment process. The service is now introducing a new ASPIRE PDR process for these staff. The staff engagement group developed this process.

A low percentage of staff had a completed appraisal (PDR) as at 31 March 2018.

Data as at 31 March 2019 has shown an improvement in appraisal completion rates for support staff. However, wholtime, on-call and fire control staff still have a low appraisal completion rate.

According to our staff survey, 79.6 percent of the 191 respondents were satisfied with their current level of learning and development. But only 58.6 percent felt that they were given the same opportunities to develop as other staff in the service.

The service should make sure that it uses its appraisal processes consistently, to increase the number of staff who receive them. This will make sure that all staff have clear, personal and specific objectives.

During our inspection, there was evidence of effective performance management within fire control. This includes call monitoring and call auditing. The call auditing process allows staff to review their own performance, and then receive constructive feedback from supervisors. In addition, the service carried out monthly reviews of call handling times for each operator. Performance is reviewed on a one-to-one basis against call handling targets.

Developing leaders

The service doesn't have a process in place to identify and develop high potential staff so that they can become senior leaders of the future.

The service has accredited development programmes for operational roles, from firefighter to area commander levels. And there is a range of development opportunities for all staff. They include intent-based and inclusive leadership training, and Windsor Leadership Trust and Army leadership programmes. A suite of online learning is also available through the county council's '21st century manager' package.

The service is making good use of the apprenticeship scheme to offer leadership development to staff at different levels.

During our inspection, we carried out a review of promotion processes. Districts and departments had autonomy to run their own promotion processes. There was no evidence of any organisational oversight or quality assurance. The service should make sure that it keeps accurate records of decisions made during these processes. This will ensure that the service can show its processes are fair and consistent. It will also allow for quality assurance to take place.

Staff told us that they felt that the promotion process changed frequently, and that different managers applied the process differently. As a result, staff don't think that the promotion process is fair, transparent or consistent.

Annex A – About the data

Data in this report is from a range of sources, including:

- Home Office;
- Office for National Statistics (ONS);
- Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA);
- our public perception survey;
- our inspection fieldwork; and
- data we collected directly from all 45 fire and rescue services (FRSs) in England.

Where we collected data directly from FRSs, we took reasonable steps to agree the design of the data collection with services and with other interested parties, such as the Home Office. This was primarily through our Technical Advisory Group, which brings together representatives from the fire sector and the Home Office to support the inspection's design and development, including data collection.

We give services several opportunities to validate the data we collect to make sure the evidence presented is accurate. For instance, we asked all services to:

- check the data they submitted to us via an online application;
- check the final data used in each service report; and
- correct any errors they identified.

We set out the source of Service in Numbers data below.

Methodology

Use of data in the reports and to form judgments

The data we cite in this report and use to form our judgments is the information that was available at the time of inspection. Due to the nature of data collection, there are often gaps between the timeframe the data covers, when it was collected, and when it becomes available to use.

If more recent data became available after inspection, showing a different trend or context, we have referred to this in the report. However, it was not used to form our judgments.

In a small number of cases, data available at the time of the inspection was later found to be incorrect. For example, a service might have identified an error in its original data return. When this is the case, we have corrected the data and used the more reliable data in the report.

Population

For all uses of population as a denominator in our calculations, unless otherwise noted, we use [ONS mid-2017 population estimates](#). At the time of inspection this was the most recent data available.

2018 survey of public perception of the fire and rescue service

We commissioned BMG to survey attitudes towards FRSs in June and July 2018. This consisted of 17,976 surveys across 44 local FRS areas. This survey didn't include the Isles of Scilly, due to its small population. Most interviews were conducted online, with online research panels.

However, a minority of the interviews (757) were conducted face-to-face with trained interviewers in respondents' homes. A small number of respondents were also interviewed online via postal invitations to the survey. These face-to-face interviews were specifically targeted at groups traditionally under-represented on online panels, and so ensure that survey respondents are as representative as possible of the total adult population of England. The sampling method used isn't a statistical random sample. The sample size in each service area was small, varying between 400 and 446 individuals. So any results provided are only an indication of satisfaction rather than an absolute.

[Survey findings are available on BMG's website.](#)

Staff survey

We conducted a staff survey open to all members of FRS workforces across England. We received 3,083 responses between 8 March and 9 August 2019 from across the 15 Tranche 3 services.

We view the staff survey as an important tool in understanding the views of staff who we may not have spoken to, for a variety of reasons, during fieldwork.

However, you should consider several points when interpreting the findings from the staff survey.

The results are not representative of the opinions and attitudes of a service's whole workforce. The survey was self-selecting, and the response rate ranged from 7 percent to 40 percent of a service's workforce. So any findings should be considered alongside the service's overall response rate, which is cited in the report.

To protect respondents' anonymity and allow completion on shared devices, it was not possible to limit responses to one per person. So it is possible that a single person could have completed the survey more than once.

Each service was provided with a unique access code to try to make sure that only those currently working in a service could complete the survey. However, it is possible that the survey and access code could have been shared and completed by people other than its intended respondents.

We have provided percentages when presenting the staff survey findings throughout the report. When a service has a low number of responses (less than 100), these figures should be treated with additional caution. Percentages may sum to more than 100 percent due to rounding.

Due to the limitations set out above, the results from the staff survey should only be used to provide an indicative measure of service performance.

Service in numbers

A dash in this graphic indicates that a service couldn't give data to us or the Home Office.

Perceived effectiveness of service

We took this data from the following question of the 2018 survey of public perceptions of the FRS:

How confident are you, if at all, that the fire and rescue service in your local area provides an effective service overall?

The figure provided is a sum of respondents who stated they were either 'very confident' or 'fairly confident'. Respondents could have also stated 'not very confident', 'not at all confident' or 'don't know'. The percentage of 'don't know' responses varied between services (ranging from 5 percent to 14 percent).

Due to its small residential population, we didn't include the Isles of Scilly in the survey.

Incidents attended per 1,000 population

We took this data from the Home Office fire statistics, ['Incidents attended by fire and rescue services in England, by incident type and fire and rescue authority'](#) for the period from 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2019.

Please consider the following points when interpreting outcomes from this data.

- There are seven worksheets in this file. The 'FIRE0102' worksheet shows the number of incidents attended by type of incident and fire and rescue authority (FRA) for each financial year. The 'FIRE0102 Quarterly' worksheet shows the number of incidents attended by type of incident and FRA for each quarter. The worksheet 'Data' provides the raw data for the two main data tables (from 2009/10). The 'Incidents chart - front page', 'Chart 1' and 'Chart 2' worksheets provide the data for the corresponding charts in the statistical commentary. The 'FRS geographical categories' worksheet shows how FRAs are categorised.
- Fire data, covering all incidents that FRSs attend, is collected by the Incident Recording System (IRS). For several reasons some records take longer than others for services to upload to the IRS. Totals are constantly being amended (by relatively small numbers).
- We took data for Service in Numbers from the August 2019 incident publication. So, figures may not directly match more recent publications due to data updates.

Home fire safety checks per 1,000 population

We took this data from the Home Office fire statistics, '[Home Fire Safety Checks carried out by fire and rescue services and partners, by fire and rescue authority](#)' for the period from 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018.

Each FRS figure is based on the number of checks it carried out. It doesn't include checks carried out by partners.

Please consider the following points when interpreting outcomes from this data.

- Dorset FRS and Wiltshire FRS merged to form Dorset and Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire FRSs before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.
- Figures for 'Fire Risk Checks carried out by Elderly (65+)', 'Fire Risk Checks carried out by Disabled' and 'Number of Fire Risk Checks carried out by Partners' don't include imputed figures because a lot of services can't supply these figures.
- The checks included in a home fire safety check can vary between services. You should consider this when making direct comparisons between services.
- Home fire safety checks may also be referred to as home fire risk checks or safe and well visits by services.
- After inspection, East Sussex FRS resubmitted data on its total number of home fire safety checks and the number of checks targeted at the elderly and disabled in the year to 31 March 2018. The latest data changes the percentage of checks that were targeted at the elderly (from 54.1 percent to 54.9 percent) and disabled (from 24.7 percent to 25.4 percent) in England. However, as noted above, in all reports we have used the original figures that were available at the time of inspection.

Fire safety audits per 100 known premises

Fire protection refers to FRSs' statutory role in ensuring public safety in the wider built environment. It involves auditing and, where necessary, enforcing regulatory compliance, primarily but not exclusively in respect of the provisions of the [Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005 \(FSO\)](#). The number of safety audits in Service in Numbers refers to the number of audits services carried out in known premises. According to the Home Office's definition, "premises known to FRAs are the FRA's knowledge, as far as possible, of all relevant premises; for the enforcing authority to establish a risk profile for premises in its area. These refer to all premises except single private dwellings".

We took this from the Home Office fire statistics, '[Fire safety audits carried out by fire and rescue services, by fire and rescue authority](#)' for the period from 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018.

Please consider the following points when interpreting outcomes from this data.

- Berkshire FRS didn't provide figures for premises known between 2014/15 and 2017/18.
- Dorset FRS and Wiltshire FRS merged to form Dorset and Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire FRSs before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.

- Several FRAs report ‘Premises known to FRAs’ as estimates based on historical data.

Firefighter cost per person per year

We took the data used to calculate firefighter cost per person per year from the annual financial data returns that individual FRSs complete and submit to CIPFA, and [ONS mid-2017 population estimates](#).

You should consider this data alongside the proportion of firefighters who are wholetime and on-call.

Number of firefighters per 1,000 population, five-year change in workforce and percentage of wholetime firefighters

We took this data from the Home Office fire statistics, ‘[Total staff numbers \(full-time equivalent\) by role and by fire and rescue authority](#)’ as at 31 March 2018.

Table 1102a: Total staff numbers (FTE) by role and fire authority – Wholetime Firefighters and table 1102b: Total staff numbers (FTE) by role and fire authority – Retained Duty System are used to produce the total number of firefighters.

Please consider the following points when interpreting outcomes from this data.

- We calculate these figures using full-time equivalent (FTE) numbers. FTE is a metric that describes a workload unit. One FTE is equivalent to one full-time worker. But one FTE may also be made up of two or more part-time workers whose calculated hours equal that of a full-time worker. This differs from headcount, which is the actual number of the working population regardless if employees work full or part-time.
- Some totals may not aggregate due to rounding.
- Dorset FRS and Wiltshire FRS merged to form Dorset and Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire FRSs before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.

Percentage of female firefighters and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) firefighters

We took this data from the Home Office fire statistics, ‘[Staff headcount by gender, fire and rescue authority and role](#)’ and ‘[Staff headcount by ethnicity, fire and rescue authority and role](#)’ as at 31 March 2018.

Please consider the following points when interpreting outcomes from this data.

- We calculate BAME residential population data from ONS 2011 census data. This figure is calculated by dividing the BAME residential population by the total population.
- We calculate female residential population data from ONS mid-2017 population estimates.
- The percentage of BAME firefighters does not include those who opted not to disclose their ethnic origin. There are large variations between services in the number of firefighters who did not state their ethnic origin.

- Dorset FRS and Wiltshire FRS merged to form Dorset and Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire FRSs before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.

Annex B – Fire and rescue authority governance

These are the different models of fire and rescue authority (FRA) governance in England. Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service is a unitary authority.

Metropolitan FRA

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

Combined FRA

The FRA covers more than one local authority area. Each is governed by locally elected councillors appointed from the constituent councils in that area.

County FRA

Some county councils are defined as FRAs, with responsibility for fire and rescue service provision in their area.

Unitary authorities

These combine the usually separate council powers and functions for non-metropolitan counties and non-metropolitan districts. In such counties, a separate fire authority runs the fire services. This is made up of councillors from the county council and unitary councils.

London

Day-to-day control of London's fire and rescue service is the responsibility of the London fire commissioner, accountable to the Mayor. A Greater London Authority committee and the Deputy Mayor for Fire scrutinise the commissioner's work. The Mayor may arrange for the Deputy Mayor to exercise his fire and rescue functions.

Mayoral Combined Authority

Only in Greater Manchester. The Combined Authority is responsible for fire and rescue functions but with those functions exercised by the elected Mayor. A fire and rescue committee supports the Mayor in exercising non-strategic fire and rescue functions. This committee is made up of members from the constituent councils.

Police, fire and crime commissioner FRA

The police, fire and rescue commissioner is solely responsible for the service provision of fire & rescue and police functions.

Isles of Scilly

The Council of the Isles of Scilly is the FRA for the Isles of Scilly.

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