

Fire & Rescue Service 2021/22

Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service



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About this inspection

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

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

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

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

What inspection judgments mean

Our categories of graded judgment are:

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

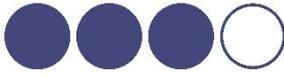
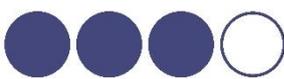
Good is our expected graded judgment for all fire and rescue services. It is based on policy, practice or performance that meet pre-defined grading criteria, which are informed by any relevant [national operational guidance](#) or standards.

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

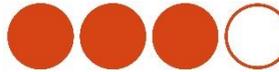
If we find shortcomings in the service, we will judge it as requires improvement.

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

Overview

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

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

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

HM Inspector's summary

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

I am pleased with the performance of Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service in keeping people safe and secure from fires and other risks, although it needs to improve in some areas to provide a consistently good service. For example, it needs to do more to improve how it identifies and supports high potential staff and aspiring leaders, and to make sure its selection, development and promotion of staff is open, transparent and fair.

There have been improvements since our last inspection. These are most notable in how the service protects the public through the regulation of fire safety, and how it gathers risk information and makes this available.

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

- The service has improved its culture, values and behaviours, with staff now feeling more empowered and willing to challenge poor behaviours when they encounter them.
- A range of well-being support is now available to support staff physical and mental health, including following a traumatic incident.
- The service now has enough staff in its protection department and has revised its risk-based inspection programme (RBIP) to target the highest-risk buildings. This has led to an increase in its protection activities.
- The service needs to improve how it carries out equality impact assessments (EIAs), which aren't always completed to an adequate standard. And it needs to do more to improve staff understanding of the benefits of positive action.

Overall, I commend the service on the changes it has made and expect it to continue working to resolve the further areas for improvement we have identified. We will continue to assess progress through our usual monitoring arrangements.



Roy Wilsher

HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Service in numbers



Response

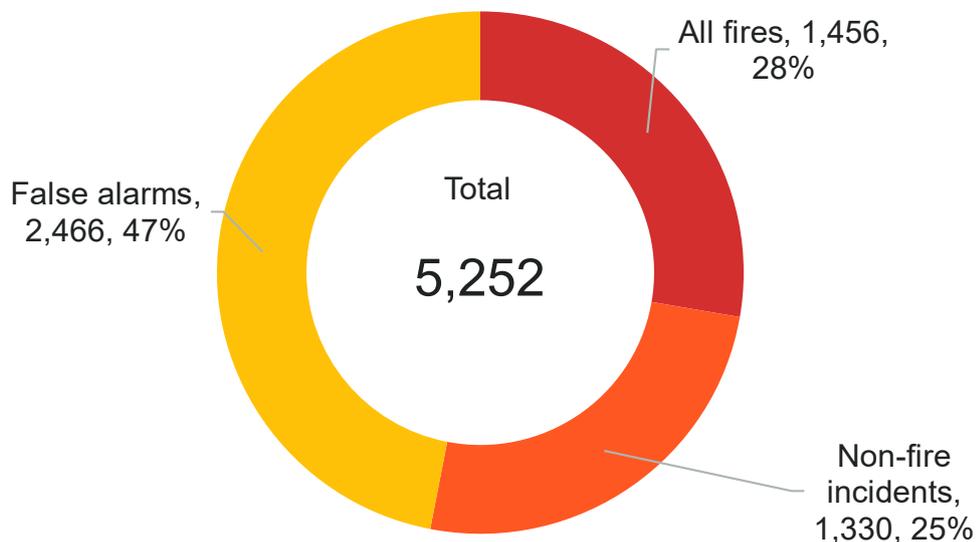
	Suffolk	England
Incidents attended per 1,000 population Year ending 30 September 2021	6.90	9.50
Home fire safety checks carried out by fire and rescue service per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	2.25	4.47
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises Year ending 31 March 2021	1.25	1.70
Average availability of wholetime pumps Year ending 31 March 2021	100%	86.4%



Cost

Firefighter cost per person Year ending 31 March 2021	£20.76	£25.02
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Incidents attended in the year to 30 September 2021

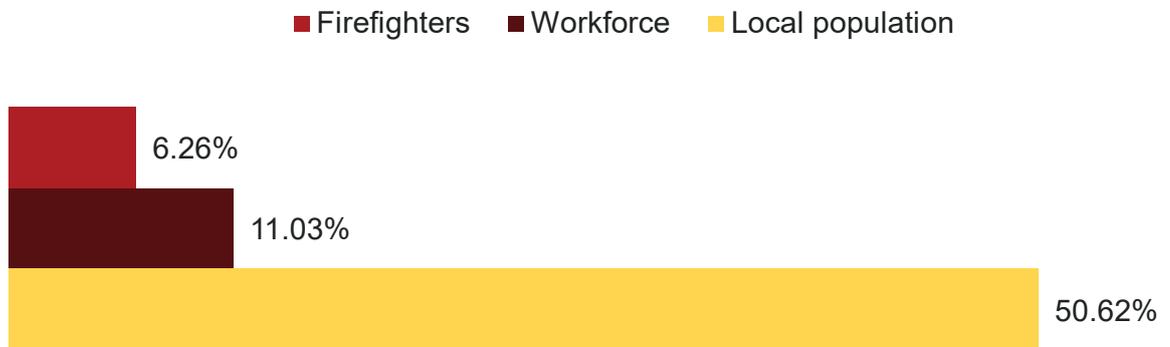




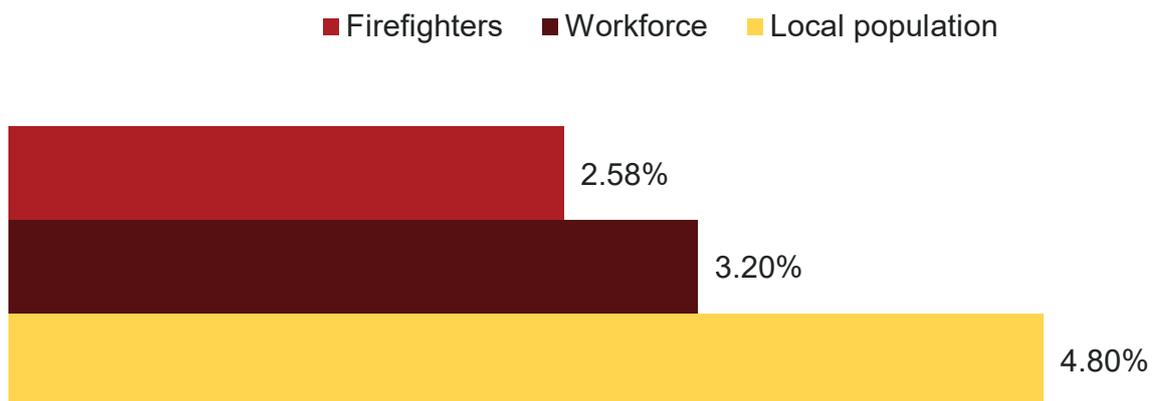
Workforce

	Suffolk	England
Five-year change in total workforce 2016 to 2021	-8.32%	-1.60%
Number of firefighters per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	0.80	0.62
Percentage of firefighters who are wholetime Year ending 31 March 2021	33.9%	64.4%

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



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



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

Effectiveness



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



Good

Summary

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

We are pleased with the progress that Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has made in terms of its effectiveness.

The service has a good [integrated risk management plan \(IRMP\)](#). The plan addresses an appropriate range of risks and threats. It describes how prevention, protection and response activity will mitigate or reduce the risks and threats the community faces.

The service is good at responding to fires and other emergencies, and at responding to national risks.

Since our last inspection, it has improved:

- the way it assesses risk, and makes sure operational staff are familiar with their local risk;
- its protection capacity and strategy, including revising its RBIP to target the highest risk buildings; and
- the way it makes national and cross-border information, including lessons learned, available to its staff.

However, the service should:

- do more to support firefighters to effectively target the people most at risk;
- do more to reduce unwanted fire signals; and
- assure itself that it is consistently evaluating and formally reviewing the range of emergency incidents it has identified in line with its monitoring and debriefing procedure.

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies



Good (2019: Good)

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service is good at understanding risk.

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

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

The service is good at identifying risk in the communities it serves

The service has assessed an appropriate range of risks and threats after a thorough integrated risk management planning process. When assessing risk, it has considered relevant information collected from a broad range of internal and external sources, including incident and societal datasets. For example, the service used data, reports and analysis from [Suffolk Observatory](#) to inform its [Strategic Assessment of Risk 2022](#). This included information relating to demographics (on topics such as ethnicity, diversity and health) and housing (on topics such as listed buildings, thatched properties, blocks of flats, and living in poverty).

After assessing relevant risks, the service has recorded its findings in an easily understood IRMP. This plan describes how prevention, protection and response activity will mitigate or reduce the risks and threats the community faces, both now and in the future. For example, it sets out measures for:

- improving [on-call](#) firefighter recruitment and retention;
- targeting Suffolk's ageing population;
- investing in technology to counter and mitigate cyberattacks; and
- preparing for major incidents, including terrorism.

When appropriate, the service has consulted and carried out constructive conversations with communities and others to both understand the risks it faces and explain how it intends to mitigate these. By holding several public roadshows, it contacted about 700 people and received about 300 responses to its IRMP consultation. It provided a light version of the consultation and made available translated copies for non-English-speaking people. The service has made good use of Suffolk County Council's race equality and communications teams to engage with seldom heard groups such as local disability and adult care groups.

The service is effective at gathering, maintaining, and sharing a good range of risk information

In our previous inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should make sure all operational staff are familiar with their local risk. The service has made good progress in relation to this.

The service routinely collects and updates the information it has about the people, places and threats it has identified as being at greatest risk. Operational staff routinely gather risk information from businesses. And staff who are qualified in fire protection inspect and audit premises for fire safety compliance.

This information is readily available for the service's prevention, protection and response staff, which enables it to identify, reduce and mitigate risk effectively. For example, risk information is made available to operational staff via [mobile data terminals](#) and tablets.

The service has systems in place to make staff aware of any significant changes to risk information. We saw it communicating new and emerging risks using a range of methods. These included giving staff information via a mobile and web application that acts as a fully interactive source of service news and information. It also uses email, including service action notes, which it monitors to make sure staff are aware of new announcements.

The service learns from operational incidents

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

The service has dedicated staff to internally communicate [national operational guidance](#) and lessons learned from national operational work. The service's operational assurance group reviews emerging information gathered from its operational activity and changes its response to risks where needed.

The service has responded well to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry

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

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

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

Preventing fires and other risks



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at preventing fires and other risks.

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

Area for improvement

The service should make sure it allocates enough resources to meet its prevention strategy.

Area for improvement

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.

The service isn't effectively delivering its prevention strategy

The service's strategic aim is to reduce risk by preventing fatalities, injuries and damage to property and the environment from fire and other emergencies by working in partnership and targeting support to [vulnerable people](#).

But we found that prevention work generally happens in isolation, with little communication between specialist prevention teams and operational firefighters to effectively target people most at risk.

On-call firefighters don't carry out prevention activities. And at the time of inspection, [wholetime firefighters](#) had a low target to carry out only two prevention activities per tour of duty. As a result, the service is in the lowest quartile nationally for carrying out [home fire safety checks](#). In 2020/21, it recorded 1,710 checks, which is 2.3 per 1,000 people.

In our previous inspection, we recommended that the service should make sure it allocates enough resources to meet its prevention strategy. Due to the impact of the pandemic, the service has been slow to demonstrate the benefits of additional funding it has received from the county council. Further investment in these areas has been made this year, to appoint a dedicated Prevention Group Manager and two more practitioners. The service must now make sure that progress is made in this area, to demonstrate a return on the investment made in prevention.

The service could do more to target home visits

The service clearly understands where the greatest risks are, and who it needs to target to address these. But we found little evidence that the service was using this information to target the people it has identified as being most at risk from fire. At the time of the inspection, the service was only arranging home visits in response to referrals from partner agencies, such as East Coast Community Healthcare and BOC (British Oxygen Company), and online requests. This means it may be missing opportunities to proactively reach the people most vulnerable from fire.

Operational wholetime staff carry out safer home visits (home fire safety checks). These include fire safety activities such as identifying and reducing fire risks and fitting fire alarms. In addition, 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, social welfare, home security, crime reduction, and how to avoid slips, trips and falls.

Staff are confident at providing safe and well checks

Staff told us they have the right skills and confidence to make safe and well visits. These checks cover an appropriate range of hazards that can put vulnerable people at greater risk from fire and other emergencies. For example, a prevention practitioner or firefighter will check and provide advice on:

- safe use of smoking materials (such as cigarettes);
- candles and heaters;
- electric blankets;
- understanding dangers from harmful substances;
- cooking hazards;
- bedtime routines; and
- carbon monoxide.

The service is good at responding to safeguarding concerns

Staff we interviewed told us about occasions when they had identified [safeguarding](#) problems. They told us they feel confident and trained to act appropriately and promptly. We saw that staff regularly recognised vulnerabilities and risks during visits, and acted appropriately to improve people's safety. This included escalating a matter to a more qualified person or making a referral to a partner agency.

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

The service works with a wide range of other organisations, such as adult and children's social care services, local housing providers, healthcare organisations and charities, to prevent fires and other emergencies. We found good evidence that it routinely refers people at greatest risk to these and other organisations which may be better able to meet their needs.

Arrangements are in place for the service to receive referrals from others through an online web form. Referrals come from local GPs, social workers, East of England Ambulance Service, Suffolk Police and Trading Standards. The service acts appropriately on the referrals it receives from these organisations, visiting people at highest risk within 24 hours of receiving a referral.

The service routinely exchanges information with other public sector organisations about people and groups at greatest risk. For example, the service has three school liaison officers based in educational establishments across the county. And it is an active member of Suffolk Roadsafe Partnership board as well as the county's safeguarding boards for adults and children.

The service could do more to tackle fire-setting

The service has only limited involvement in targeting and educating people who show signs of fire-setting behaviour. We found that prevention practitioners were mainly targeting young people, through a fire setting intervention scheme.

There is limited evidence that firefighters and prevention practitioners target adult fire-setters. And there is limited exchange of information between the service and other relevant organisations to support the prosecution of arsonists.

The service doesn't routinely evaluate its prevention activity

In our previous inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should better evaluate its prevention work, so that it can understand the benefits of this more clearly.

Disappointingly, there is still little evidence that the service evaluates the effectiveness of its prevention activity, or that it makes sure all its communities have equal access to prevention activity that meets their needs.

Protecting the public through fire regulation



Good (2019: Requires improvement)

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

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

Area for improvement

The service should make sure it effectively addresses the burden of false alarms.

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

The service has an effective protection plan

Following our last inspection, the service secured extra funds from the county council to invest in protection. It is making good use of these.

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service 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 department action plan. The service’s protection strategy is clearly linked to the risk it has identified in its IRMP.

Staff across the service are involved in protection-related activity, with information effectively exchanged between departments as needed. For example, information from audits targeting commercial premises is collected by operational staff and specialist protection team members. This information helps staff to identify new risks, which are then added to the service’s RBIP.

The service has revised its protection activity to target the highest risk buildings

In our previous inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should assure itself that its RBIP prioritises the highest risks and includes proportionate activity to reduce risk. The programme should also include appropriate monitoring and evaluation. The service has made good progress in this area.

The service has reviewed its RBIP to make sure that risk is prioritised appropriately and that the programme is focused on the highest-risk buildings.

We found that fire safety audits were recorded in line with the policy and timescales the service has set itself, and were monitored and reviewed.

The service has audited all its high-risk, high-rise buildings

Audits have been carried out at all high-rise buildings the service has identified as using cladding that is similar to the cladding installed on Grenfell Tower. Information gathered during these audits is made available to response teams and control operators, enabling them to respond more effectively in an emergency.

The service had visited all the high-rise, high-risk buildings it had identified in its service area by the end of 2021.

The quality of fire safety audits is good

We reviewed a range of audits of different premises across the service. This included audits that took place:

- as part of the service’s RBIP;
- after fires at premises where fire safety legislation applies;
- where [enforcement action](#) had been taken; and
- at high-rise, high-risk buildings.

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

The service uses its full range of enforcement powers

In our previous inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should assure itself that its use of enforcement powers prioritises the highest risks and includes proportionate activity to reduce risk. The service has made good progress in relation to this.

The service consistently uses its full range of enforcement powers, and when appropriate, prosecutes those who don't comply with fire safety regulations.

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

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

- 0 alteration notices;
- 52 informal notifications;
- 1 enforcement notice;
- 4 prohibition notices; and
- undertook 1 prosecution.

Between 2016/17 and 2020/21 inclusive, it completed 1 prosecution, which was successful.

The service has invested in developing its protection staff

Since our previous inspection the service has invested in protection to develop the skills of current inspecting officers and train station-based staff to carry out simple audits.

The service now has enough qualified protection staff to meet the requirements of its RBIP. The service told us it has trained 26 station-based staff to carry out simple audits. The protection team has increased in size from 17 to 20 staff, which helps the service to provide the range of audit and enforcement activity needed, both now and in the future.

Staff get the right training and are accredited to national recognised standards.

The service works well with other enforcement agencies

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

These include Suffolk County Council's housing and environmental health departments, Suffolk Trading Standards and Suffolk Constabulary. They work with the service to carry out joint visits and enforcement action and share risk information. One example of working together effectively is the service's 'impact days'. The impact days involve inspecting officers from the service working with local authority housing officers to carry out joint inspections. These target high-risk sleeping accommodation located above commercial premises.

The service should review arrangements to respond to building consultations

While the service is responding to all requests for statutory building consultations, we have concerns that it isn't always doing this in a timely manner. The service should make every effort to meet the timescales in which feedback should be given to the local authority building control, to make sure it can be acted upon.

The service could do more to engage with local businesses and other organisations

The service could do more to engage with local businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation.

In our previous inspection we found that while the service had a dedicated business engagement officer, most of this staff member's time was taken up with planning, running impact days, and working with businesses through the service's [primary authority scheme](#). This left little time to carry out other activities such as business seminars and other direct engagement with businesses. It was disappointing to find little improvement at the recent inspection.

The service relies mainly on its website to give businesses information about fire safety regulations, enforcement and prosecution.

The service isn't effective at reducing unwanted fire signals

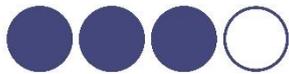
The service has call-challenge and non-attendance policies for automatic fire alarms. This is in line with national guidance. In the year ending 31 March 2021, the service received 2,607 unique automatic fire alarms. It didn't attend 34.2 percent of these. It does, of course, attend automatic alarms if it receives confirmation of a fire.

The service has a policy to work with the premises that generate the most unwanted fire signals to help reduce future callouts.

But we found staff weren't applying this policy consistently, with only limited action being taken to reduce the number of unwanted fire signals. Home Office data shows that the service isn't effectively reducing the number of unwanted fire signals. This means that engines may be unavailable to respond to genuine incidents because they are attending false alarms. It also creates a risk to the public if more fire engines travel at high speed on roads to respond to these incidents.

The service rightly recognises this problem and has reviewed its unwanted fire signals policy. We will be interested to see how this develops.

Responding to fires and other emergencies



Good (2019: Good)

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

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

Innovative practice: The service makes effective use of QR codes

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

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

The service's response plan is aligned to risks identified in its IRMP

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has a response strategy. This is part of its response statement 2019–2022. The service's response strategy is linked to the risks identified in its IRMP. Its fire engines and response staff, as well as its working patterns, are designed and located to help the service to respond flexibly to fires and other emergencies with the appropriate resources.

The service has 43 fire engines and a range of specialist vehicles strategically situated around Suffolk. And it has effective measures in place to make sure there is enough staff to operate these. The service uses an on-call crewing reserve cohort (known as County Day Crewing) to fill gaps at stations where there are shortages of staff.

The service has reviewed its response standards

There are no national response standards of performance for the public. But the service has set out its own response standards in its IRMP.

The service aims to respond as follows:

- to have the first fire engine at a property fire within 11 minutes, for 80 percent of incidents;

- to have the secondary fire engine at a property fire within 16 minutes, for 80 percent of incidents; and
- to have the first fire engine at a road traffic collision within 13 minutes, for 80 percent of incidents.

The service doesn't always meet its standards. And Home Office data shows that in the year to 31 December 2021, the service's average response time to dwelling fires was 10 minutes and 8 seconds, which is slower than the average for predominantly rural services. We found the service hadn't reviewed its shift patterns to improve its performance, as it stated it would do in its 2019–2022 IRMP. However, the service has reviewed its speed of response standards as part of the current IRMP (2019–2022) aligned to national community risk guidance. The new response standard will be consulted upon as part of the new community risk management plan for the service. At the time of our inspection the service was developing its draft community risk management plan. It will be going into consultation on this draft plan in 2023.

The service is good at maintaining availability

To support its response plan, the service aims to have all its wholetime fire engines available on all occasions. The service consistently meets this standard. In the year to 31 March 2021, the overall availability of on-call fire engines was 93.1 percent of occasions.

Staff have a good understanding of how to command incidents safely

The service has trained incident commanders who are assessed regularly and properly. This helps the service to safely, assertively, and effectively manage the whole range of incidents that it could face, from small and routine ones to complex multi-agency incidents.

As part of our inspection, we interviewed incident commanders from across the service. The incident commanders we interviewed were familiar with risk assessment, decision-making and recording information at incidents in line with the [National Fire Chiefs Council's](#) national operational guidance, and with the [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles \(JESIP\)](#).

Fire control is involved with the service's command, exercise and debrief activity

The service has a combined [fire control](#) with Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service. One fire control, based at Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service headquarters in Huntingdon, handles all 999 calls for both services.

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

- control staff are invited to Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service training and exercises;

- control staff are invited to the service's structured (formal) debriefs following [critical incidents](#); and
- there are processes for those working in fire control to carry out a debrief following incidents involving six or more fire engines, or incidents of interest.

The service has good fire survival guidance call systems

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

Control has good systems in place to exchange real-time risk information with incident commanders, other responding partners and other supporting fire and rescue services. Maintaining good situational awareness helps the service to communicate effectively with the public, providing them with accurate and tailored advice.

Risk information is good and easily accessible to staff

We sampled a range of risk information, including:

- records on the service's premise management system; and
- site-specific records on fire engines' mobile data terminals.

The records include permanent and temporary risk information for firefighters responding to incidents at high-risk, high-rise buildings. (The permanent information includes records for buildings such as hospitals and factories while temporary information would list, for example, oxygen users.) Firefighters also have access to information from fire control.

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

The service is good at evaluating operational performance

As part of the inspection, we reviewed a range of emergency incidents and training events. We found that the service has an excellent, detailed and clear operational monitoring and debrief policy, as well as innovative ways of recording lessons learned.

The service gives every fire engine a QR code linked to its operational assurance system. This gives staff instant access to record lessons learned at operational incidents, training and exercises.

We are encouraged to see that the service is contributing towards, and acting on, learning from other fire and rescue services and operational learning gathered from other emergency service partners. This includes [national operational learning](#) from incidents such as those involving aerated concrete.

But the service should assure itself that it is consistently evaluating and formally reviewing the range of emergency incidents it has identified, in line with its policy.

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

The service has good systems in place to inform the public about ongoing incidents and help keep them safe during and after incidents. This includes:

- proactive use of social media, particularly Twitter and Facebook;
- the incident tab on the service's website; and
- media-trained incident commanders.

We saw evidence that the service uses these communication channels to update the public during and after incidents.

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents



Good (2019: Good)

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

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

Area for improvement

The service should make sure it participates in a programme of cross-border exercises, sharing the learning from these exercises.

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

The service is prepared for major and multi-agency incidents

The service has effectively anticipated and considered the reasonably foreseeable risks and threats it may face. These risks are listed in both local and national risk registers as part of its integrated risk management planning. The service works well with other organisations on multi-agency response plans. The plans are tested regularly. For example, at the time of inspection the service was testing plans for high-risk sites such as Sizewell Power Station.

It is also familiar with the significant risks that could be faced by neighbouring fire and rescue services that it might reasonably be asked to respond to in an emergency. Firefighters have access to risk information from neighbouring services.

The service can respond effectively to major and multi-agency incidents

We reviewed the arrangements the service has in place to respond to different major incidents such as wide area flooding and marauding terrorist attacks.

The service has good arrangements in place, which are well understood by staff. For example, the service is well prepared to form part of a multi-agency response to a high-rise incident. Its procedures for responding to major incidents are understood by all staff and are well tested.

The service works with other fire services

The service supports other fire and rescue services responding to emergency incidents. It is intraoperable with these services and can form part of a multi-agency response.

The service doesn't have a cross-border exercise plan

In our previous inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should arrange a programme of cross-border exercises, sharing the lessons learned from these exercises. It hasn't made enough progress in this area.

Data provided by the service for our recent inspection shows that there was a reduction in joint training with other services in 2019/20 (pre-pandemic) compared to 2018/19. It is disappointing that the service doesn't have a cross-border exercise plan with neighbouring fire and rescue services.

In our staff survey, 56 percent (57 out of 101) of respondents told us they haven't participated in training with neighbouring services in the past 12 months.

The service is missing opportunities to learn and work more effectively together to keep the public safe.

Sharing of cross-border risk information is effective

In our previous inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should make sure its operational staff have good access to relevant and up-to-date risk information. This should include cross-border risk information. The service has made good progress in this area.

As part of our recent inspection, we reviewed site-specific risk information files, including those from surrounding services. It is encouraging to see that the service provides firefighters with a good range of cross-border risk information for Essex, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire.

Firefighters have a good understanding of JESIP

The incident commanders we interviewed had been trained in and were familiar with JESIP. This helps make sure they can work effectively with other emergency services.

The service gave us strong evidence that it consistently follows the principles. This includes:

- staff knowledge and use of the joint decision-making model; and
- the use of a nationally recognised messaging format that all emergency services and related organisations understand.

The service is a lead partner in the Suffolk Resilience Forum

The service has good arrangements in place to respond to emergencies with other organisations that make up the Suffolk Resilience Forum. These arrangements included having staff available to respond to requests from other organisations during the pandemic.

Staff:

- support East of England Ambulance Service with ambulance driving;
- make visits to check people's welfare and deliver food and essential items to those who need them;
- support the national vaccination programme with marshalling and logistics; and
- chair the tactical co-ordinating groups which oversee response activity.

The service is a valued Suffolk Resilience Forum partner. The chief fire officer is its executive director for fire and public safety. The service takes part in regular training events with other members and uses lessons learned from these to improve responses to major and multi-agency incidents.

The service keeps up to date with national learning

The service keeps itself up to date with joint operational learning updates from other fire services and national operational learning from other emergency organisations, such as the police service and ambulance services. The service has effective processes for communicating this information internally through notifications (operational learning notes, action learning notes and [safety flashes](#)) via the service's Fire News app and intranet. It uses this learning to inform planning assumptions that have been made with other partners.

Efficiency



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



Requires improvement

Summary

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

We are pleased to see that the county council has invested in the service since our last inspection. The service has used this funding to help it work more effectively and efficiently.

Since our last inspection, the service has focused on increasing staff numbers in important areas of work to improve performance. There are now increased staff numbers in both the protection team and the information, communication and technology (ICT) team. This is helping these teams improve the way the service meets its statutory duties and has improved how it uses technology to increase its efficiency.

The service proactively works with other organisations to make savings and improve outcomes for the public.

But station-based staff could be more productive. The arrangements for managing performance are weak and don't clearly link use of resources to the IRMP and the service's strategic priorities. The station plans we examined were too generic and not widely understood by staff.

Making best use of resources



Requires improvement (2019: Good)

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

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

The service's budget for 2021/22 is £22.519m. This is less than a 1 percent decrease from the previous financial year.

Area 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.

Area for improvement

The service should make sure its arrangements for managing performance ensure its workforce uses its time in line with the priorities in the 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.

The service needs to make sure resources are appropriately allocated to support the activity set out in its integrated risk management plan

In our previous inspection, we identified an area for improvement that 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 IRMP. The service hasn't made enough progress in this area.

There remain weaknesses that need addressing. The service's plans still don't make sure enough staff are allocated to prevention, protection and response activities. [On-call](#) staff don't carry out prevention and protection activity, and [wholetime staff](#) do minimal prevention activity compared to other fire and rescue services.

The service has a clear capital spend strategy. Suffolk's fire and public safety directorate has been allocated a capital budget of £7.235m for 2021/22 to 2023/24, with a further £4.729m for the period beyond 2024. The capital budget is intended to provide for:

- working together with police and ambulance services;
- the incident command and [mobilising](#) system;
- ICT;
- [mobile data terminals](#);
- operational equipment;
- property improvements; and
- vehicle renewals.

The service has carried out scenario planning through budget gap workshops with Suffolk County Council to help it develop its strategic plans. These plans help make sure the service is sustainable and are underpinned by financial controls that reduce the risk of misusing public money.

The service needs to improve productivity and ways of working

In our previous inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should make sure its arrangements for managing performance ensure its workforce uses its time in line with the priorities in the IRMP. The service hasn't made enough progress in this area.

The service structure supports performance management at a strategic level, and performance reporting is good. But the arrangements for managing performance are weak and don't clearly link resource use to the IRMP and the service's strategic priorities. We found that station plans lacked detail, on-call firefighters didn't carry out prevention activities and wholetime firefighters had a performance target of carrying out only two prevention activities per tour of duty. The service told us it has reviewed these problems and that there are plans to increase prevention activity. We are interested to see how this develops.

The service is in the lowest quartile nationally for the number of [home fire safety checks](#) it carries out. It hasn't identified the contribution it will make towards the national productivity target (using an extra 3 percent of national wholetime firefighter capacity to carry out additional prevention and protection work).

The service could do more to make sure its workforce's time is as productive as possible, and to carry out prevention, protection and response functions effectively and efficiently. This includes considering new ways of working. The service could make better use of flexible working and flexible contracts for firefighters.

The service works well with other emergency services

We are pleased to see the service meets its statutory duty to collaborate, and routinely considers opportunities to collaborate with other emergency responders.

Collaborative work is aligned to the priorities in the service's IRMP. For example, the service shares a multi-agency community vehicle designed for use by different emergency services. It also shares two multi-agency unmanned surveillance aircraft to support [missing person](#) searches and responding to large-scale or complex structural fires.

The service monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and results of its collaborations. Most notably, a comprehensive feasibility study led to building a combined fire and police station at Felixstowe with no cost overrun.

The service shares 16 buildings with one of either Suffolk Police or East of England Ambulance Service. It has plans to share a further four buildings in this way.

The service has good continuity plans in place

The service has good continuity arrangements in place for areas where threats and risks are considered high. These threats and risks are regularly reviewed and tested so that staff are aware of the arrangements and their associated responsibilities. For example, during our recent COVID-19 inspection, we found that the service had a flu pandemic plan and business continuity plans which were in place and in date. It also has plans for industrial action and [fall-back](#) control (relocating the team or diverting calls if fire control systems fail), which it reviews and tests regularly.

The service shows sound financial management

There are regular reviews to consider all the service's expenditure, including its non-pay costs. The process of continuously challenging its spending arrangements helps to make sure the service gets value for money. The service works closely with the county council finance team through regular review meetings. Finance and performance are also reported and scrutinised regularly by council cabinet members. And the service's programme and project board meets quarterly to review progress with the capital programme.

The service is taking steps to make sure important areas, including estates, fleet and procurement, are well placed to achieve efficiency gains through sound financial management and best working practices. The service has made savings and efficiencies, which haven't affected its operational performance and the service it provides to the public. For example, the service has bought a new mobilising system with Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service, leading to savings of approximately £400,000 a year from a combined fire control.

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



Good (2019: Good)

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service is good at making the service affordable now and in the future.

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

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

The service is improving its value for money

In our previous inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should make sure it has sufficiently robust plans in place which fully consider the medium-term financial challenges so it can prepare to secure the right level of savings. We are encouraged to see the improvements the service has made since the last inspection.

As part of Suffolk County Council's fire and public safety directorate, the service has a sound understanding of future financial challenges. It can also show a balanced budget over the medium term.

The service has carried out scenario planning for possible future spending cuts through Suffolk County Council budget gap workshops. These include assumptions for increases in pay, inflation and funding changes. The underpinning assumptions are relatively robust, realistic, and prudent, and take account of the wider external environment. These continue to be subject to informed challenges by the county council.

There are clear arrangements for the use of reserves

[Reserves](#) are held by Suffolk County Council. There is a robust process in place for any use of reserves. And the service makes good use of reserves for projects such as its new mobilising control system, training centre and unmanned surveillance aircraft.

The service needs to improve its fleet plans

The service's estate strategy (strategic asset management plan) is clearly linked to the IRMP. The strategy is reviewed annually so that the service can properly assess the impact on changes in estate provision, or future innovation have on risk. The service makes the most of opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness by working with other emergency services. For example, it has refurbished Princess Street Fire Station. It now operates from this location with Suffolk Police.

The service has a 15-year fleet renewal programme and detailed plans for the period from 2018/19 to 2022/23. But it doesn't have a fleet strategy with clear links to the IRMP or plans beyond 2023.

The service has invested well in technology and capacity to support future change

In our previous inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should make sure it makes the best use of technology to improve its efficiency and effectiveness. We are encouraged to see the improvements the service has made since the last inspection.

The service secured an extra £100,000 from the county council to invest in future innovation and technology, capacity and capability. Through a digital transformation project, it has improved the service's wide area network, updated its mobile data terminals, and can remotely monitor IT and electrical systems at stations.

The service has put in place the capacity and capability needed to achieve sustainable transformation by recruiting additional business analysts and a programme manager. It routinely seeks opportunities to work with others to improve efficiency and provide better services in the future.

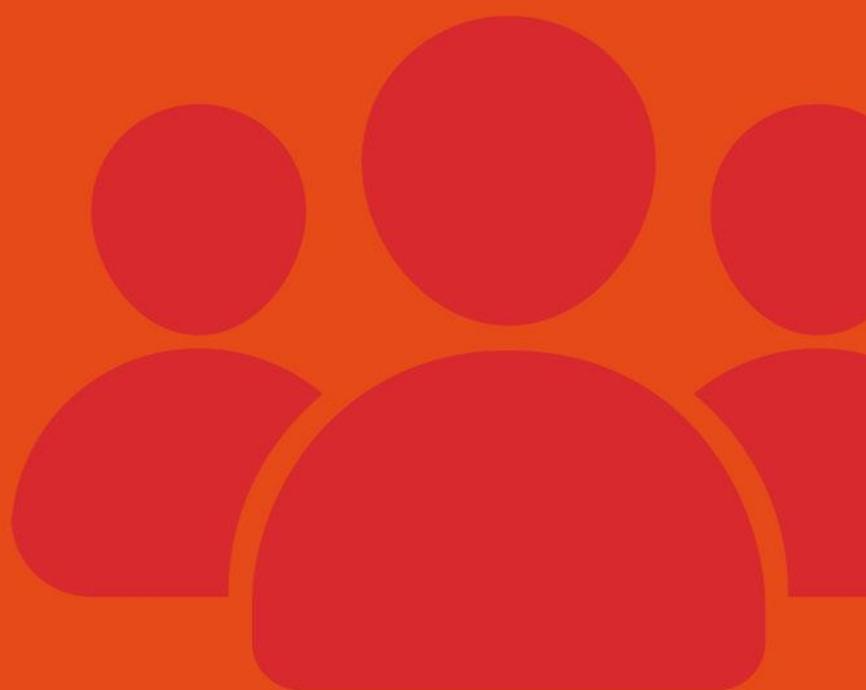
The service generates sustainable income

The service actively considers and exploits opportunities for generating extra income. This includes its sharing of estates with Suffolk Police and East England Ambulance Service. In this way, the service has saved about £12m in capital spending and makes savings through shared premise business rates.

The service receives a total annual income for shared stations, from other emergency services, of £238,975 (2021/2022).

Where appropriate, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has secured external funding to invest in improvements to the service provided to the public. These include £3.6m (with Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service) from central government to improve the fire control mobilising system, and £144,951 from the central government [fire transformation fund](#) to support building a combined fire and police station at Felixstowe.

People



How well does the service look after its people?



Good

Summary

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

Since our last inspection, the service has created a positive working culture where staff feel more valued and listened to. The behaviours it expects and the values it promotes are understood and demonstrated by all.

The service has improved its support for its workforce's physical and mental well-being – most notably for staff following a traumatic incident.

The service has also put effort into developing its recruitment processes so that they are fair and understood by potential applicants. But it was disappointing to find that not enough progress has been made in this area. The service needs to do more to improve how it identifies and supports high potential staff and aspiring leaders; and to make sure its selection, development and promotion of staff is open, transparent and fair.

Additionally, the service could do more to:

- increase staff diversity;
- improve staff understanding of the benefits of positive action; and
- improve the consistency and quality of EIAs.

Promoting the right values and culture



Good (2019: Good)

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

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

Area for improvement

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

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

The service's culture, behaviours and values are improving

In our previous inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should make sure its values and behaviours are understood and demonstrated at all levels of the organisation. We are encouraged to see the improvements the service has made since then.

There is a positive working culture throughout the service, with staff now feeling more empowered and willing to challenge poor behaviours when they encounter them.

The service has well-defined values within its own behavioural framework (ASPIRE 4 FIRE), which is understood by staff. At all levels, the workforce shows behaviours that reflect the service's values. We are encouraged by the cultural improvements the service has made. Work is in hand to integrate the new national [Core Code of Ethics](#) into its approach.

Most staff we spoke to said that the behaviours of both their colleagues and their line managers reflected the service's values, and that more senior leaders now act as role models than previously. But some staff told us that not all senior leaders model the values or are open to being challenged.

The service has improved its support for the workforce's mental and physical well-being

In our previous inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should make sure it has effective arrangements in place to support staff following a traumatic incident. We are encouraged to see the improvements the service has made since then.

The service has well-understood and effective well-being policies in place that are available to staff. A significant range of well-being support is available to support both physical and mental health. This now includes effective arrangements to support staff following a traumatic incident. The service has also made available:

- critical events boxes that contain information on mental health and forms to self-refer to services;
- an employee assistance programme;
- a 24/7 counselling service;
- mental health first aiders;
- a fitness and well-being officer;
- a well-being magazine; and
- access to The Fire Fighters Charity.

There are good provisions in place to promote staff well-being. These include regular conversations about health and well-being. For example, in our staff survey 69 percent (104 out of 150) of respondents said they have had a conversation more than once a year about their health and well-being with their manager. All staff reported they understand and have confidence in the well-being support processes available.

Health and safety management is good

The service has effective and well understood health and safety policies and procedures in place. In our staff survey, 98 percent (147 out of 150) of respondents told us they understand the policies and procedures the service has in place to make sure they can work safely.

These policies and procedures are readily available and effectively promoted to all staff. In our staff survey, 97 percent (146 out of 150) of respondents told us the service has clear procedures to report all accidents, [near misses](#), and dangerous occurrences. And 95 percent (143 out of 150) told us they have appropriate and properly fitting personal protection equipment they need to do their job safely, and that their personal safety and welfare is treated seriously at work.

There is a good health and safety culture, and staff have confidence in the health and safety approach taken by the service. Ninety-three percent (140 out of 150) of staff survey respondents told us they are encouraged to report all accidents, near misses, and dangerous occurrences.

In our previous inspection, we found that the service wasn't carrying out fitness testing for its operational staff in line with national guidance. It has since employed a fitness advisor and has gradually introduced annual fitness testing throughout the service with a view to aligning its approach with national guidance. We are interested to see how this develops.

Absence management is good

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

We found there are clear processes in place to manage absences for all staff. There is clear guidance for managers, who are confident in the process. Absences are managed well and in accordance with policy.

The service records the reasons for all absences, which allows it to monitor trends. Overall, the service saw a decrease in staff absences over the 12 months between 2019/20 and 2020/21.

The service should do more to monitor staff working hours

The service could do more to monitor staff working hours, including for staff who have multiple contracts with the service or other fire and rescue services. Staff are told they should comply with relevant working time regulations and not work excessive hours. But we didn't see robust arrangements for line managers to monitor the working hours of their staff. The service should review this matter.

Getting the right people with the right skills



Good (2019: Good)

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

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

Area for improvement

The service should make sure its workforce plan takes full account of the skills and capabilities necessary for carrying out the integrated risk management plan.

Area for improvement

The service should review its succession planning to make sure that it has effective arrangements in place to manage staff turnover while continuing to provide its core services to the public.

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

The service needs to improve workforce planning

The service does some workforce planning, and has a good understanding of its workforce profile. At a local level, the service understands the skills and risk-critical safety capabilities of the workforce necessary to meet current and future organisational needs.

Most staff told us that they could access the training they need to be effective in their role. For example, in our staff survey 86 percent (129 out of 150) of respondents told us they have received sufficient training to effectively do their job. The service prioritises risk-critical training, and its training plans make sure it can maintain competence and capability effectively. The service monitors the competence of its operational staff by planning and tracking training in a central system.

But the service doesn't have a workforce plan, or effective succession plans, that take full account of the skills and capabilities it needs to carry out the IRMP or adapt to changing future risk. We found that workforce planning tended to be reactive rather than considering likely future needs in advance. And succession planning was focused only on retirement. This was sometimes leading to longer than necessary staff shortages if staff left the service for other reasons.

The service supports staff with a range of training opportunities

A culture of continuous improvements is promoted throughout the service and staff are encouraged to learn and develop. For example, the service keeps staff up to date on national, regional and local operational learning through its internal communication systems. It also makes effective use of apprenticeships and offers health and safety management courses to staff.

The service has adapted how it offers training and development opportunities during the pandemic. This has included making the most of online platforms.

Most staff told us that they can access a range of learning and development resources. In our staff survey, 81 percent (122 out of 150) of respondents told us they were satisfied with the level of learning and development that is available to them. This allows them to do their job effectively.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity



Requires improvement (2019: Good)

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

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

Area for improvement

The service should improve staff understanding of positive action.

Area for improvement

The service should make sure it has robust processes in place to carry out equality impact assessments and review any actions agreed as a result.

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

The service needs to do more to improve staff confidence in giving feedback and challenging management

In our previous inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should assure itself that it has effective grievance procedures for all staff. In this inspection we were encouraged to see some improvements in this respect. But the service needs to do more to improve staff confidence in giving feedback and challenging management.

The service has developed several ways to engage with staff on issues and decisions that affect them. This includes methods to build all-staff awareness of fairness and diversity, as well as targeted engagement to identify matters that affect different staff groups. In this inspection, we found an increase in senior managers engaging with staff. We also found that the service was introducing grievance training, and that staff felt more confident to challenge senior leaders than before.

But in our staff survey, 36 percent (54 out of 150) of respondents told us they didn't feel confident in feedback systems and 32 percent (48 out of 150) said they felt they wouldn't be listened to. Most staff told us they were unable to provide evidence for action taken by the service following their staff survey.

The service is good at tackling bullying, harassment, and discrimination

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

In our staff survey, 7 percent (11 out of 150) of respondents told us they had been subject to harassment and 9 percent (14 out of 150) to discrimination over the past 12 months. Of these staff, most did not think their concerns had been dealt with appropriately.

Most staff are confident in the service's approach to tackling bullying, harassment and discrimination, grievances and disciplinary matters. Staff are clear about what to do if they encounter inappropriate behaviour. But we found that most staff were unaware of the service's whistleblowing procedure.

The service needs to do more to improve its approach to positive action

In our previous inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should improve the understanding among staff of positive action and the benefits of having a diverse workforce. There hasn't been enough progress in this area.

The service has put effort into developing its recruitment processes so that they are fair and understood by potential applicants. The recruitment, promotion and development policies are comprehensive and cover opportunities in all roles. Recruitment opportunities are advertised both internally and externally which has encouraged applicants from diverse backgrounds, including into middle and senior management roles.

But the service knows it still needs to do more to increase workforce diversity, especially for middle and senior management roles. Plans to address this are in place. These include plans to employ an external recruitment company and involve both the EDI working group and the community fire engagement officer in the service's recruitment processes. But we found limited understanding among staff about what positive action is or its benefits. The service is taking action to address this.

It previously introduced EDI training, but some staff didn't feel this met their needs. The service has since adjusted the training in response to this feedback.

There has been little progress to improve either ethnic background or gender diversity for all staff in the service. In 2017/18, 1.9 percent of the workforce self-declared as being from ethnic minority backgrounds and 11 percent of the workforce were women. In 2020/2021, 3.2 percent of the workforce self-declared as being from ethnic minority backgrounds, and 11 percent were women.

Firefighter-specific recruitment has only improved very slightly in this regard. The proportion of all firefighters identifying as being from ethnic minority backgrounds rose from 2 percent in 2017/18 to 2.6 percent in 2020/21. And the proportion of all firefighters who were women rose from 6.1 percent in 2017/18 to 6.3 percent in 2020/21.

The service could do more to improve equality, diversity and inclusion and its approach to equality impact assessments

The service's EDI strategy is good. It has a good Race Equality and Equality Action plan. And a wide range of support networks are available to staff.

These include the Asian Fire Service Association and Suffolk Women in Fire Together. Other networks support staff who:

- have a disability;
- are women;
- are from a black or Asian ethnic background; and
- are vegan.

But some support staff told us they feel they aren't always included, or treated as fairly as their operational colleagues. In our staff survey, 46 percent (69 out of 150) of respondents thought the service was effective in ensuring all staff are included and have equal opportunities.

The service needs to improve its approach to EIAs. During this inspection we sampled a range of EIAs. Although the service has a good process in place for these, this isn't being consistently applied. We were told that EIAs aren't always of the standard we would expect before they are submitted to Suffolk County Council's equality, diversity and inclusion board for scrutiny.

Managing performance and developing leaders



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at managing performance and developing leaders.

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

Area for improvement

The service should make sure its selection, development and promotion of staff is open, transparent and fair.

Area for improvement

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.

The service should do more to make sure that all staff have meaningful performance conversations

There is a good performance management system in place which allows the service to effectively develop and assess the individual performance of all staff. Each staff member should have individual goals and objectives, and regular assessments of performance, but currently this isn't always the case.

In our previous inspection we found that a low percentage of staff had completed a performance development review (appraisal). It was disappointing to find in our staff survey for the recent inspection that some staff had still not completed an appraisal and that 27 percent (41 out of 150) of respondents had had 1 or no conversations with their line manager about their performance in the last year. We found that appraisals weren't always being carried out appropriately. For example, not all staff were given specific and individual objectives. And appraisals were sometimes used to increase [on-call](#) staff hours rather than enable a meaningful career and development discussion with a manager.

Staff should feel confident in the performance and development arrangements that are in place.

Not all staff feel that promotion and progression processes are fair

In our previous inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should make sure its selection, development and promotion of staff is open, transparent and fair. There hasn't been enough progress in this area.

The service has put considerable effort into developing its promotion and progression guidance so that it is fair and understood by staff. But most staff we spoke to didn't have confidence in the process for promotion. In our staff survey, 55 percent (82 out of 150) of respondents thought the promotion process in the service was unfair.

From the files we sampled, and interviews with staff, we found that the service was running two different promotion processes. These were an interim assessment and development process, and a development pathway process under the service's promotion and development guidance. Inspectors were unable to give a clear rationale for running two processes. And some staff told us they didn't understand the reason for which of these processes they were being asked to carry out.

The service is reviewing its promotion and progression guidance, which is creating further complication.

The service isn't succession planning or developing leadership and high-potential staff effectively

In our previous inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders. There hasn't been enough progress in this area.

The service doesn't have effective succession planning processes in place that allow it to effectively manage the career pathways of its staff, including roles requiring specialist skills. But the service told us that it will be looking to develop the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#)'s succession planning model. We are interested to see how this develops.

The service's promotion and development guidance defines development pathways for both firefighters and support staff. But as stated above, we found that it wasn't following this guidance consistently, and not offering all staff a development pathway. This has resulted in inconsistency and undermines staff perception of fairness in the process.

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

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