

Fire & Rescue Service

Effectiveness, efficiency and people 2018/19

An inspection of West Midlands Fire 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 West Midlands Fire 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**.

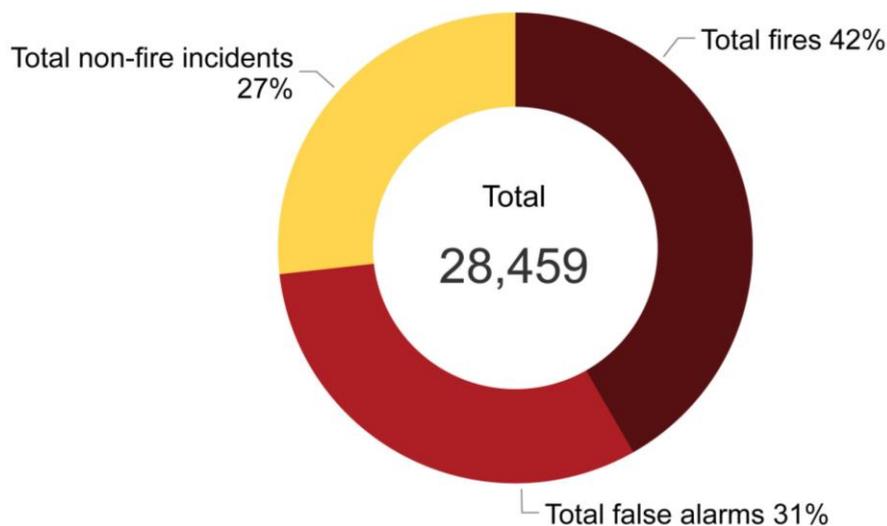
If we find shortcomings in the service, we will judge it as **requires improvement**.

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	West Midlands	England
Perceived effectiveness of service Public perceptions survey (June/July 2018)		83%	86%
	Response	West Midlands	England
Incidents attended per 1,000 population 12 months to 30 September 2018		9.8	10.5
Home fire risk checks carried out by FRS per 1,000 population 12 months to 31 March 2018		10.9	10.4
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises 12 months to 31 March 2018		2.4	3.0

Incidents attended in the 12 months to 30 September 2018





Cost

West Midlands

England

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

£22.16

£22.38



Workforce

West Midlands

England

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

0.5

0.6

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

-14%

-14%

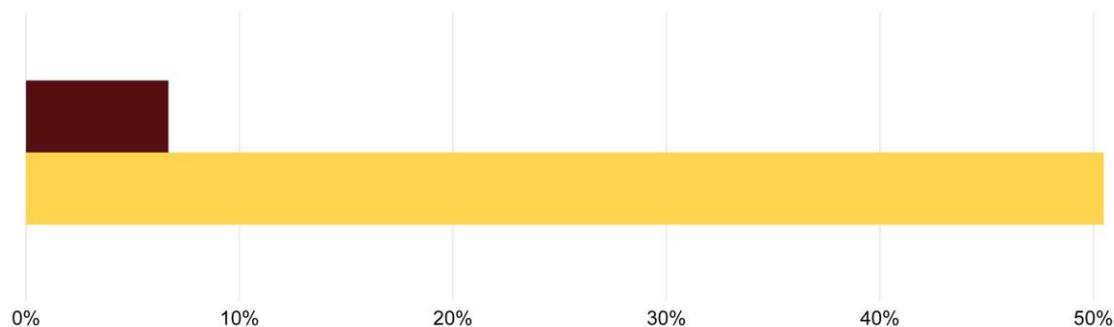
Percentage of wholetime firefighters
As at 31 March 2018

100%

70%

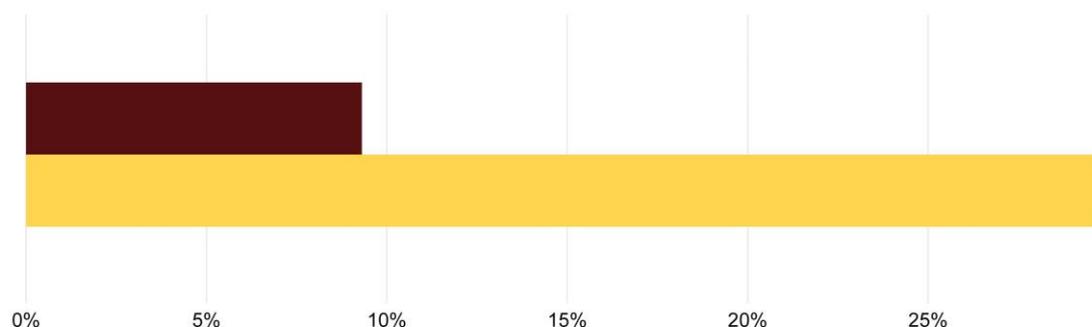
Percentage of female firefighters as at 31 March 2018

● Female firefighters ● Female residential population



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

● BAME firefighters ● BAME residential population



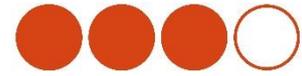
Please refer to annex A for full details on data used.

Overview

 Effectiveness	 Good
Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies	 Good
Preventing fires and other risks	 Good
Protecting the public through fire regulation	 Good
Responding to fires and other emergencies	 Outstanding
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



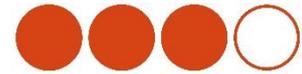
Good

Promoting the right values and culture



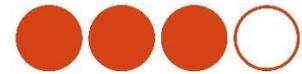
Requires improvement

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 very pleased with the performance of West Midlands Fire Service in keeping people safe and secure, and in particular with its effectiveness.

West Midlands Fire Service is good at providing an effective service. Its response to fires and other emergencies is outstanding. It is good at:

- understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies;
- preventing fires and other risks;
- protecting the public through fire regulation; and
- responding to national risks.

The service's efficiency is good. We judged it to be good at making the best use of resources and at giving an affordable service.

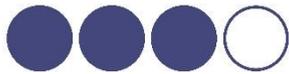
It is good at looking after its people, too. It is good at getting the right people with the right skills and at ensuring fairness and promoting diversity. But it does require improvement at promoting the right values and culture, and at managing performance and developing leaders.

Overall, we commend West Midlands Fire Service for its performance. We are confident it is well equipped for this to continue.

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. West Midlands Fire Service's overall effectiveness is good.

West Midlands Fire Service has a good understanding of local and community risk. Its approach is outlined in its three-year plan, which is available to the public via its website. The plan uses a range of data to inform its response, protection and prevention strategies.

The service's prevention strategy covers four main areas. It carries out research to make sure prevention work focuses on people who are most at risk from fire. It prioritises requests and referrals for [safe and well visits](#) to those deemed most at risk. The service also carries out many campaigns to promote community safety.

Following the Grenfell Tower fire, the service made it a priority to assure the public about the safety of high-rise buildings. As a result, its statutory risk-based inspection programme fell behind schedule. To catch up, it is recruiting more specialist staff.

The service is supportive in its approach to enforcement to ensure compliance. Fire crews carry out routine visits to commercial premises to ensure fire safety compliance. It also works with other organisations to improve public safety.

The service is very effective in how it responds to emergencies. It has introduced smaller response vehicles and changed shift patterns so its resources are appropriately allocated to the highest risks. It uses a tool, 999eye, which allows control operators to see incidents. It uses GPS to make sure its response vehicles are well positioned throughout the region. And it uses various methods to monitor and evaluate its performance to make sure it keeps to its ambitious response standards.

The service can show it is ready to respond to both local and national events when needed. It regularly tests its procedures jointly with other organisations. But it could improve how often it trains with neighbouring services. It could also improve its crews' access to cross-border risk information.

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies



Good

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

West Midlands Fire Service has a good understanding of local and community risk. It lets the public know about these risks, and how it will manage them, in its three-year plan.

The service uses a wide range of information to build this plan. It bases its main priorities on evidence. It considers the requirements of the [Fire and Rescue National Framework](#), and looks at factors such as age, income, health deprivation, and education and skills. The service uses data from various sources to build its response and prevention strategies. It also looks at target projections, such as future changes in population. For example, using local authority data, the service knows the local population is set to increase by 7.5 percent by 2025, and that 20 percent of that increase will be people over 65 years old.

The service has used academic research – a survivability study – to help decide the best response to community risks. As a result, it has introduced an average response time of five minutes to high-risk incidents, to reduce the potential for loss of life.

West Midlands Fire Service uses its public website to communicate and consult with a wide range of communities in several different languages. It uses social media to post safety messages to increase public awareness about the risk of fire and other emergencies. It can translate its plan into about 100 different languages. It also has an active community membership scheme with 3,239 members. It uses this scheme to consult and give feedback on service-related topics.

The service identifies and prioritises domestic and commercial properties that are most at risk from fire by using a system known as RIDGE (risk information data gathering engine). This system is still being developed, but it already contains a range of data from other organisations, such as Ofsted reports and Food Standards Agency ratings.

Having an effective risk management plan

West Midlands Fire Service's plan is clearly linked to the work it carries out. This plan is a live, interactive online document that describes how the service will reduce risk through prevention, protection and response. The service uses a matrix called SAFER (satisfaction, aspiration, finance, environment and risk) to measure the plan's efficiencies and make sure its work continues to improve public safety.

The service uses data from both internal and external sources. This includes operational incident data and site-specific risk information (SSRI) about commercial and domestic premises. It works closely with other organisations and national groups to keep informed about emerging and potential changes to local and national risks, such as hoarding and waste sites.

The service identifies high, medium and low-risk areas of the West Midlands by mapping risk and using predictive analysis. It uses this information to identify areas of highest risk so it can have suitable prevention, protection and response measures in place.

Its command management teams include members of its prevention and protection departments, who share information for risk planning. The developing RIDGE system enables both prevention and protection teams to upload risk information about individual properties. A serious incident review process enables cross-departmental risk sharing.

Maintaining risk information

West Midlands Fire Service has a good system in place to record all its visits to premises for the purpose of collecting and updating SSRI. Birmingham City Council gives the service information about high-rise buildings, and the two organisations are developing a data-sharing agreement. This will enable them to share information about tenants who are at greater risk from fire, allowing the service to develop a more appropriate response strategy.

Firefighters carry out visits to and exercises at various premises to make sure the risk information they hold is correct. SSRI is available to, and shared with, all staff. The service has used learning from operational events such as the Grenfell Tower fire to gather risk data.

We found that firefighters had a good understanding of local risks. They were also well informed about new and emerging risks. The service shares risk information via a platform on its intranet in the form of alerts, ops flashes (a means of sharing information that staff need to know about as soon as possible) and electronic debriefs. The control room also has a process in place to share urgent risk information across the service. And fire crews have access to risk information through the [mobile data terminals](#) (MDTs) in every fire engine.

We were pleased to see that the service has good systems in place to keep the public informed about local risks. The public can access the community safety strategy via its website. This is an online interactive tool, updated four times a year. It allows people to monitor risks in their area and see how the service is responding to them. The public and the service's local managers can use the platform to access

postcode-specific information about the operational, prevention and protection activity that has taken place in their area.

Preventing fires and other risks



Good

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

Prevention strategy

West Midlands Fire Service has a strategy in place to make sure its prevention work complies with its statutory responsibility to protect the public from the risk of fire. This strategy covers four specific areas: accidental fires, road safety, arson, and health engagement.

The service has carried out considerable research to help it understand the primary risk factors within communities. This includes reviewing serious incidents where injuries or deaths have occurred and where smoking, mental health or alcohol was a contributory factor. It uses this information to make sure that its prevention work is concentrated on those people most at risk from fire in the community.

The service conducts safe and well visits, also known as [home fire safety checks](#), for those residents most at risk from fire and other emergencies. Visits take place following referrals from a range of agencies, and firefighters generate them locally. As at 31 March 2018, home fire safety checks in the service include identifying potential fire risks; acting to reduce those risks; making sure working smoke alarms are fitted; advising on social welfare; ill-health prevention; advising on slips, trips and falls; and advising on other matters such as road safety. In the year to 31 March 2018, the service carried out 10.9 home fire safety checks per 1,000 population.

As well as referrals from other organisations, firefighters generate their own safe and well referrals through activities such as coffee mornings for elderly people, assisted living schemes, student activities, and visits to high-rise premises where it is known some residents may be more vulnerable to the risk of fire.

We established that 55 percent of current safe and well referrals come from partner agencies, such as the local authority [safeguarding](#) board. The service prioritises these referrals for visits, as they are considered to be higher risk than the visits that are self-generated by firefighters.

The service uses a points matrix to assess the level of risk for each referral. It sets targets for firefighters, to make sure safe and well visits focus on members of the public who are most at risk from fire and other emergencies. We found some evidence that staff felt under pressure to meet their targets. We took a dip sample of the recording system for safe and well visits. We were disappointed to find no action had been taken against a very small number of requests which had been in the system for some time.

It was good to see that the service has introduced several complex needs officers (CNOs). These CNOs are available at most stations and are specially trained to understand more complex vulnerabilities, such as dementia, drug and alcohol abuse, and modern-day slavery. They work to direct [vulnerable people](#) towards local support services and reduce their likelihood of needing interventions in the future.

Promoting community safety

West Midlands Fire Service and its partner organisations, such as Age UK, are involved in a wide range of meaningful and diverse projects to promote community safety. Local initiatives are evaluated, and rolled out to the whole service if successful.

The service has worked extensively with Birmingham City Council to reassure residents and improve building safety in high-rise flats. Following the Grenfell Tower fire, it took part in more than 30 joint advice and reassurance sessions for residents of 213 tower blocks between November 2017 and April 2018.

The service actively works with several organisations at a strategic level, such as safeguarding boards and local authorities, to look at safety in high-rise buildings.

A central team co-ordinates fire-setter intervention work. It uses a system called inPhase to track fire activity so it can target its interventions with young people more effectively.

The team visits children who have misused fire through curiosity, crime or gang related activity. Sessions are one-to-one and focus on how arson can affect the community. The team also explains the consequences of arson to children and their parents or carers. Referrals come from organisations such as schools and youth offending teams. Examples of work with partner agencies to reduce arson include a local prison initiative with HM Prison Service. This has resulted in a reduction from 57 incidents of arson in prisons in 2017/18 to only 2 in the first quarter of 2018.

We were impressed with the two Safeside education centres which the service has established with other organisations. These centres inform and educate about fire safety, fire-setting behaviour and arson, including the legal consequences of these acts for offenders.

The organisations we spoke to were extremely positive about their working relationships with West Midlands Fire Service. One organisation described their joint work as exceeding expectations. It explained that the service had created a training and awareness package for staff about modern slavery. This resulted in the service identifying victims of trafficking, who were then referred to the police.

Road safety

The service is actively involved in several local and national initiatives to promote road safety. It is the lead authority in the Birmingham Road Safety Partnership.

A central team co-ordinates all road safety work. The work includes initiatives with West Midlands Police, covering topics such as speed awareness, use of mobile

phones and seat belts, anti-drink/drug-driving campaigns, and crash extraction demonstrations to the public.

The team also works with the combined authority to support the West Midlands Regional Road Safety Strategy. It takes part in joint campaigns such as [Biker Down](#) (motorcycles), Travel West Midlands (pedestrians) and Every Choice Counts (young drivers). Through working with other organisations, the service has identified that the risk age group has changed from 16–25 years to 16–35 years. This information helps the team target road safety activity at those most at risk.

Protecting the public through fire regulation



Good

West Midlands Fire Service is good at protecting the public through fire regulation. But we found the following area in which it needs to improve:

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure it has sufficient resources to deliver its risk-based inspection programme.

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

West Midlands Fire Service has a risk-based inspection programme. Audits focus on commercial premises with an associated risk, such as a sleeping area above a shop. The service is using and developing its RIDGE system, which enables it to prioritise audits to those of highest risk.

We found that fire safety staff were carrying out many audits that were reactive rather than proactively risk-based. The service decided to re-prioritise its risk-based inspection programme following the Grenfell Tower fire. This resulted in the risk-based inspection programme schedule falling behind, so the service is actively recruiting 11 qualified fire safety officers to address this. In the year to 31 December 2018, it audited 1,901 of the 11,712 high risk premises it had identified.

In the year to 31 March 2018, the service carried out 2.4 fire safety audits per 100 known premises, which equates to 2,211 audits. This compares to the England rate of 3.0 over the same period. Of the 2,211 fire safety audits the service carried out in the year to 31 March 2018, 56 percent were satisfactory.

Operational crews carry out 'safe and strong' protection visits. These are routine visits to commercial premises. Staff complete a series of online learning packages to give them the necessary knowledge to conduct them. They prioritise their visits on the basis of themed risks, or because of fires at similar types of premises – for example, light industrial premises, shops or pubs. If staff identify significant or more complex risks, a referral means that a qualified fire safety officer will audit the premises.

Protection teams are aligned across command areas to ensure consistency of work patterns. Quality assurance has been limited, but there are plans to address this with the newly recruited fire safety officers.

We were disappointed to see that the service has been slow at responding to building regulation consultations during the last quarter of 2018. It received 478 consultations and only responded to 253 within the required timeframe.

Enforcement

West Midlands Fire Service is proactive in taking enforcement action for the non-compliance of fire safety regulations. In the four years ending 31 March 2018, it issued 98 enforcement notices, 106 prohibition orders, 16 alterations and brought 68 prosecutions. The service has a dedicated team comprising specialised fire safety officers that works to build such prosecution cases.

It was interesting to note that the service adopts a supportive approach to enforcement. Businesses are allowed a 42-day appeal period, rather than the statutory 21 days, to enable them to achieve compliance.

Firefighters and fire safety staff are appropriately trained to national standards to identify and respond to fire safety concerns when attending buildings for visits or incidents.

The service works with a range of organisations to share information on risk and take joint enforcement action. Examples include:

- business support officers working with enforcement agencies to identify premises linked to terrorism and modern-day slavery;
- working with housing providers to audit 551 high-rise buildings in the West Midlands to make sure flammable cladding was identified and removed when needed; and
- in conjunction with police, the local authority and UK Visas and Immigration, identifying a residential property above a shop (an unprotected sleeping risk) which uncovered evidence of criminality. This resulted in a closure order on the premises.

Working with others

West Midlands Fire Service works effectively with a broad range of partner agencies and businesses. It is working hard to reduce the negative effect of attending false alarms (unwanted fire signals). It has introduced business support vehicles, crewed by business support officers. These officers work with premises where alarms frequently activate. Since 2011, calls to unwanted fire signals have dropped from 27 percent to 19 percent of total calls.

The service identified that, in one area, 40 percent of its unwanted fire signals originated from singularly owned properties. As a result, it established a project involving fire safety officers and local station crews working with residents to understand why alarms were sounding. This project is ongoing and due for evaluation shortly.

In response to the Grenfell Tower fire, the service has carried out joint exercises in high-rise buildings with organisations such as local council housing departments. The next exercise will test how effectively the service can evacuate more than 100 residents in the event of a fire in a high-rise building.

The introduction of safe and strong visits to businesses is an innovative initiative. These are similar to safe and well visits, but more focused towards sharing information after incidents in commercial properties. However, we found that not all firefighters fully understood the purpose of these visits.

Responding to fires and other emergencies



Outstanding

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

We found strong evidence that West Midlands Fire Service is highly effective in how it responds to fires and other emergencies.

The service has set itself an ambitious standard of responding to high-risk incidents in a median average time of five minutes from the time a fire engine starts travelling to the incident. This standard was adopted after extensive research into survivability rates and how to reduce loss of life. In the period between 1 April 2018 and 31 December 2018, the service's median average response travel time for high risk calls was 4 minutes 43 seconds, excluding call handling times. In the year to 31 March 2018, its average response time to all [primary fires](#), regardless of the risk and including call handling time, was 6 minutes 41 seconds.

To achieve this standard, the service has made several significant improvements over the past few years, such as introducing:

- 19 brigade response vehicles, crewed by fewer firefighters than a traditional fire engine, to attend lower-risk incidents. These vehicles can still carry out rescues, if needed;
- three business support vehicles, crewed by a single member of staff. These vehicles respond to unwanted fire signals, enabling the larger vehicles to stay available for more risk-critical work; and
- a revised 12-hour shift for staff, covering the period from 10am to 10pm daily. This makes sure the service can give the public a more effective and timely response during periods of highest demand.

Response

The improvements detailed above have contributed to the service's ambitious response standard. It has worked hard to understand and assess where its risks are, so it can organise its resources more effectively. It has the added benefit that all its operational firefighters are [wholetime staff](#). This means it can respond to calls immediately, 24 hours a day.

In the year to 30 September 2018, the service attended 9.8 incidents per 1,000 population. This compares to the England rate of 10.5 over the same period.

In 2017, the service introduced a tool called 999eye, which enables control room operators to see an image of an incident. The caller receives a hyperlink with which they can send a photo or video directly to the control room. Control room staff can then assess the scale and severity of the incident, and so make sure the service responds with the most appropriate resources. We found evidence of this tool being used effectively during our inspection, at the scene of a fatal fire in a neighbouring service.

The service uses a dynamic cover tool and GPS to give real-time updates of how and where response vehicles are located at any given time across the region. The software calculates the best way for the service to achieve its response time by moving resources around the county. Control room staff use this information to make sure the service maintains its stated average response time of five minutes to high-risk incidents.

Control room staff have access to a wide range of information to make sure they send the most appropriate resources to an incident (for example, fire survival guidance and major hazards). They are also notified of any temporary or urgent updates to risk information so they can add markers to addresses.

The service is making good progress in adopting [national operational guidance](#) (NOG) both locally and regionally. It already has a gap analysis, action plan and implementation framework in place.

Command

Commanders across West Midlands Fire Service showed good levels of knowledge and understanding of how to command operational incidents. Staff could describe the actions they would take if they had to step outside of normal operational procedures. Commanders are regularly assessed to show that they are competent.

Incident commanders have a variety of aids to give them information about incident risk. When vehicles are sent to an incident, their crews receive certain details in the form of a turnout sheet. This sheet contains information about the type of incident they are attending and any associated risk information – for example, if the service is aware that oxygen is in use at the property or the occupier is a known hoarder.

Keeping the public informed

The service has introduced two systems in its control room to enable its operators to communicate more effectively with the public, some of whom don't speak English.

One system, known as LanguageLine, enables ready access to an interpreter, who can relay information between the caller and the control operator. A second system, known as EISEC, gives geographic information about a caller's location via an online map.

The service has a corporate social media account, which it uses to share safety and incident information with the public. It also uses social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. We saw examples of local stations using social media to engage with local communities.

We found evidence that staff, without exception, can identify vulnerability and safeguard vulnerable people at incidents.

Evaluating operational performance

West Midlands Fire Service has a good process in place to evaluate and assess operational performance.

We found that [hot debriefs](#) (held shortly after the incident) are routinely carried out by fire crews. These debriefs are designed to identify good practice and learning. The service also has a more formal process where commanders and crews complete a debrief form. This is used after large-scale incidents or exercises.

A central team collates information from debriefs, summarises the results and shares the learning across the service in a bulletin. If an issue is risk-critical, an immediate routine notice is issued. We saw examples of these notices.

It is service policy that when five or more fire engines are sent to an incident, a performance review command (PRC) officer must attend. A PRC officer is a trained command assessor who can assess the effectiveness of commanders at incidents. According to service policy, commanders must have a PRC assessment every 12 months. We carried out a review of PRC evaluations and found the information recorded was constructive, with areas of strengths and development identified. Commanders receive feedback and, if necessary, a development plan.

We were impressed with the service's station peer assessment (SPA) team. This team is responsible for evaluating the performance of station-based teams. The SPA team also gives quality assurance to check that systems and practices are consistent across the service. Themes include the recording and monitoring of staff competency, prevention activities and SSRI. After each assessment, a report is prepared, and learning is shared with both the station teams and the central intelligence team.

The service is involved in regional thematic peer reviews. Regional services take turns to review response protocols for different types of incident, such as working at height and near water, to share learning and draw up action plans, if needed.

The service actively monitors the performance of all call handlers within the control room. This is to make sure they meet monthly call handling time targets.

Responding to national risks



Good

West Midlands Fire 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 operational staff have good access to cross-border risk information.
- The service should arrange a programme of over-the-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

West Midlands Fire Service has several [national resilience assets](#) that can be called on in the event of a national incident. Control room staff have a clear understanding of the process they should follow if these assets are needed, supported by an aide memoire. When assets are deployed, there are plans in place to move fire engines and personnel to maintain normal operational cover.

In the event of a large-scale incident (involving 15 or more fire engines), a strategic level commander is needed. This commander decides if additional resources or interventions, such as [fire control](#) support, incident room managers or inter-agency liaison officers, are needed.

Exercise plans incorporate the higher-risk premises within station areas so realistic training can be carried out. This makes sure that site-specific response plans can be tested.

Working with other services

The service is proud of the control room function it shares with Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service (FRS). This has resulted in the two services being able to share risk-critical information and resources more effectively. As previously mentioned, the service supports a regional action plan for implementing NOG. It works regionally to test resource plans and nationally to share learning – such as work following the Grenfell Tower and waste site fires.

Crews from West Midlands Fire Service regularly give operational support to Staffordshire and Warwickshire FRSs, and there is some joint training across those borders. However, we found that the West Midlands crews' access to cross-border risk information was limited. Also, there is no centrally co-ordinated schedule in place for regular training and exercising with neighbouring services.

We also found evidence of several occasions where the service had supported other FRSs further afield at major and complex incidents. One such example is the 2018 Winter Hill wildfires in Lancashire.

Working with other agencies

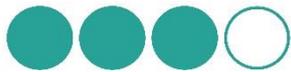
A senior representative from West Midlands Fire Service chairs the [local resilience forum](#) (LRF) and the service is an active member. Joint training and exercising takes place with local organisations through the LRF. Partner organisations record lessons learnt and share information on planning and response through [joint organisational learning](#). This knowledge is shared via the online portal [Resilience Direct](#). We found there is limited opportunity for multi-agency training and exercising at tactical (initial response) level, however.

The service is well trained and prepared to respond to a variety of incidents as part of a multi-agency response, including a terrorist attack. Specially trained staff have been involved in large-scale multi-agency exercises to test response plans. Control room staff show a good understanding of procedures in the event of a marauding terrorist attack. Commanders at all levels show a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the event of a major incident.

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. West Midlands Fire Service's overall efficiency is good.

West Midlands Fire Service is good at financial planning. It has robust financial plans in place, and good processes for their scrutiny. Since 2011, it has made savings of £28m. It has a flexible resourcing model to cover prevention, protection and response work. It can show that it has made changes to resources to reflect the changing role of firefighters.

The service collaborates well with both blue light partners and other agencies, such as the local authority emergency planning team, to improve public safety. It shares its fire control function with Staffordshire FRS and is looking to expand this function with Warwickshire FRS.

The service manages its finances successfully. Its planning cycles are based on a three-year rolling programme to take account of uncertainties with future funding streams.

The service is continually striving to improve. It has successfully implemented many IT improvements, such as a project management tool and dynamic cover tool. It has good continuity plans in place, including a clear business continuity plan for IT failure.

The service has an appropriate level of financial [reserves](#). It works with other organisations to save money and uses specialist staff to generate additional income, among other initiatives.

Making best use of resources



Good

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

West Midlands Fire Service has clear and robust financial plans in place to provide an emergency service, as required by the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. The plans are built on sound planning assumptions, which are subject to informed challenge and meet financial requirements. The service achieved efficiency savings of £28m between 2011 and 2017, following a reduction in service funding.

In the year to 31 March 2018, the firefighter cost per head of the population was £22.16. This compares to the England average of £22.38 over the same timeframe. The service is aware that proposed changes to terms and conditions for operational crews may pose a risk in the future. It is also considering the effect of a possible governance change to West Midlands Combined Authority.

The service has developed a comprehensive understanding of risk, which it has used to develop a resourcing model. As at 31 March 2018, it had 38 [wholetime fire stations](#) and 41 operational fire engines, which are supported by various smaller vehicles. This creates a flexible model covering prevention, protection and response activities.

Operational staff working in central teams are expected to carry out 22 shifts each year, supporting local crews. They can also volunteer for additional shifts. This gives the service operational resilience. It is recruiting 11 additional staff in its protection team to meet an identified increasing risk. It is also looking at how it can use its resources more efficiently and flexibly to conduct safe and well visits for the public.

The service has good processes in place for scrutiny of its financial plans. For example, Grant Thornton carries out its external audits. Internally, West Midlands Fire Authority members assess its financial reports and the financial strategy during their regular quarterly meetings.

Productivity and ways of working

West Midlands Fire Service has made several significant changes to improve the service it gives to the public. It has recognised that the role of a firefighter has changed, and that its traditional shift patterns and ways of working need to be flexible. We were impressed with some of the fundamental changes the service has achieved.

As previously mentioned, the service has introduced smaller vehicles. It has also changed shift patterns for some operational staff, to give the public a better service during periods of highest demand. It has introduced mobile electronic tablets for firefighters, so they can save time on paperwork and spend more time in their communities.

The service offers a range of flexible working patterns. Support staff predominantly use these between the hours of 6.00am and 10.00pm. It was good to see the service is using control room staff to operate the safe and well booking system during quieter times, and operational crews to carry out low-level business safety checks (safe and strong visits).

We did note that there was unease among some staff about how performance – such as the numbers of completed safe and well visits – was being managed within the service. If the senior team considers targets are necessary to drive certain activities, it needs to make sure that staff understand the reasons behind these decisions.

Collaboration

West Midlands Fire Service is meeting its legal duty to collaborate with its blue light partners. The service understands the link between vulnerability, health and risk. It works with a wide range of organisations to improve public safety. It makes sure any joint working or collaborative arrangements benefit the public and give value for money.

The service shares its fire control function with Staffordshire FRS, as well as supporting that service with fire investigations. West Midlands Fire Service is negotiating with another neighbouring service to collaborate on three areas of work: shared fire control, training and community safety.

The service works with others to share information on bulk purchasing and the testing of equipment. It uses established frameworks where possible, including central government frameworks and Birmingham City Council's framework for major construction projects.

We found some good evidence of how the service reviews and evaluates the benefits of collaboration. For example, the joint fire control venture with Staffordshire FRS has resulted in a joint annual saving of £1.5m between both services. Response times for residents across both services have also improved.

Continuity arrangements

West Midlands Fire Service has good continuity plans which are regularly tested.

The business continuity plan for its control room contains a comprehensive list of evacuation strategies and actions linked to multiple scenarios. These include electronic and radio failures, and natural impacts such as bad weather. Each scenario details immediate actions and solutions. A testing and exercising schedule is in place.

There is also a clear business continuity plan for IT failure. Action cards are available which detail scenarios, with the resources needed for recovery and specific contingency arrangements. All data is backed up to a cloud-based server every 24 hours so that data can be restored, meaning the loss of only 24 hours' worth of data at most.

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



Good

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

West Midlands Fire Service is good at its financial management of principal non-pay costs, including fleet and equipment. It has arrangements in place to scrutinise procurement quotes above £3,000, with more formal processes for spending over £30,000.

The service has a dashboard, 3PT, to oversee project management systems. This is fully understood by staff at all levels of the organisation. It allows principal managers to discuss and scrutinise ongoing projects to make sure they are providing value for money. 3PT is used to support cross-departmental working across the service.

To improve value for money, the service is extending the life of its vehicles based on maintenance records, usage, resale value, etc. For example, each full-size fire engine has had its life expectancy increased from 10 to 13 years. The replacement cycles are then linked to budget forecasts.

The service bases its broader financial planning on a three-year rolling programme, in line with its plan. This means there is little financial planning beyond this. It is awaiting the government's pending comprehensive spending review, which may affect future budgets significantly.

We noted that West Midlands Fire Service has looked at alternative funding to support its service delivery model. Unfortunately, these plans proved unpopular with the workforce and were withdrawn to avoid industrial action. This is a challenge for the service, as national pay and conditions negotiations are outside its influence.

Innovation

We found West Midlands Fire Service to be forward-thinking and innovative. It has a strong desire to continuously improve its service to the public and support its workforce.

The service is working through a plan to improve effectiveness and efficiency through the use of technology. It has already implemented the dynamic cover tool (fire engine availability) and 999eye systems. It has also introduced Skype. One benefit of this is a reduction in travel time and costs.

We found that staff are frustrated by some inefficient IT systems. They told us some information has to be entered more than once into different databases. We also found that a few fire stations were still using paper-based methods. The service has recently purchased licences for Office 365 software with the intention of modernising these systems.

The service has several initiatives ongoing, such as:

- replacing MDTs and introducing GPSs;
- upgrading its command and control function;
- modernising its estates; and
- investing more in project management.

It has also seconded a senior member of staff to the West Midlands Combined Authority to help plan for the effect of any potential changes in governance arrangements.

Future investment and working with others

West Midlands Fire Service has a good level of financial reserves. It uses these productively to support investments to enhance its service to the public. The total reserve fund is 57 percent of its net expenditure budget, as at 31 March 2018. The service intends to reduce its reserves over coming years by using a large proportion to fund capital projects. It is aiming to reduce its general reserves balance to £5m by 2021. This is around 5 percent of its net expenditure budget.

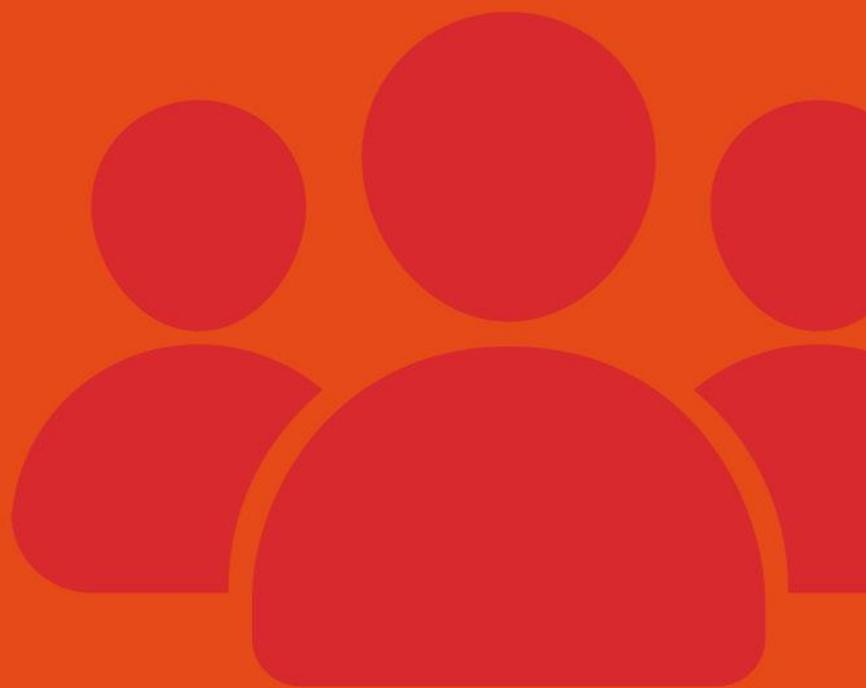
The service knows its current use of reserves isn't sustainable to fund capital purchases in the long term, and that it will need to review its strategy beyond 2020/21.

It works with several other organisations to improve efficiency, for example:

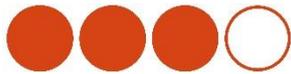
- sharing accommodation with West Midlands Police;
- sharing emergency planning with Wolverhampton Council;
- having regional procurement groups; and
- collaborating with Warwickshire FRS in the future.

The service also uses specialist staff to generate additional income. It has a fully trained fire investigation team, with a commissioning agreement in place across the region. Staff are encouraged to pursue opportunities for low-level income generation. For example, developments made in the service's IT department are sold to other FRSs.

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, West Midlands Fire Service is good at looking after its people.

West Midlands Fire Service offers good wellbeing support for its staff, including after traumatic incidents. Health and safety is taken seriously, and staff are encouraged to report accidents and [near misses](#) so that learning and improvement can be shared.

The service has a comprehensive policy in place for managing sickness absence. It also has a clear set of behavioural values and a code of conduct. The service is going through a period of substantial change. It is challenging traditional ways of working, which some staff have found difficult to accept. It recognises this is causing discontentment among some staff. Staff told us that some managers are using a heavy-handed approach to push through changes.

Staff are well trained and the service has a clear approach to workforce planning to make sure there are enough staff to cover important roles. But we found this approach didn't extend to management of temporary staff. The service has a high percentage of staff who have been in temporary roles for long periods of time.

West Midlands Fire Service has many ways to communicate with staff and seek their feedback. These include internal networks to support staff from under-represented groups. The service is keen to succeed as an inclusive employer and actively seeks to make its workforce more reflective of the diverse communities it serves. This has raised some challenges that it will need to manage carefully.

The service doesn't have a process to identify and develop high-potential staff. But it does have a system to make sure promotion processes are consistent. However, some staff don't think the promotion processes are fair.

Promoting the right values and culture



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure its values and behaviours are demonstrated at all levels of the organisation. It should also ensure that managers actively promote these standards to improve the perception among some staff of an overbearing management style.

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

Workforce wellbeing

West Midlands Fire Service has a comprehensive wellbeing strategy, which offers support to staff for a broad range of issues. It includes provisions for physical and mental health, stress and menopause. Staff have access to a 24-hour employee assistance programme covering a range of topics, including debt management. The service also offers physiotherapy and rehabilitative support to staff after an injury.

Staff understand the [critical incident](#) debrief process, which is offered after a difficult or traumatic incident. They can also contact the occupational health (OH) department and request one-to-one support if needed.

The service offers good OH provision. The OH team monitors sickness absence and trends, and has a good understanding of health and wellbeing across the service. We found that staff have a good understanding of how to contact OH, and the majority spoke positively about how their wellbeing needs are met.

The service has a comprehensive policy in place for managing sickness absence. It monitors its sickness and accident data against national OH data. It encourages quick return to work by providing personalised rehabilitation plans and modified duty patterns.

Health and safety

West Midlands Fire Service has robust health and safety arrangements in place, including a governance process for strategic oversight and management of all health and safety issues.

It has a centrally-based health and safety team. This team works proactively across the service, carrying out regular inspections and responding to emerging health and safety issues. Risk-critical health and safety messages are shared across the service via safety-critical notices.

Staff are encouraged to report near-miss events, and the health and safety team reports on incidents within 28 days. The team monitors trends and themes, and recommends interventions. Local managers investigate minor incidents. However, we noted that the central team have minimal oversight of these local investigations.

The service takes part in quarterly regional meetings with neighbouring FRSs. This makes sure it is well informed about wider health and safety issues, which can then be translated into learning across the organisation.

Culture and values

West Midlands Fire Service has a clear set of behavioural values and a code of conduct. These are published on its intranet, and are central to how it recruits, appraises and progresses staff.

Notably, the service is going through a period of substantial change. It is challenging traditional ways of working, which some staff have found difficult to accept. The 2018 trade dispute has also caused employee relations to suffer.

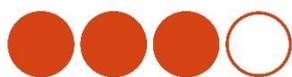
Using data, the service can show that less than 10 percent of firefighters' time is spent responding to emergencies. As a result, it is making changes to make sure staff spend their time more productively. The senior team acknowledges this is causing discontentment among staff.

During our inspection, a lot of staff spoke of a working environment where they now feel valued, respected and empowered. We were given various examples that reflected the service's open and inclusive leadership style. Overall, staff spoke positively about the current management and how the organisation is now more open to challenge. However, many firefighters spoke of "a performance management culture", "heavy-handed and dictatorial management", "fear of reprisals" and "a lack of trust in the grievance process".

As part of our inspection, we carried out a survey of FRS staff to get their views of their service. The staff survey showed that, of the 308 respondents, 52 percent stated they were treated with dignity and respect. But only 25 percent were confident their ideas or suggestions would be listened to. The survey also showed that 46 percent of respondents stated that they had experienced some form of bullying or harassment in the last 12 months. There are limitations to the staff survey which should be considered alongside the findings. We explain these in Annex A.

We are satisfied that these internal issues aren't affecting the service given to the public. And we accept that introducing significant changes to long-standing working practices can present problems both to the workforce and the leadership. However, the service needs to do more to gain the support of its staff and improve working relationships at all levels across the organisation. It is good to see that it is commissioning a cultural survey. This should enable it to focus on those areas where staff have the greatest concerns.

Getting the right people with the right skills



Good

West Midlands Fire Service is good at getting the right people with the right skills. But we found the following areas in which it needs to improve:

Areas for improvement

- The service needs to ensure records for risk critical competencies, such as breathing apparatus, emergency fire appliance driving, and incident command are accurate and up to date.
- The service should ensure its workforce plan includes how it intends to reduce the number of operational staff on temporary promotion.

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

Workforce planning

West Midlands Fire Service has a clear strategic approach to workforce planning. Its strategy identifies four main areas:

- workforce analysis;
- capacity and horizon scanning;
- talent management; and
- diversity and succession planning.

It uses workforce analysis to predict skill requirements against the three-year plan, with information supplied through a human resources management system. For example, it is planning to increase its use of apprenticeships in support functions.

The service has a good understanding of its current workforce's skills and capabilities. It collects a range of data to make sure it doesn't fall below the minimum number of staff needed in specific roles. It also uses this data to identify gaps likely to occur in the future, so it can identify and plan when recruitment may be needed.

As at 31 March 2018, the service had 1,814 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff and 99.6 percent of its 1,408 FTE firefighters were wholetime.

The service wants to create a more flexible and productive workforce. It is choosing to move away from having dedicated specialist staff and teams, and is broadening the skills of existing staff instead. For example, it is training operational crews to give basic fire safety advice to businesses.

Despite the good work described above, we were concerned to find that data provided by the service during our inspection showed 23 percent of operational staff are in temporary managerial level roles. Temporary positions are in place pending a review of the management structure. But we found some staff had been in these temporary positions for several years. The senior team fully acknowledges that this is a problem and is seeking ways to address it. We found that staff felt unable to challenge this situation for fear of jeopardising the possibility of gaining a permanent position.

Learning and improvement

The service has developed a good culture of learning and improvement. Some staff spoke positively about the level of training they receive, although others felt they don't receive enough training.

Commanders at all levels across the service are well trained and suitably skilled to perform their role. Commanders (levels 1 to 4) are assessed through scenario-based training and e-learning. Strategic commanders (levels 3 and 4) receive additional training such as MAGIC (multi-agency gold incident command), emergency planning, and cyber security-related training.

The service gives additional training to support those in specialist roles. For example, CNOs receive enhanced training in mental health, dementia and special needs.

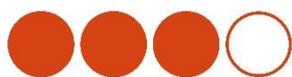
The service uses the learning from operational and training debriefs. The SPA team gives quality assurance across all operational teams. Feedback from staff is that this process has led to tangible improvements, and they consider it both constructive and positive.

We were disappointed to find inconsistencies in the way records are kept on the service's computer system that records staff competency. For example, we found gaps in the recording and assurance of training records for operational staff in areas such as breathing apparatus, emergency fire engine driving and incident command. We found similar inconsistencies in relation to control room staff, who are assessed for call handling. However, it was pleasing to see that these staff have their competency measured against a framework aligned to NOG for fire control.

The service has an ambitious testing and exercising schedule in place. This consists of 104 training exercises each year, each involving several fire engines.

The service takes advantage of a range of opportunities to train fire crews in realistic situations. For example, a partnership with Birmingham City Council enables fire crews to use blocks of flats scheduled for demolition to practise rescue procedures. This includes the use of cosmetic smoke to create a realistic search and rescue scenario. The service tells tenants in other high-rise flats about these activities, to reassure them following the Grenfell Tower fire.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity



Good

West Midlands Fire 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 improve the way it communicates with its staff, specifically those in operational roles.
- The service needs to understand and address the impact positive action is having on staff, including those with protected characteristics.

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

West Midlands Fire Service communicates with staff and seeks their feedback in various ways. Managers use a video link to communicate important messages across the service. The senior team conducts visits to every department and fire station as part of a pre-planned schedule. The service holds management briefings, when needed, to update staff about organisational change.

Despite this, it is clear it needs to improve the way information is shared across all levels of the organisation. We found that staff working at its headquarters feel more informed about current issues, and able to challenge and consult with the senior team. This isn't the case for some operational fire crews – they described a culture of fear, a lack of trust in organisational decisions and feeling talked at rather than listened to. We found that staff in temporary positions are reluctant to challenge decisions made by senior managers in case it adversely affected their likelihood of a permanent promotion.

We reviewed the service's grievance procedure. We found that it deals with staff grievances in a proper and prompt manner. Where cases took longer to resolve, the service had recorded the reasons and kept the person informed. All cases showed that staff had been offered wellbeing support, as well as support from a representative body.

The service has several internal networks in place to support staff from under-represented groups. These include:

- Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA);
- FireOut, for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) staff;
- Affinity, for women; and
- Inspire, for black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) staff.

These groups are chaired by the staff themselves and feed into the strategic enabling team performance meetings. The service is part of the Stonewall network and is ranked in the top 50 inclusive employers in the West Midlands.

Diversity

West Midlands Fire Service has clear policies about equality and diversity in pay, employment practices and recruitment. It has put a significant emphasis on positive action and set itself ambitious targets to recruit a workforce that is more reflective of its communities. As at 31 March 2018, 9.3 percent of its firefighters were from a BAME background. This compares with a BAME residential population of 29.8 percent. As at 31 March 2018, 6.7 percent of firefighters were female.

It was interesting to hear that the service has proactively used section 159 of the Equalities Act 2010. This allows employers to treat an applicant or employee who has a protected characteristic (for example, race, sex or age) favourably in connection for recruitment or promotion than someone without that characteristic who is equally qualified for the role.

The service uses a range of positive action tools to attract applicants. For example, it uses a toolkit called Thinkology to target social media recruitment campaigns at those from under-represented groups. It also runs taster sessions in areas with diverse communities. It gives women more information about practical tests, as this is known to be an area that female applicants find more difficult.

Despite all this good work, there are some issues that the service should address. We were disappointed to find that some staff, including some managers, don't understand or support the need for a more diverse workforce. We also found that some staff simply don't agree with this need.

We were equally concerned that some staff with protected characteristics hadn't applied for promotion. This was because they felt that colleagues might see them as getting preferential treatment, rather than achieving promotion on their own merit. While we recognise the good work the service is doing, it needs to understand and address the effect that its recruitment strategy is having on staff with protected characteristics.

The service recognises that the role of a firefighter has changed considerably. To reflect this, it has introduced a different set of skills as part of its recruitment process, including caring, communication and other softer interpersonal skills. Candidates role-play various scenarios to see how they react in certain situations, such as having to deal with someone who may be vulnerable (for example, a hoarder or a victim of domestic abuse).

Managing performance and developing leaders



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

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

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

Managing performance

West Midlands Fire Service has effective arrangements in place to manage and develop the individual performance of its staff. Each member of staff is expected to have a regular individual personal development review (IPDR) with their line manager. This gives an opportunity to discuss performance and aspirations, and identify development opportunities. Operational staff must record their level of competence against the four main areas (prevention, protection, response and people) in their IPDR.

The process is designed to be a continuous development and learning opportunity. However, we found that completion of IPDRs wasn't consistent across the service. Also, not all staff had confidence in the IPDR process. As at 31 March 2018, 91 percent of wholtime firefighters, 86 percent of fire control staff and just 29 percent of support staff had completed an IPDR.

The service offers a suite of online learning modules called the effective manager series. It covers a wide range of managerial and people knowledge areas to support those in managerial roles. Topics covered include managing absence, investigations and underperformance. As these courses aren't mandatory, the service doesn't know how many managers have completed them.

West Midlands Fire Service also gives opportunities for staff to attend management masterclasses taught by external speakers such as employment lawyers, and one-day seminars for staff who want to improve their personal effectiveness. The seminars are voluntary, and cover subjects such as change management, coaching, planning and organising, and strategic awareness.

Developing leaders

The service doesn't have a system to identify, develop and support high-potential staff. However, it does have processes to develop leaders both in operational and management roles. It also offers development opportunities to support staff, such as role-specific specialist qualifications and higher education.

During our inspection, we reviewed the service's promotion process. We found that there is a framework in place to make sure promotions are conducted in a fair and consistent way. However, we found the results of the promotion process and the feedback to candidates weren't always well recorded.

The service gives appropriate training to staff sitting on promotion panels. They all receive unconscious bias training. Despite this, we found that not all staff believe the promotions process is fair. This was most apparent among operational staff. There is also a perception among some support staff that opportunities for their progression are limited.

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);
- public perception survey;
- our inspection fieldwork; and
- data we collected directly from all 45 fire and rescue services in England.

Where we collected data directly from fire and rescue services (FRS), 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 the FRS Technical Advisory Group, which brings together representatives from FRSs and the Home Office to support the inspection's design and development, including data collection. We gave services several opportunities to validate the data they gave us and to ensure the accuracy of the evidence presented. For instance:

- We asked all services to check the data they submitted to us via an online application.
- We asked all services to check the final data used in the report and correct any errors identified.

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

Methodology

Population

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

BMG survey of public perception of the fire and rescue service

We commissioned BMG to survey attitudes towards fire and rescue services in June and July 2018. This consisted of 17,976 surveys across 44 local fire and rescue service 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 via face-to-face interviews 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 was small, varying between 400 and 446 individuals in each service area. 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 2,905 responses between 1 October 2018 and 15 February 2019 from across 16 FRSs during this period in Tranche 2.

The staff survey is 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 8 percent to 31 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 multiple times. It is also possible that the survey 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.

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 public perceptions survey:

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 October 2017 to 31 September 2018.

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 FRSs to upload to the IRS. Totals are constantly being amended (by relatively small numbers).
- We took data for Service in numbers from the February 2019 incident publication. So figures may not directly match more recent publications due to data updates.
- Before 2017/18, Hampshire FRS did not record medical co-responding incidents in the IRS. It is currently undertaking a project to upload this data for 2017/18 and 2018/19. This was not completed in time for publication on 14 February 2019.

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's figure is based on the number of checks it carried out and 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 & Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire 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 FRAs 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 FRSs.

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 FRSs carried out in known premises. According to the Home Office 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 & Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire 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 / retained.

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 & Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire 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.
- 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 & Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire 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. West Midlands Fire Service is a metropolitan FRA.

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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