

Fire & Rescue Service 2021/22

Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Dorset and Wiltshire 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 (FRS) in England. We first inspected Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service in October and November 2018. We published a report with our findings in June 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 Dorset and Wiltshire 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	Requires improvement
Preventing fires and other risks	 Good	Good
Protecting the public through fire regulation	 Good	Good
Responding to fires and other emergencies	 Good	Good
Responding to major and multi-agency incidents	 Good	Good

Question	This inspection	2018/19
 Efficiency	 Outstanding	Good
Making best use of resources	 Outstanding	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	 Outstanding	Good
Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity	 Good	Good
Managing performance and developing leaders	 Good	Good

HM Inspector's summary

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

I congratulate the service on its first-rate performance in keeping people safe and secure from fires and other risks. We have judged the service to be outstanding in two areas; in the way it uses its resources to manage risk and that staff are equipped with the right training and skills.

It has made excellent progress in many areas, and we have identified four examples of innovative or promising practice. We were impressed with how the service collaborates with its partners. For example, its partnership with utility companies has helped the service to secure 25,000 carbon monoxide detectors and 2,500 wi-fi carbon monoxide detectors over the next 5 years.

We are also impressed with the value-for-money dashboard the service has created, which is aligned to the strategic priorities. This clearly shows where money has been saved for reinvestment, where the service has done more with its resources, future costs that have been avoided, and how it has saved money for partner organisations. The service has developed an impressive performance dashboard, which is easy to navigate and provides operational staff a clear summary of their performance. The dashboard is refreshed daily.

Since our last inspection, the service has introduced a new one-to-one performance management process, which is effective. The staff we spoke to during our inspection spoke highly about the recognition button, that forms part of the appraisal process. This allows staff to recognise a positive contribution a colleague has made.

The service has experienced major incidents and we found it has good arrangements in place. It is also encouraging to see that [on-call](#) availability is improving.

We found that the service comprehensively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and results of its collaborations. This was an area for improvement we identified in the last inspection. The service could clearly demonstrate what benefits and results the collaboration brings through its value-for-money dashboard.

The service's financial and workforce plans are consistent with the risks and priorities identified in its [integrated risk management plan \(IRMP\)](#). And plans are built on sound scenarios.

We are pleased with the progress the service has made in the way it looks after its people. The service has strong workforce planning in place for all roles. This makes sure skills and capabilities align with what is needed to effectively deliver its community safety plan (CSP). Workforce and succession planning is consistently scrutinised through regular meetings to discuss requirements.

There are many positive findings during the inspection, and we found that all areas for improvements identified in our last inspection have been addressed. But the service can still make further improvements, such as ensuring that all urgent risk information and [safety flashes](#) have been read and understood by staff. We have identified two areas of outstanding practice and are sure the service will wish to build on this achievement. We look forward to working with the service as it continues to improve.



Wendy Williams

HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Service in numbers



Response

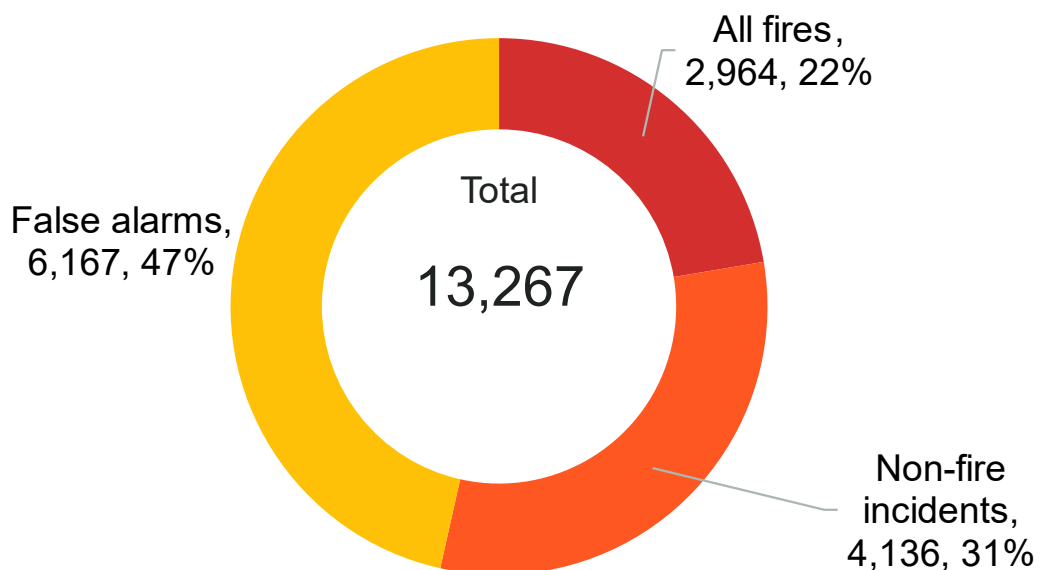
	Dorset & Wiltshire	England
Incidents attended per 1,000 population Year ending 30 September 2021	8.82	9.50
Home fire safety checks carried out by fire and rescue service per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	3.85	4.47
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises Year ending 31 March 2021	0.44	1.70
Average availability of pumps Year ending 31 March 2021	81.4%	86.4%



Cost

Firefighter cost per person Year ending 31 March 2021	£22.67	£25.02
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Incidents attended in the year to 30 June 2021

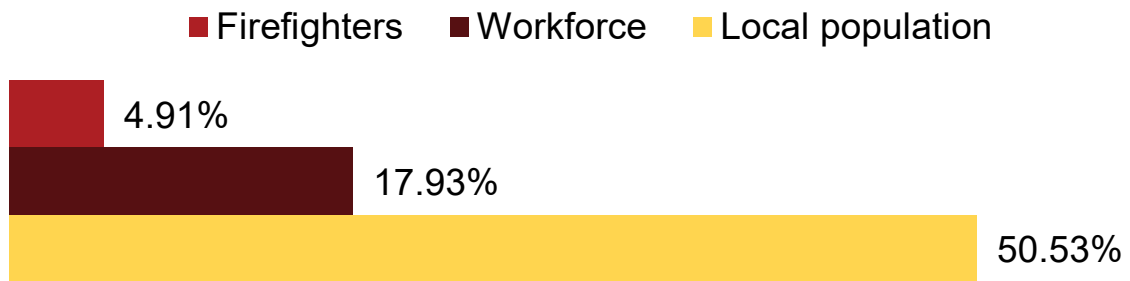




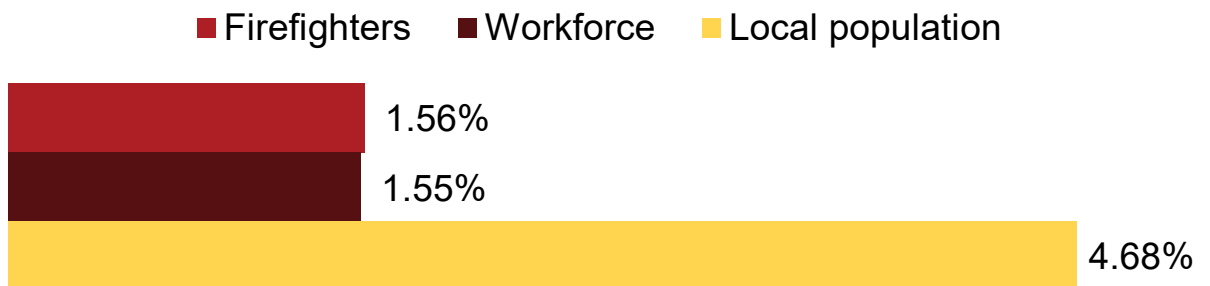
Workforce

	Dorset & Wiltshire	England
Five-year change in total workforce 2016 to 2021	0.76%	-1.60%
Number of firefighters per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	0.65	0.62
Percentage of firefighters who are wholetime Year ending 31 March 2021	39.0%	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. Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service's overall effectiveness is good.

We are pleased with the progress that Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service has made in its effectiveness. Since our last inspection, the service has published its new CSP 2021–24. It describes how prevention, protection and response activity is resourced to mitigate or reduce the risks and threats the community faces, both now and in the future.

We were impressed with how the service collaborates with its partners. For example, its partnership with utility companies has helped the service to secure 25,000 carbon monoxide detectors and 2,500 wi-fi carbon monoxide detectors over the next 5 years. We have identified this as an innovative practice. We were also pleased to see prevention activities being evaluated so the service understands how effective its work is.

In our last inspection, we identified the service's on-call availability as an area for improvement. It is encouraging to see that progress has been made in this area. The service has responded well to major incidents and we found it has good arrangements in place to respond in the future.

Although there are many positives in this area, the service should make sure that operational staff have read and understood any urgent risk information or [safety flashes](#).

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies



Good (2019: Requires improvement)

Dorset and Wiltshire 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.

Area for improvement

The service should ensure that all urgent risk information and safety flashes have been read and understood by staff.

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

Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service has assessed an appropriate range of risks and threats through a thorough integrated risk management planning process. The service has developed a strategic assessment of risk document which is updated every two years. When assessing risk, it considers relevant information collected from a broad range of internal and external sources and datasets. This includes data from the national risk register, census data and information from external organisations.

The service has consulted and undertaken constructive dialogue with communities and other organisations on its IRMP, known as the CSP, which was published in June 2021. The service was unable to hold face-to-face meetings because of the pandemic, but it used social media and contacted community groups through the police and local authorities. This work helps the service understand risks and explain how it plans to mitigate them.

There is an effective community safety plan

After assessing relevant risks, the service has recorded its findings in its easily understood CSP. This plan describes how prevention, protection and response activity is to be effectively resourced to mitigate or reduce the risks and threats the community faces, both now and in the future.

The CSP sets out the service's main priorities:

- making safer and healthier choices;
- protecting you and the environment from harm;
- being there when the public needs it;
- making every penny count; and
- supporting and developing its staff.

The service regularly reports to [Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority](#) on its performance and progress, which are measured against the priorities outlined in the CSP.

The service gathers, maintains and shares a good range of risk information

The service routinely collects and updates the information it has about the people, places and threats it has identified as being at greatest risk. This includes thatched and heritage properties as the service has the highest number of thatched properties in the UK.

It was encouraging to see that following our last inspection the service has established processes and systems to gather and record up-to-date site-specific risk information (SSRI) and make it readily available to the service's prevention, protection and response staff. All staff have access to the risk portal on the service's intranet pages, which display all the SSRI records. This helps them to identify, reduce and mitigate risk effectively. We raised this as an area for improvement in the last inspection and were pleased with the improvements made.

Since our last inspection, the service has introduced a new process to make sure firefighters have good access to relevant and up-to-date risk information about temporary events. This was raised as an area for improvement in the last inspection. Staff now receive an email bulletin that contains information about the temporary event taking place.

Where appropriate, risk information is also given to other organisations such as local authorities and other emergency services.

The service should make sure staff read and understand urgent information

We found that the service sends an email to all operational staff about urgent risk information or safety flashes they must be aware of. The supervisory managers are responsible for making sure staff have read and understood them. But we were disappointed to find that that this doesn't always happen. Despite processes in place, the service needs to improve the way it monitors that staff have read and understood urgent bulletins, particularly staff on annual leave or returning from absence.

Feedback from operational activity informs the service's understanding of risk

The service records and communicates risk information effectively. It routinely updates [risk assessments](#) and uses feedback from local and national operational activity to inform its planning assumptions. It also shares learning nationally.

Since our last inspection, the service has further developed its operational effectiveness database, which has improved the way it records and disseminates learning from operational activity.

The service has responded positively 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.

Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service has responded positively and proactively to learning from this tragedy. The service had assessed the risk of each high-rise building in its service area.

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



Good (2019: Good)

Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service is good at preventing fires and other risks.

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

Innovative practice: The service effectively collaborates with its partners

The service has collaborated with SGN (previously Scotia Gas Networks) and Wales and West Utilities. This has helped the service to secure 25,000 carbon monoxide detectors and 2,500 wi-fi carbon monoxide detectors over the next 5 years. In addition, the service has worked effectively with road safety partners who sponsor the service's road safety activities.

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

The prevention plan aligns with the community safety plan

The prevention plan is clearly linked to the risks identified in its CSP. The risks identified include:

- an increase in the number of elderly people requiring specialist support; and
- the increased strain on the NHS and adult and social care services as the population profile changes.

The service's teams work well together and with other relevant organisations on prevention, and it shares relevant information when needed. Information is used to adjust planning assumptions and direct activity between the service's prevention, protection and response functions. For example, following fire safety audits in high-rise premises, the prevention team sent letters to occupants in premises considered higher risk and offered them a [safe and well visit](#).

The service adapted its prevention activities during the pandemic

We considered how the service had adapted its prevention work during our COVID-19 specific inspection in October 2020. At that time, we found it had adapted its public prevention work appropriately. A notable achievement was the creative way in which the prevention team promoted the Government's main COVID-19 safety messages. For example, it produced several interactive road safety and school training packages for younger children. Since then, we are encouraged to find that the service has continued to develop its virtual resources. We were also pleased to find that all outstanding safe and well visits have been completed.

Prevention activity is prioritised to risk

Prevention activity is clearly prioritised using a risk-based approach towards people most at risk from fire and other emergencies. For example, all safe and well visits are assessed using a triage process to make sure the most [vulnerable](#) are prioritised.

The service takes account of a broad range of information and data to target its prevention activity at vulnerable individuals and groups. This includes NHS data, demographic information, vulnerability data from the local authorities and historic incident data. [Wholetime operational staff](#) also use the pinpoint tool, which allows them to generate referrals.

It provides a range of interventions that it adapts to the level of risk in its communities. Specialist safe and well advisors complete the highest-risk safe and well visits and wholetime staff address all other risks.

Staff receive the appropriate support in carrying out safe and well visits

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. The safe and well advisors receive enhanced training and regular continuous professional development. This is further supported by online training packages.

There is a clear quality assurance process in place. Most of the files we sampled showed visits were completed to a good standard, although some wholetime operational staff didn't record sufficient information about their safe and well visits.

Staff are good at identifying and 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. The staff we spoke to, including on-call firefighters, were able to tell us what actions they would take when responding to a safeguarding concern. The information is also accessible on the electronic tablets stored on the fire engines.

The service's collaboration with other organisations is impressive

The service works with a wide range of other organisations, such as South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust and local authorities, to prevent fires and other emergencies.

We found good evidence that it routinely refers people at greatest risk to organisations that may be better able to meet their needs. These organisations include social care providers.

The service routinely exchanges information with other public sector organisations about people and groups at greatest risk. It uses the information to challenge planning assumptions and target prevention activity. Arrangements are in place to receive referrals from others such as the British Red Cross and Age UK. The service acts appropriately on the referrals it receives. For example, the referring organisation receives a monthly report detailing the result of each referral it sent. This includes any work undertaken in the premises, such as fitting of smoke detectors.

We were impressed by the way the service works with its partners. The service has collaborated with SGN and Wales and West Utilities. These partnerships have helped the service to secure 25,000 carbon monoxide detectors and 2,500 wi-fi carbon monoxide detectors over the next 5 years. The arrangement helps the service and the utility companies to refer vulnerable people to receive extra, tailored support.

The service has also collaborated with many other organisations. For example, vehicle specialist Arval UK sponsors the service to deliver the Safe Drive Stay Alive campaign to Year 10 pupils.

The service is good at tackling fire-setting behaviour

The service has a range of suitable and effective interventions to target and educate people of different ages who show signs of fire-setting behaviour. This includes a programme aimed at children and young people. We were pleased to see that the level of deliberate fires in the service area was much lower than the England rate.

When appropriate, it routinely shares information with other organisations such as the Wiltshire Bobby Van Trust, a charity that works with Wiltshire police to provide community security and protect the vulnerable. When they refer arson cases to the service, joint visits take place. The service has a deliberate fire reduction officer and fire-setting advisors who assist the police to support the prosecution of arsonists.

The service is effective at evaluating its prevention activities

In our last inspection, we found the service's evaluation of its prevention work was an area for improvement. We were pleased to see the service now has good evaluation tools in place. These tools measure how effective its work is, so that the service knows what works and that its communities experience prevention activity that meets their needs. The service evaluates the following prevention activities:

- safe and well visits;
- road safety;
- youth intervention; and
- education programmes.

Prevention activities take account of feedback from the public, other organisations, and other parts of the service. There is a customer satisfaction survey. For example, following a safe and well visit, a survey checks the visit met the occupants' expectations and reviews behaviour changes the occupant has made since, such as testing their smoke detector more regularly.

Feedback is used by the service to inform its planning assumptions and amend future activity so it is focused on what the community needs and what works.

In addition, the service has an impressive framework to ensure it offers value for money, which is outlined in the efficiency section of this report.

Protecting the public through fire regulation



Good (2019: Good)

Dorset and Wiltshire 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.

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

There are good links between the risk-based inspection programme and its community safety plan

The service's RBIP is clearly linked to the risks it has identified in its CSP.

Staff across the service are involved in this activity, with information effectively exchanged as needed. For example, fire safety inspectors pass on information about evacuation strategies in high rise premises to operational staff. Information is then used to adjust planning assumptions and direct activity between the service's protection, prevention and response functions. This means resources are properly aligned to risk.

The service adapted its protection activities during the pandemic

We considered how the service had adapted its protection activity during our COVID-19 specific inspection in October 2020. At that time, we found it had adapted its protection work well. Since then, we are encouraged to find the service has returned to face-to-face inspections for its protection work, with appropriate measures in place.

Protection activity is focused on the highest-risk premises

The service's RBIP is focused on its highest-risk buildings. The service uses a range of data sources and a scoring matrix to identify these premises. The service told us it has identified 527 premises at its highest risk, which includes residential boarding schools and fast-food establishments with sleeping accommodation. We were told that the service is on track to inspect all premises by April 2024.

The audits we reviewed were completed in the timescales the service has set itself. It was encouraging to see that 38 percent of audits result in an assessment that fire safety is unsatisfactory. This is higher than the England rate of 25 percent and indicates that the service is consistently targeting the right premises.

All high-rise premises have been inspected

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. The service identified 356 high-rise premises in total and we were pleased to find that they have all been inspected. Information gathered during these audits is made available to response teams and [control](#) operators, enabling them to respond more effectively in an emergency.

Fire safety audits are completed to a good standard

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

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 quality assurance process is effective

Quality assurance of protection activity takes place in a proportionate way. At the time of our inspection, an experienced fire safety officer reviewed a fire safety inspector's audit on a three-month cycle. The inspector receives feedback, a quarterly report is produced and wider learning is shared. The service is further enhancing this process so the line manager will complete the quality assurance check in person with the inspector.

The service has good evaluation tools in place to measure the effectiveness of its activity and to make sure all sections of its communities get appropriate access to the protection services that meet their needs.

The service is good at using its full range of enforcement powers

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

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

- 1 alteration notice;
- 3 enforcement notices; and
- 6 prohibition notices.

Although the service has only prosecuted once in the last 5 years, from 2016/17 to 2020/21, it has the appropriate resources to investigate alleged fire safety breaches and prosecute when necessary. The service has 24/7 availability to respond to dangerous conditions out of hours.

The service has increased its protection resources

The service has enough qualified protection staff to meet the requirements of the service's RBIP. Most of its staff have now achieved their Level 4 [Diploma in fire safety](#). This helps the service to provide the range of audit and enforcement activity needed, both now and in the future.

Wholetime operational staff have recently received training in how to carry out fire safety checks in lower-risk premises. They spoke highly of the training they received. They would benefit from the service selecting premises for them to check.

The service aligns staff training with nationally recognised standards. It doesn't have a fire engineer but has arrangements with neighbouring services to access engineer support when this is needed.

The service works closely with other enforcement organisations

The service works closely with other enforcement agencies to regulate fire safety and routinely exchanges risk information with them. The service has a protocol with some local authorities that provides clarification on which authority uses its powers in certain parts of a premises. The service has built good links with its local authorities and has representation at a monthly care quality monitoring group meeting to share information. The service has carried out joint inspections where necessary. For example, a joint visit was carried out with the police, UK Border Agency and local authority following concerns about a premises.

The service responds to building and licencing consultations in a timely manner

The service responds to all building consultations on time, so consistently meets its statutory responsibility to comment on fire safety arrangements at new and altered buildings. We were pleased to find that in 2020/21, the service responded to almost all building regulations and licensing consultations within the required time frames.

The service continues to work well with businesses

The service proactively works with businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation. It uses social media and its website to deliver messages about fire safety compliance. It has held seminars to promote the benefits of sprinkler systems. The service has appointed a manager to progress engagement activities with businesses that were carried out before the pandemic, such as safety seminars.

The service has reduced its attendance to automatic fire alarms

An effective risk-based approach is in place to manage the number of unwanted fire signals. The service has a dedicated officer who monitors unwanted fire signals daily and reviews any trends in both Dorset and Wiltshire. The officers decide whether any intervention is required.

The service gets fewer calls because of this work. For the year to 31 March 2021, the proportion of automatic fire alarm activations decreased to 27 percent of all emergency calls received from 35 percent in the previous 12 months. However, this is above the England rate of 18 percent.

Fewer unwanted calls mean that fire engines are available to respond to a genuine incident rather than responding to a false one. It also reduces the risk to the public if fewer fire engines travel at high speed on the roads.

Responding to fires and other emergencies



Good (2019: Good)

Dorset and Wiltshire 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.

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

Response resources are regularly reviewed

The service identifies risks through its CSP. Its fire engines and response staff, as well as its working patterns, are designed and located to help the service respond flexibly to fires and other emergencies with the appropriate resources. For example, the service reviewed its technical rescue capabilities and relocated this where the risks are greater and to improve efficiency.

The service is continually improving its response times

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

The service sends two fire engines to all incidents where people might be sleeping. The first fire engine aims to arrive on average within 10 minutes and the second fire engine on average within 13 minutes. For all other fires, the service aims on average for the first engine to arrive within 10 minutes and the second within 15 minutes. For road traffic collisions, the service aims for the first engine to arrive on average within 15 minutes.

The average response time to dwelling fires in the year to 31 December 2021 was 8 minutes 37 seconds, which is slightly faster than the average for the significantly rural service group. The service would benefit from providing its response performance to the public as it is not easily available on its website.

On-call availability is increasing

To support its response strategy, the service aims to have 78 percent of its fire engines available on all occasions. This is 1 fire engine on each of its 50 fire stations and a second fire engine at each fire station where it has wholtime and on-call firefighters combined. The service consistently meets this standard. It told us that in 2019/20 the service achieved 77.0 percent overall availability and 81.4 percent in 2020/21.

In our previous inspection, we identified that the service should improve the availability of its on-call firefighters. Encouragingly, the availability has improved. In 2019/20 the on-call availability was 73.5 percent, which increased to 78.6 percent in 2020/21. Despite the increased availability, there were 42 failures to mobilise (2.49 per 1,000 incidents) in 2020/21. This is where a crew is requested to attend but can't, so a further crew is required. This is above the England rate.

Incident commanders were confident in their role

The service has trained incident commanders who are assessed regularly and properly. In 2020/21, 99 percent of incident commanders had been accredited within the preceding 2 years. 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. They were familiar with risk assessing, decision-making and recording information at incidents in line with national best practice, as well as the [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles \(JESIP\)](#).

Control room staff are well integrated into operational response

We are pleased to see control staff integrated into the service's command, training, exercise, debrief and assurance activity. We were given examples of how [fire control](#) staff have been involved in training and major incident exercises with operational staff. We were also pleased to find that control staff were involved in structured debriefs after incidents.

Control room staff can provide fire survival guidance to multiple callers

The service has an effective partnership with Devon and Somerset FRS and Hampshire and Isle of Wight FRS through the Networked Fire Services Partnership (NFSP). All three services share the same mobilising system, which means that, when necessary, they can take emergency calls for each other and mobilise resources.

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.

There are good processes in place to manage risk information

We sampled a range of risk information involving short-term and long-term risks, including what is in place for firefighters responding to incidents at high-risk, high-rise buildings and what information is held by 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 has invested in demountable risk-information tablets for all fire engines. Staff were extremely positive about these tablets, as they allow them to access a range of information while at an incident. This includes policies and procedures on the service's intranet pages.

Operational learning is obtained regularly

We identified in our last inspection that the service should make sure it has an effective system for staff to use learning and debriefs from incidents to improve future operational response. We are pleased the service has addressed this. It has further developed its operational effectiveness database, which gathers learning from lower-level incidents to large incidents.

As part of the inspection, we reviewed a range of emergency incidents and training events which included the Wareham Forest fire, the largest in the service area in recent history. We are pleased to see the service routinely follows its policies to assure itself that staff command incidents in line with operational guidance. Internal risk information is updated with the information received. Any operational learning obtained is sent to all operational staff via a monthly bulletin, although staff don't need to confirm whether they have read or understood the learning.

We are encouraged to see the service is contributing towards, and acting on, learning from other fire and rescue services or operational learning gathered from other emergency services. National information and learning is reported to the operational assurance team, then communicated to the rest of the service.

The public is informed of ongoing incidents

The service has good systems in place to inform the public about ongoing incidents and help keep them safe during and after incidents. The communications team provide 24/7 cover, which helps keep the public informed, and provides media training to staff at station manager level and above. In addition, the team works well with the [local resilience forums \(LRF\)](#) in both Wiltshire and Dorset to provide consistent messages to the public.

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents



Good (2019: Good)

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

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

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

The service is well prepared to respond to 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 CSP. For example, the service has plans to deal with wildfires and severe weather conditions.

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 that risk information.

The service has dealt with major incidents effectively

We reviewed the arrangements the service has in place to respond to different major incidents, including sites covered by the [Control of Major Accident Hazards \(COMAH\)](#) regulations and marauding terrorist attacks (MTAs). Although the service doesn't have a specialist MTA team, it has trained all its operational staff in MTA and aligned its staff to the latest joint operating principles.

We are pleased the service has good arrangements in place to respond to major incidents, which are well understood by staff. As we reported in the COVID-19 inspection, the service responded effectively to its largest fire in recent history at Wareham Forest. This incident lasted over eight weeks. This large-scale incident was attended by more than 1,000 firefighters and used considerable resources across the service.

The service works well with other fire and rescue services in emergencies

The service supports other fire and rescue services responding to emergency incidents. For example, it can mobilise resources to any incidents in the relevant service areas in the NFSP. The service has additional formal arrangements in place with neighbouring services. It is intraoperable with these services and can form part of a multi-agency response.

During the Wareham Forest fire, the service successfully worked with its neighbouring fire and rescue services and the National Fire Chiefs Council, as well as accessing and using [national resilience assets](#), such as high-volume pumps, during this incident.

Cross-border exercises are carried out

Each fire station located near a border must carry out an exercise with bordering fire and rescue services annually. In our previous inspection, we identified as an area for improvement that the service should arrange a programme of cross-border exercises and share the learning. We are pleased to see the service now incorporates this into its training programme.

We were told about cross-border exercises that had taken place. This results in services working together effectively to keep the public safe. We were encouraged to see that feedback from these exercises is used to inform risk information and service plans.

Principles for working effectively with other emergency services are well understood

The incident commanders we interviewed had been trained in and were familiar with JESIP principles for working with other emergency services. This includes online training packages and assessments of the command of an incident to consider how well the principles were adhered to. The service could provide us with strong evidence that it consistently follows these principles.

The service works well with its local resilience forums

The service is a member of two LRFs: Dorset, and Wiltshire and Swindon. The service has good arrangements in place to respond to emergencies with their partners on these forums. These arrangements include joint plans for potential major incidents in places such as Bournemouth Airport.

The service is a valued partner and is an active member of several subgroups. The service takes part in regular training events with other members of the LRFs and uses the learning to develop plans for responding to major and multi-agency incidents. For example, the service is an active member of the South-West Malicious Risks Working Group, which aims to provide the LRFs with a consistent understanding of current terrorism and other malicious risks so response capabilities can be improved.

The service keeps up to date with national learning

The service keeps itself up to date with [national operational learning](#) updates from other fire services and joint operational learning from other organisations, such as the police service and ambulance trusts. This learning is used to inform planning assumptions that have been made with other partners.

Efficiency



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



Outstanding

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. Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service's overall efficiency is outstanding.

Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service has made commendable progress in relation to efficiency and we have judged the service to be outstanding for how it uses its resources to manage risk.

We are impressed with the value-for-money dashboard the service has created, which is aligned to its strategic priorities. This clearly shows where money has been saved for reinvestment; where the service has done more with its resources; future costs that have been avoided; and how it has saved money for partner organisations. We have identified this as an example of innovative practice.

The service has an excellent performance dashboard which is easy to navigate and provides operational staff a clear pathway to access their performance. For example, it shows staff how many hours they have worked in specific areas. We have identified this as a promising practice. The service has a predominantly on-call workforce and we were pleased to find that on-call availability has improved.

The service's financial and workforce plans are consistent with the risks and priorities identified in its CSP. And plans are built on sound scenarios. The service told us it had made annual savings of £6.6m in the 4 years after Dorset and Wiltshire and Swindon fire authorities combined in 2016 and it has made a further £1.3m savings annually since.

We found that the service comprehensively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and results of its collaborations with other organisations. This is an area for improvement we identified in the last inspection. In its value-for-money dashboard, the service could clearly demonstrate what benefits and results each collaboration brings.

Making best use of resources



Outstanding (2019: Good)

Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service is outstanding 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 net budget for 2022/23 is £61.05m. This is a 4.4 percent increase from the previous financial year.

Innovative practice: There is a comprehensive value-for-money dashboard

The service has developed a comprehensive value-for-money dashboard, which is aligned to the strategic priorities. It outlines:

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

Promising practice: The performance dashboard is impressive

The service has developed an impressive performance dashboard. It is easy to navigate and provides operational staff a clear summary of their performance. The dashboard is refreshed daily. It shows:

- the number of safe and well visits completed and if there are any overdue;
- response information, such as turnout times and incidents attended;
- site-specific risk information completed, scheduled or overdue; and
- HR-related information, such as the number of exit interviews completed.

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 impressive approach to allocating its resources to meet its strategic objectives

The service's approach to financial and workforce planning is outstanding, including allocating staff to prevention, protection and response. The staffing levels across all functions are monitored monthly. They continue to reflect and are consistent with the risks and priorities identified in its CSP. The service has a predominantly on-call workforce, and we were pleased to find that it has improved its on-call availability, and prioritises recruitment and retention of its on-call staff.

Plans are built on sound scenarios. They help make sure the service is sustainable and are underpinned by financial controls that reduce the risk of misusing public money. We were impressed in the way the service approaches its risk planning and uses its resources effectively. For example, the service reviewed the way it was delivering its road safety activities and changed the staffing model to make sure it was more effective, and was providing value for money. Since our last inspection, the service introduced a dedicated team that makes sure optimal crewing is achieved and opportunities for efficiency are realised. This team provides cover seven days a week, which has resulted in further efficiency savings.

There is a comprehensive dashboard ensuring the service delivers value for money

We were impressed with the comprehensive value-for-money dashboard the service has created. It outlines:

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

The dashboard uses unit costs from official sources, such as the Department for Transport, as well as some developed locally to show savings. The inspection team was shown several examples of the dashboard across the different functions. The service can demonstrate what the return on investment is for every pound invested. For example, the dashboard shows the savings the service has achieved by reducing its attendance to automatic fire alarms. Wholetime staff didn't respond to 392 automatic fire alarms between 2018/19 to 2020/21. Each incident is recorded as taking one hour, which covers travel times, investigation and recording the incident. The dashboard shows the reduction saved 392 appliance hours resulting in a non-cashable saving of £106,569. The service has also used the dashboard to demonstrate improvements in its environmental impact. The value-for-money dashboard is aligned to its strategic priorities.

The performance dashboards are impressive

We are pleased to see that the service's arrangements for managing performance clearly link the use of resources to its CSP and strategic priorities. The service has further developed its 'How's My Team Doing?' tool into an impressive performance dashboard, which is easy to navigate and provides operational staff in each of the 50 stations a clear summary of their performance. The dashboard is refreshed daily. It shows:

- the number of safe and well visits completed and if there are any overdue;
- response information, such as turnout times and incidents attended;
- SSRI completed, scheduled or overdue; and
- HR-related information, such as the number of exit interviews completed.

There is a clear 'hours worked' area, which allows wholetime operational staff to monitor the hours they have worked on specific activities. There is an expectation from the service that wholetime operational staff commit to approximately 40 hours per tour of duty in prevention, protection and response activities. The dashboard is being further developed for other areas of the service.

The service has saved £1.67m annually from duty systems since Dorset and Wiltshire and Swindon fire authorities combined in 2016. The service has previously evaluated its duty systems to see which ones are the most effective. The service has various shift patterns available, including stations crewed by wholetime staff during the day, stations crewed day and night, and job-share options. The service has changed shift start times to avoid shift changes at known peak times. The service told us that most wholetime staff favoured the traditional shift system of two days and two nights and they found this to be the most productive. The service has a predominantly on-call workforce. The service introduced a new pay model, which is a single contract that pays for the individual's availability per hour, replacing the four separate previous contracts available. We look forward to seeing how this develops in the future.

Flexible working has been reviewed and we spoke to corporate and fire control staff who appreciated the flexible working arrangements the service offers.

The service has considered 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). At the time of the inspection, the service was awaiting more guidance from the National Fire Chiefs Council before it commits to any specific targets.

The service has an outstanding IT infrastructure in place

The service has seen the benefits of sound investment in its IT infrastructure. During our inspection, staff spoke positively about the IT in place. The service had invested in Microsoft Office 365 well before the pandemic. This allowed staff, including on-call firefighters, to access systems remotely from all devices, including mobile phones and laptops. We were told by the service that working remotely has generated savings in the region of £120,000 per year.

We are pleased to see the service has digitalised most of its activities. For example, most staff complete records of safe and well visits and site-specific risk information visits directly on to the risk-information tablet. This reduces the need for paper-based systems, improving efficiency. We were also pleased to find that the service has used its existing resources and expertise to create and maintain its IT applications in-house. This includes, among other things, the performance dashboard and the value-for-money framework.

The service collaborates effectively with others

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 CSP and is held on a central register. It includes:

- leading collaborative procurement to replace [mobile data terminals](#) resulting in efficiency savings across the sector;
- the NFSP with Devon and Somerset FRS and Hampshire and Isle of Wight FRS, which has resulted in cashable savings;
- prevention partnerships;
- activities carried out with South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust, including co-responding; and
- sharing several premises with partner organisations.

We found that the service comprehensively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and results of its collaborations. This was an area for improvement we identified in the last inspection. In its value-for-money dashboard, the service could clearly demonstrate what benefits and results the collaboration brings. For example, by sharing its estates with other partners, the service generates £151,000 per year. The service has a benefits tracker in place to make sure the collaborations are providing value for money.

The service has effective continuity arrangements 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, each year the service looks ahead at the context it works in, using external sources such as the Business Continuity Institute, to provide assurance the current arrangements are effective.

We visited the service's control room. There is a secondary control room on the same site, which had been used recently due to flooding. As part of the NFSP, the service regularly tests its ability to take calls from neighbouring fire services.

The service makes excellent use of savings

There are regular reviews to consider all the service's expenditure, including its non-pay costs. And this scrutiny makes sure the service gets value for money. The service told us it had made annual savings of £6.6m in the 4 years after Dorset and Wiltshire and Swindon fire authorities combined in 2016 and it has made a further £1.3m savings annually since.

The service has made savings and efficiencies, which haven't affected its operational performance and the service it provides to the public. For example, technical rescue resource has been rationalised from a service-wide provision to a three-station model, which demonstrates the service is matching its resources to risk. Since our last inspection, a restructure occurred leading to further efficiency savings.

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. This is demonstrated through the value-for-money dashboard where procurement and contract management are considered in all activities and compared against other similar-sized fire and rescue services. The service has invested in a new asset management system to make sure all equipment is effectively managed. When significant projects are completed, an evaluation is routinely carried out and the service reviews the actual savings and efficiencies made compared to initial projections.

The service has a resourcing and savings programme that looks at where further savings and efficiencies could be achieved. The service:

- costed all functions and budgets across all departments;
- introduced zero-based revenue budgeting and reduced expenditure where appropriate;
- conducted a review of prevention, protection and response activities that involved staff and its representative bodies; and
- proactively engaged with all staff who suggested further saving opportunities across the service.

There is effective strategic oversight by the senior leaders. The fire authority, which has a separate finance and audit committee, provides more scrutiny and oversight.

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



Good (2019: Good)

Dorset and Wiltshire 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 has a good understanding of its future financial challenges

Since combining Dorset and Wiltshire and Swindon fire authorities in 2016, the Government's settlement funding assessment (baseline funding levels and revenue support grants) for the authority has reduced by approximately £5m.

The service has developed a sound understanding of future financial challenges. It plans to mitigate its main or significant financial risks. For example, the service has acted on the court ruling in the ongoing national firefighter pension dispute. The underpinning assumptions are relatively robust, realistic and prudent, and take account of the wider external environment and some scenario planning for future spending reductions. These include the rise in fuel and energy costs. The service forecasts budget deficits of £1.1m in 2023/24 rising to £1.8m in 2025/26. The service is working hard both locally and nationally to secure an increase in the flexibility of the council tax precept (the share of council tax proceeds allocated to the service).

We are pleased to see that the service has identified savings and investment opportunities to improve the service to the public or generate further savings. This is detailed in its value-for-money dashboard and the resourcing and savings programme. We were also pleased that the service involved its staff, getting a good response to a request for suggestions on how it can make further efficiencies. It made a video documenting what it had put into practice in response to those suggestions.

The service has a clear plan for its reserves

The service has a sensible and sustainable plan for using its [reserves](#). Several earmarked reserves are held to mitigate financial risks, such as the insurance reserve, which mitigates any unforeseen ill-health retirements. The service plans to invest in its training centre and has invested in transformation projects which supports the delivery of its CSP.

Fleet and estates are linked to the community safety plan

The service's asset management strategy, which includes fleet and estates, has clear links to its CSP. The strategy exploits opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness. For example, the service has extended the life cycle of some of its fleet vehicles and is investing £225,000 to support the installation of solar standby power equipment at 5 fire stations. The strategies are regularly reviewed so that the service can properly assess the impact on any changes in estate and fleet provision, or future innovation, have on risk.

The service has carried out an independent survey of all its estates. This includes the current building condition, the environmental options and the investment required to modernise the buildings. There is an internal system staff use to monitor and resolve any defects identified in its estates. However, the inspection team saw examples where some issues identified hadn't been fixed. For example, we were told that there is an ongoing heating issue at a fire station and the drill tower had been decommissioned because required improvements had not been made.

Innovative systems have improved efficiency

The service actively considers how changes in technology and future innovation may affect risk. For example, the service has invested in a new recording system which records all staff (including corporate and fire control staff) competencies in one central system. This makes it easier for the service to monitor training records for all staff. It also seeks to exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness presented by changes in technology. The service has used existing specialist staff to develop several systems, such as the operational effectiveness database and the value-for-money and performance dashboards.

The service has put in place the capacity and capability needed to achieve sustainable transformation, and it routinely seeks opportunities to work with others to improve efficiency and provide better services in the future.

Where appropriate, staff can work more flexibly. This reduces the service's carbon footprint and improves efficiencies. The service is further investing in its technology and has plans to further strengthen its approach to incident command. It also continues to work closely with its neighbouring fire control partners.

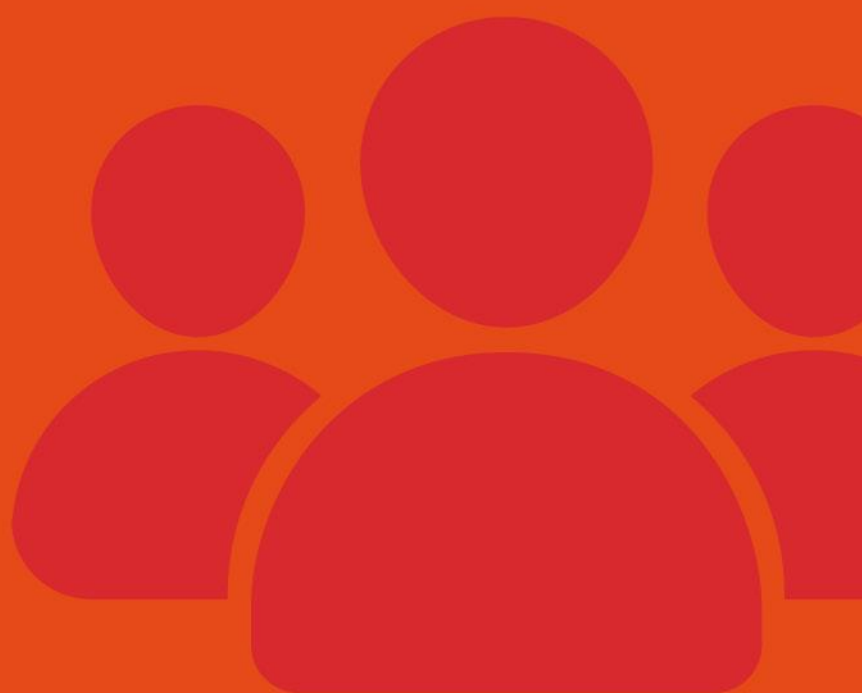
The service is good at securing external funding and generating income

The service actively considers and exploits opportunities for generating extra income. It has:

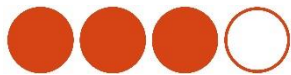
- secured funding of £285,000 by collaborating with utility companies who provide carbon monoxide detectors;
- generated £151,000 per year from its estates; and
- secured the provision of £6,000 worth of heaters and extension leads from energy networks.

The service told us that since 2017 it has generated over £1m of grants income from prevention partners. It also received £457,000 from the Home Office to help offset the £570,000 direct costs of the major fire at Wareham Forest.

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, Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service is good at looking after its people.

The service has shown a strong commitment to driving improvements in the way it develops and maintains its workforce, notably with strong planning for all roles. This makes sure skills and capabilities align with what is needed to effectively deliver the service's CSP. Workforce and succession planning is subject to consistent scrutiny in the form of regular meetings to discuss requirements.

Since our last inspection, the service has introduced a new one-to-one performance management process, which is effective. The staff we spoke to during our inspection spoke highly about a 'recognition button' that is part of the appraisal process which allows staff to recognise a colleague's positive contribution. We have identified this as a promising practice.

Almost all respondents to our staff survey were aware of the service's values (233 out of 234). We spoke to many staff who said they felt confident in challenging any inappropriate behaviours.

The service recognises it needs to increase the diversity of its workforce. It had limited success in its wholetime firefighter recruitment campaign despite carrying out positive attraction activities.

The service has clear policies on staff working dual and secondary contracts. However, during our inspection we spoke to staff whose hours weren't regularly monitored and some were working excessive hours.

Promoting the right values and culture



Good (2019: Good)

Dorset and Wiltshire 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 dual 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.

Expected values and behaviours were well demonstrated across the service

The service has well-defined values that are understood by staff. Our staff survey showed that almost all respondents are aware of the service values. Behaviours that reflect service values are shown at all levels of the service. This was reflected in our staff survey where 92 percent (214 out of 233) of respondents stated that service values are constantly modelled and maintained by their colleagues, with 84 percent (196 out of 233) stating that line managers modelled and maintained the values. Staff are proud to work for Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service.

We were pleased to see the new national [Core Code of Ethics](#) had been introduced on 1 January 2022. The service:

- provided training to its managers;
- displayed posters across its estates; and
- produced a handbook and video that was published on its intranet site.

However, despite this, most staff that we spoke to didn't know the difference between the service's previous sets of values and the new Core Code of Ethics so the service should improve their understanding.

While most staff spoke positively of senior leaders, we also heard from some staff who didn't feel confident in challenging them. Furthermore, 33 percent (77 out of 233) of respondents to our staff survey felt senior leaders didn't model and maintain the service's values.

Staff have good access to services that support their mental and physical health

The service continues to have 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. For example:

- there is a dedicated health and well-being team;
- staff can access support through occupational health;
- specialist counselling services are available; and
- there are specialist trauma practitioners.

Measures to promote staff well-being include a training package on managing well-being and performance that includes a mental health awareness session. Encouragingly, 95 percent (223 out of 234) of respondents to our staff survey said they can access services to support their mental well-being.

We were also impressed with the service's innovations. For example, all well-being posters displayed have a QR code that staff can scan on their mobile devices. This takes them straight to well-being pages on the service's intranet site.

Following a suggestion by a firefighter, the prevention team has developed welfare business cards, which have been shared with the police. This allows anyone affected by an incident, including the public, to access welfare support from the service's partners.

The service has appropriate health and safety provisions in place

The service has effective and well understood health and safety policies and procedures in place. These policies and procedures are readily available and effectively promoted to all staff. The deputy chief fire officer chairs the health and safety committee, and it is only 1 of 3 fire and rescue services across the country to have British Standard ISO 45001 (occupational health and safety management standard) accreditation. This helps the service drive safety improvements. Both staff and representative bodies have confidence in the health and safety approach taken by the service. Our staff survey shows that 92 percent of respondents (215 out of 234) feel their personal safety and welfare is treated seriously at work.

In our previous inspection, we identified as an area for improvement that the service should have an effective system to record and monitor health and safety training. All staff receive basic health and safety training, managers receive enhanced training, and we are pleased that in this inspection all health and safety records could easily be accessed from the central training system.

Working hours should be regularly monitored

The service could do more to monitor staff working hours, including those who have dual contracts. As of 31 March 2021, 39 percent of wholetime firefighters had a secondary employment and 19 percent had a dual contract. The service has clear policies in place and staff are told that they should comply with regulations and not work excessive hours. But, disappointingly, during our inspection we spoke to staff whose hours weren't regularly monitored. For example, we heard that rest periods before and after wholetime shifts weren't always adhered to by staff in order to maintain their on-call availability. We also found examples where firefighters worked a dual contract and worked overtime despite having minimal rest periods in between. This is something the service should review.

Absence management processes are effective

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 and trends are monitored. Absences are managed well and in accordance with policy. HR staff provide additional support and most staff we spoke to knew how to report absence and spoke positively about the support provided.

The service told us that overall, it has seen an increase in the number of firefighter's shifts lost due to absence over the 12 months between 2020/21 and 2021/22.

Getting the right people with the right skills



Outstanding (2019: Good)

Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service is outstanding at getting the right people with the right skills.

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

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

The service has an effective understanding of current and future skill requirements

The service has strong workforce planning in place for all roles. This makes sure skills and capabilities align with what is needed to effectively deliver the IRMP, which it calls the CSP.

At the time of our inspection, workforce planning priorities included:

- workforce diversity;
- long-term succession planning;
- a review of its approach to firefighter recruitment;
- improved retention of on-call firefighters;
- organisational agility in response to future finance; and
- leadership development and progression.

The service has an excellent understanding of current and future skills requirements and has an achievable plan to address them. Workforce and succession planning is subject to consistent scrutiny in the form of regular meetings to discuss requirements. The heads of departments review their staffing plans every quarter. This allows any issues to be addressed in a timely manner. Alongside its quarterly review, the departmental manager sets out their training requirements each year for the next three years, which is then fed into the central team. The workforce planning is forecasted five years in advance and considers many aspects, such as retirement profiles.

The service has established a culture of continuous improvement with examples of sustained service development and improvement. Through its value-for-money dashboard, the service can clearly demonstrate how resources are effectively used to mitigate the risks. The strong workforce planning makes sure the service is effective. We were pleased to see the service has enough trained staff in all departments across the service. For example, all outstanding safe and well visits built up over the pandemic have been completed and all high-rise premises in the service area have been inspected. This translates into a better service for the public.

Most staff told us that they could access the training they need to be effective in their role, including those in fire control and corporate staff roles. Training plans make sure they can maintain competence and capability effectively.

The service has introduced a training system which records all training for all roles in a central place. The service monitors staff competence through this system and quarterly performance reports are reviewed by the strategic leadership team. It regularly updates its understanding of staff's skills and risk-critical safety capabilities through monitoring of competencies by line managers and the central training team. This approach means the service can determine gaps in workforce capabilities and resilience and can make sound and financially sustainable decisions about current and future needs. Encouragingly, the records sampled showed that staff's competencies were all up to date.

There is a positive culture of learning and development

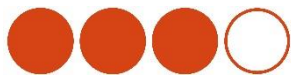
A culture of continuous improvement is promoted throughout the service and staff are encouraged to learn and develop. We are pleased to see that the service has a range of resources in place. These include online learning resources and access to external learning providers. This allows them to do their job effectively.

There is a clear training plan for all staff across the service, including prevention and protection roles. Continuous professional development is further discussed during the appraisal process. The service has a learning hub where staff can access any learning and development relevant to their roles. A monthly learning and development newsletter is sent to all staff with updates on what is available and staff can view and book courses through the central system.

Practical and online training courses are evaluated, and the feedback is used to create further improvements. For example, the service has identified that it needs to provide more support for neurodiversity.

We spoke to firefighters who were in development who spoke highly of the support they have received. Overall, 78 percent of staff (183 out of 234) who responded to our survey said they are satisfied with the level of learning and development that is available to them. However, as 45 percent of respondents (105 out of 234) said they had learning and development conversations with their line manager once a year or less, the service should consider how it ensures the training it offers continues to meet the needs of staff.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity



Good (2019: Good)

Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service is good 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 needs to improve the diversity of its workforce, particularly for whole-time firefighter roles.

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 the way it seeks feedback and challenge

The service has developed several ways to engage with staff on issues and decisions that affect them, for example staff surveys. It has also developed a leadership consultancy group where members from all staff groups and locations, nominated by their colleagues, provide assistance and feedback on topics such as the new promotion process.

As we saw in the COVID-19 inspection, the service introduced a regular service-wide question time session with senior leaders. However, during our inspection, staff told us that they felt when they raised certain topics, such as the promotions process, some senior leaders were dismissive of their points and staff weren't as engaged as before. The service recognises it needs to improve its approach to these sessions and has consulted staff on what improvements it should make. In our staff survey, 44 percent of respondents (102 out of 234) said they don't feel confident in the system to provide feedback at all levels.

There are methods to build awareness of fairness and diversity among all staff, as well as work to determine matters that affect different staff groups. For example, the service has several staff networks in place, but some are still new so the full benefits are yet to be realised. Representative bodies and staff associations reported that the service works well with them.

Staff feel confident in challenging inappropriate behaviour

Staff have a good understanding of what bullying, harassment and discrimination are and their negative effect on colleagues and the organisation. There is a clear policy in place and there are guidance documents available for all staff. In addition, staff networks provide extra support.

The service has made sure all staff are trained and clear about what to do if they encounter inappropriate behaviour and encouragingly, we spoke to many staff who said they felt confident in challenging it.

In this inspection, 12 percent (28 out of 234) of staff survey respondents told us they had been subject to bullying or harassment and 13 percent (31 out of 234) to discrimination over the past 12 months.

In our last inspection, we identified as an area for improvement that the service should assure itself it has effective grievance procedures. We were pleased to find that most staff spoken to were confident in the service's approach to tackling grievances, bullying, harassment and discrimination and disciplinary matters. The service put a performance management plan in place increasing staff confidence to raise grievances. In addition, HR staff are assigned to each geographical area to provide extra support and investigation officers received further external training.

The service recognises it needs to increase the diversity of its workforce

There is an open, fair and transparent recruitment process for staff or those wishing to work for the fire and rescue service. The service provides [unconscious bias](#) training to managers and for those who sit on interview panels. The service also evaluates each stage of its whole-time firefighter recruitment process and understands which stages of the process those from a [protected characteristic](#) aren't passing. But the service hasn't used this information to further enhance the measures they take to improve the workforce's diversity.

Of the whole workforce, 1.5 percent are from an ethnic minority background (local population is 4.7 percent) and 17.9 percent are women. The service has previously arranged experience days and developed a buddying system where applicants from diverse communities can be paired with an existing member of staff, but it should do more to increase the diversity of its workforce.

We recognise the service has a predominantly on-call workforce. It has carried out an analysis of the difficulties in attracting diverse applicants in those areas. In October 2020, the service's recruitment drive for wholetime firefighters disappointingly didn't have any successful applicants who were female or from an ethnic minority background despite a social media campaign to promote opportunities.

The service needs to encourage applicants from diverse backgrounds into all roles including middle and senior level positions. These positions aren't always advertised externally, meaning that the service isn't attracting a diverse pool of applicants.

There is a good approach to equality, diversity and inclusion

The service has improved its approach to EDI and is making sure it can offer the right services to its communities and support staff with protected characteristics.

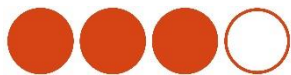
For example, the service recently invited community leaders to provide information and awareness on various topics. The service has produced cultural guides to allow operational staff to increase their understanding of the communities in its station area but most staff we spoke to told us they don't use them.

EDI is also integrated into the recruitment and promotion process and reasonable adjustments are made where applicable. There is a stakeholder panel that has representation from across the service, which provides assistance and independence in the promotion process. The training records we sampled showed all staff had received some form of EDI training.

The service has an effective process in place to assess the equalities impact on existing and new processes. The equality impact assessments we reviewed were completed to a good standard and both internal and external equality groups were consulted.

The deputy chief fire officer chairs the EDI committee every quarter and senior leaders are diversity champions for each network. We were also pleased to find that all estates had been reviewed and improvements were made to make sure they are inclusive.

Managing performance and developing leaders



Good (2019: Good)

Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service is good at managing performance and developing leaders.

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

Promising practice: Good work is recognised

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

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

The new one-to-one performance management process is effective

There is a good performance management system in place which allows the service to effectively develop and assess the individual performance of all staff. This one-to-one process, where individual staff meet with their line manager, was introduced following our last inspection and after engaging with staff. Managers encourage staff to discuss health and well-being, performance and behaviour, and development needs. Staff have received training and guides have been produced. The process is designed so that staff and their line manager can complete this as often as they like, but it must be completed formally at least once a year.

We were pleased to find that the new one-to-one process has been evaluated to make sure it is effective. Through our survey, most staff reported that they had regular discussions with their manager and that they were meaningful. Each staff member has individual goals and objectives, and regular assessments of performance. Staff feel confident in the performance and development arrangements that are in place.

The staff we spoke to during our inspection spoke highly about the 'recognition button' in the appraisal process. This allows all staff to recognise a positive contribution by a colleague. For example, a [watch](#) was impressed with a firefighter who provided cover for a shift. They added the information onto the system, which resulted in the individual receiving an automatic email with an explanation of why they had been recognised.

There is a fair promotion process, but many staff feel it is onerous

The service has put considerable effort into developing its promotion and progression processes so that they are fair and understood by staff. The service introduced a new promotion process and developed an online portal. Applicants can apply at any given time and progress at their own pace. There are user guides available for applicants. The files we sampled showed a clear process, that reasonable adjustments had been made and staff were given feedback.

However, from our staff survey, 46 percent of respondents (107 out of 234) said they felt the promotion process is unfair. Staff also felt it is too onerous, particularly when on-call firefighters are applying for wholetime roles. We were told of examples where applications weren't successful as the testimonial by the line manager didn't meet the pass mark. The service has made improvements following staff feedback, but it needs to build staff understanding and trust in the process.

The service has effective succession planning processes in place that allow it to effectively manage the career pathways of its staff, including roles requiring specialist skills. We also found that temporary promotions are used appropriately to fill short-term resourcing gaps.

The service is good at developing leaders

In our previous inspection, we identified that the service should put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders. We are pleased that the service has addressed this area for improvement.

Its effective succession planning processes allow it to manage high-potential staff into leadership roles. This is discussed during the one-to-one performance management process and a nine-box grid allows managers to consider existing skills and talent within their teams. Furthermore, staff in the promotion pool are monitored to match them against the future skills requirements.

The service has several leadership programmes, which have been reviewed and evaluated. These include:

- supervisory and middle management development programmes;
- bite-sized leadership forums aimed at middle managers;
- apprenticeship schemes; and
- coaching and reverse mentoring programmes.

We were pleased to find that 27 percent of staff across the service are on tailored development pathways.

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