

# Fire and Rescue Service inspections 2018/19

## Summary of findings from Tranche 2



# Contents

Foreword	1
About this report	3
Summary of Tranche 2 grades	4
Headline findings	5
Recommendations	9
<b>Effectiveness</b>	<b>11</b>
How effective are the services at keeping people safe and secure?	12
Understanding risk	12
Prevention	14
Protection	17
Responding to fires and other emergencies	21
Responding to national risks	25
<b>Efficiency</b>	<b>28</b>
How efficient are the services at keeping people safe and secure?	29
Making best use of resources	29
Making the fire and rescue service affordable now and in the future	31
<b>People</b>	<b>34</b>
How well do the services look after their people?	35
Promoting the right values and culture	35
Getting the right people with the right skills	38
Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity	40
Managing performance and developing leaders	45
Future inspections	47
Our continuous improvement	48
Annex A – About the data	49
Annex B – Tranche 2 judgments	54

# Foreword

This report gives an overview of the findings from our second tranche of inspections of 16 fire and rescue services (FRSs) in England. It builds on our findings from the first tranche of 14 service inspections that we reported on in December 2018.

In this tranche, we inspected very different FRSs, from large metropolitan services to smaller services covering vast rural areas. Regardless of shape or size, the dedication and commitment of staff to serving their communities was evident in each and every service. The public continue to hold FRSs in high regard; this message came through loud and clear in the public perception survey we carried out last year.

As in Tranche 1, services can respond effectively when the public need them. Staff are highly skilled, can access a range of equipment and provide a number of services to their local communities.

But we continue to be concerned with how services carry out their protection duties as, all too often, teams are under-resourced.

More than a decade of localism has led to marked differences between services: for example, in how they have determined their response standards and record them; how they identify and mitigate risk; and how they define and audit high-risk premises.

While our people findings are more positive in this tranche, we have concerns about how a few services look after their staff.

For the first time we have identified a serious gap in one service's ability to respond to a terror attack in one of our largest cities, Manchester. This must change.

Most fire and rescue services are operating with reducing budgets and fewer staff. But in this tranche we inspected two services that are operating in a much more difficult financial environment. We are concerned that those two services may not be able to absorb further budget reductions without this having a negative effect on the service they provide to the public.

## **We have made two recommendations**

Until we inspect every service, we don't have a complete national picture. But some themes are emerging, which we have reflected in this report. We will form judgments and make recommendations as part of the first State of Fire and Rescue report, which we will publish later this year.

However, in the meantime, there are two areas where we believe the fire and rescue sector need to take action. We have made two recommendations which are given in more detail later in the report.

In summary, 45 different ways of defining and doing things is not helpful in some situations. There should be more consistency, for example, in how fire and rescue services define risk and calculate and communicate response standards to the public. More consistency will make it easier for the public to understand how their service is performing, and also help services understand more about where they need to improve. The National Fire Chiefs Council's (NFCC) community risk programme should help address this.

The fire sector also needs more support to change and modernise. There is significant transformation under way across the sector and we believe some services need help.

### **Working together to strengthen fire and rescue services**

Our inspections are designed to promote improvements to make everyone safer. I therefore welcome the work the NFCC and Local Government Association, among others, are doing to respond to the themes we have identified in our first reports. I hope we can continue to work together to promote improvement in fire and rescue services.

The report from the first phase of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry – relating to events on the night of the fire – is due to be published in the autumn. The report may lead to some sector-wide changes, and our future inspections will reflect this. Regardless, the events of that tragic night continue to bring into sharp focus the vital role that fire and rescue services play in keeping the public safe.

Finally, in relation to our own policies and practices as the new inspectorate for FRSs, we are determined to improve wherever we can. We have reviewed our approach and have taken steps to strengthen our inspection process and improve how we collect and analyse data. We set out the changes we have made later in this report.



**Zoë Billingham**

HM Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services

## About this report

This report summarises our findings from the second tranche of our fire and rescue service inspections, covering 16 fire and rescue services. It is published alongside individual reports for those services, which contain more detail.

We began inspecting fire and rescue services in England in 2018. We currently inspect all 45 services in three tranches over 18 months. We published the first set of reports covering fourteen services, along with a [national summary report](#), in December 2018.

We answer three principal questions:

- How effective is the service at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks (the effectiveness pillar)?
- How efficient is the service at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risk (the efficiency pillar)?
- How well does the service look after its people (the people pillar)?

We grade services as ‘outstanding’, ‘good’, ‘requires improvement’ or ‘inadequate’ in our answers to each of these questions. Good is our expected graded judgment for all fire and rescue services. It is based on policy, practice and performance that meet pre-defined grading criteria, which are informed by any relevant national guidance or standards.

## Summary of Tranche 2 grades

In this tranche, we have given services the following overall pillar grades:

	Outstanding	Good	Requires improvement	Inadequate
Effectiveness	0	9	7	
Efficiency	0	9	7	
People	0	8	7	1

A full breakdown of grades for Tranche 2 services is at Annex B.

These grades are slightly more positive, particularly in relation to people, than our Tranche 1 findings. In Tranche 1 we graded ten services as good and four as requiring improvement for **effectiveness**; eight as good, five as requiring improvement and one as inadequate for **efficiency**; and three as good, ten as requiring improvement and one as inadequate for **people**.

# Headline findings

## **Responding to emergencies continues to be a strength for the sector**

Services we inspected in this tranche can respond effectively when the public need help. They all have highly trained staff and appropriate specialist equipment and are able to support each other to meet the challenges they face, day in, day out.

Our concerns in this area are not about staff but about the resources available to support them. For example, in some services there are too few firefighters available to crew fire engines on a regular basis than the service says it needs to meet its foreseeable risk.

Access to up-to-date risk information is also vital to enable firefighters to respond to an incident safely and effectively, especially at a site containing risks to firefighters. But in some services, firefighters were working with out-of-date or inaccurate information, or were unable readily and efficiently to access this information due to poor technology.

## **Protection remains a concern: its application is inconsistent, and teams are often under-resourced**

We are still concerned about how services protect the public through the regulation of fire safety. Services need to be confident that people who are responsible for fire safety in buildings are making sure they are safe.

All too often, protection teams are under-resourced to meet the expectations set in the service's risk-based inspection programme. In the absence of national standards and legislation, there is no consistent way in which services fulfil their protection responsibilities. Services vary considerably in how they define high-risk premises, the frequency of audits and the use of enforcement action. As a result, premises in one service area are often treated very differently from similar premises in another. We recommend that the Home Office and the fire and rescue sector establish a consistent definition of what constitutes a high-risk premises and a specification of how frequently these should be audited.

## **Some services are well resourced; others are struggling to carry out their core functions**

Fire funding is complex and funding arrangements differ across services. Unlike in the first tranche of inspections, we have inspected two services – Northamptonshire and Northumberland – which are operating in testing financial environments. This is making it harder for them to effectively carry out their core functions of prevention, protection and response. It will be difficult for these services to absorb any further budget reductions without adverse implications for public safety.

## **Services are increasingly prioritising health, wellbeing and mental health support**

Overall, our people pillar gradings are more positive this tranche than last. Many services showed that they have a strong culture and values, where staff are proud to work for their service and look after their communities. Fire staff, especially firefighters and control staff, are often required to respond to traumatic incidents. We are encouraged to see the range of support that services have put in place for their staff.

## **Not enough progress is being made to improve workforce diversity**

While work is under way in most services to increase the diversity of workforces and access the widest talent pool possible, the number of staff in fire services who are women or from an ethnic minority background is still low. Services are still nowhere near having a workforce which reflects their communities. And in some services, leaders aren't effectively communicating the benefits of, or need for, workforce diversity with their staff.

## **We continue to see considerable variation in definitions and how things are done across services**

While fire and rescue services in England operate under the same legal framework and are responsible for providing the same functions, more than a decade of localism has seen them now operate very differently in many respects. This includes in how things are defined, such as response standards and high-risk premises, and how things are done, including how often high-risk premises should be audited, how risk should be mitigated, and how response standards are calculated. While we accept there may be a need for some local differences, such varied definitions are not helpful. The result is that people living in very similar communities up and down the country can receive quite different levels of service from their fire and rescue services. Fire and rescue services should adopt a more consistent approach.



## **This continues to be a time of change for the fire sector**

A great deal of change is happening across services and the fire and rescue sector as a whole. Services in this tranche are responding to governance changes, dealing with budget reductions, implementing large technological improvements and using collaborative functions, such as joint control rooms. And further changes are planned: since our last report, the Fire Standards Board has been formed and the Grenfell Tower Inquiry is due to publish shortly. The sector and some services need to have enough capacity and capability to bring about this change.

While we have seen significant modernisation in some services, it is much less evident in others, indeed in some services the pace and scale of change and reform is painfully slow. Some service leaders told us that a limiting factor to reformed and modernised working practices is the complex negotiating machinery and the strength of the Fire Brigades Union.

## **Prevention activities aren't always targeted at those at most risk of fire**

To reduce the number and severity of fires in the home, fire and rescue services must promote fire safety. Services are doing a range of prevention work and we saw much innovative practice. But sometimes this work isn't organised in order of priority, so resources aren't always focused on those at greatest risk. It is also very rarely evaluated, so services can't always be sure it is achieving what they had hoped.

## **Most fire and rescue services are ready for large-scale incidents but national capability needs to be reviewed further**

The services we inspected in this tranche have arrangements in place to respond to national risks. They are generally well practised and prepared for large-scale and national incidents, such as flooding or terrorist attacks, and are able to work with other fire and rescue services, and other emergency services during a major incident.

However, at the time of the inspection one FRS, Greater Manchester, did not have its own capability in place to respond to terror-related incidents because of an industrial relations dispute. Instead it has an agreement for its neighbour, Merseyside FRS, to provide this capability. This arrangement is of considerable concern in respect of the safety of the public. The delay of any emergency service responding to such a crisis could very well cost lives. This matter deserves the most urgent attention and resolution.

## **Services are not exploiting the benefits of technology**

Nearly half of the services we inspected are using broken, dated or unreliable IT systems and some rely on using inefficient paper-based systems, which is hindering their productivity. Services could also work better together; all too often we saw fire services operating in isolation to design their own technical solutions. Working and purchasing together can foster new ideas and be more cost-effective in the long run.

## **While there is greater use of operational learning, not all learning is gathered, nor used to improve the service**

Debriefing is widely used across services, in particular following larger incidents, to understand what went well and what should be improved. However, some services aren't gathering the learning from smaller incidents. And some services couldn't show how the learning they have obtained is being used to improve how they operate to provide a better service and improve firefighter and public safety.

## **Some services aren't effectively evaluating, reviewing and monitoring their collaboration activities**

Services are generally keen to explore collaboration opportunities and are willing to engage in initiatives with local organisations. For example, we have seen services sharing estates, creating joint control rooms and working on behalf of police and ambulance services. But not enough fire services are evaluating, reviewing and monitoring this work to understand whether they are achieving the benefits they anticipated.

# Recommendations

Until we inspect every fire and rescue service, we won't have a complete national picture. But some themes are emerging following the inspection of 30 of the 45 fire and rescue services in England.

We will form judgments and make further recommendations in our first State of Fire and Rescue report, which we will publish later in 2019. However, there are two areas that stand out as requiring immediate attention and action: the need for greater consistency in approach and the need for the sector to be supported in its quest to reform through enhanced capacity and capability. These are matters on which there is little, if any, dissent across the sector.

## Recommendation 1

Fire and rescue services in England operate under the same legal framework and are responsible for providing the same functions, but they operate very differently. The range of different local approaches has meant that significant variations in standards have emerged. For example, services have wide variation in response standards (the service's commitment to the public on how quickly it will get to incidents). There is also too much variation in how services record and report on response standards. And services have different approaches to defining high-risk properties for protection work, so it is difficult for services to be confident that they are targeting the right premises. Risk is also identified and defined differently.

We have worked with the sector to improve the data that is available, but sector-wide common definitions, standards and applications need to be adopted. There are four **priority areas** where there will be immediate benefits to the public if a consistent approach is adopted by all fire and rescue services across England, namely:

1. identifying and determining risk as part of the IRMP process;
2. identifying and measuring emergency response standards and approaches;
3. defining what are high-risk premises for the purposes of fire protection; and
4. setting an expectation for how frequently high-risk premises, and parts of those premises, should be audited for compliance with fire safety legislation.

We recognise the overlaps between this and the work that is already underway to implement the recommendations of Dame Judith Hackitt's review of building regulations and fire safety.

**As soon as is practicable the Home Office, National Fire Chiefs Council and Local Government Association, in consultation with the Fire Standards Board and Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, should establish a programme of work that will result in consistency in the four priority areas above.**

**By December 2020, there will be completion or significant progress in the four priority areas specified above, towards a common set of definitions and standards for fire and rescue services to adopt and apply as soon as reasonably practicable, for each of the four priority areas.**

## **Recommendation 2**

The past few years have seen significant reform and transformation across the fire and rescue sector in England. There have been many factors behind this, such as the Government's fire reform programme, austerity, the new inspectorate and the consequences of and response to the tragic events at Grenfell Tower. Further sector-wide change is likely to be needed after the conclusion of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry (the first report is due this autumn). While the National Fire Chiefs Council has some full-time resources, it mainly relies on fire and rescue services to provide staff, often on a part-time basis, to carry out national programmes on behalf of the sector. A similar model is being used by the newly formed Fire Standards Board.

The fire and rescue service nationally has very limited resources and access to the skills and expertise it needs to bring about change. Without access to this support, the Government's fire reform programme might be in jeopardy.

**As part of the next Spending Review, the Home Office in consultation with the Fire and Rescue Sector should address the deficit in the fire sector's national capacity and capability to support change.**

# Effectiveness



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

In this pillar we ask five questions:

1. How well does the service understand the risk of fire and other emergencies?
2. How effective is the service at preventing fires and other risks?
3. How effective is the service at protecting the public through the regulation of fire safety?
4. How effective is the service at responding to fires and other emergencies?
5. How effective is the service at responding to national risks?

## Understanding risk

### There is no set way of identifying and mitigating risk

Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs) vary widely in content, size, style and even name. There is currently no national guidance to help services produce these plans. As a result, there is little consistency, even though plans are in line with the requirements set by the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England. Services also assess risk in very different ways. The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) is in the process of updating the national guidance and providing tools that will help services model their risks more consistently.

Services don't always base their planning on up-to-date information about risk. For example, one service didn't update its risk information when it produced its current IRMP in 2016, so its plans are based on dated information. This means the service can't be sure it is allocating resources appropriately to manage its current risks. While the IRMP should determine a service's work, in one case we found no link between a service's IRMP and its activities. This service has since consulted on, and approved, a new IRMP from April 2019.

Some services produce both service-wide and station-level risk plans. For example, this worked well in Oxfordshire, as the station plans helped the service prioritise local activity. But in other services, the station plans aren't so useful. For example, in one service we found that staff didn't plan their activities according to the station risk plans.

## **While some services are good at engaging with the public, others could do more**

Public engagement is an important element of the planning process. Our recent survey of nearly 18,000 people reported that, while most respondents are interested in knowing about their local fire service (77 percent), over half (52 percent) didn't feel informed about what it was doing.<sup>1</sup>

Services are increasingly using interactive websites and social media to engage with the public, as well as face-to-face events such as community roadshows and focus groups. However, most services also recognise that they could do more to engage with the public.

We saw a number of positive examples of services trying new methods of public engagement. When Dorset and Wiltshire fire and rescue services combined in 2016, the new service employed external specialists to assess the consultation process, leading to the production of its first community safety plan. The process for producing this plan was in line with best practice and included focus groups and online forums.

Other services have appointed staff dedicated to public engagement. West Midlands FRS communicates on its website in several languages and translates its service plan into approximately 100 different languages. It also has an active community membership scheme with around 3,000 members, which the service consults on a range of topics. Tyne and Wear FRS employs multilingual community advocates to engage with diverse and hard-to-reach communities.

### **Services are broadly aware of their local risks**

Risk modelling tools help services gain a better understanding of complex data. These are computer programmes that help services predict what might happen in various scenarios and allocate resources accordingly. For example, Leicestershire FRS decided, based on risk modelling, that more resources were needed at Castle Donington, reflecting its proximity to the M1 and East Midlands airport. Royal Berkshire FRS used modelling to develop a business case for a tri-service – fire, police and ambulance - community fire station at Theale and to identify vulnerable people or households for targeted prevention work.

Services also use modelling to predict future risk and demand, though the sophistication of their methods varies greatly. Tyne and Wear FRS maps predicted growth and development areas for the county to 2030. Greater Manchester FRS continuously analyses the political, economic, societal, technological, environmental, legal and organisational factors affecting the city to predict its future demand.

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<sup>1</sup> Please see Annex A for full details on this survey.

## **Some services need to improve the risk information they collect and provide firefighters**

Services collect risk information to help protect people and property during fires and other emergencies. If this information is out-of-date, it could endanger firefighters, put the public at unnecessary risk of harm and hinder the response. In good fire and rescue services, trained staff run a clear process and keep risk information up to date. Staff should regularly familiarise themselves with their sites of known risk by visiting them and performing training exercises there.

Fire engines are fitted with computers called mobile data terminals (MDTs). These give firefighters access to important risk information when attending fires and other emergencies. In most services, the MDTs worked well when we tested them.

We were concerned to find that ten services had risk information for high-risk buildings on their MDTs that has passed its service-defined review date. This is consistent with our findings from the first tranche of inspections. Some services duplicate the information held on MDTs with back-up paper-based systems. This is for a variety of reasons including the unreliability of MDTs. But we found some paper records to be out of date or incomplete. Other services don't update MDTs frequently enough, meaning crews can't access vital risk information for months after the service becomes aware of it. These services need to review their processes.

Some services don't visit their risk sites frequently enough. For example, one service wasn't carrying out enough risk visits and we found very little evidence of there being a performance management framework in place to ensure visits were completed on time. As a result, much of the service's risk information was out of date. Similarly, another service had only completed 17 percent of its risk visits within its target in the year ending 31 March 2018. Several services didn't appropriately record risk information for temporary events, such as festivals and concerts. Others don't upload this information to MDTs or share it consistently with staff and this means firefighters don't have access to the most up-to-date risk information.

Generally, staff are well trained in identifying and recording risk information. However, in one service, staff rely on experience as they haven't had any recent training in the information they ought to be recording.

## **Prevention**

### **Every service undertakes prevention activities**

Every fire and rescue service we inspected had identified prevention as a priority in its IRMP and allocated its resources accordingly. Most services make good use of specialist teams and operational wholetime staff in doing prevention work. One service hadn't allocated enough resources to its prevention work and another needs to provide more training to its staff on the different issues they may face.

We graded Merseyside FRS as outstanding for its prevention work. It concentrates on fire safety in the home and on reducing arson, and this work is established across the service. We were impressed with the Home Office data that shows how, in the year to 31 March 2018, the service carried out around 52,500 home fire safety checks,



equating to 37.1 home fire safety checks per 1,000 population. This is more than three times the average rate in England of 10.4. In the same period, Merseyside targeted just under 31,000 (58.8 percent) of these checks at households occupied by an elderly person and just under 9,000 (16.6 percent) to households occupied by a person declaring a disability. When firefighters identify additional needs during a visit, they refer people to more specially trained staff who follow up with a more in-depth safe and well visit.

### Prevention activities differ between services

Every service we inspected in Tranche 2 has expanded the range of prevention activities it provides, covering things such as health and lifestyle (e.g. smoking, drinking). That said, in some services, some staff didn't feel equipped to discuss the wide spectrum of issues. As in Tranche 1, we found differences between what services said they offered and the reality on the ground. The table below illustrates the different issues covered by each service.

**Figure 1: Activities included in a prevention visit as at 31 March 2018**

	Berkshire	Dorset & Wiltshire	Greater Manchester	Humberside	Kent	Leicestershire	Merseyside	Norfolk	Northamptonshire	Northumberland	Nottinghamshire	Oxfordshire	Shropshire	Tyne and Wear	West Midlands	West Sussex
Identify potential fire risks	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Take action to reduce fire risks	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ensure working smoke alarms are fitted	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Advice on social welfare	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Health screening/detection	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Health prevention	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
Advice on slips, trips and falls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

**Source: HMICFRS data collection**

**For further information about this data, please see Annex A**

Fire and rescue service staff have a responsibility to safeguard the vulnerable children and adults they come into contact with. Sometimes they may need to refer vulnerable people to other support. Most services provide training on safeguarding responsibilities and, in general, the staff we interviewed felt confident identifying factors that would make someone at greater risk of a fire in the home. However, not all relevant staff were able to identify people with vulnerabilities and make safeguarding referrals.

The best services employ skilled and passionate people to provide face-to-face safeguarding training. But some rely solely on staff working through an online course, which has less impact. Good services also have clear safeguarding referral procedures about what to look out for and what to do if they find a concern, which staff are confident in using.

We saw examples of services working closely with a range of organisations to provide other community safety programmes, such as water safety awareness campaigns. For example, Tyne and Wear's water safety work includes taking part in the national Be Water Aware campaign. The service launched the throw bag campaign, supported by the RNLI, which trains pub staff on Newcastle's quayside to use lifesaving throw bags where people fall in the water. Several people have been rescued in this way since the campaign's launch in July 2018.

### **Services need to do more to target their prevention work at the most vulnerable**

To target resources effectively, services need to know who is at greatest risk of fire and other emergencies and prioritise their activity to target these people. We found that over half of the services inspected in Tranche 2 didn't always target their prevention work effectively at those people who are at greatest risk of fire. Staff in these services told us they are frustrated that their time is not better spent on helping those most in need.

West Midlands FRS has carried out considerable research into primary risk factors in its area. It has reviewed serious incidents in which injuries or deaths have occurred and smoking, mental health or alcohol was a contributory factor. The service uses this information to make sure its prevention work is targeted at those most at risk of fire.

We saw some services collaborating with the police to act on very high-risk referrals. For example, they fit smoke alarms and fireproof letter boxes in the homes of people who have been referred as victims of domestic abuse. We also saw services working with the police and ambulance service, for example, by forcing entry into homes to access casualties who are in urgent need of care.

### **Services need to evaluate what works**

All fire and rescue services should evaluate their prevention activities so they understand what works. They should assess which interventions are most helpful and decide how best to measure the results. As in Tranche 1, we found that services were often conducting a wide range of prevention activities beyond their statutory remit, with little understanding of the outcomes and the actual safety benefits that follow.

There were a few notable exceptions; for example, in Merseyside, the service seeks feedback, evaluates and quality assures its activity to make sure it is contributing to its intended strategy. This has led to a change in who receives a home fire risk check. Home Office data now shows the service completes fewer checks: in the year to 31 March 2017 it carried out 57,679 compared with 52,564 in the year to 31 March 2018. The service says these checks are now better targeted at those most at risk.

## **While we saw a good range of work to tackle arson, some services are de-prioritising the issue**

Services should be working with people who set fires in order to tackle their behaviour, as Home Office data shows in the year ending September 2018 they attended 82,215 deliberate fires. We found services in this tranche were doing a range of different things to tackle arson. In Leicestershire, a police officer works with both Leicestershire Police and Leicestershire FRS as the main point of contact for arson. Whenever there's a major incident, the officer will co-ordinate the response and resources for both organisations and the service supports the police in arson prosecutions.

We inspected Merseyside FRS in the run up to bonfire night, a traditionally busy period. We were impressed by the work the service had done to reduce the risk to both the public and staff. Working with partner organisations such as Merseyside Police, it had removed over 50 tonnes of bonfire materials and carried out joint target-hardening visits to better protect particular premises. It frequently drove its fire engines along high-risk routes to increase visibility and deter offenders and worked with the police to reduce violence to staff.

However, in a small number of other services, resources are being diverted away from preventing arson, in part due to reducing staff numbers, with services allocating remaining staff to other work.

## **Services are proactively engaged in road safety**

Fire and rescue services have a statutory duty to rescue people from road traffic collisions. This duty does not extend to doing road safety prevention activity, but all services recognise the value of this work and do it anyway. Most services work well with other organisations (e.g. police and local authorities) through safer roads partnerships. We saw some good innovation, including in Merseyside FRS and Leicestershire FRS, where they used virtual reality technology as part of their driver education campaigns.

## **Protection**

### **Lack of resource and capacity continues to limit protection work**

All fire and rescue services must promote fire safety, which includes fire protection. This means they should conduct audits to make sure that the people responsible for fire safety in buildings comply with fire safety legislation. And they should, where necessary, use available legal powers to enforce fire safety legislation. We gave the lowest grades for this area in Tranche 1 and we remain concerned following our findings in Tranche 2.

Most services we inspected didn't have enough qualified inspectors to meet the requirements set in their risk-based inspection programmes. Nationally, there has been a gradual reduction in the number of competent staff who are dedicated to protection. Of the 30 services that provided data for the HMICFRS collection, there were 820 competent staff as at 31 March 2011, falling to 535 as at 31

December 2018.<sup>2</sup> Most protection teams we interviewed described themselves as under-resourced.

There are a number of reasons for this. Resources are being allocated elsewhere – namely to prevention and response – across the service, there is poor succession planning, and services have difficulty in retaining trained inspectors.

While some fire protection work requires specially trained personnel, services should use the capacity and skills of operational crews to share the load. This is not the case for every service. We did see some good examples of service-wide protection work. For example, Merseyside FRS uses their operational fire crews to conduct fire safety audits at lower-risk commercial and industrial premises. This allows the crews to maintain a working knowledge of the risks in their immediate station area and also gives them the opportunity to expand their practical knowledge. West Midlands FRS's operational crews carry out what they call safe and strong protection visits to commercial premises to provide information.

One way to tackle a lack of resources is for services to do more so-called short audits, instead of the full audits that most currently undertake. These short audits assess risk and trigger a full audit when they identify problems. Greater Manchester FRS does short audits, which are escalated to a full audit if necessary. Similarly, Dorset & Wiltshire FRS's protection officers conduct a short audit in the first instance and staff then do a full audit if compliance issues arise.

### **There is a lack of consistency in the way services define high risk**

With limited resources, services need to prioritise their protection work and focus on the buildings they have defined as being at the highest risk. Services generally define their high-risk premises according to the probability that an incident will occur multiplied by the impact it will have. That said, there is no national definition for what constitutes high-risk so there is little consistency between services. There is also a wide variance in how frequently services audit these premises and how they enforce compliance. Businesses operating in different fire service areas may therefore face different requirements. Some services will aim to audit all their high-risk premises annually, others do so over many years. Some services have recently changed their definition of high risk, which has had a large impact on the number of premises they have in that category. We found one service that is not clear about which properties should be part of its risk-based inspection programme.

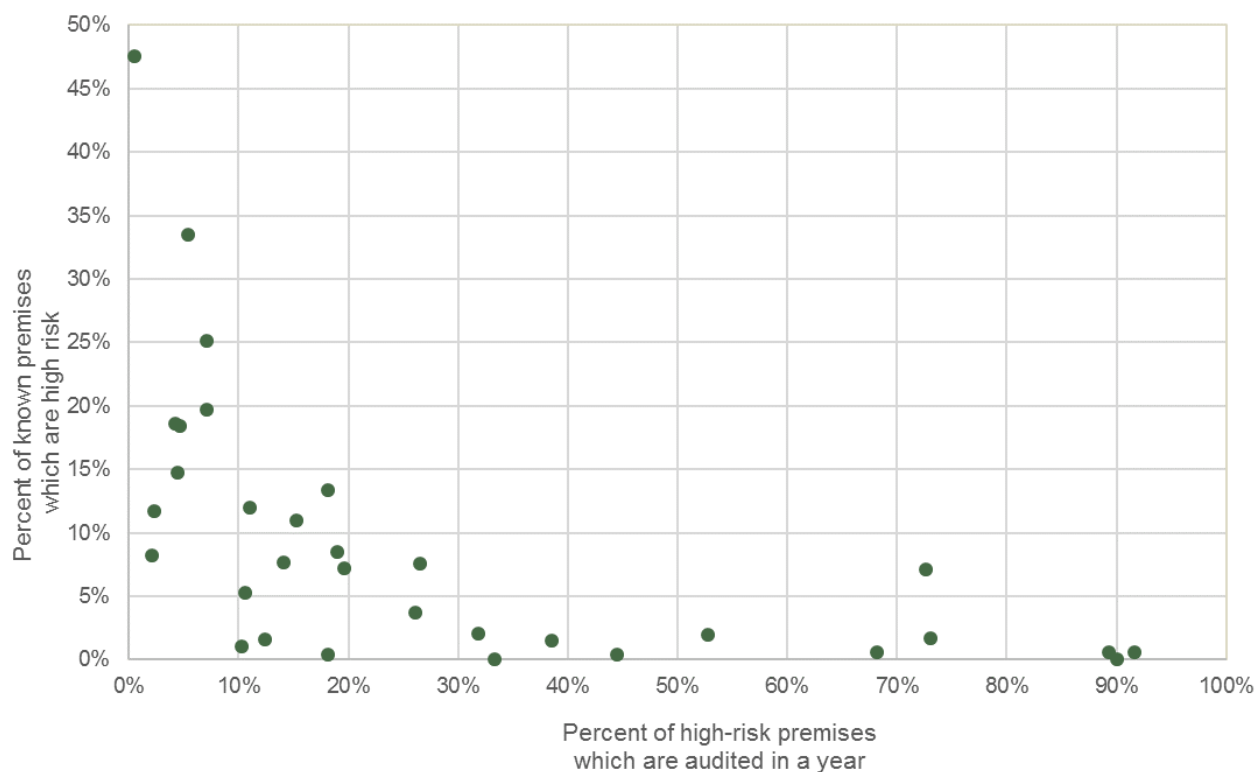
The graph below illustrates FRSs as a dot and the national variance in the percent of premises a service considers to be high risk against how frequently they are audited. Often, the services that have a high percentage of high-risk premises audit them less frequently than those with a lower percentage. If services genuinely consider these

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<sup>2</sup> Services that didn't provide a full set of data: Avon, Cheshire, Cleveland, Cornwall, Devon and Somerset, Dorset & Wiltshire, Hampshire, Hereford & Worcester, Humberside, Isles of Scilly, North Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, Surrey, Warwickshire and West Midlands. The number given is headcount. To count as dedicated to protection, at least 75 percent of a staff member's work or role should be in protection.

premises to be high risk, they need to allocate enough resource to make sure appropriate protection work is undertaken.

**Figure 2: Percentage of high-risk premises audited in a year against percentage of known premises which are high risk<sup>3</sup>**



**Sources: Number of known premises: Home Office FIRE1202: 2017/2018**  
**High-risk premises audited: HMICFRS data collection: 2017/2018**  
**Number of known high-risk premises: HMICFRS data collection: as at 31 March 2018**  
**Number of high-risk premises audited: HMICFRS data collection: 2017/2018**

**Services are responding promptly to planning applications**

Local authorities must consult fire and rescue services on planning applications for new buildings and renovations to business premises and developments. The number of applications tend to rise and fall with the performance of the local economy and investment. Services should respond to the local authority in writing and within stated timescales (usually within 15 working days). Since Tranche 1, we have improved the data we collect on this issue. It shows that most services are responding in a timely manner.

<sup>3</sup> Services that have been excluded for not providing a complete set of data: Avon, Royal Berkshire, Dorset & Wiltshire, Durham, East Sussex, Greater London, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Isle of Scilly, Norfolk, Warwickshire and West Midlands. West Yorkshire has been removed as it makes the scale on the axis hard to interpret. Percentages are shown on the graph, but it is important to consider the pure number that is behind these percentages.

## **Out-of-hours specialist support is lacking**

We are concerned that some services don't have specialist fire protection staff available at all times of the day and night to respond to serious fire safety concerns and to take urgent action to make sure people are safe. This means that serious fire safety issues could go unaddressed or important evidence for prosecutions might not be collected. For example, in one service, the protection team mainly works during office hours and outside that time, there is limited protection advice available to deal with urgent fire safety issues.

## **Services are influencing improvements to fire protection**

Some services have been successful in influencing local authority fire safety policy. Oxfordshire FRS has worked with Oxford City Council to fit all its high-rise residential blocks with sprinklers after the initial proposal didn't include them. Royal Berkshire FRS worked with Wokingham Council to install sprinklers in newly built schools, and in Reading, work is under way to fit domestic sprinklers in high-rise premises.

## **A varied approach to how services work and enforce with others**

A number of services work with other organisations and conduct multi-agency enforcement actions to keep the public safe. Dorset & Wiltshire FRS works with other enforcement agencies including local authority housing teams, Border Force, councils, building control companies, the Environment Agency and the Care Quality Commission to exchange information on risk and take joint enforcement action where necessary.

## **Services are supporting businesses in their compliance**

Most services have clear advice on their websites for businesses about how to comply with fire safety regulation, providing them with support and education through seminars and visits. For example, Nottinghamshire FRS uses social media to promote fire safety to local businesses and is a member of Nottinghamshire's business development hub, where it gives information to people setting up a new company. It also runs workshops at community events. Dorset & Wiltshire FRS works with local businesses and large organisations to exchange information and expectations on compliance with fire safety regulations and hosts seminars supported by the local chamber of commerce. The seminars are run to coincide with national fire safety campaigns.

## **Most services are tackling the number of fire false alarms**

Nationally, Home Office data shows that fire false alarms made up 40 percent of all incidents attended in the year ending 30 September 2018. In some services this is higher; for example, in one service, fire false alarms made up 51 percent of all incidents attended in the same time period.

Services should have adopted the NFCC's best practice guidance for dealing with unwanted fire signals. We found that not all had. For example, most services challenge calls to some degree, namely control operators might seek to establish whether there is a fire before dispatching a fire engine. West Midlands FRS has introduced smaller vehicles with business safety officers as crew. These officers

respond to the initial fire call to check it is valid, rather than sending a fully equipped fire engine.

## Responding to fires and other emergencies

### **Some services don't routinely have the number of available fire engines they say they need**

Fire and rescue services need to respond to the public when they are called and should have the right combination of trained staff and equipment available. Services should know how many engines they need to meet their foreseeable risks.

Most services have a good understanding of fire engine availability. This can fluctuate considerably for on-call stations, where firefighters are not based at the station. Good services have set up systems to track the availability of their on-call staff and link that with the systems that track the availability of their fire engines. For example, in Norfolk FRS, staff can log their availability via an app on their mobile phone, allowing the service to establish exactly how many fire engines it could mobilise at any one time. However, other services still use inefficient manual processes.

Recruiting and retaining on-call staff can be difficult and we don't underestimate the challenge. Many services we inspected in this tranche, and in the previous tranche, are struggling to meet their own targets. For example, Kent FRS is failing to achieve its targets for the number of available fire engines. Between April and December 2018, the overall average monthly pump availability ranged from 41 to 47 percent. According to its recent fire cover review, the service needs 50 engines by day and night, but between April 2018 and the end of February 2019, it averaged just 34 by day and 51 at night.

Northamptonshire FRS was graded inadequate for this element of the inspection. In part, this is down to the poor availability of its fire engines. Although the service has established that it needs to have a minimum of 14 fire engines available, in the short time period we sampled, the service had fewer on-call engines available than it needed during weekday mornings and during weekends. Action is now being taken to make sure its fire cover is distributed better.

We were pleased to find that in Shropshire FRS, which is predominately an on-call service, the overall average monthly engine availability ranged from 96 to 98 percent between April and December 2018.

Some services have changed their duty systems and response vehicles to provide appropriate fire cover. For example, West Midlands FRS uses satellite tracking to give real-time updates about where its response vehicles are and where they should be to help achieve response standards.

### **Services need to be clearer on what response resources they need**

Not all services are clear in their IRMPs about the resources they need to meet the risks they have identified. Good services assess the risks and decide how many fire engines and specialist resources they need at certain locations. They vary the numbers during the day and night as risk levels change.

On the one hand, Merseyside FRS has analysed demand and found that most emergency incidents happen during the day. As a result, it has reduced the number of fire engines available overnight. On the other, West Sussex FRS acknowledges that it rarely adjusts its response model to reflect changes in levels of risk.

### **Services need to hit their promised response time targets**

Every service should have a published response standard, which is the time it takes to respond to an emergency. We found that these vary considerably across England, so what you can expect in one service differs from what another would provide a few miles away across a border. In this tranche, only Tyne and Wear FRS didn't have an agreed response standard in its IRMP, but it did approve a trial of response standards in April 2019 as part of a public consultation.

It is reasonable for response times to vary depending on the risk, geography and demography of an area. But it isn't reasonable for services to commit to a response time and then consistently fail to meet it. If it isn't possible to achieve a response time with the resources available, the service needs to be frank with the public about that.

Sometimes, there is a stark difference in response times across service borders. We inspected a number of neighbouring services in this tranche: Northumberland and Tyne and Wear; Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire; and Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire. In every case, response times and standards were different. For example, as at 1 April 2018, Royal Berkshire's response standard is for the first engine to arrive at 75 percent of emergency incidents within 10 minutes, while Oxfordshire's response standard is for the first engine to arrive at 80 percent of incidents within 11 minutes. Royal Berkshire FRS times its standard from the time of call while Oxfordshire FRS from the time the crew is alerted.

West Midlands FRS is the first service we have graded outstanding in this part of the inspection. 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 an incident. This standard was adopted after extensive research into survivability rates and how to reduce loss of life. Data shows us in the period between 1 April 2018 and 31 December 2018, excluding call handling, the service's median average response travel time for high-risk calls was 4 minutes 43 seconds. Home Office data shows 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, West Midlands FRS has made several significant improvements over the past few years, such as introducing:

- 19 brigade response vehicles, with a crew of 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 with a crew comprising 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 the periods of highest demand.

It is significant that, unlike the vast majority of other fire services, West Midlands FRS's operational firefighters are nearly all wholetime rather than on-call. This means that they are available to be deployed immediately, 24 hours a day.

### **Response standards need to be clear for all to understand**

The Home Office collects and publishes data on response times by measuring the time between the call being made and the first fire engine arriving at the scene. However, we found services measure their own response times in a range of different ways. For example, West Midlands FRS doesn't include call handling in its response standards. Nottinghamshire FRS has changed from a 10-minute response standard to incidents in 90 percent of occasions, which includes call handling time, to an 8-minute standard that does not. This makes it look as if the service has improved its response time by 2 minutes, but this isn't the case. Home Office data shows that in the year ending 31 March 2018, the service had a 1 minute 57 average call handling time to primary fires so, in fact, the new response standard is almost identical.

### **Call handling is broadly effective**

In Tranche 2, we found that control operators handle calls effectively, dispatch resources and pass risk-critical information to fire crews. In most services, control staff can vary the number of fire engines they send to an incident based on information from the caller. Control rooms across the country have a range of operating models; some specific to one service, others shared by several. We found that shared control rooms improve mobilisation across borders. For example, we saw effective practice in Thames Valley Control, which handles emergency calls for Royal Berkshire and Oxfordshire FRSs. It also serves Buckinghamshire FRS, which we will inspect in Tranche 3. Thames Valley Control responds to calls about life-critical emergencies near a service border with the quickest available fire engine, regardless of whether that means crossing a border.

We saw co-located police and fire control rooms in Kent and Merseyside. This provides staff from both services with access to different systems, such as closed-circuit television (CCTV), which can help improve the response. It also encourages better joint agency co-ordination, including incident command decisions and public communication.

### **Good progress on implementing national guidance, but more work needed**

All the fire and rescue services we inspected in Tranche 2 had either adopted or were in the process of adopting National Operational Guidance (NOG), which will improve consistency, effectiveness and efficiency. Some services are more advanced in this than others.

We saw services working in regional groups to pool resources for implementing guidance. For example, Nottinghamshire FRS is working with five fire and

rescue services in the East Midlands to make sure its operational policies meet national guidelines. It has made good progress.

Some services haven't yet adopted NOG in all areas and are operating two-tier systems using their own protocols as well as NOG. This causes confusion for firefighters, who don't know which approach to follow. It also makes working across borders and with others less effective, as different services apply different procedures. While one service has aligned some of its procedures to NOG, it doesn't have a clear plan for adopting the full guidance. Staff also described an over-reliance on e-learning for training in changes to operational procedure.

### **Incident command training and reassessment is falling behind schedule in some services**

Incident commanders need to be ready to lead teams competently, assertively, effectively and safely during incidents. Half of the services we inspected in Tranche 2 had fallen behind with their training and/or reassessment for incident commanders, particularly for middle and senior managers. For example, in one service, training for commanders was inconsistent at all levels, while another service doesn't provide any refresher training or assessment for commanders above supervisory level and so it can't be sure these staff are working to the latest guidance and best practice.

### **Operational discretion is understood and used by services**

In a number of services, we found that some staff didn't understand relatively new incident command terms used in NOG such as the 'decision control process' and 'operational discretion'. However, most commanders told us they felt senior leaders supported them to use operational discretion to step outside standard procedures where necessary. Our staff survey supported this.

We conducted a staff survey open to all members of a Tranche 2 service's workforce from 1 October 2018 to 15 February 2019 and received just over 2,900 responses from members of staff from Tranche 2 services.<sup>4</sup> Of the 959 firefighters who responded who were crew manager rank or above, 64 percent agreed that the service would support them to use unauthorised tactics, or use tactics in a new way if an incident required it.

### **There is mixed evidence of how well services evaluate operational performance**

Fire and rescue services should evaluate their performance. After each incident, they should assess how well they responded in order to work out what went well, what they could improve and whether they were using new procedures and techniques effectively. All the fire and rescue services we inspected have a process for debriefing staff after incidents. Many services have a central operational assurance team to analyse information from debriefs and help the organisation improve. We found that this helped with debriefing large and complex incidents.

Good services also have processes that help staff learn from debriefs. These include staff bulletins, new training scenarios and highlighting any improvements that have been made in response to feedback. Kent publishes debrief reports and, where

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<sup>4</sup> Please see Annex A for more information.

appropriate, produces case studies. It requires stations to acknowledge receipt of any safety-critical information from debriefs. It also responds to staff feedback by buying new equipment or changing policies.

West Midlands FRS has a central team that collates information from debriefs, summarises the results and shares learning across the service. If an issue is risk-critical, the service issues an immediate notice. We were impressed with the service's station peer assessment (SPA) team, which evaluates the performance of station-based teams. It gives quality assurance to check that systems and practices such as recording and monitoring staff competency, prevention activities and risk information are consistent across the service. Learning is then shared with both station teams and the central intelligence team. Of the 2,056 firefighters or specialist support staff who replied to our staff survey, 64 percent agree they are confident their service takes action as a result of operational learning, and eight percent didn't know.

We were disappointed to find that over half of the services we inspected weren't consistent in how they identified and used learning from smaller incidents. This is a missed opportunity. One service didn't know how many staff were reading its bulletins and not all stations seemed to give information from debriefs to staff. In another, the service gathers information from operational staff after an incident, but this isn't then used to identify lessons for the organisation. Finally, staff in another service couldn't recall the last time it shared debriefs across the organisation.

### **Most services are sharing learning with others**

All fire and rescue services have access to a national IT platform – the NFCC's National Operational Learning – that they can use to share learning with each other. We found most services understood the value of this, and that they could submit information and make good use of available case studies. Staff we spoke to had found the platform useful.

In Humberside, following two significant incidents, the service created case studies to illustrate what they had learned and provided them to other services through the National Operational Learning system. The service has also reviewed and changed its own operational procedures in response to other local and national incidents. Greater Manchester FRS has implemented a process to learn from significant national and international incidents. This was used to review a water rescue training accident in another fire service with Greater Manchester FRS issuing new guidance as a result.

## **Responding to national risks**

### **Services are prepared to respond to emergencies at high-risk sites**

Every fire service we inspected has plans for dealing with incidents at high-risk sites such as power stations and chemical factories. We interviewed representatives from local resilience forums as part of the inspection process. They told us that fire and rescue services were valued members of these forums.

We found good practice in Oxfordshire and Kent where the services have created incident command assessments based on risks sites in their areas, offering realistic

training. Northumberland FRS exercises its wildfire plans with local partners in preparation for wildfires, which are a particular risk for the service.

### **Access to cross-border risk information access needs to improve**

It is important that firefighters can access risk information for neighbouring service areas from their MDTs. However, we found that in half of the services we inspected, firefighters had difficulty accessing this information.

For example, we found in one service that fire control has to give cross-border risk information verbally as firefighters can't access it on their MDTs. Northamptonshire FRS shares a county border with seven other fire and rescue services, but we found that operational staff were either unaware of being able to access cross-border risk information or unable to do so.

### **Services can draw on resources from other services in a time of need**

We found that most staff, particularly fire control and middle and senior managers, were confident about how to call upon neighbouring fire and rescue services and national resources in times of need. They could accurately describe the national co-ordination advisory framework arrangements.

Mostly, we found that services have effective training programmes for maintaining competence and availability of specialist national resources. We did find some isolated examples where firefighters felt ill-equipped to use specific pieces of equipment, for example a high-volume water pump.

### **Most services are able to work with other agencies**

Good services have trained all incident commanders so they have a sound understanding of the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP). These principles help all blue light services work together effectively. We found that some FRSs needed to make sure their managers, particularly at supervisory level, have a clear understanding of the principles and how to apply them at a multi-agency incident.

### **Improvement is needed in cross-border exercising**

It is important for fire and rescue services to take part in cross border and multi-agency exercises at high-risk sites and for major incidents such as large crashes or flooding. This allows them to practice responding together. It also makes sure their response plans are effective and helps senior managers train in commanding large and complex incidents. However, half the services we inspected needed to improve their exercising at a local and cross-border level.

We were disappointed to find that one service had no structured exercise programme between it and neighbouring services. Operational staff in another service said that they didn't undertake any training or exercises with neighbouring services to help them work with each other effectively. Staff described working in isolation at operational incidents involving other fire and rescue services. This doesn't lead to an effective joint response.

## **Services are largely equipped to respond to a broad range of emergencies**

Fire and rescue services are increasingly responding to a broad range of emergencies beyond fires and road traffic collisions. All the services we inspected are prepared for dealing with flooding and terrorist incidents. While the amount of equipment, expertise and training within services varies, every service understands how to call on extra resources.

The Home Office funds some services to respond to terrorist-related incidents. In relation to Tranche 2 services, all of those who receive funding have capability in place. The exception is Greater Manchester FRS, which, at the time of our inspection, lost its capability to provide this response because of an industrial relations dispute. Despite attempts by the service to resolve this locally, it now has an agreement with Merseyside FRS to provide this capability. We consider this a concern to the safety of the public and believe the matter needs urgent attention and resolution. It does have national inter-agency liaison officers to provide command and control at such incidents.

Following Lord Kerslake's report into the terrorist attack at Manchester Arena, Greater Manchester FRS is implementing an action plan to improve its response to terror-related incidents. For example, there is now a dedicated communications channel with the police and ambulance service, which we tested during our visit. The senior leadership team are keeping track of the plan's progress.

## **Merseyside FRS plays a key national role**

We graded Merseyside FRS outstanding for this element of our inspection. This is, in part, due to how effective the service is at working with other fire services nationally. It is the lead authority on behalf of the fire sector for national resilience capabilities, which the Home Office funds and strategically places in fire services across the country. This equipment, trained personnel and supporting infrastructure is necessary to deal with national emergencies requiring mass decontamination, or involving chemical, biological or radiation agents, explosives, large-scale flooding or terrorist attacks.

Merseyside FRS is the base for the National Resilience Assurance Team (NRAT), which provides support and information to other services during national emergencies. It also runs the National Resilience Fire Control, which co-ordinates the availability of this specialist equipment and mobilises the equipment when services request it. The service also co-ordinates training with the equipment and leads on managing long-term capability for all national resilience fleet and equipment on behalf of the Home Office. This has created a deep understanding throughout Merseyside FRS of the equipment's capabilities.

# Efficiency



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

In this pillar we ask two questions:

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

## Making best use of resources

### Services need to make savings and they are broadly being made

Nearly all the services we inspected in Tranche 2 had managed to make savings. There is a wide variation in the scale of the savings services have been required to make.

Services are doing a range of things to become more efficient, including restructuring. Royal Berkshire FRS has streamlined its management structure by introducing a hub model and remotely-managed stations. Some services, such as Nottinghamshire FRS, have altered shift patterns and crewing models and have introduced new ways of working. Home Office data shows that all but one of the Tranche 2 services have reduced the number of firefighters (FTE) they have since 2010. For example, in response to a falling budget, Merseyside FRS reduced the number of firefighters by 31 percent between 31 March 2010 to 31 March 2018 to 684. It also has three fewer fire stations and 14 fewer fire engines over the same period.

Services are collaborating and finding other ways to save money. FRSs in Norfolk and Northamptonshire share buildings with local organisations such as the police and the council, and West Sussex has reduced the cost of its support services by making joint procurement initiatives and more cost-efficient contract renegotiations. We found some services could be doing more to improve their efficiency, including recovering costs for the use of their personnel and facilities, and charging for things such as primary authority schemes.

We found two services are operating in a very challenging financial environment. Northumberland FRS has already achieved significant savings of £4.5m over recent years but its unitary authority requires it to make more, despite having an incredibly lean operating model with only 256 FTE firefighters (137 wholetime and 119 on-call) as at 31 March 2018 compared with 342 FTE firefighters (176 wholetime and 166 on-call) as at 31 March 2010. The savings it is required to make over the next three years could compromise the service it provides to the public. Meanwhile, governance

responsibility for Northamptonshire FRS has recently moved from the county council to the police, fire and crime commissioner. Under the county council, the service needed to make significant reductions to its prevention, protection and response functions. We found these functions don't have sufficient resources to meet the service's targets. It also has no financial reserves and needs to develop a capital plan. The change in governance responsibilities is intended to lead to an improved financial position for Northamptonshire FRS.

### **Services need access to better financial data**

To manage budgets, use resources efficiently and effectively, and pursue opportunities to reduce costs, fire and rescue services need accurate and reliable data. Senior leaders need to understand their true costs in order to run an efficient service. As in Tranche 1, we have concerns that some services, particularly those that are part of a county council, lack credible and comparable data about expenditure.

Most county council services struggle to understand how the council calculates and allocates charges for their support services, which makes it difficult for them to know whether they are getting value for money. We also found that the financial data services provided to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) is not good enough. We are working with CIPFA and the sector to improve this, and we hope to see better financial data by September 2019.

### **Most services have matched their operational resource to risk, sometimes at the expense of protection and prevention**

Services should be able to demonstrate that their budget and resource allocation supports the activity set out in their IRMP. This was the case in two thirds of the services we inspected. These services used a range of historical, current and predictive data to work out what resources they need and how they should be used.

Some services have varied their resources to match changing risk. For example, alongside reducing the number of stations and fire engines, Merseyside FRS has introduced various work patterns at its remaining fire stations, which it has matched to the demands of the local area. It adjusted the start and finish times for operational firefighters to make them available when demand is highest and to maximise the time they have to interact with the public and businesses.

Every service we inspected prioritised its ability to respond to incidents. Services should outline in their IRMP what resources – including the number of fire engines – they need to meet their foreseeable risks. This increases efficiency. For example, Kent FRS is able to respond quickly to incidents – one of the quickest among similar services – but has low fire engine availability, which suggests that it needs to reconsider its planning model. The service's operational review states that it needs 50 engines available at any given time, but its own data reported that between April 2018 and the end of February 2019, despite having 75 fire engines, it was averaging only 34 available during the day and 51 by night.



Services need to be able to demonstrate that they are allocating enough resources to prevention, protection and response activity. In Tranche 1, we found that almost half of the services required improvement (with one graded as inadequate) in this area. Unfortunately, this has also been a problem in Tranche 2, with two-thirds of services either under-resourcing their protection and/or prevention teams or not being able to demonstrate a clear rationale for the levels of activity in these areas.

As budgets and staffing levels have reduced, protection and prevention has been reduced in a number of services to protect operational response. One service's protection department was so short staffed that it had invoked its business continuity plan at the time of our inspection to ensure it was meeting its critical functions.

### **Some work is underway to make sure workforces are productive**

Fire and rescue services need to make sure that their workforces are productive. Nearly half of the services we inspected use flexible workforce patterns and have altered their crewing models to increase efficiency. Some services have also looked at and reduced the number of firefighters needed to a crew a fire engine.

Dorset and Wiltshire fire and rescue services combined in 2016. As part of the combination process the services reviewed every post and removed duplication, which the service claimed has saved £4.5m.

Shropshire has been able to make the workforce's time more productive by introducing a flexible crewing model, which maintains response standards with a minimum number of firefighters on duty. The service has also been trying to make the on-call role more attractive and sustainable by recruiting full-time on-call support officers and introducing a more easily-accessible electronic availability system. The service predicts its flexible crewing model could save £450,000 by 2021.

This is not the case for every service. We are concerned that one service has introduced a new shift pattern with little evaluation as to its efficiency or effectiveness. Other services rely heavily on overtime to make sure enough staff are on duty, which is not cost-effective. Managers in another service spend an excessive amount of time moving staff around the service to fill short-term gaps. Some services couldn't demonstrate to us whether their staff time is being used productively.

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

### **Services are mitigating financial risks although reliance on reserves is unsustainable**

We were encouraged to see services looking to the future to assess potential financial risks. Some are actively considering factors such as the Government's Fair Funding Review, which will affect how funding is allocated and redistributed between local authorities from 2020 onwards, changes in the government grant towards unfunded pension schemes, and potential reductions in the amount that can be retained from business rates.

We were concerned to find that some services are too reliant on using their reserves to plug funding gaps. This approach is unsustainable. For example, some services are using reserves to bridge budget gaps in the absence of longer-term financial plans, while another was depleting its reserves at such a rate that it would no longer have any by 2021.

### **Services can make better use of technology**

Some services are investing in technology to improve their effectiveness and efficiency. West Midlands FRS uses a dynamic cover tool to map the availability of its fire engines and 999eye, which allows control operators to see images of an incident from the caller. This helps them assess the scale and severity of the incident so they can send the appropriate response.

Nearly half of the services we inspected were using broken, dated or unreliable IT systems and relied on inefficient paper-based systems. In one service, staff told us that the tablet computers they were using to conduct safe and well visits were unreliable, so they were recording information on handwritten forms that then needed to be typed up. Staff in the same service also said they spent a large amount of time managing and updating three separate training systems. In another, its firefighters rely on paper-based risk information, which differs in some instances from the information held on MDTs. It is clear that the current lack of investment in IT is making these services less productive and that the systems being used to record information are producing poor quality data, which in turn has an impact on a service's ability to effectively manage its performance.

### **Services are keen to collaborate with others**

All the fire and rescue services we inspected in Tranche 2 were meeting their statutory duties to consider emergency service collaboration. We saw a range of activity including sharing estates, equipment and control rooms, joint procurement and work on behalf of police and health services.

In Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire FRSs, joint working has helped maintain services while making savings. Both are part of a tri-service Thames Valley Fire Control Service with Buckinghamshire FRS. We were told that this new arrangement has generated £1m of annual savings for the three fire services. Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire FRSs have jointly procured 47 fire engines and equipment, which is expected to save the services more than £700,000 over four years as well as improving cross-border working as services respond with identical equipment. West Midlands FRS shares a control mobilising system with Staffordshire FRS, which achieves a joint annual saving of £1.5m between both services. But we believe services can do more to realise the full financial benefits of collaborative activity.

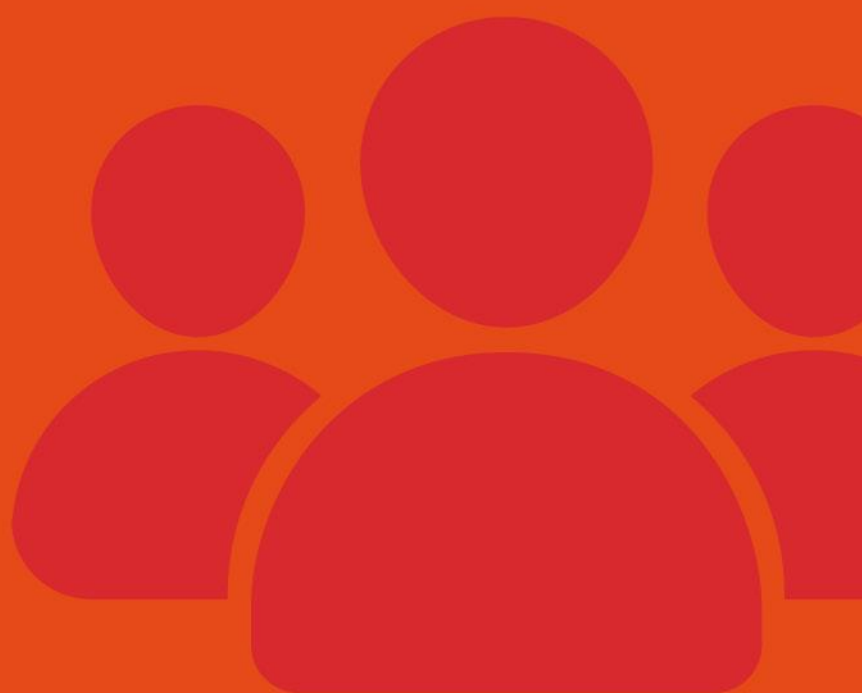
Over half of the services we inspected were not consistently or effectively evaluating, reviewing and monitoring collaboration activities to see if they were beneficial and cost effective. Services were entering into expensive collaboration projects without processes in place to make sure they are achieving value for money or operational efficiencies.

## Continuity plans

Fire and rescue services need robust continuity plans to make sure they can operate after an unexpected incident. We were pleased to find every service we inspected in this tranche had plans in place, but half the services we inspected weren't regularly testing and updating them.

In one service we found a lack of corporate oversight for continuity arrangements, and a lack of accountability and understanding at a departmental level. In the same service, the continuity plans had passed their review dates and it was unclear if and when testing had taken place. Services should make sure there is a testing programme for their continuity plans, particularly in high-risk areas of service such as control.

# People



# How well do the services look after their people?

In this pillar we ask four questions:

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

## Promoting the right values and culture

### **Not every service has made its values and culture part of daily practice**

We were pleased to find that more services were effectively promoting their values and culture in Tranche 2 than in the previous tranche. In every service we inspected, most staff we spoke to were dedicated and proud to work in the fire and rescue service. They had a strong commitment to improving public safety and protecting their communities. However, once again, we saw both excellent and poor examples of culture and values, with one service being graded as outstanding and seven graded as requires improvement.

In eight services, we found clear, unambiguous values and statements outlining acceptable behaviours. In these services, senior leaders demonstrated these values. Most staff knew and understood the values and their behaviour and attitudes reflected them.

Oxfordshire has been graded as outstanding in this respect. A relatively new senior leadership team has created an inclusive and positive culture. Staff are comfortable raising their ideas and feel valued by the organisation. In Humberside, the service created and developed its values in consultation with staff, who felt a particularly strong connection with them. Kent has implemented an open chair in senior leadership meetings, which allows a member of staff from any level of the service to attend and contribute to each meeting. A senior manager will take time before the meeting to discuss and explain any agenda items the guest is unsure of. Initiatives like these have helped staff at lower levels feel valued and have fostered a feeling of openness and transparency.

In eight services, however, we found significant pockets where the culture was poor. Values weren't well established or understood by staff. Some staff questioned their relevance and others couldn't explain how those values translate into positive workplace behaviours. In some services, this lack of understanding went further. We witnessed inappropriate language and found evidence of behaviours such as bullying, harassment and discrimination, and management styles that were described as overly autocratic. This is similar to what we found in Tranche 1.

We received just over 2,900 responses from members of staff from Tranche 2 services to our staff survey. Of these, 23 percent felt that they had been harassed or bullied at work in the previous 12 months. The vast majority of those said it was by someone more senior than them, and the most common reason given was their role, level or rank. There are limitations to the staff survey which should be considered alongside the findings. We explain these in Annex A.

Separately, 20 percent of responses felt they had been discriminated against at work in the last 12 months. Like those who felt they had been bullied or harassed, the vast majority said that it was by someone more senior than them, and the most common reason given was their role, level or rank.

Worryingly, over half of those who felt bullied, harassed or discriminated against in the last 12 months at work didn't report the behaviour, either informally or formally. Also, in the case of some of the issues that they did report, managers had failed to deal with them effectively. Despite the survey's limitations, we are concerned by this. Services need to do more to tackle poor behaviour and to make sure that their values are reflected at every level of the organisation.

### **A range of wellbeing support is now in place**

We were pleased to find that services are increasingly prioritising the wellbeing of their staff. Almost every service we inspected in this tranche has an effective system for supporting the general health and wellbeing of its staff. All offer an occupational health service that staff can access via their line manager or HR. In some services, staff can refer themselves if they want the issue to remain confidential. Most services offer a range of support functions, such as counselling, physiotherapy and medical screening.

While we found that there was a good range of support on offer, in some services staff aren't aware of this and don't know how to access support in times of need. Most FRSs would benefit from promoting their health and wellbeing support more effectively. All staff should be aware of what support is available and how to access it.

Many services are focusing on improving the mental health of their staff. Almost every service we inspected has implemented programmes to support and improve mental health in the workplace. An example is the introduction of Blue Light Champions with the mental health charity Mind. These champions are employees who volunteer to raise awareness in the workplace of mental health problems and to challenge the stigma around the issue.

Most services would benefit from providing training for managers in how to identify signs of stress and poor mental health in their staff. This was particularly relevant in services where line managers act as a filter for staff to access occupational health and other specialist support. Often, we heard that line managers don't have the confidence or knowledge to direct their staff to the support they need.

We were pleased to note that services such as Merseyside, Royal Berkshire and Kent are taking a more holistic view of staff support. They offer an employee assistance service, which allows staff to access help and support with issues such as debt management and legal advice. These services recognise that personal problems inevitably have a detrimental impact on how well staff perform. In Kent, staff with caring responsibilities outside of work can apply for a carer's contract. This allows them to work flexibly and helps improve their work-life balance.

Analysing staff sick-leave data can provide a useful insight into the health and wellbeing of a workforce. Understanding the causes and types of sickness can help an organisation in targeting work to prevent and manage sickness absence.

Similar to our findings in Tranche 1, almost every service has systems in place to support staff following traumatic incidents, such as critical incident 'defusing' and specific wellbeing debriefs. Some services have introduced trauma risk management (TRiM) to help prevent secondary post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health illnesses related to traumatic stress. We are pleased that services increasingly recognise the potential short and long-term harm that traumatic incidents can cause to their staff, and are taking steps to mitigate this.

Operational staff are required to achieve the national fitness standard that was introduced in 2017. Most services have introduced fitness advisers to support this. These are either dedicated fitness professionals employed by the service, or existing staff trained to carry out the role.

### **A positive health and safety culture has developed**

We found that 13 services have a good health and safety culture. They provide regular training for staff and manage accidents and near misses effectively. Of the just over 2,900 members of staff who took part in our staff survey, 85 percent agreed that their personal safety and welfare is treated seriously at work. Most services monitor statistics about accidents to learn from trends, reduce the risk of further harm and find out where organisational improvements are required. [The Home Office publishes the number of injuries sustained by firefighters while on duty](#). Between the year ending 31 March 2004 and the year ending 31 March 2015, the number of firefighters injured went down, but since then it has stayed relatively stable at around 2,600 injuries per year.

Disappointingly, we found that this positive health and safety culture wasn't present in three services we inspected. These services did not provide or record training consistently. Operational risk assessments were out of date and there was a backlog to update them. Also, actions arising from debriefs and accident investigations weren't being carried out quickly enough.

## Getting the right people with the right skills

### **Some services aren't monitoring staff overtime closely enough**

We were concerned to find that three services have little or no control or oversight of the hours their staff are working. This particularly applies to staff who work overtime on their rest days, or who work on secondary contracts with the service (usually as on-call firefighters). Often, the only monitoring is by the individual member of staff. In some cases, there was none at all. In these cases, we couldn't see how the service was making sure its staff had sufficient rest to meet their legal obligations and be safe to work.

### **While training provision is good, staff skills need to be recorded more robustly**

We found that most services gave the right level of priority to operational and risk-critical training, such as breathing apparatus, rescues, and working safely at height or near water. The staff we interviewed could confidently demonstrate how to use their breathing apparatus equipment. They could also correctly describe the procedures to be adopted in the event of an emergency. Operational staff showed good knowledge of the equipment carried on fire engines, and how to use and maintain it to a high standard.

However, in nine services we found that the recording, evidencing and assurance of staff competence was not robust, in particular for the training which takes place locally at stations. This was particularly the case with training done locally at stations. In those services, we found examples of training records that were incomplete or significantly out of date, and local recording systems that weren't being updated consistently.

We were disappointed with the training and recording of skills for fire control staff and flexi-duty response officers. This lags some way behind that of operational station-based staff. Some services haven't made training these staff a high enough priority, but should, given that their roles are as risk-critical as station-based staff.

It isn't enough for services to provide effective training to equip staff to carry out their roles safely and efficiently. They also must make sure they are properly assessing and recording the skills and training of their staff. This gives services and the public confidence that firefighters are properly trained and that their performance is up to standard. This is particularly important in the event of accidents and adverse events. Services must be able to reassure themselves and the Health and Safety Executive that staff are skilled and competent enough. Worryingly, not all services we inspected in Tranche 2 had good enough systems in place to do this.

In a small number of services, some staff expressed concern that the training they receive is increasingly being provided via e-learning packages on computers. This was particularly worrying where the package was used as the sole means of training staff in practical skills, such as breathing apparatus search procedures.



We recognise the value and potential of e-learning as a modern training and assessment tool, and its ability to reach large numbers of staff with minimum resources. However, we would encourage services to think carefully about how effective it is when it is the only method of training staff and checking their competence and confidence in certain areas.

We look forward to the continued development of the NFCC's blended learning programme, which recognises that staff learn best in a variety of different ways. Services can access and contribute to these training packages. These combine face-to-face teaching, online activities, individual reading and interactive digital packages. This will help services make sure that training is provided as efficiently as possible while relating to the broadest range of staff.

### **Workforce planning is improving**

Services need to make sure the right people with the right knowledge and skills are in the right jobs. This is essential for providing services to the public as effectively and efficiently as possible, both now and in the future. Effective workforce planning also makes sure staff departures don't disrupt the service to the public too badly. This is particularly important because a large number of staff are expected to retire over the next five years and the average age of firefighters is gradually increasing. For example, Home Office data shows that in 2011 it was 40, rising to 42 in 2017. The main reason staff left the fire service in the year ending 31 March 2018 was due to retirement or early retirement (31 percent or 1,233 of the 3,988 who left). It is important that services give particular consideration to making sure critical posts stay filled, with a succession plan in place if the current job holder is expected to leave.

In Tranche 2, 13 services showed that they have effective workforce planning processes in place. They monitor the current and future staffing requirements and capabilities they need to meet the commitments in their IRMP. This is a significant improvement on what we found in Tranche 1.

This planning is being done in various ways. Some services use ICT systems to make sure their workforce capability takes into account succession planning, training requirements and recruitment needs. However, in some of these services, we found a gap between planning and practice. This was particularly evident in services that weren't allocating enough resources for specialist roles and functions such as protection teams. In these services, the time it takes for protection officers to be trained has left them without enough staff to carry out their inspection programmes. Services should make sure that their workforce and succession planning takes full account of specialist roles and functions.

In three services, we found that ineffective workforce planning left some departments without enough staff. This was causing significant backlogs of work.

## **Excessive use of temporary promotions**

As we said earlier, we have expanded the amount of data we collect from fire and rescue services. For the first time, we now have data on the number of staff who are currently temporarily promoted. In some services, staff were being kept in temporary promotions for long periods of time; in some cases for more than 10 years. As at 31 December 2018, of the 41 services that provided data,<sup>5</sup> the shortest average length of temporary promotions in a given service was 120 days and the longest was 861 days. The highest average for a Tranche 2 service is 649 days. In one service, we found that 23 percent of operational staff were in temporary management positions.

We recognise that services are in a state of significant change. Temporary promotions can be an effective tool to maintain flexibility in the workforce while long-term staffing decisions are made. They also give staff development opportunities. But we found a worrying number of extreme examples, both in terms of the length of temporary promotions and the number of staff on these promotions. This has a significant impact on staff morale. Staff in temporary promotions told us they feel vulnerable, fearful for the security of their wage, and unable to challenge or make difficult decisions for fear of losing their promotion.

## **Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity**

### **Much more needs to be done to improve the diversity of workforces**

We were pleased to find that most services in Tranche 2 are considering workforce diversity when planning and carrying out recruitment campaigns. Expanding the pool of people services can recruit from increases the talent they can access. Most have carried out positive actions or have plans in place to start very soon. Activities such as have-a-go events, myth-busting sessions and boot camps are being used widely to promote fire and rescue careers to a more diverse range of people. The more proactive services evaluate their activities and make an effort to understand their local community better. In future inspections, we plan to examine how services select and recruit applicants. Building on the work of the NFCC, we will identify where there are unnecessary and unintended barriers to entering the fire and rescue services.

The new national awareness campaign to recruit firefighters uses role models from under-represented groups to attract candidates who might not have thought about a career in the fire service. This campaign is supported by the Home Office and the NFCC.

Some services are using new and innovative ways to increase the diversity of their workforce. Royal Berkshire FRS provides internships for graduates with disabilities via the Leonard Cheshire Change 100 programme and has recruited some of these interns as permanent members of staff. Shropshire FRS prominently displays its openness to flexible working on job advertisements to attract candidates with caring commitments who might not be able to commit to full-time employment. West Midlands FRS has recognised that the role of a firefighter has changed significantly in recent years and now looks for different skills as part of its recruitment process. These include 'softer' qualities such as communication and

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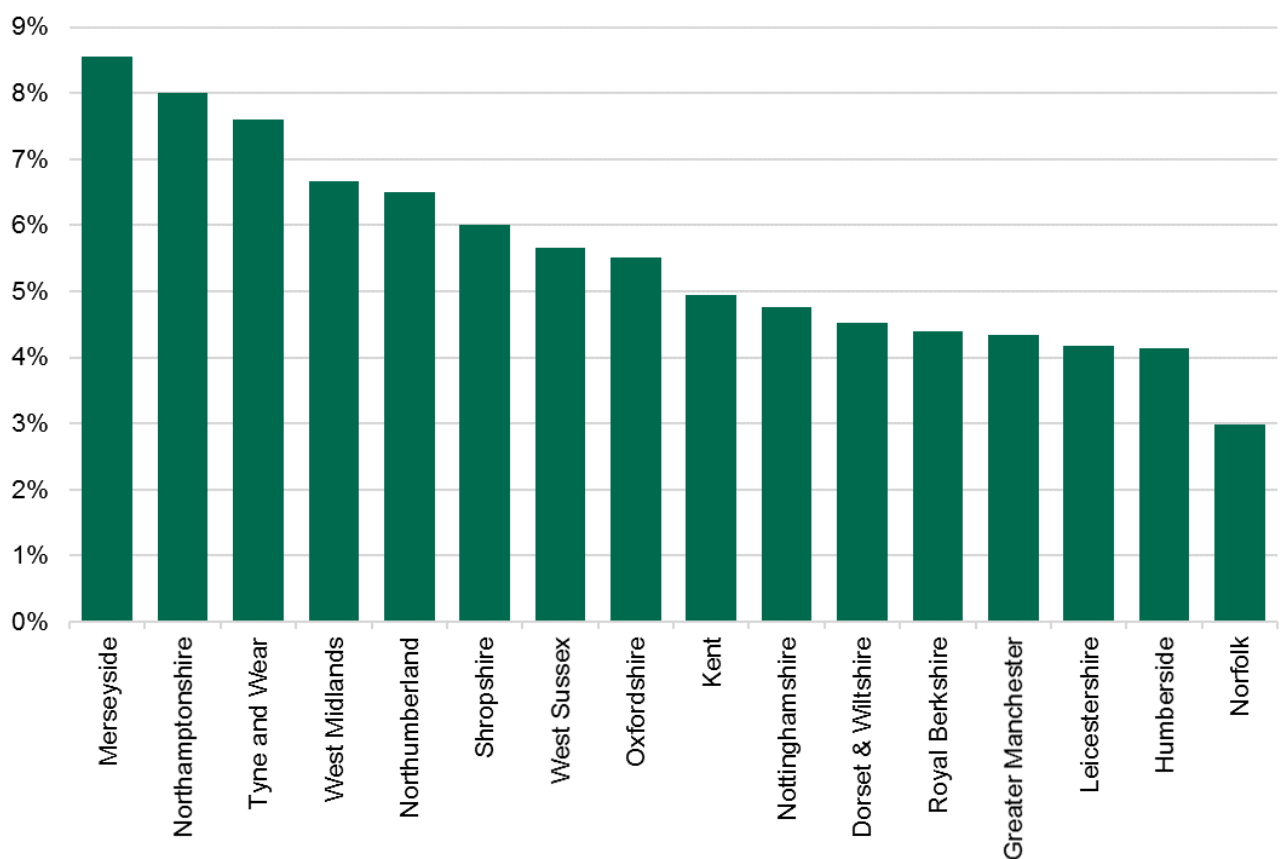
<sup>5</sup> Kent, Lincolnshire, Northumberland and Warwickshire services did not provide data.

interpersonal skills. Candidates carry out role plays to see how they react in certain situations; for example, when dealing with vulnerable members of the public such as hoarders or victims of domestic abuse.

These activities are increasing the numbers of applications from under-represented groups. But change remains limited across the sector, and not all services have tried hard enough to understand why.

The Home Office publishes data on the diversity of fire and rescue service workforces. The percentage of female firefighters increased from 3.9 percent as at 31 March 2010 to 5.7 percent as at 31 March 2018. However, the main cause of the percentage increase has been a fall in the number of male firefighters rather than a substantial increase in female firefighters.<sup>6</sup> In the year ending 31 March 2018, only 10.5 percent of new firefighters were female.

**Figure 3: Percentage of firefighters who are women as at 31 March 2018 for Tranche 2 services**

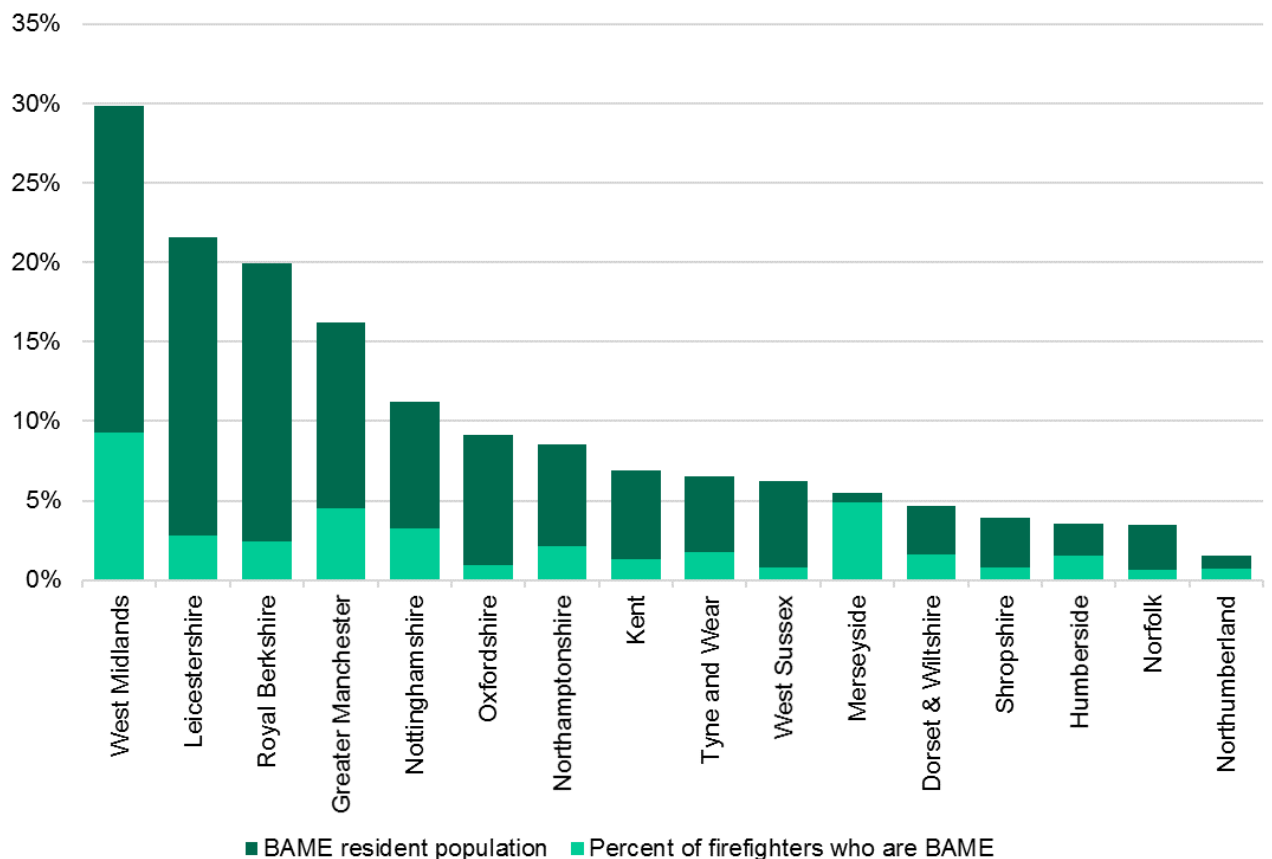


**Source: Home Office FIRE1103**

<sup>6</sup> The number of female firefighters has slightly increased by around 250 over this time while the number of male firefighters has decreased by almost 9,600.

The Home Office also publishes workforce ethnicity data. The proportion of firefighters who were from a black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME)<sup>7</sup> group has increased slowly from 3.5 percent as at 31 March 2011 to 4.1 percent as at 31 March 2018.<sup>8</sup> However, there were 85 fewer firefighters from a BAME group as at 31 March 2018 than as at 31 March 2011. It should also be noted that 9.5 percent (as at 31 March 2018) of firefighters don't state their ethnicity so this number may be higher.

**Figure 4: Percentage of BAME firefighters as at 31 March 2018 for Tranche 2 services compared with the BAME service resident population**



**Source: Home Office FIRE1104 and ONS population**

Similar to our findings in Tranche 1, in 11 services we found pockets of the wider workforce that don't understand the need for, or the benefits of, workforce diversity. In more extreme examples, staff stated that they were being discriminated against by positive action and that white males were no longer afforded the same opportunities as women or people from a BAME background. We heard examples from women and BAME staff who hadn't applied for promotion because they felt their colleagues would think they were only being promoted because they are from a minority group rather than because they have the right skills and abilities. Where positive action takes place without effective communication, myths develop among sections of the workforce, for example that standards have been lowered for candidates from

<sup>7</sup> The Operational Statistics data collection collects ethnicity information using five groups: White, Mixed, Asian or Asian British, Black or Black British and Chinese or Other Ethnicity. The other option is "not stated" and these responses are removed from the calculations above.

<sup>8</sup> This compares with 14.6 percent of the English population in the 2011 Census.

under-represented groups. These attitudes were generally strongest and most entrenched among operational staff.

The only way some services educate their workforce on the need for diversity and its benefits is through e-learning. Staff we spoke to were sceptical about how effective this was. We would encourage services to think about whether this is the most effective way to promote significant social and cultural change. We were pleased to find that a small number of services are proactively engaging their workforces in conversations about the benefits of workforce diversity and its relevance to staff in real-life situations, as well as dispelling the myths that have developed.

It is vital that services continue to strive for more diversity across the workforce at all levels. However, we have found that, in some services, managing the broader diversity and inclusion agenda is creating unintended consequences across the wider existing workforce, for both majority and minority staff. If services are to create a genuinely progressive and inclusive culture at all levels, myths and negative attitudes need to be more effectively challenged. We look forward to the publication of the new NFCC inclusion strategy, which will support service leaders in bringing about the necessary improvements.

### **Some services still lack provision for female firefighters**

We were disappointed to find that there was a lack of basic hygiene facilities, such as showers, for women at some stations within Greater Manchester FRS. This has prevented the service from placing female firefighters at these stations.

In some services, we found that female staff have to wear ill-fitting clothing and footwear because workwear designed for women isn't available. In some instances, female staff had to adapt male uniforms or find their own. Fire and rescue services must address this problem urgently if they are to become the inclusive employers they aspire to be.

### **An inconsistent approach to seeking and acting on staff feedback**

Almost all services have formal or informal mechanisms for getting regular feedback from their staff. They include staff surveys, station visits, team briefings, consultative committees, staff networks and social media platforms. The stated aim is to give staff the opportunity to raise their concerns and suggestions with management. However, the effectiveness of these processes varies greatly between services.

Shropshire FRS seeks feedback from its staff via surveys and a staff suggestion scheme and has held workshops to explore and understand the negative feedback in its last survey. It also hosts staff focus groups to address specific topics such as the impact of increased fitness test standards, particularly for on-call staff. Kent FRS chose not to carry out an overarching staff survey but instead completes small thematic surveys, staff forums, online briefings, interactive monthly chief officer updates, and manager visits. In these services, staff felt valued, listened to, and were able to give examples of changes that had been made as a result of concerns or suggestions that they had raised.

In eight services, we found that staff lacked confidence in the feedback methods, so didn't engage with them. This was for a variety of reasons. We heard many examples of services failing to provide enough feedback to staff on the outcomes of surveys, action plans not being created, or actions not followed up. In a small number of services, staff didn't engage with the feedback methods as they were worried that the process wasn't confidential and feared reprisals.

Of the approximately 2,900 responses to our staff survey, 69 percent agreed there were opportunities for them to communicate their views upwards within their service. However, only around a half of respondents expected their ideas or suggestions to be listened to.

We are encouraged that so many services offer a wide variety of staff feedback methods. But some services need to do more to increase the trust and confidence of their staff that feedback will be heard and acted upon where appropriate.

### **No set approach for resolving staff concerns**

As part of our inspections, we reviewed how services handle staff grievances. All the services we inspected in this tranche have a grievance procedure, which is generally clear and aligned with best practice. However, the application of these procedures varies greatly.

We saw good practice in Oxfordshire FRS, which provides trained mediators for formal and informal processes, while wellbeing support is available at all stages. The service has used expertise from Oxfordshire County Council to carry out independent reviews of some cases. It receives very few formal grievances, but those it does receive are resolved in accordance with its policies and timescales.

In most services, supervisory managers are responsible for resolving lower-level grievances informally, before formal grievance processes are required. This is entirely appropriate and meets the guidance set out in the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service codes of practice. However, in nine services, we found that improvements are needed in how responsibility is allocated. These services have little or no oversight of informal grievances or how to resolve them, and managers don't have the training or skills they need to carry out this role. These services can't be sure that they are dealing with informal grievances fairly and consistently and they can't see trends that need addressing.

In some services, this has led to staff lacking confidence in the system. In three services, a number of staff reported being afraid to use the grievance processes for fear of reprisals from managers or harm to their career prospects.

To understand the concerns of their staff, services need to monitor a range of information and data, such as trends in grievances and staff feedback. They should use this information to make improvements. Services that do this, and are open about why and how they reached certain decisions, can improve their staff's perceptions of fair and respectful treatment.

## Managing performance and developing leaders

### Staff don't always understand the importance of performance management

Good performance management is critical for services to be successful. Staff need to understand what is expected of them. To achieve their goals, services need to manage staff so that they are motivated, have the skills, resources and support they need, and are accountable. Good performance management should revolve around regular and effective feedback on objectives.

We recognise that there is no single best approach. Performance management should align with the commitments in the service's IRMP and people strategy, and be appropriate for the type of job in question.

All services we inspected in this tranche have some form of periodic performance review or appraisal. However, these processes vary, and in most services, some staff think the performance review is of little value, either because it doesn't explicitly provide a platform for discussing their performance, or because they feel that their requests for development often aren't met. Objectives and goals often weren't clear, and we heard frequent references to appraisals being 'tick box' exercises.

Similar to our findings in Tranche 1, two services carried out their performance reviews as part of a group, rather than as individuals. We recognise the value in having group discussions to improve the performance of teams and the time pressures services with on-call staff face. But relying solely on performance reviews carried out in large groups doesn't allow managers to effectively and openly discuss the performance, welfare needs, and career aspirations of individual staff. Some staff hadn't had a review or broader conversation about their performance for several years.

We did find examples of good performance management. In Royal Berkshire FRS, there are good arrangements to assess and develop staff performance. These are underpinned by an annual appraisal, which reviews the previous year's performance and sets targets and objectives for the coming year. These objectives are linked clearly to departmental and organisational objectives. Staff were broadly positive about the process and felt able to review it with their manager at any time. They can access courses on personal development, which include subjects such as personal resilience and having difficult conversations. At the time of inspection, the service was piloting a new behavioural framework within the review. This allows staff to make a judgment on their performance against a set of behaviours. We welcome this and hope that more services begin to make better use of performance management mechanisms to promote good performance and behaviour among their staff.

### More needs to be done to make sure that promotion processes are fair

We reviewed promotions processes to assess how fairly, consistently and openly services promote staff at all levels of the organisation. We found that six services apply their promotions processes consistently at all levels. Their policies and procedures are openly available to all staff, and the promotion processes comply with them. The services communicate outcomes in a timely and open fashion.

These services also embed a degree of independent oversight and scrutiny into their processes and carry out regular reviews to improve their practices. There was often a clear link between the testing and selection processes and the service's values and behaviours.

Disappointingly, we found that seven services couldn't show that they consistently follow due process and comply with their own procedures. In these services, we found that selection criteria often weren't consistent or clear, processes were run locally with little or no independent scrutiny, and policies and procedures were many years out of date and not always followed. These services have a lot to do to break down widespread staff perceptions of unfairness and to show their staff that the opportunities for progression are equitable.

### **Not enough is being done to identify staff with high potential**

Similar to our findings in Tranche 1, there are currently only two services – Kent and Humberside – that have processes outside the traditional development pathways to identify, develop and support staff with the potential to be the senior leaders of the future. A number of services have development pathways that have names relating to the notion of talent but that do little or nothing to identify and support high-potential staff. We understand that a significant number of senior leaders – possibly around 20 percent of chief fire officers – are expected to retire from the fire and rescue service over the next two years, which is likely to result in a rapid 'leadership drain'. We encourage services to invest in talent management to mitigate the effects of this.

We are pleased to see some services beginning to explore how best to identify and develop their high-potential staff. Northamptonshire FRS is currently working with Northamptonshire Police to develop a coaching and talent management process. Royal Berkshire FRS provides a bursary to support a member of staff to research talent management as part of a master's degree.

### **Services are investing in apprenticeships**

We were pleased to note that services are increasingly exploring apprenticeships as a way to invest in their future workforce. Apprenticeships can reduce recruitment costs, help attract and develop talent from diverse backgrounds, and increase staff motivation and loyalty. The NFCC supports the implementation and expansion of apprenticeships. It is co-ordinating the development of apprenticeship standards and publishing a strategy to provide support and guidance for services.

A particularly positive example of this was in Merseyside FRS. It has been investing in apprenticeships since 2015 and includes them in its workforce and succession plans across the entire organisation. As well as the benefits explained above, this also presents an opportunity to improve the current workforce's skills with a nationally recognised qualification.



## Future inspections

We inspected 14 services in the first tranche of our fire and rescue service inspections and have just completed a further 16 in this tranche. We will inspect the remaining 15 services in summer 2019 and anticipate publishing their service reports in December 2019.

Alongside this, we will also publish our first State of Fire and Rescue report. We are required by section 28B of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 to publish an annual report on the fire and rescue inspections we carry out. This report will summarise our findings and main themes from all inspections to date and may, if we consider it necessary, make sector-wide recommendations.

We will shortly consult on our inspection programme for cycle 2. We are working on the basis that we will carry out another full round of inspections of every service, rather than move to risk-based inspections at this point. We anticipate beginning cycle 2 in 2020.

We will consult separately on proposals to carry out corporate governance inspections. We intend for these to be used only in exceptional circumstances if we identify significant failings in the effectiveness or efficiency of the service to the public.

## Our continuous improvement

As an organisation, we are inspecting fire and rescue services for the first time. We therefore recognise we need to refine our inspection processes and have sought learning from our staff, services and our External Reference Group and Technical Advisory Group to gather views.

Since being appointed as the fire and rescue service inspectorate, we have worked hard with the sector to improve the data we collect, especially considering the absence of consistent, comparable and good quality data in some areas.

Following Tranche 1, we have reviewed the data we collect and have considered how we use this data to support our findings. This has included identifying where we have gaps in our current data and whether the data we collect provides us with the value we had hoped. As a result, we have changed the data we collect to include:

- percentage of building regulation consultations completed to time;
- data on the number of site-specific risk information – or 7(2)(d) – visits completed;
- the service's target for how many high-risk premises it should audit;
- greater clarity on the service's published response standards;
- joint training and exercising;
- overtime and overtime expenditure; and
- the number and length of temporary promotions.

We have also sought data to provide greater clarity on each service's response availability and response standards.

These changes have improved our data breadth and quality and have been considered as part of our findings for Tranche 2 and our preparation for Tranche 3.

As we design our second round of inspection activity – which is due to begin in 2020 – we will further consider our inspection processes to determine what further improvements can be made.

## Annex A – About the data

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

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

Where we collected data directly from FRSs, we took reasonable steps to agree the design of the data collection with services and with other interested parties such as the Home Office. This was primarily through 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 give services several opportunities to validate the data they give us and to make sure the evidence presented is accurate. For instance, we asked all services to check the data they submitted to us via an online application and 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 make sure 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. Any results provided are, therefore, 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 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. Any findings, therefore, 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 a graphic indicates that a service couldn't give data to us or to the Home Office.

### Perceived effectiveness of service

We took this data from the following question in 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 'Data' worksheet 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 FRSs before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.
- Figures for 'Fire Risk Checks carried out by Elderly (65+)', 'Fire Risk Checks carried out by Disabled' and 'Number of Fire Risk Checks carried out by Partners' don't include imputed figures because a lot of 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.

Services may also refer to home fire safety checks as home fire risk checks or safe and well visits.

## 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 FRSs before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.
- Several FRAs report 'Premises known to FRAs' as estimates based on historical data.

## **Firefighter cost per person per year**

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

You should consider this data alongside the proportion of firefighters who are wholetime and on-call/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 of whether 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 FRSs before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.

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

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

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

- We calculate BAME residential population data from ONS 2011 census data.
- 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 FRSs before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.

## Annex B – Tranche 2 judgments

Table 1: Effectiveness inspection judgments for each fire and rescue service

Service	Effectiveness	Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies	Preventing fires and other risks	Protecting the public through fire regulation	Responding to fires and other emergencies	Responding to national risks
Dorset & Wiltshire	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Good	Good	Good
Greater Manchester	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement
Humberside	Good	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Good
Kent	Good	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Good
Leicestershire	Requires improvement	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good
Merseyside	Good	Good	Outstanding	Good	Good	Outstanding
Norfolk	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Good



<b>Service</b>	<b>Effectiveness</b>	<b>Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies</b>	<b>Preventing fires and other risks</b>	<b>Protecting the public through fire regulation</b>	<b>Responding to fires and other emergencies</b>	<b>Responding to national risks</b>
<b>Northamptonshire</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Requires improvement
<b>Northumberland</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good
<b>Nottinghamshire</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Good
<b>Oxfordshire</b>	<b>Good</b>	Requires improvement	Good	Good	Good	Good
<b>Royal Berkshire</b>	<b>Good</b>	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
<b>Shropshire</b>	<b>Good</b>	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Good
<b>Tyne and Wear</b>	<b>Good</b>	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Good	Good
<b>West Midlands</b>	<b>Good</b>	Good	Good	Good	Outstanding	Good
<b>West Sussex</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Requires improvement	Requires improvement

**Table 2: Efficiency inspection judgments for each fire and rescue service**

<b>Service</b>	<b>Efficiency</b>	<b>Making best use of resources</b>	<b>Making the fire and rescue service affordable now and in the future</b>
Dorset & Wiltshire	Good	Good	Good
Greater Manchester	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good
Humberside	Good	Good	Good
Kent	Good	Good	Good
Leicestershire	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good
Merseyside	Good	Good	Good
Norfolk	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good
Northamptonshire	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Northumberland	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Nottinghamshire	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Oxfordshire	Good	Good	Good
Royal Berkshire	Good	Good	Good
Shropshire	Good	Good	Good
Tyne and Wear	Good	Good	Requires improvement
West Midlands	Good	Good	Good
West Sussex	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement

**Table 3: People inspection judgment for each fire and rescue service**

<b>Service</b>	<b>People</b>	<b>Promoting the right values and culture</b>	<b>Getting the right people with the right skills</b>	<b>Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity</b>	<b>Managing performance and developing leaders</b>
<b>Dorset &amp; Wiltshire</b>	<b>Good</b>	Good	Good	Good	Good
<b>Greater Manchester</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Requires improvement
<b>Humberside</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
<b>Kent</b>	<b>Good</b>	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Good
<b>Leicestershire</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
<b>Merseyside</b>	<b>Good</b>	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Good
<b>Norfolk</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
<b>Northamptonshire</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>	Good	Inadequate	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
<b>Northumberland</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
<b>Nottinghamshire</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
<b>Oxfordshire</b>	<b>Good</b>	Outstanding	Good	Good	Requires improvement
<b>Royal Berkshire</b>	<b>Good</b>	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Good
<b>Shropshire</b>	<b>Good</b>	Good	Good	Good	Requires improvement

<b>Service</b>	<b>People</b>	<b>Promoting the right values and culture</b>	<b>Getting the right people with the right skills</b>	<b>Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity</b>	<b>Managing performance and developing leaders</b>
<b>Tyne and Wear</b>	<b>Good</b>	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement
<b>West Midlands</b>	<b>Good</b>	Requires improvement	Good	Good	Requires improvement
<b>West Sussex</b>	<b>Inadequate</b>	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Requires improvement

