



Fire & Rescue Service 2023–25

Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service

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Changes to this round of inspection

We last inspected Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service in spring 2022. And in January 2023, we published our inspection report with our findings on the service's effectiveness and efficiency and how well it looks after its people.

This inspection contains our third assessment of the service's effectiveness and efficiency, and how well it looks after its people. We have measured the service against the same 11 areas and given a grade for each.

We haven't given separate grades for effectiveness, efficiency and people as we did previously. This is to encourage the service to consider our inspection findings as a whole and not focus on just one area.

We now assess services against the characteristics of good performance, and we more clearly link our judgments to [causes of concern](#) and [areas for improvement](#). We have also expanded our previous four-tier system of graded judgments to five. As a result, we can state more precisely where we consider improvement is needed and highlight good performance more effectively. However, these changes mean it isn't possible to make direct comparisons between grades awarded in this round of fire and rescue service inspections with those from previous years.

A reduction in grade, particularly from good to adequate, doesn't necessarily mean there has been a reduction in performance, unless we say so in the report.

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

More information on [how we assess fire and rescue services](#) and [our graded judgments](#) is available on our website.

Overall summary

Our judgments

Our inspection assessed how well Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service has performed in 11 areas. We have made the following graded judgments:

Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate
	Understanding fire and risk	Public safety through fire regulation	Preventing fire and risk	Promoting values and culture
	Responding to fires and emergencies	Responding to major incidents	Promoting fairness and diversity	
	Best use of resources		Managing performance and developing leaders	
	Future affordability			
	Right people, right skills			

In the rest of the report, we set out our detailed findings about the areas in which the service has performed well and where it should improve.

HMI summary

I am satisfied with some aspects of the performance of Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service in keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks, but there are areas in which the service needs to improve. In particular, I have concerns relating to the culture of the organisation.

The service has more to do to establish a positive workplace culture where its staff routinely demonstrate behaviour that is consistent with its values. But an independent review into the workplace culture commissioned by the chief fire officer found that there is still an underlying culture of misogyny and sexism.

In December 2023, following this review, senior leaders agreed an action plan to deal with the concerns it raised. We also brought forward the date of our inspection. Most staff we spoke to during our inspection demonstrated the service's values and were committed to the organisation. And we acknowledge that moving our inspection earlier reduced the time available for the service to implement change.

Nonetheless, our inspection found some worrying issues that are consistent with the independent review. We were told about some concerning examples of poor behaviour. These included use of inappropriate language, lack of respect for colleagues, and discrimination. More needs to be done to implement the action plan and make sure staff act with integrity and demonstrate the service's values. We thank those staff who shared their experiences with us.

The service has made some progress in other areas since our 2022 inspection. For example, it is better at understanding risk, and has addressed the area for improvement from our last inspection, which was to make sure staff have read and understood all urgent risk information. It has also further strengthened its performance dashboards. And it continues to perform well in efficiency, and has a clear plan in place to make further efficiency savings. But we were disappointed to find that [safe and well visits](#) aren't prioritised based on the level of risk.

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

- The service is good at identifying risk and responding to emergencies, has sound financial and workforce plans, and understands its future financial challenges.
- More needs to be done to make sure prevention resources are used effectively, and the service needs to prioritise safe and well visits based on risk and lower the performance target for high-risk occupants.
- The service has a plan to improve its organisational culture, but behaviours persist in some areas that aren't in line with its values, and when staff report these issues, they aren't supported by managers.
- The service hasn't made enough progress in equality, diversity and inclusion, and staff don't have confidence in the grievance and discipline process or the promotions process.

In view of these findings, particularly with regard to the service's culture, I have been in contact with the chief fire officer. I recognise that changing the culture takes time. I will keep in close contact with the service to monitor its progress in addressing the cause of concern and associated recommendations.



Roy Wilsher
HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Service in numbers



Profile

	Dorset and Wiltshire	England
Area Square miles	2,370	50,370
Population (thousands) 30 June 2022	1,537	57,106
Population density Thousands per square mile	0.6	1.1



Cost

Funding Year ending 31 March 2023	£63.5m	£2.5bn
Expenditure per population Year ending 31 March 2023	£42.33	£46.66

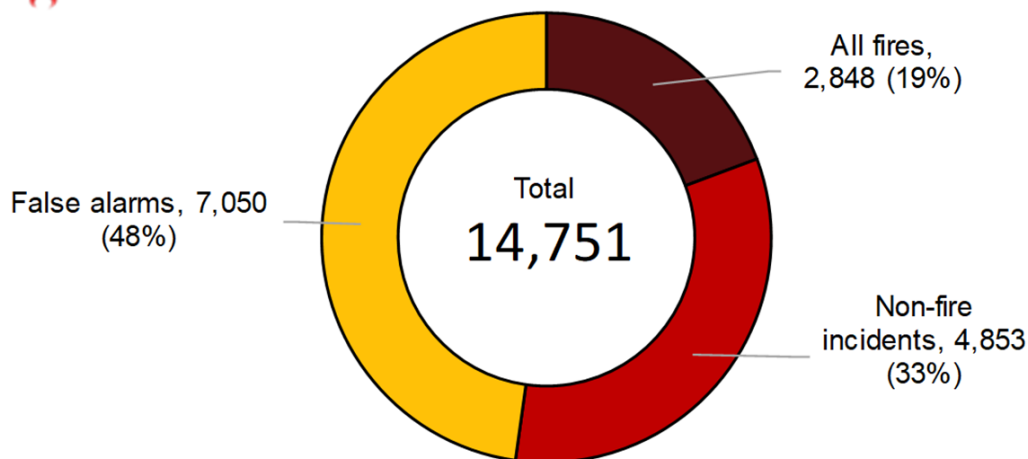


Response

Incidents attended per 1,000 population Year ending 31 December 2023	9.6	10.4
Home fire safety checks carried out by fire and rescue service per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2023	6.3	9.3
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises Year ending 31 March 2023	1.1	2.0
Availability of wholetime pumps Year ending 31 March 2023	99.0%	
Availability of on-call pumps Year ending 31 March 2023	66.9%	



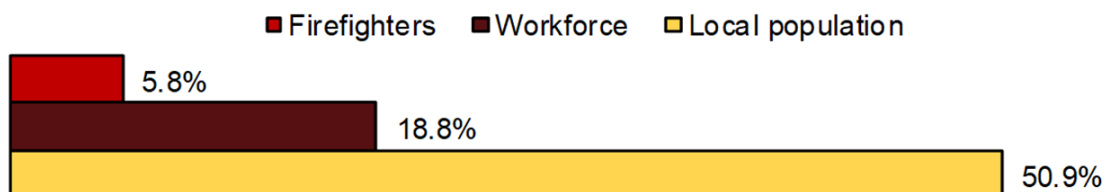
Incidents attended in year ending 31 December 2023



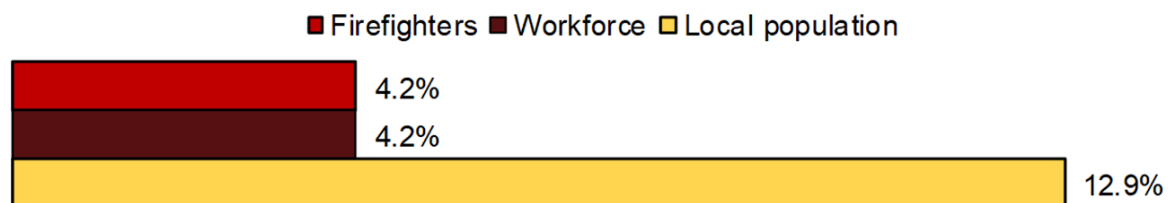
Workforce

	Dorset and Wiltshire	England
Five-year change in total workforce 2018 to 2023	-0.1%	1.4%
Number of firefighters per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2023	0.65	0.61
Percentage of firefighters who are wholetime Year ending 31 March 2023	39.8%	65.5%

Percentage of firefighters, workforce and population who identified as a woman as at 31 March 2023



Percentage of firefighters, workforce and population who were from ethnic minority backgrounds as at 31 March 2023



References to ethnic minorities in this report include people from White minority backgrounds but exclude people from Irish minority backgrounds. This is due to current data collection practices for national data. For more information on data and analysis in this report, please view the [‘About the data’ section of our website](#).

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies

Good

Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service is good at understanding risk.

Each fire and rescue service should identify and assess all foreseeable fire and rescue-related risks that could affect its communities. It should use its protection and response capabilities to prevent or mitigate these risks for the public.

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

Main findings

The service continues to identify risk well

The service has assessed a suitable range of risks and threats using a thorough community safety planning process. It carries out a comprehensive strategic assessment of risk every two years – its current assessment is for 2023–25. In this assessment, it uses information it has collected from a broad range of internal and external sources and datasets.

The service turns this risk information into station risk profiles. These bring together information relevant to each station, including historical incident data, details about high-rise residential buildings, and census information about its community.

The service has completed a comprehensive fire cover review, the first since its merger in April 2016. Alongside the strategic assessment of risk, this provides baseline data which the service will use to inform its new community safety plan for 2024–28. This was due to be published soon after our inspection, in June 2024.

When appropriate, the service has consulted and held constructive dialogue with its communities and other relevant parties to help it understand risk and explain how it intends to mitigate it. This includes the use of social media. The service also produced a video summarising its plan. We were told that its work with its communities has improved, and it received more responses than in the previous consultation process, which was during the pandemic.

The service has an effective community risk management plan

The service refers to its [community risk management plan](#) as its community safety plan (CSP). This records the service's assessment of risks, and describes how it intends to use its prevention, protection and response activities to mitigate or reduce the risks and threats the community faces, both now and in the future.

The current CSP sets out the service's main priorities:

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

The new CSP will continue to have the same priorities. It identifies additional risks, such as drowning, and outlines how the service intends to work with its partners to mitigate them. The service regularly reports to Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority on its performance and progress, which are measured against the priorities outlined in the CSP.

The service has an effective process to manage risk information

The service routinely collects and updates the information it has about the highest-risk people, places and threats it has identified. This includes listed properties such as Salisbury Cathedral and Bournemouth Town Hall, as well as thatched properties, of which the service has the highest number in the UK. Short-term risks are also recorded, such as Camp Bestival, a music festival that attracts thousands of people.

We sampled a broad range of the risk information the service collects, including on high-rise residential buildings and commercial premises. These samples contained good information, such as the evacuation procedures in high-rise residential buildings.

The service has approximately 833 site-specific risk information records. The team that manages risk information regularly reports on performance to departmental heads. We were pleased to find that these records were all up to date.

This information is readily available to the service's prevention, protection and response staff. For example, there is a formal process to share risk information with all departments, including [fire control](#), prevention, protection, and response teams. This process is routinely carried out. And all staff have access to all the site-specific risk information records via the risk portal on the service's intranet pages. This means these teams can identify, reduce and mitigate risk effectively. Where appropriate, the service shares risk information with other organisations, such as local authorities and other emergency services.

Staff at the locations we visited, including firefighters and emergency control room staff, were able to show us that they could access, use and share risk information quickly to help them resolve incidents safely.

The service can now assure itself that staff have read urgent risk information

During our 2022 inspection, we highlighted as an area for improvement that the service should make sure all urgent risk information has been read and understood by staff. We were pleased to see the progress the service has made, and this area for improvement is now closed.

All urgent risk information is now sent electronically to the availability system. This system is regularly used by firefighters, and they must read the information before they can move on to the next screen. Supervisory managers also distribute information via the more traditional approach of printing off bulletins and displaying them on noticeboards. Staff we spoke to confirmed that they receive urgent risk information electronically and were positive about this process.

The service builds understanding of risk from operational activity

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

For example, it uses information from the national and local community risk registers to develop its CSP. As a result, it has listed wildfires and extreme weather among the highest risks it plans for. The service also uses its operational effectiveness database to record and share learning from its operational activities.

Preventing fires and other risks

Requires improvement

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

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

Areas for improvement

The service should make sure that it prioritises the people most at risk for its [safe and well visits](#).

The service should review whether its 56-day performance target for safe and well visits is appropriate for high-risk occupants.

When its partners make referrals for safe and well visits, the service should make sure they provide vulnerability information.

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

Main findings

The service's prevention plan aligns with its CSP

The service's prevention plan for 2023–25 is clearly linked to the risks it has identified in its CSP. The risks identified include:

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

At the time of our inspection, the service was developing its new community safety strategy, which will be aligned to the new CSP. This will include new areas, such as working with its partners to prevent drowning incidents and reducing the environmental harm from outdoor fires.

The service's teams work well with each other and with other relevant organisations on prevention, and they share relevant information when needed. The service uses information to adjust its planning assumptions and to direct activity between its prevention, protection and response functions. For example, the prevention team worked closely with the protection team to send leaflets to residents in high-rise residential buildings offering them a safe and well visit.

Home Office data for the year ending 31 March 2023 shows that the service carried out 6.3 safe and well visits per 1,000 population. This is higher than the rate for all fire and rescue services in England, which is 5.4. It completed a total of 9,712 safe and well visits, which is higher than previous years.

The service needs to do more to prioritise risk

The service has a basic risk-based approach for directing prevention activity towards the people most at risk from fire and other emergencies. It uses an initial scoring process to identify whether an occupant qualifies for a safe and well visit. Factors that increase the need for a visit include:

- over 70 years old
- children under 11
- male
- smoker(s)
- living alone
- disability or long-term health condition such as dementia.

However, we found that once occupants have passed the initial screening, they aren't organised in order of priority based on risk. Instead, visits are generally arranged based on the date of referral. The service needs to do more to make sure that its safe and well visits prioritise people who are most at risk. This is an area for improvement.

We also found that the service sets a 56-day timescale for completing each of its safe and well visits, regardless of the level of risk. The only exception is urgent requests such as police referrals. Eight weeks is too long for a high-risk occupant to wait for a visit. The service needs to review whether this performance target is appropriate and reasonable for high-risk occupants. This is an area for improvement.

The service has several partners that make referrals to it for safe and well visits. But not all partners provide vulnerability information when making a referral. The service told us that everyone who receives a safe and well visit is high risk. However, some firefighters told us that safe and well visits they carry out often turn out to be low risk, as referrals from partners aren't always accurate, and not having this information in advance means they can't assess the level of priority. This is an area for improvement.

Most staff are competent at completing safe and well visits

Most staff told us they have the right skills and confidence to make safe and well visits. These visits cover an appropriate range of hazards that can put [vulnerable people](#) at greater risk from fire and other emergencies. The specialist safe and well advisors receive enhanced training and [continuing professional development](#). For example, the advisors have awareness training about dementia.

There is a clear quality assurance process in place for specialist civilian safe and well advisors. Firefighters who carry out safe and well visits receive a quality assurance review by their supervisory or middle manager. However, we found that not all staff had received this. Most files completed by firefighters that we sampled didn't record enough details, for example the specific advice provided to the occupant. And records of properties where there has been a fire included only limited information on whether the mandatory safe and well visit was completed.

The service is good at responding to safeguarding concerns

Most staff we interviewed told us about occasions when they had identified [safeguarding](#) problems. They told us they have the confidence and training to act appropriately and promptly. This includes escalating matters to a more qualified person and making referrals to partner agencies, such as local authorities. As part of its performance reporting, each service area records the number of safeguarding referrals made.

Training in identifying safeguarding concerns is completed through the service's e-learning platform. However, some of the training records we sampled for [on-call](#) firefighters showed that their safeguarding training had expired.

The service continues to work well with its partners

The service continues to work with a wide range of other organisations to prevent fires and other emergencies. These include South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust, housing associations and social services. In the year ending 31 March 2023, the service carried out 3,648 safe and well visits following referrals from other agencies.

In our last inspection, we noted the way the service collaborates with SGN (previously Scotia Gas Networks) and Wales & West Utilities as [innovative practice](#). This collaboration has helped the service to secure 2,500 wi-fi carbon monoxide detectors (which can be linked to smartphones) and 25,000 other carbon monoxide detectors which will be provided over the next five years.

We found good evidence that the service routinely refers people at greatest risk to organisations that may better meet their needs. Arrangements are also in place to receive referrals from others. And the service acts appropriately on the referrals it receives. For example, the service recently visited an occupant who wouldn't interact with anyone other than their housing officer. The housing officer contacted a safe and well advisor who attended and provided the appropriate advice and fitted smoke detectors.

The service routinely exchanges information with other public sector organisations about people and groups at greatest risk. It uses this information to challenge planning assumptions and target prevention activity. For example, a safe and well advisor flagged an address as a hoarding risk; this information was automatically passed on to the response department and other agencies, such as the ambulance service, so they have prior knowledge if they are required to attend the address.

The service works to reduce deliberate fire-setting

The service has a range of suitable and effective interventions to target and educate people with different needs who show signs of fire-setting behaviour. This includes a fire safety intervention where a safe and well visit is completed at the young person's home.

Where there are concerns that a property may be a target for arson, the service can fit a range of equipment, such as arson-proof letterboxes and heat detectors above the front door.

When appropriate, the service routinely shares information about fire-setting with other organisations such as the Wiltshire Bobby Van Trust, a charity that works with Wiltshire Police to protect vulnerable people. We were encouraged to find that the level of deliberate fires in the service area was much lower than the rate across the whole of England.

There are good evaluation processes in place for the service's prevention activity

The service has good evaluation tools in place to measure how effective its activity is, and to make sure all sections of its communities get appropriate access to prevention services that meet their needs. During a safe and well visit, the service scores each residence before and after advice is provided, to assess whether the visit has reduced the overall risk to the occupant. This data is regularly evaluated to see how much the service has reduced the risk score in occupants' homes.

Prevention activities take account of feedback from the public, other organisations and other parts of the service. A monthly report is completed which provides additional feedback from occupants, such as the 'Have your say' process and a customer satisfaction survey. The service uses this feedback to inform its planning assumptions and change future activity, so it focuses on what the community needs and what works.

Since our last inspection, the service has introduced a new response group for fatal fires and [near misses](#). Representatives from various departments including prevention and protection, safeguarding leads and fire investigators meet within 72 hours of an incident to assess what immediate response is required.

There has been a significant restructure in prevention

Since our 2022 inspection, the service has restructured its prevention department. This restructure was carried out due to the financial pressures faced by the service, but it provided an opportunity to review which of its non-statutory functions the service could maintain. It decided to end its youth engagement programmes, such as the Prince's Trust and the Fire Cadet programme. The number of safe and well advisors was also reduced. The savings were reinvested in other areas of the service.

It is too early to determine the long-term effect of removing these programmes. But some staff we spoke to felt that it could lead to more responsibilities being placed on firefighters, which might affect the service that communities receive.

Protecting the public through fire regulation

Adequate

Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at protecting the public through fire regulation.

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

Area for improvement

The service should regularly monitor the [prohibition notices](#) and enforcement notices it serves and make sure they are being complied with.

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

Main findings

Protection activities are clearly linked to the CSP

The service's risk-based intervention programme is clearly linked to the risks it has identified in its CSP.

Staff across the service are involved in this activity, and exchange information effectively as needed. For example, firefighters work with inspecting officers to inspect premises. They also work with local businesses to share information and advise on how they can comply with fire safety regulations.

The service then uses information gathered in protection work to adjust its planning assumptions and direct activity between its protection, prevention and response functions. This means resources are properly aligned to risk.

The service has a new risk-based intervention programme which focuses on the highest-risk premises

The service's risk-based intervention programme is focused on the highest-risk buildings. On 1 April 2024, the service published its new risk-based intervention programme which is structured into three strands: known risk, anticipated risk, and unknown risk. We were told that the programme lists 933 known risks, which include its highest-risk premises. The service intends to inspect all the residential care premises it hasn't inspected for five years or more. The programme also lists 400 anticipated and unknown risks, including premises such as fast-food outlets where there is associated sleeping accommodation.

The audits we reviewed had been completed in the time frames the service has set itself within its policies and procedures.

The service carries out good quality audits but doesn't routinely follow up formal notices

We reviewed a range of audits that the service had carried out at different buildings across its area. These included audits carried out:

- as part of the service's risk-based intervention programme;
- after fires at premises where fire safety legislation applies;
- after enforcement action had been taken; and
- at high-rise, high-risk buildings.

The audits we reviewed were completed to a high standard in a consistent, systematic way and in line with the service's policies. The service makes relevant information from its audits available to operational teams and control room operators. For example, we spoke to fire control operators who have access to evacuation information for high-rise residential buildings.

We examined a sample of formal notices, such as prohibition and enforcement notices, and were surprised to find that some hadn't been followed up to check whether they were being complied with. For example, we saw a prohibition notice that was issued in April 2016 and hadn't been followed up since February 2022, despite the service telling us that all prohibition notices should be followed up at least annually to make sure they were being complied with. We also saw an expired enforcement notice where there had been limited engagement with the responsible person in the lead up to and after its expiry. This sends the wrong message to those who don't take fire safety legislation seriously. Therefore, this is an area for improvement.

The service should consider the use of alteration notices, as some prohibition notices currently in force were served several years ago. Alteration notices put the onus on the responsible person at a premises to notify the service if they intend to make changes that could affect fire safety.

The service uses its full range of enforcement powers where necessary

The service uses its full range of enforcement powers. In the year ending 31 March 2023, it issued 1 alteration notice, 23 enforcement notices and 24 prohibition notices.

The service hasn't carried out a prosecution in over five years. But since our last inspection, it has invested in a prosecutions team that investigates alleged fire safety offences and is prepared to prosecute when necessary. The team has provided further support and training to staff, and fire safety inspectors we spoke to felt confident in taking enforcement action if required. At the time of our inspection, the service was preparing a case file which is due to go to court.

The service has the ability to respond to enforcement issues 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

There is a good quality assurance process in place for specialist fire safety inspectors

The service carries out proportionate quality assurance of the protection activity carried out by its specialist fire safety inspectors. At least once a year, it carries out a desktop assessment and a practical quality assurance assessment. We were shown examples of this process and how feedback is provided to the inspector. We were pleased to find that learning points are recorded and, if appropriate, shared across the protection department.

The service has good processes in place to measure how effective its activity is, and to make sure all sections of its communities have appropriate access to protection services that meet their needs.

Half of the service's fire safety inspectors are in the process of developing their skills and qualifications

The service is working towards having enough qualified protection staff to meet the requirements of its risk-based intervention programme. It has invested £600,000 into its protection function. At the time of our inspection, we were told that half of the fire safety inspectors are currently in development. We recognise that it takes time for staff to achieve the required competencies.

Staff who are in development can't work on the highest-risk premises or carry out enforcement work, so we were told that the high proportion of staff in development is one reason the risk-based intervention programme was extended from a three-year to a four-year cycle. This is affecting the workloads of the inspectors who are qualified for that work.

The service's [wholetime](#) firefighters carry out fire safety checks in low-risk business premises. We spoke to some firefighters who said they hadn't been provided with any training since this process was introduced in 2021. Some firefighters told us that they aren't confident in completing these checks, and most said that they hadn't been subject to any quality assurance process.

The service needs to make sure its operational staff are trained to competently carry out fire safety checks on businesses. We recognise the service has plans in place to do this.

The service is adapting to new legislation

Since our last inspection, the [Building Safety Act 2022](#) and the [Fire Safety \(England\) Regulations 2022](#) have been introduced to bring about better regulation and management of tall buildings. The service is supporting the introduction of the [Building Safety Regulator](#).

The service has the highest number of tall buildings in the Southwest of England. By the end of 2021, it had completed an audit of all high-rise buildings in its area. The service anticipates that the changes in fire safety legislation will put greater demand on its service.

The Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 introduced a range of duties for the managers of tall buildings. These include the requirement to give floor plans to the fire and rescue service, and to inform it of any substantial faults to essential firefighting equipment, such as firefighting lifts.

We found the service has good arrangements in place to receive this information. When it doesn't receive the right information, it takes action. And it updates the risk information it gives its operational staff accordingly.

The service works effectively with others in enforcement

The service works closely with other enforcement agencies to regulate fire safety and routinely exchanges risk information with them. It has an effective working relationship with local authorities to manage high-rise buildings.

For example, the service and one local authority have joint access to a central SharePoint site with information about all the high-rise buildings in the area. This provides details such as when it was last inspected, information about joint visits and any actions that are outstanding.

The service responds well to building and licensing consultations

The service consistently meets its statutory responsibility to comment on fire safety arrangements at new and altered buildings. In the year ending 31 March 2023, it responded to 99.9 percent of building consultations and 100 percent of licensing consultations within the required timescales.

The service works with businesses

The service works with local businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation. It has a team that is responsible for working with businesses, and has put in place plans to strengthen this work.

The service provides information for businesses on its website. It also manages six [primary authority partnership schemes](#), which give advice to businesses about compliance with fire safety legislation.

The service has a new process to reduce the number of times it attends automatic fire alarms

The service continuously monitors automatic fire alarms and intervenes where necessary. In the year ending 31 March 2023, it attended 6,742 false alarms, and 27 percent of its emergency incidents were automatic fire alarms – one of the highest rates for fire and rescue services in England. This means that its fire engines may not be available to respond to genuine incidents because they are attending false alarms. It also creates a risk to the public if more fire engines are travelling at high speed on the roads to respond to these incidents.

As of 1 April 2024, the service has changed its process and no longer attends automatic fire alarms at low-risk commercial premises. The service told us there has been a significant improvement and the number of false alarms it attends has reduced. We look forward to seeing how this develops.

Responding to fires and other emergencies

Good

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

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

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

Main findings

The service aligns its resources with the risks identified in its CSP

The service outlines its risks in its CSP. Its fire engines and response staff, as well as its working patterns, are designed and located to help the service respond flexibly to fires and other emergencies with the appropriate resources.

For example, the service changed its duty system at Amesbury fire station from on-call only to both day duty and on-call. This means that firefighters are available during the day and ready to respond to emergencies. This investment was made because of increased risks within the station area due to residential and commercial development.

The service has completed a comprehensive fire cover review, which we outline in our chapter [Making the fire and rescue service affordable now and in the future](#).

The service is mostly meeting its response standards

There are no national standards for response times to incidents. But the service has set out its own response standards in its CSP.

The service sends two fire engines to all incidents involving buildings where people might be sleeping ('sleeping risk'). Its overall targets are that the average time it takes for the first fire engine to arrive at an incident is 10 minutes or less, and the average time for the second fire engine is 13 minutes or less. For all other buildings, the target for the average arrival time for the first engine is 10 minutes or less, and 15 minutes or

less for the second engine. For road traffic collisions, the service's target for the average arrival time of the first engine is within 15 minutes.

The service has met most of its standards. It told us that in the year ending 31 March 2024, the average time for the first fire engine to arrive at a sleeping risk incident was 9 minutes and 31 seconds. The only response standard it didn't meet was that the average arrival time for the first fire engine at incidents at all other buildings was 11 minutes and 5 seconds, compared to its target of 10 minutes.

Home Office data shows that in the year ending 31 March 2024, the service's average response time for [primary fires](#) was 10 minutes and 35 seconds. This is slower than the average of 10 minutes and 15 seconds for comparable (predominantly rural) services.

The availability of the service's fire engines has remained broadly the same

To support its response strategy, the service aims to have 78 percent of its fire engines available at all times. In the year ending 31 March 2024, the overall availability was 71.7 percent (98.3 percent wholetime and 66.8 percent on-call).

At the time of our inspection, the service was reviewing on-call contractual cover and communicating with its on-call workforce. One reason for this was to review on-call firefighters' current availability and consider whether this meets the demands and risks of their fire station area. The review aims to improve on-call availability.

The service has a good command of incidents

The service has trained incident commanders, who are assessed regularly and appropriately. In the year ending 31 March 2024, all level 1, 2 and 3 incident commanders (313 in total) had been accredited. They are formally assessed every two years, and carry out regular continuing professional development between assessments. This helps the service safely, assertively and effectively manage the whole range of incidents it could face, from small and routine ones to complex multi-agency incidents.

The service provides [body-worn video](#) to all level 1 and 2 incident commanders, which assists with learning. We were told that the incident commander can submit the camera footage to be reviewed as part of their incident command revalidation process. This is a good way to learn from incidents. The video also assists the police with any investigations.

As part of our inspection, we interviewed incident commanders from across the service. They were familiar with risk-assessing, decision-making and recording information at incidents in line with national best practice, as well as the [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles \(JESIP\)](#).

The service works well with its fire control partners

The service has a partnership with Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service (FRS), Hampshire and Isle of Wight FRS and Kent FRS through the Networked Fire Services Partnership (NFSP). There is a shared mobilising system which means that, when necessary, the services can take emergency calls for each other and mobilise their resources to respond.

We were pleased to see the service's fire control staff integrated into its command, training, exercise, debrief and assurance activity. We found that fire control staff are involved in exercises, including testing the management of high-rise incidents.

Staff have good access to risk information

We sampled a range of risk information on the service's central database and on its [mobile data terminals](#). This included the information for firefighters responding to incidents at high-risk, high-rise buildings, and the information held by fire control.

The information we reviewed was up to date and detailed. Staff could easily access and understand it. Encouragingly, it had been completed with input from the service's prevention, protection and response functions when appropriate. For example, fire control staff had access to evacuation strategies for high-rise residential buildings.

The service has an effective process to evaluate operational performance

As part of the inspection, we reviewed a range of emergency incidents. These included wildfires and fires in domestic and commercial premises.

We were pleased to see the service routinely follows its policies to make sure that staff command incidents in line with operational guidance. It updates internal risk information with the information it receives.

The service has responded to learning from incidents to improve its service for the public. It has an operational effectiveness database which staff spoke positively about. This is a central system where staff can feed back any learning, including from operational incidents. All the information is available to staff, and they can track all the actions resulting from any learning submitted.

The service told us that in the year ending 31 March 2024, 396 [hot debriefs](#) (normally carried out on the incident ground) and 14 structured debriefs (a more formal process carried out after the incident) were completed. Learning from these is disseminated across the service in several ways, including monthly communications. For example, a multi-agency hot debrief was carried out following a gas explosion where an elderly woman was rescued. She wasn't adequately covered, and a salvage sheet was the only means the firefighters had to preserve her dignity while she was being treated for injuries. The learning from this resulted in the use of a temporary screen which is fast to assemble and protects the individual from public view.

The service also used feedback to make a change to their 'leading firefighter' role. This is a firefighter who has a level 1 incident command qualification but may not wish to progress to a crew manager position. They wore a standard yellow helmet and there was no way of distinguishing them at an incident. Following feedback, the service added a single stripe to the helmet to make it easy to identify them.

The service has an [operational discretion](#) panel, which considers whether operational discretion has been used during an incident. The panel convenes when appropriate and, if necessary, shares any learning points with the wider workforce.

We were encouraged to see the service is contributing towards, and acting on, learning from other fire and rescue services, and operational learning gathered from emergency service partners. For example, the service highlighted operational learning nationally following an incident at a high-rise building which had wet risers (a supply system intended to distribute water to multiple levels of a building). The firefighters encountered excessive water pressures, making it difficult to use the system.

The service is making good progress in aligning its procedures with national operational guidance

The service has invested in a [national operational guidance](#) implementation team. This team has developed a portal for operational staff, which gives them access to a range of training aids. There is a clear plan in place to implement the service's strategic plans, and senior leaders have oversight of this. The service is confident that the guidance will be implemented by March 2025.

The service collaborates with the NFSP to implement the part of the national operational guidance about fire control operations, to make sure actions are consistent across the fire and rescue services in the partnership. The NFSP project team is leading this.

The service is effective at keeping the public informed

The service has good systems in place to inform the public about ongoing incidents and help keep them safe during and after incidents. This includes having cover from a communications team 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Media training is provided to staff at middle management level and above. In addition, the service works closely with the [local resilience forums \(LRFs\)](#) in Wiltshire and Dorset to provide consistent messages to the public.

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents

Adequate

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

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

Areas for improvement

The service should make sure appropriate staff understand and participate in a programme of cross-border exercises, with learning from them recorded and shared.

The service should make sure it is well prepared to form part of a multi-agency response to a terrorist incident, and its procedures for responding are understood by all staff.

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

Main findings

The service is prepared to respond to major and multi-agency incidents

The service has effectively anticipated and considered the reasonably foreseeable risks and threats it may face. These risks are listed in both local and national risk registers as part of its strategic assessment of risk and community safety planning. For example, the service has plans to deal with wildfires and flooding risks.

The service has effective means of responding to major incidents. It is also familiar with the significant risks neighbouring fire and rescue services may face, and which it might reasonably be asked to respond to in an emergency. As part of the NFSP, risk information is shared between all partners (Devon and Somerset, Hampshire and Isle of Wight, and Kent, as well as Dorset and Wiltshire).

However, firefighters told us that they aren't sure what risk information is available to them for the other four neighbouring services which aren't part of the NFSP (Avon, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire).

The service has an appropriate interim method for sharing fire survival guidance

In our last inspection, we focused on how the service collected risk information and responded to the Government's building risk review programme for tall buildings.

In this inspection, we have focused on how well prepared the service is to respond to a major incident at a tall building, such as the tragedy at Grenfell Tower.

We found the service has policies and procedures in place for safely managing this type of incident. It has completed practical exercises in Bournemouth and Swindon where there are a significant number of tall buildings. However, we spoke to firefighters who haven't been involved in any practical exercises in tall buildings, even though they would be expected to respond to an incident of this nature.

At this type of incident, a fire and rescue service would receive a high volume of simultaneous fire calls. We found that the systems the service has in place are appropriate to receive and manage this volume of calls. The service has developed an interim electronic method of sharing [fire survival guidance](#) information between its teams. Staff in the emergency control room, at the incident and in assisting control rooms can share, view and update the actions that result from the individual fire calls. Even though this is an interim method, the service would benefit from improving the security of this process, as the electronic document can be edited by anyone who can view the system.

The service works well with other fire and rescue services

The service supports other fire and rescue services in responding to emergency incidents. For example, the service told us that between January 2023 and June 2024, 998 incidents resulted in the [mobilisation](#) of resources to neighbouring fire and rescue services. It is intraoperable with these services and can form part of a multi-agency response. The service has successfully deployed to other services such as Royal Berkshire and has used national assets, for example to assist with a flooding incident.

The service needs to improve its approach to cross-border exercises

We recognise that the service does carry out cross-border exercises with neighbouring fire and rescue services. In the year ending 31 March 2024, it participated in 30. However, it doesn't have a specific plan to for these to help it work effectively together with other services to keep the public safe. We spoke to many firefighters who work near a border but haven't participated in exercises with their neighbouring fire and rescue service. We spoke to an operational manager who told us that they were deployed to a neighbouring service to attend an incident which they didn't have the required knowledge and understanding to deal with.

The service should make sure it has a plan for cross-border exercises, to help operational staff understand what is expected of them. This should also include the risks of major events at which the service could foreseeably give support or ask for help from neighbouring services. This is an area for improvement.

Incident commanders have a good understanding of JESIP

The incident commanders we interviewed had been trained in and were familiar with JESIP. We found that staff who respond to emergency incidents have a consistent level of awareness, knowledge and understanding of the principles and how they are applied. In the year ending 31 March 2024, the service carried out 47 multi-agency exercises.

Our inspectors spoke to firefighters and incident commanders at all levels who were all able to explain how they use JESIP to work with other emergency responders, and the benefits that this brings to their roles. The service could give us strong evidence that it consistently follows these principles. In addition, fire control managers are trained as national inter-agency liaison officers to enhance communications and respond to major incidents.

We sampled a range of debriefs the service had carried out after multi-agency incidents and/or exercises. We were encouraged to find that the service is identifying any problems it has with applying JESIP and taking appropriate, prompt action with other emergency services.

The service works well with its partners, but operational staff need more support to understand their roles in a marauding terrorist attack

The service is a member of two LRFs: Dorset, and Wiltshire and Swindon. Both LRFs have a senior leader from the service as their vice chair. The service has good arrangements in place to respond to emergencies with its partners on these forums. These arrangements include joint plans for potential major incidents at events such as the Bournemouth Air Festival.

The service is a valued partner and active member of several LRF subgroups. It takes part in regular training events with other members and uses the learning to develop plans for responding to major and multi-agency incidents. For example, 'Mustang' was a two-day practical exercise run by the Wiltshire and Swindon LRF which involved two individuals armed with firearms.

We recognise that the service doesn't provide a specialist marauding terrorist attack capability. Instead, a specialist team would be mobilised from a neighbouring fire and rescue service. However, many firefighters and supervisory managers told us they didn't know what their role would be during this kind of incident. They also had limited understanding of the joint operating principles, and some hadn't been involved in practical exercises to test these arrangements. Therefore, this is an area for improvement.

The service makes use of national learning

The service makes sure it knows about national operational updates from other fire and rescue services, and joint [organisational learning](#) from other organisations, such as the police service and ambulance trusts. It uses this learning to inform the planning assumptions it makes with partner organisations. National operational learning and joint organisational learning are shared through a single point of contact in the service and managed through its operational effectiveness database.

Making best use of resources

Good

Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service is good at making best use of its resources.

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

The service's revenue budget for 2024/25 is £73.9 million. This is a 12 percent increase from the previous financial year.

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

Main findings

The service's financial and workforce plans are effective, but staff resources could be used more effectively in prevention

The service's financial and workforce plans, including the allocation of resources to protection and response, are mostly consistent with the risks and priorities it has identified in its CSP. We were told that the service is close to having all posts in all departments filled.

The service has increased the budget allocated to its protection department. This has allowed it to increase the number of fire safety inspectors, and helped it to implement the recommendations of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry and enhance its approach to reducing risk in high-rise residential buildings.

Since our 2022 inspection, the service has restructured its prevention department. This was carried out due to the financial pressures faced by the service, but it provided an opportunity to review which of its non-statutory functions the service could maintain. It decided to end its youth engagement programmes, such as the Prince's Trust and the Fire Cadet programme. The number of safe and well advisors was also reduced. The savings were reinvested in other areas of the service.

During our inspection, we found that safe and well visits arranged by firefighters aren't prioritised based on risk, and that the service's 56-day target for completing all safe and well visits is too long for high-risk occupants to wait. The service should make sure it uses its resources more effectively to prioritise prevention activity based on risk.

The service has evaluated its mix of crewing and duty systems. It carried out a comprehensive fire cover review in parallel with the development of its new CSP, including a cost-benefit analysis, so it can show that it deploys its fire engines and response staff to manage risk efficiently.

In setting its revenue budget for 2023/24, the service reduced its total crewing numbers, saving approximately £1.4 million per year. The service has invested approximately £600,000 annually into Amesbury fire station and changed the duty system from on-call only to both day duty and on-call to improve its fire cover, due to the increased risks within the station area. The service told us this will lead to efficiency savings in staff pay costs, as previously fire cover was maintained by extensive use of overtime to cover the shortfall in on-call firefighter availability.

The service builds its plans on sound scenarios. These help make sure the service is sustainable and are underpinned by financial controls that reduce the risk of misusing public money. The service continues to use [zero-based budgeting](#) and to reduce expenditure where appropriate. Senior managers and the [fire and rescue authority](#) oversee and scrutinise the service's plans and budget performance to make sure it uses public money appropriately.

Performance dashboards are being used effectively

The service understands how it uses its wholetime firefighters. It collects data on how they spend their time across day and night shifts, and uses this to make the most of its capacity. In our last inspection, we identified the service's performance dashboards as [promising practice](#). These provide operational staff with a clear, easy-to-use summary of their performance. We were pleased to find that this has been strengthened and that staff including supervisory operational managers and protection managers use the dashboards regularly and find them helpful and effective.

For example, one of the dashboards for wholetime firefighters is updated daily and shows:

- the number of safe and well visits completed, and if any have passed the 56-day target;
- the number of fire safety audits and business safety checks completed;
- which site-specific risk information records are completed, scheduled or overdue; and
- HR-related information, such as the number of exit interviews completed.

The dashboard has a clear 'hours worked' area, which allows wholetime operational staff to monitor the hours they have worked on specific activities. The service expects wholetime operational staff to commit approximately 40 hours of each shift cycle to prevention, protection and response activities, including training.

At the time of our inspection, the service was reviewing on-call contractual cover. One reason for this was to review on-call firefighters' current level of availability and consider whether it meets the demands and risks of their fire station area. The review aims to improve on-call availability.

The service is taking steps to make sure the workforce's time is as productive as possible during the night. At the time of our inspection, a new process was being introduced to record activities completed during the night shift.

Despite these steps, we spoke to many managers across the service who have significant workload issues. The service has responded to this by introducing a new structure to help manage workloads better. For example, a new central team will complete certain jobs on behalf of middle managers, such as investigating discipline cases, as these can take up a significant proportion of managers' time.

The service's collaboration arrangements continue to be effective

We were pleased to see the service continues to meet its statutory duty to collaborate. It has a central collaboration and partnerships register, which provides information such as:

- the details of the collaboration;
- frequency of contact; and
- a red/amber/green rating which allows the service to evaluate the benefits of each collaboration.

The collaborations include the NFSP with Devon and Somerset FRS, Hampshire and Isle of Wight FRS and Kent FRS, which has resulted in budget savings. The service has also continued to strengthen its prevention partnerships with utility companies.

The service collates details of all its collaborations, and uses these to monitor, review and evaluate the benefits and results. This makes sure that the service only maintains collaborations where there is a benefit to doing so.

Through its collaborative work with the ambulance service, the service attends incidents where a person has collapsed behind a locked door, which were previously attended by the police force. The service told us that these incidents make up 30 percent of its non-fire-related calls. It responded to 561 of these incidents in 2019/20, 618 in 2020/21 and 600 in 2021/22. The service estimates that this has saved the police force £56,000 per year since 2019.

The service's continuity arrangements are good

The service has good continuity arrangements in place for areas in which it considers threats and risks to be high. It regularly reviews and tests these threats and risks so that staff know the arrangements and their associated responsibilities.

We found that the service has effective continuity plans in place for industrial action. It has assured itself and can demonstrate that it has adequate resources available for future periods of industrial action. The plans are detailed and comprehensive and include actions to be taken, where fire engines will be located, and the communication channels to be used with the workforce. It has tested these plans and used what it learned to update them.

The service has a primary and a secondary fire control room on the same site, and both were used during recent floods. As part of the NFSP, the service regularly tests its ability to take calls from neighbouring fire and rescue services. However, we spoke to some fire control staff who haven't carried out a practical continuity exercise in several years.

The service continues to have sound financial management

The service is in the bottom quarter of fire and rescue services in England in terms of total expenditure per head of population and firefighter cost per head of population. It carries out regular reviews of all its expenditure, including non-pay costs. This scrutiny helps the service make sure it gets value for money.

We reported in our last inspection that the service has an impressive value for money framework, which is aligned to strategic priorities. We identified this as innovative practice. It outlines:

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

The service regularly scrutinises all information about its costs. This includes the running costs of each wholetime and on-call fire station compared to similar stations and the previous year's running costs. This information is stored electronically and aggregated to help provide strategic oversight.

The service has made savings and efficiencies which haven't affected its operational performance and the service it gives the public. It regularly reviews the demand on its resources to make sure its response is effective and efficient.

The service reviewed how its resources are mobilised to prison fires. It identified that these weren't being used effectively, so it decreased its level of response. It provided a memorandum of understanding for prison governors about the reduction in response, and provided additional advice about what to do if an increased response was needed. The service views this as a positive improvement.

The service is taking steps to make sure it achieves efficiency gains through sound financial management and best working practices. It is doing this in important areas such as estates, fleet and procurement.

The service told us that it has made savings of £1.7 million per year as a result of procurement-related efficiency savings. For example, a collaborative procurement exercise involving the NFSP to replace and upgrade its mobile data terminals saved the service £236,000, with total savings across all partners of £805,000. The NFSP is in the process of procuring a new mobilisation system which will generate further savings for all partners.

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

Good

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

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

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

Main findings

The service understands its future financial challenges

The service has a sound understanding of its future financial challenges. It anticipates that its budget deficit will be £2 million in 2025/26, rising to £3.1 million in 2027/28. However, future funding is uncertain so these figures may change. At the time of our inspection, the service had set a target of saving £2.5 million within the next two years through its resourcing and savings programme.

The service's underpinning financial assumptions are relatively robust, realistic and prudent. They take account of the wider external environment and some scenario planning for future spending reductions. These include scenario planning for pay awards.

The service has plans to mitigate its significant financial risks. It has completed a comprehensive fire cover review to identify efficiencies and effective ways of working, and to better match resources to risk. The review set out to:

- provide a clear understanding of existing operational demand against both statutory and non-statutory duties;
- provide a clear understanding of current and emerging risks faced by the service;
- make sure that the availability of fire engines and other resources is efficient and effective to meet current and future risk and demand across all areas;
- provide evidence of which crewing models meet the risk and demand levels of each station;
- identify stations where fire engines could be reduced or used more efficiently; and
- identify stations where crewing numbers could be reduced or used more efficiently.

The service has identified several workstreams where it can make efficiency savings, and was progressing this at the time of our inspection. We look forward to seeing how this develops.

The service has a clear plan for how to use its reserves

The service has a sensible and sustainable plan for using its reserves. It has been able to use some reserves to offset long-term borrowing to support its capital investments. It has allocated a total of £9.5 million to support capital investments. This includes investing in its training facilities and purchasing a new mobilisation system through the NFSP.

The level of its general reserves had been set at £2.5 million or 5 percent of the annual revenue budget, whichever was higher. However, due to the increase in budget over the last two years, the service can afford to maintain a higher balance of general reserves, so the level is decided based on a risk assessment. The balance of its general reserves was expected to be £3.1 million at the start of 2024/25, and to increase to £3.15 million during the year.

The service's estate and fleet strategies have clear links to the CSP

The service's estate and fleet strategies have clear links to its CSP. For example, one of the priorities of its estate strategy is to make sure appropriate facilities are in place in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion. It also details the investment required to modernise two key training sites. It aims to bring its fire control function closer to its headquarters, and to sell sites it no longer needs.

The capital programme includes the required future investments in its fleet. These include:

- replacement of four standard fire engines;
- a large off-road fire engine;
- six officer-response vehicles; and
- some other smaller vehicles.

The programme includes provision to replace a further 22 large fire engines, four 4x4 fire engines and some other specialist and smaller vehicles over the next five years.

Both the estate and fleet strategies exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness. The service has invested in diagnostic and re-calibration equipment for vehicle windscreens. This will create financial savings, as this work was previously done by an external organisation.

The service regularly reviews its fleet and estate strategies so that it can accurately assess the effect any changes in estate and fleet provision, or future innovation, have on risk. For example, it has recognised the need for smaller, lighter-weight vehicles to help it to respond more quickly and easily to smaller incidents.

The service records any efficiencies and savings it makes. It also regularly monitors expenditure on electricity, gas and water to see if there have been any significant increases.

The service invests in technology to support change and improve efficiency

The service actively considers how changes in technology and future innovation may affect risk. It plans to invest in a smoke extraction system for the live fire exercises that are carried out in buildings as part of firefighter training. The system captures, extracts and filters any smoke produced in the building before it is released to the environment. The system is used by other fire and rescue services and its effectiveness has been proven.

The service also seeks to exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness presented by changes in technology. For example, body-worn video is provided to all level 1 and 2 incident commanders, which assists with learning. The incident commander can submit the camera footage to be reviewed as part of their incident command revalidation process. The video also assists the police with any investigations.

As reported in our last inspection, the service has moved away from paper-based systems and uses electronic systems to manage many of its prevention, protection and response activities. And, impressively, most of its systems and dashboards have been developed internally by its staff.

The service has put in place the capacity and capability it needs to achieve sustainable transformation, and it routinely seeks opportunities to work with others to improve efficiency and provide better services in the future. For example, as part of the NFSP, the service is working collaboratively to purchase a new mobilisation system.

The service continues to generate funding and income

The service actively considers and exploits opportunities for generating extra income. It told us that between April 2016 and January 2023, its prevention team secured funding of £910,628 from various sources.

Extra income the service generated in 2023/24 included:

- £48,000 from charging to attend special service calls;
- £62,000 from mast renting at service locations; and
- £164,000 from sharing property costs with partners.

Where appropriate, it has secured external funding to invest in improvements to the service it gives the public. For example, it continues to collaborate with SGN (previously Scotia Gas Networks) and Wales & West Utilities. As we reported in our last inspection, this collaboration has helped the service to secure 2,500 wi-fi carbon monoxide detectors and 25,000 other carbon monoxide detectors which will be provided over the next five years.

Promoting the right values and culture

Inadequate

Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service is inadequate at promoting the right values and culture.

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

Cause of concern

The service needs to do more to make sure that its staff routinely demonstrate behaviours in line with its values. We found strong evidence of behaviours that aren't in line with service values, and were told about some areas of the service which have a culture of tolerating unacceptable behaviour. Staff don't always have the confidence to report these issues and worryingly, when they do, they aren't always supported by managers.

We acknowledge that the service has commissioned and published an independent review into its workplace culture, and has a plan in place to improve its organisational culture.

Recommendations

The service should update its culture delivery plan to include the following recommendations:

- The service should make sure that its staff are able to demonstrate that they understand and follow the [Core Code of Ethics](#), and should be able to demonstrate that it has built the code into all relevant policies and practices.
- The service should assure itself that senior and middle managers act as role models and show they are committed to service values through their behaviour.
- The service should establish a culture where behaviours that aren't in line with its values are routinely challenged, making sure all staff are trained and supported to identify and challenge these behaviours.
- The service should make sure appropriate support is provided to those raising workforce concerns.
- The service should make sure staff fully understand the role of the culture development committee and the actions it is taking.

Area for improvement

The service should proactively monitor working hours to make sure staff (including those on dual and secondary contracts) don't work excessive hours.

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

Main findings

The service's values aren't routinely demonstrated by all staff

The service has more to do to establish a positive workplace culture where its staff routinely demonstrate behaviour that is consistent with its values.

On 31 January 2023, ITN broadcast several allegations against the service. Dorset Police carried out an investigation relating to the inappropriate sharing of images on messaging platforms. It found no evidence to support the original allegation and concluded that there was no evidence of criminal offences having taken place.

Following the media allegations, the chief fire officer commissioned an independent review into the service's workplace culture. This was published on 17 October 2023. It stated:

"Sadly, many cases of inappropriate conduct and behaviours were described to the review team. There remains an underlying culture of misogyny and sexism in [Dorset and Wiltshire FRS], coupled with a lack of understanding of every individual's equality, diversity and inclusion duties."

It further stated in its conclusion:

"[Dorset and Wiltshire FRS] has a minority of people who are damaging the reputation of the hardworking, decent people who want to create an inclusive workplace and make a positive difference to their communities."

The service accepted all 28 recommendations and created a culture delivery plan for their implementation.

During our inspection, most staff we spoke to demonstrated the service's values and were committed to the organisation. Many felt that the negative media attention didn't represent the service they work for.

However, our inspection also made a number of worrying findings consistent with those of the independent review. These included use of inappropriate language, lack of respect for colleagues, and discrimination. We are concerned that some behaviours we were told about don't meet the standards expected, and that the culture of the organisation doesn't always align with its values.

We were told about several examples of poor behaviour that staff have experienced. Just a few examples of these are:

- firefighters made it clear that they wouldn't work on some [watches](#) due to the negativity they had experienced or heard;
- racist jokes were shared on messaging platforms (described as "banter") and an inappropriate display picture was used for work-related group chats; and
- during a training exercise, a male firefighter objected to three female firefighters being in a team of four, as he said that they wouldn't be strong enough to carry out the task.

We are also concerned that there isn't a strong culture of challenge. We found only limited examples of staff and managers feeling confident enough to challenge poor behaviour. We were told how some staff challenged inappropriate behaviour and, disappointingly, weren't supported by their managers. The service needs to do more to improve awareness of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours and make sure its values are being modelled at all levels, and there is appropriate challenge when they aren't. We have highlighted this as a cause of concern with associated recommendations.

Following publication of the independent report, some staff felt that the service was more worried about its reputation rather than the people it employs. It was felt that staff (including managers) could have been better supported in dealing with the findings from the review. For example, a female staff member told us she discussed the report with a middle manager, but she was continually ignored and interrupted, and then the conversation was closed down without any support being provided, which left her upset. We were also told about a male staff member who stated that he didn't know how to act in front of female colleagues. We were told about a large number of examples of poor and inappropriate behaviour by male staff members towards women.

The service has created a culture development committee, chaired by the deputy chief fire officer, which meets four times a year. Senior leaders have agreed a culture delivery plan which includes the key outcomes the service aims to achieve. But the service would benefit from including more detail in the plan, such as how progress against each action will be monitored. The service needs to publicise the work of the committee better and improve its communications across the workforce. We spoke to staff who weren't aware of the committee or who didn't know what the strategic approach was to improve the culture of the organisation.

The service has a clearly defined set of values, and it has previously implemented the [Core Code of Ethics](#). Workshops have recently been introduced to improve staff members' understanding of these. And 98 percent (261 out of 267) of respondents to our staff survey said they are aware of the values. But more needs to be done to make sure staff act with integrity and demonstrate the service's values.

The service has introduced some positive initiatives, but these will take time to fully take effect. An initiative called 'Not on my watch' supports staff to challenge inappropriate behaviour. We spoke to staff who were positive about this. The service would benefit from investing more resources into this, as the training is provided by only one supervisory manager. At the time of our inspection, only around a third of the workforce had received it. The service has introduced other new initiatives such as 'Safe to', designed to give staff the confidence to challenge poor behaviours.

The service has a strategic risk register, in which its significant risks are outlined and scored according to the level of the risk. But we found the findings from the independent review aren't on the risk register, despite presenting significant risks to the organisation.

The service has good well-being provisions in place

The service continues to have well-understood and effective well-being policies in place, which are available to staff. A significant range of well-being support is available to support both physical and mental health, such as support from the [occupational health service](#), specialist counselling services and specialist trauma practitioners.

The service regularly evaluates its well-being provisions and uses the results from its staff survey to see whether it can make further improvements. Of those that completed our staff survey, 97 percent (258 out of 267) felt that they can access services to support their mental well-being, and 79 percent (211 out of 267) agreed that they achieve a good balance between their work and private life.

We spoke to managers across the service who have significant workload issues. The service has introduced new structures to help manage workloads better.

The service has negotiated with a healthcare organisation to provide private medical healthcare insurance. Its staff can opt in to this service for a monthly fee, which provides medical healthcare insurance for themselves and for their dependants. The arrangement covers services such as medical diagnosis and medical treatment. It aims to provide early intervention, which may reduce overall sickness.

The service has appropriate health and safety provisions in place

The service continues to have effective and well-understood health and safety policies and procedures in place. The health and safety documents we reviewed were in date and clear. We spoke to staff who were positive about the health and safety culture in the service. Staff are trained regularly through a mandatory e-learning package and health and safety-related qualifications. However, during our inspection we sampled four on-call firefighters' health and safety records at random and found that three showed their training had expired.

The service continues to have the British Standard ISO 45001 (occupational health and safety management standard) accreditation. This helps it to make safety improvements and provides extra assurance to its approach to health and safety.

The service has good performance measures in place and learns from accidents and near misses. For example, some firefighters were injured while using a specific piece of gym equipment, so further information was sent to firefighters on how to use the equipment safely.

Both staff and representative bodies have confidence in the health and safety approach the service takes. The representative bodies also agree that the service includes them in the decision-making process for health-and-safety-related issues, and that staff are encouraged to report all accidents, near misses and dangerous incidents.

More needs to be done to monitor working hours

In our last inspection, we highlighted as an area for improvement that the service should monitor dual contracts to make sure working hours aren't exceeded. It has introduced a new process that monitors the number of hours operational firefighters work in their wholetime and on-call employment. Staff told us that there is a focus on making sure rest periods are being adhered to.

However, we spoke to several firefighters and managers who said this process isn't being managed effectively. They told us that they don't always understand their responsibilities and sometimes fail to adhere to the policy. For those on dual contracts, we heard that rest periods before and after wholetime shifts aren't always followed.

At the time of our inspection, a new guidance document was being produced to provide advice on managing staff with secondary contracts. But the service needs to do more to make sure staff don't work excessive hours. Therefore, this area for improvement remains.

The service has clear absence management processes

We found there are clear processes in place to manage absences for all staff. There is clear guidance for managers, who told us they are confident in using the process. Most staff we interviewed thought that the service manages absences well and in accordance with policy. We spoke to managers who told us that a well-being discussion takes place when staff return to work, and absences and trends are monitored by senior leaders. The service has also assigned HR specialists to each fire station to provide additional support to staff.

In the year ending 31 March 2023, we found that short-term sickness decreased by 17.2 percent compared to 2021/22, but over the same period, long-term sickness increased by 4.8 percent.

Getting the right people with the right skills

Good

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

Fire and rescue services should have a workforce plan in place that is linked to their [community risk management plans](#). It should set out their current and future skills requirements and address capability gaps. This should be supplemented by a culture of continuous improvement, including appropriate learning and development throughout the service.

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

Main findings

The service continues to be effective at workforce planning

The service has good workforce planning in place. This makes sure that the skills and capabilities of its workforce align with what it needs to effectively carry out its community risk management plan, which it calls its CSP. Its training plans are aligned with its workforce planning and its CSP.

The service's strategic workforce plan for 2023–25 continues to set out its six workforce planning priorities:

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

Workforce and succession planning is subject to consistent scrutiny in the form of regular meetings to discuss requirements. For example, each departmental manager completes an annual succession plan document for their function. This allows the service to address any issues in a timely manner and identify whether the department has sufficient staffing to meet the needs of the CSP. This information is then provided to senior leaders. We saw an example where a staff member was due to retire, and effective workforce planning resulted in their replacement being recruited six months before the staff member's retirement to allow an effective handover to take place.

Although most roles across the service are filled, operational firefighters told us there aren't enough emergency driver training instructors, which has resulted in courses being delayed. The service told us that they do have enough emergency drivers across the service, but they may not be located in the appropriate geographical areas. It is addressing this.

Workforce skills and capabilities are managed well

Most staff told us that they could access the training they need to be effective in their roles, and not just in operational skills. The service's training plans make sure that staff can maintain their competence and capability effectively. Most staff told us that they can access the training they need to be effective in their role, including specialist prevention and protection staff. Of those who responded to our staff survey, 91 percent (242 out of 267) told us that they have received sufficient training to do their job effectively.

The service monitors the competencies of its staff using a system which records all training in a central place. Performance dashboards allow its staff to manage their own skills. The service regularly updates its understanding of staff's skills and risk-critical safety capabilities through monitoring of competencies by line managers and the central training team. This approach means the service can identify gaps in workforce capabilities and resilience. It also means it can make sound and financially sustainable decisions about current and future needs.

Although most staff spoke positively about the training they receive, we found that some supervisory managers would benefit from additional training in how to use the service's IT systems.

The service has two training centres (one in each county) due to its large geographical area. We spoke to operational firefighters who felt there are inconsistencies between the two sites in some of the training that is provided.

The service previously implemented the Core Code of Ethics. We recognise that it has recently introduced workshops to improve its staff's understanding of this. But it needs to make sure its staff can demonstrate that they understand and follow the code. In addition, the service hasn't provided any recent equality, diversity and inclusion training.

The service promotes a culture of continuous learning and development

The service promotes a culture of continuous improvements throughout the organisation, and it encourages staff to learn and develop. For example, it provides area managers with the opportunity to act up into a deputy assistant chief fire officer role. This is done through the operational manager's rota, which allocates senior leaders to provide additional resilience for operational cover. Each area manager has the opportunity to act up into this role via the rota every six months. We were told that almost all area managers have completed this development opportunity.

We were pleased to see the service has a range of training and development resources in place. These include e-learning modules, mentoring, and apprenticeship schemes. An online learning hub gives staff access to learning and development relevant to their roles. And a monthly learning and development newsletter is sent to all staff with updates on what courses are available. Staff can view and book these through the central system.

Most staff told us they can access a range of learning and development resources. Of those who responded to our staff survey, 88 percent (236 out of 267) agreed that they are able to access the right learning and development opportunities when they need to. This allows them to do their job effectively.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity

Requires improvement

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

Creating a more representative workforce gives fire and rescue services huge benefits. These include greater access to talent and different ways of thinking. It also helps them better understand and engage with local communities. Each service should make sure staff throughout the organisation firmly understand and show a commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. This includes successfully taking steps to remove inequality and making progress to improve fairness, diversity and inclusion at all levels of the service. It should proactively seek and respond to feedback from staff and make sure any action it takes is meaningful.

Areas for improvement

The service needs to improve the diversity of its workforce, particularly for wholetime firefighter roles.

The service should train all staff in equality, diversity and inclusion and make sure staff understand the benefits of positive action.

The service should make sure it has effective grievance procedures that staff have confidence in, and should resolve disciplinary and work-related concerns promptly.

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

Main findings

The service needs to do more to create an environment of trust where all staff feel safe and empowered to provide feedback and challenge senior leaders

More work is needed to build trust and confidence between senior leaders and the workforce by improving the way the service seeks challenge, gathers feedback from all staff and responds to staff concerns.

The service has developed several ways to work with staff on issues and decisions that affect them. These include methods to build awareness of fairness and diversity, and targeted initiatives to identify issues that affect different staff groups. For example, the service has “phone-ins” with senior and middle managers four times a year, where staff can submit questions in advance. It has also run management engagement days. There are five staff networks in place which staff can use to give feedback or suggest improvements on any matters related to their work.

In our staff survey, 74 percent of respondents (198 out of 267) said they feel confident in the processes for providing feedback at all levels. But some staff we spoke to have limited confidence in the service’s feedback processes and don’t think they are effective. Many firefighters we spoke to felt confident in providing feedback to their line managers (up to station manager level) and HR specialists, but not to managers above this, as it was felt that senior leaders would ignore their feedback.

The senior leaders don’t have a programme of workplace visits, as they feel it is more beneficial to visit workplaces informally without a pre-determined agenda or specific structure. But the service should review whether this approach is as effective as it could be, as we spoke to some staff who felt that senior leaders aren’t visible, and some who didn’t even know who their senior leaders are.

The service should improve staff confidence in the grievance procedures

The service should improve staff understanding of bullying, [harassment](#) and discrimination, including their duty to eliminate them. The chief fire officer personally visits all new starters and explains how bullying, harassment and discrimination won’t be tolerated. But in our staff survey, 9 percent of respondents (24 out of 267) told us they had felt bullied or harassed at work in the last 12 months. The most common factors they thought the bullying or harassment was related to were “performance at work” and “role or terms of contract”. Of those who said they felt bullied or harassed, the primary reason most didn’t report the bullying or harassment was that they thought nothing would be done about it.

In our survey, 10 percent (27 out of 267) of respondents told us they had felt discriminated against at work in the previous 12 months. The most common factors they thought the discrimination was related to were gender and “performance at work”. The primary reason most respondents didn’t report the discrimination was concern about being labelled as a troublemaker.

Although the service has policies and procedures in place, staff have limited confidence in how well it deals with cases of bullying, harassment and discrimination, as well as grievances and discipline. The service was due to publish its new grievance policy soon after our inspection.

We found that staff don't always raise workforce concerns because they have limited confidence in the process. Some staff don't feel the grievance process is robust enough to protect them from reprisal, and feel that the service will try to suppress the issue. We were told by one individual that they were advised to withdraw their grievance in order to progress their career. And, worryingly, some staff that we spoke to who have raised concerns told us that they received limited support from the service.

We were told that staff don't always hear about the outcome of disciplinary investigations which results in rumours circulating. But we recognise that sharing the outcomes of disciplinary cases is difficult due to confidentiality. We heard from some staff that they didn't feel the resulting sanctions from disciplinary cases were appropriate. They felt that cases often rest on the word of the complainant against the individual they have raised concerns about, and that the perpetrator was believed more often than not.

We were also told that some grievance and discipline cases take too long to investigate. The service has introduced a central team to investigate discipline and grievance cases and has put in place additional HR resources to support this. Nonetheless, this is an area for improvement.

Following the publication of the independent review into its workplace culture, the service has developed a culture dashboard in order to increase transparency. This displays information such as the number of ongoing grievances and discipline cases, and is among the top three dashboards accessed by staff. We also heard positive views about the HR specialists who provide additional support to staff.

The service still needs to improve the diversity of its workforce

In our 2022 inspection, we highlighted as an area for improvement that the service needs to improve the diversity of its workforce, particularly for wholetime firefighter roles. We recognise the service hasn't recruited for wholetime fighters since our last inspection, but this area for improvement will remain.

At the time of our inspection (May 2024), the service was planning to recruit for wholetime firefighters. As of 31 March 2023, 6.4 percent of wholetime firefighters and 5.4 percent of on-call firefighters identified as a woman; 18.8 percent of the service's overall workforce identified as a woman, compared to an average of 19.4 percent throughout all fire and rescue services.

As of 31 March 2023, 4.9 percent of wholetime firefighters and 3.8 percent of on-call firefighters identified as being from an ethnic minority; and 4.2 percent of the overall workforce identified as being from an ethnic minority. This is much lower than the local population of 12.8 percent.

The service has a predominantly on-call workforce and faces challenges in recruiting into those roles from diverse groups. The service has taken steps to improve diversity although it needs to do more. For example, it runs 'Have a go days'. And at the time of our inspection, it was developing a buddying system where applicants from diverse communities can be paired with an existing member of staff. We look forward to seeing how effective these initiatives are at increasing the diversity of the workforce.

The service has a clear recruitment process, which incorporates steps to understand and reduce the risk of disproportionality. For example, it offers alternative verbal and numerical testing for applicants who don't hold formal qualifications in English and Mathematics. It is a [Disability Confident](#) employer, which means it guarantees an interview for applicants with a disability. The service has evaluated each stage of its on-call firefighter recruitment process and understands which stages of the process those with a [protected characteristic](#) aren't passing. It has also carried out analysis to find out why on-call firefighters are leaving.

The service has put considerable effort into developing its recruitment processes so that they are fair and potential applicants can understand them. On-call staff were frustrated with the length of time it takes to join the service as an on-call firefighter. But the on-call recruitment process is due to be amended so that candidates can move through the process more quickly. This includes new starters who are required to gain consent from their employer, as this has historically been a time-consuming process. We also found that the service has improved its approach for applicants who declare that they are neurodivergent. For example, applicants are permitted to take notes into their interview and can have the questions printed on coloured paper.

The service advertises recruitment opportunities both internally and externally, including on the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) website, social media and its own website. However, it could do more to encourage applicants from diverse backgrounds, including into middle and senior management roles.

The service should train all staff in equality, diversity and inclusion

The service needs to improve its approach to equality, diversity and inclusion. Of the training records we sampled, we found that none recorded any form of equality, diversity and inclusion training since 2021. This is an area for improvement.

We found that some staff had misconceptions about positive action and positive discrimination and would benefit from further awareness training. For example, we spoke to a firefighter who felt that he was being discriminated against and was overlooked for promotion because he was a White heterosexual male. We spoke to many staff who want to see the return of face-to-face equality, diversity and inclusion training, but we recognise the geographical and resourcing challenges the service faces.

There are five staff networks in place. We were pleased to find that suggestions from the networking for women group has led to new initiatives being introduced. The staff who attended the 'Understanding menopause' workshop were positive about it. But attendance is voluntary, which means that this information won't reach all parts of the workforce.

The service has a clear process in place to carry out [equality impact assessments](#). It has recently introduced a scrutiny panel which reviews the completed assessments. Training has been provided to key staff, including the panel members. All proposed actions are assigned to a lead officer with clear time frames for completion. The equality impact assessments we reviewed had been completed to a good standard.

Managing performance and developing leaders

Requires improvement

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

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

Area for improvement

The service should make sure its promotions process is transparent and fair.

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

Main findings

The service continues to have an effective one-to-one performance process

There is a good performance management system in place, which allows the service to effectively develop and assess the individual performance of staff. The one-to-one system, which was developed with the workforce, encourages managers to have a conversation with their staff about training, health and well-being, and performance. Through our staff survey, most staff reported that they have regular, meaningful discussions with their manager. Each staff member has individual goals and objectives, and regular performance assessments. Staff feel confident in the performance and development arrangements in place. The service should continue to make sure that its values and behaviours are discussed during this process.

Most staff complete this annually, but the system is designed so that it can be carried out as often as they like. In our last inspection, we highlighted as promising practice that staff spoke highly about the “recognition button” in the appraisal process, which allows staff to recognise a positive contribution by a colleague.

Staff don’t feel the promotions process is transparent or fair

The service needs to do more to make sure its promotion and progression processes are fair. We spoke to many operational staff who were frustrated by the process and didn’t have confidence in it. In our staff survey, 38 percent (102 out of 267) of respondents told us they felt the promotions process isn’t fair. This is an area for improvement.

The promotions process for firefighters and supervisory managers used to involve an endorsement stage (referred to as a personal impact assessment) in which the line manager approves the suitability of the individual going for promotion. However, most staff told us that the endorsement stage wasn’t consistent or fair. For example, some firefighters told us their line manager wasn’t good at completing personal impact assessments, which resulted in their application not proceeding.

Some staff feel that the marking process is inconsistent. One firefighter told us they had improved and strengthened their original application using the feedback they were given and re-submitted it, only to receive a lower score.

We were disappointed to hear from another individual that, despite passing a promotions process, they were prevented from taking a promotion because their current watch needed their specialist skills. This unnecessarily penalised an individual who had followed the proper process.

We were told that anyone involved in the promotion or recruitment process is required to take [unconscious bias](#) training to help reduce discrimination.

We found that interviews aren’t always carried out by staff with the appropriate interview training, which may create inconsistencies in the process. In addition, managers aren’t trained in having difficult conversations with staff who they decide are unsuitable for promotion. We found that there is a perception of nepotism within the promotions process, and that in the process “it isn’t what you know, but who you know”; some felt that there is a “boys’ club”. The service needs to improve confidence in the promotions process and make sure it is transparent and fair.

The service needs to continue to improve diversity among its future leaders

In recent years, the service has appointed three women to non-operational roles in its strategic leadership team. It has recruited external applicants into middle management positions and advertises vacancies both internally and externally. The service has two female middle managers in fire control. But the highest-ranking woman in an operational role is at supervisory level.

Leaders are continually developed

The service has effective succession planning processes in place, which allow it to manage high-potential staff into leadership roles. This is monitored in the promotions process, where successful applicants are matched to the vacancies available.

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

- 'colour works' management workshops and a 360° assessment tool for middle managers and above;
- apprenticeship schemes;
- coaching and 'reverse mentoring' programmes; and
- bite-sized leadership forums aimed at middle managers.

It also has talent management schemes to develop staff. This is initially discussed during the one-to-one performance management process. A nine-box grid is used by managers to consider the existing skills and talent within their teams.

At the time of our inspection, the service had carried out a gap analysis to implement the December 2022 Fire Standards '[Leading the service](#)' and '[Leading and developing people](#)'. We look forward to seeing how this develops in future.

