HMICFRS

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services

State of Fire and Rescue

The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England

2019

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services

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State of Fire and Rescue – The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2019

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services

Presented to Parliament pursuant to section 28B of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004

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Designed by Redhouse

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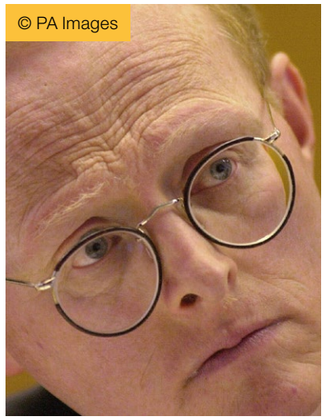
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Foreword

This is my first report to the Secretary of State under section 28B of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. It contains my assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of fire and rescue services in England, based on the inspections we carried out between June 2018 and August 2019.

Fire and rescue services haven't been formally inspected for more than a decade. The National Audit Office published a report on fire and rescue services in 2015, but its focus was solely on their financial sustainability. So this is a landmark report: our first assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of the fire and rescue sector that draws upon detailed inspections of all 45 services in England.

I will publish an annual report on the state of the fire and rescue sector from now on. I report separately every summer on the effectiveness and efficiency of police forces in England and Wales.

This report's structure and purpose

Part 1 contains my assessment of the state of fire and rescue services in England. In making my assessment, I have drawn on the inspections we have carried out since June 2018, as well as the findings and reports of other organisations, and other information and analysis available to me. This part also contains four recommendations which I have made to the sector.

Part 2 gives an overview of the gradings and the findings from our first round of inspections, which we carried out between June 2018 and August 2019.

Part 3 sets out the full list of our fire and rescue reports and other inspection publications for the period covered by this report.

The results of our individual inspections enable an assessment of the performance of individual services. I hope that institutions that are responsible for holding fire and rescue services to account, as well as the public, will draw on the overall conclusions in this report just as much as they draw on the specific conclusions we have reached for each service.

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Inspection is a continuous process of design, monitoring and reporting.

Our approach to inspecting fire and rescue services

The expansion of our remit to inspect fire and rescue services was a proud moment for the inspectorate and a reflection of the quality of our inspections to date. I congratulate our staff, who have designed and implemented a robust inspection methodology with which we have completed 45 high-quality fire and rescue inspections. I have also been greatly encouraged by the constructive way in which chief fire officers and their teams, as well as fire and rescue authorities, have broadly welcomed the scrutiny we are bringing to their operations.

I would like, too, to recognise the support we have received from the fire and rescue sector in general. At the beginning, we made three commitments. The first is to work closely with the sector to develop our ways of working. We have received advice and challenge throughout, which have strengthened our approach, and we continue to seek this input as we refine our processes. The second is to design a methodology that can promote improvement. We identify good practice as well as areas where services need to improve. The third is to inspect on a no-surprises basis. Services will know when we will inspect them, as well as the judgment criteria against which they will be assessed. Our approach was also subject to public consultation before we started inspecting services.

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Inspection is a continuous process of design, monitoring and reporting. Now that we have carried out one full inspection of every service, we will monitor what improvements are taking place and how services are responding to our recommendations and areas of concern. From 2020, we will inspect every service for a second time.

Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs)

Rather than appoint a single inspector with responsibility for independently assessing the performance of fire and rescue services, this work has been shared among the organisation's existing HMIs: Zoë Billingham, Phil Gormley, Matt Parr, Dru Sharpling and Wendy Williams. I am grateful to them all for how they have responded to this increase in their workloads, especially HMI Billingham as the senior lead for fire and rescue inspections.

Contributions to my assessment

When compiling this assessment, I wrote to chief fire officers and other interested parties across the fire and rescue sector, inviting them to contribute their views on the state of fire and rescue in England. I would like to place on record my warmest thanks to all those who responded for their very thoughtful and insightful contributions. They have been of great help in producing this report.

Finally, I would like to thank our staff, who have put so much hard work into planning, organising and carrying out this first set of inspections. They have taken on this entirely new area of work with the utmost dedication and professionalism. We have benefitted from many joining us on secondment from the fire and rescue sector, bringing considerable expertise and experience. I am very grateful to everyone at HMICFRS for all they do.

Sir Thomas P Winsor
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services

Part 1: Overview

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Overview

This is our first time inspecting fire and rescue services (FRSs) in England. We have seen much of which services can and should be proud: for example, their commitment to their profession and their communities; their life-saving prevention initiatives; and their highly skilled emergency response. But we have also seen some worrying themes: some services not doing enough in relation to building safety; barriers to becoming more effective and efficient; a notable lack of diversity; and, in a few services, a toxic, bullying culture.

The fire at Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017, which cost 72 lives, brought into sharp focus the work of FRSs. This includes their building and fire safety activity, and also how they responded. As chair to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, Sir Martin Moore-Bick made several far-reaching recommendations in his Inquiry phase 1 report.[1] If implemented, these should profoundly change the sector and reduce the likelihood that tragedies such as this will ever happen again.

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This is a sector with many strengths

Almost universally, the focus of the fire staff we met is on protecting the communities they serve. Their determination and dedication to protect life and property are second to none. Services provide a highly skilled response to a range of emergencies and have designed life-saving initiatives. Firefighting is dangerous, but the sector continues to improve its working practices to make responding to incidents as safe as it can be.

The sector is admired by the public, as our most recent public perception survey[2] showed: only 2 percent of just over 10,000 respondents said they were dissatisfied with their local service.

STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
PART 1: OVERVIEW

Services are generally highly skilled and able to respond to all kinds of challenges.

Whether it be fires or other emergencies, services are generally highly skilled and able to respond to all kinds of challenges. A recent notable example is that, during the summer of 2019, 15 FRSs worked side by side to deal with the potentially dangerous risk of flooding at Toddbrook Reservoir, Whaley Bridge, in Derbyshire. This was co-ordinated by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) under national resilience arrangements. The commendable efforts by many over several days reduced the reservoir's water level to prevent a catastrophic collapse of the dam, which would certainly have destroyed the local town.

© Merseyside FRS

The demand that FRSs face has changed over the past few years. The number of fire incidents attended by FRSs in England peaked in 2003/04 at 473,563. This number fell to as low as 154,461 in 2012/13, although it has since increased to 182,825 in 2018/19. In 2018/19, only around three in ten incidents attended by FRSs were fires (40 percent were fire false alarms and 28 percent were non-fire incidents). The long-term decrease in the number of fire incidents is due to many factors, including prevention work by services for which they deserve great credit.

As a result of responding to fewer incidents, services have used their capacity in a range of different ways to support their local communities. This includes expanding the breadth of their prevention work.

But improvement is needed

Given that the fire and rescue sector hasn't been formally inspected for more than a decade, it is perhaps not surprising that we have found areas that need to improve.

The sector needs reform. Some reform and innovation have been achieved, but improvements are sporadic. Across every service, there are barriers to becoming more effective and efficient. The extent to which each one affects each service varies. There is greater detail on all the barriers in this Part, but they include a lack of consensus as to what firefighters and FRSs ought to do; negotiating mechanisms for determining staff working conditions that don't work as they ought to; unclear demarcation between political oversight and operational leadership; the considerable influence of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU); and services' varied capacity and capability to bring about change. Taken together, these factors are preventing the sector from efficiently and effectively meeting the demands it now faces.

During our inspections, we saw some out-of-date working practices, including a prevalence of paper-based systems in many services. Digital and IT enhancements are taking place in a few services, but without much joint working or central strategy.

Across every service, there are barriers to becoming more effective and efficient.

STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
PART 1: OVERVIEW

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There is also a regrettable lack of diversity. Most worryingly, we saw some examples of toxic culture that have gone unchecked and should not be part of any 21st century public service.

Since 2004, localism has been encouraged at the expense of national standards. While it is reasonable to allow services to best respond to local risk, there is, in some cases, unjustifiable variation in the level of service the public receive. In June 2019, we recommended that the sector should take steps to address some of this variation. As part of this, the NFCC, through its community risk programme, has begun work to develop a consistent risk assessment methodology for services to use.

An unintended consequence of this localism has been the lack of national capacity and capability to bring about lasting sector change. The recently created NFCC and Fire Standards Board will help, but both bodies mainly rely on staff working on national activities in addition to their day jobs. In June 2019, we also recommended that the Home Office address this lack of national capacity and capability.

The long-term reduction in the demand to respond to fire incidents has seen services diversify their work. Most services are now deploying their staff into effective and productive roles to the benefit of the broader community when they are not training or responding to emergency calls. This is positive.

However, in some services, staff are spending too long in stations. As well as responding to emergency calls, training and exercising, staff should, when they can, be carrying out a range of fire safety work, especially with vulnerable people. This should include referring people who need support to appropriate agencies, such as those concerned with health and housing, and responding to referrals from others. Crews should also be doing checks to make sure the service has current information on the buildings in the area that present heightened risks.

But many services have diversified much further. I accept that there may be local need for things such as body recovery for coroners, tree removal and promoting public fitness and wellbeing, among others. But it is essential that services give enough attention to meeting their core functions and priorities set out in their integrated risk management plans (IRMPs). In particular, services need to do more to make sure buildings are compliant with fire safety regulations.

I was also surprised to find considerable financial disparity between services. Some have been protected from budget reductions. But others have already had to make considerable savings and are being required to make more, which could have a detrimental effect on their service to the public.

Most services rely on on-call firefighters to supplement their wholetime workforces. I have great admiration for the thousands of men and women across the country who make up the on-call workforce. But I do have concerns about the viability of this model, now and in the future.

I will expand on all these points later in my assessment. But, before I do, it may be helpful to consider what has happened in the sector up to this point.

Most services are now deploying their staff into effective and productive roles to the benefit of the broader community when they are not training or responding to emergency calls.

STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
PART 1: OVERVIEW

In the history of the fire and rescue sector, there have been moments of profound change.

Change is constant

In the history of the fire and rescue sector, there have been moments of profound change. However, I cannot help but conclude that there have been missed opportunities.

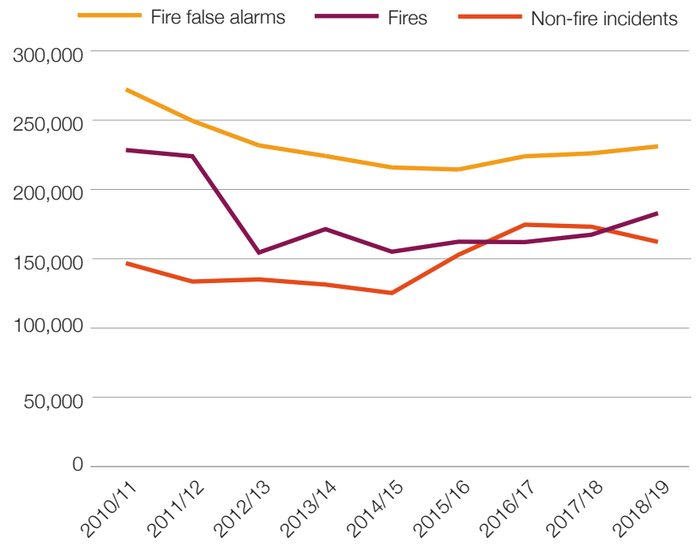
The Great Fire of London in 1666 set in motion the foundations for organised firefighting in the United Kingdom, with private fire services formed, paid for by insurance charged against building owners.

Then the Second World War saw over 1,600 small fire services amalgamated into a single national service, intended to bring greater resilience and standardisation. This single service didn't last long and, in 1947, responsibility passed to county councils (although there were far fewer services – 135 – than before the war). Reorganisation of local government in the 1970s saw services merge into a number near to what we have today.

The independent review[3] by Sir George Bain in 2002 and the White Paper, Our Fire and Rescue Service, in 2003[4] prompted a shift in emphasis in the role of fire services from response to prevention. This was the catalyst for localism and a move away from national standards, institutions and arrangements. Fire and rescue authorities were required to produce IRMPs – locally agreed plans on which their local communities should be consulted. These plans are still an important element in how services establish and meet the needs of their communities.

We then saw a period of reducing demand. Home Office data shows that the total number of incidents (including fires, fire false alarms and non-fire incidents) attended by FRSs in England peaked in 2003/04 at over a million incidents. This fell to a low of 496,135 incidents in 2014/15, although there has been a general increase in the total number of incidents attended since: for example, 576,040 in 2018/19.

Figure 1:
Incidents attended by fire and rescue services in England, 2010/11 to 2018/19



Source:
Incidents attended by fire and rescue services in England: Home Office FIRE0102: 2018/2019. The data in this graph is consistent with records that reached the Incident Reporting System by 16 June 2019.
Note: 2018/19 refers to the financial year, from 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019. Other years follow the same pattern.

As well as demand falling, it also changed. The number of non-fire incidents attended increased from 2014/15, mainly as a result of the rise in response to medical emergencies alongside ambulances. But with fewer fires and services responding differently to local need, services diversified their work.

In May 2013, a review of the efficiency of fire and rescue services by Sir Ken Knight found that services had done little to respond to their changing risk environments.[5] He set out several areas where fire and rescue authorities could improve their efficiency, including increasing the proportion of on-call firefighters and strengthening collaboration, including with other emergency services.

In the past couple of years, four police and crime commissioners and the mayors of London and Greater Manchester have become responsible for their FRSs locally.

The Knight review posed the question of whether firefighters' conditions of service could act as a barrier to change that might otherwise result in a more effective and efficient service. Adrian Thomas, an independent human resources professional, was commissioned by the then government to carry out a review to answer this question.[6] His report was submitted to ministers in 2015 and published a year later. Despite making a series of recommendations, very few have been implemented. This was a missed opportunity – in particular, to reform firefighters' working terms and conditions.

Responsibility for fire policy has moved between government departments over the past 20 years, including to the then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Department for Communities and Local Government, and, most recently, to the Home Office in 2016. This change has meant little consistency in either focus or strategy.

In 2016, the then Home Secretary, Theresa May MP, announced a fire reform programme. This included creating a new independent inspectorate; legislating to allow police and crime commissioners to take on local governance of their FRSs if there were a case for it, and to create a duty to collaborate with other emergency services; creating national professional standards; and focusing on diversifying the workforce. From this, the NFCC was also created, to bring together the operational leads from across the sector to speak with one voice.

Over time, a range of different governance arrangements have also been put in place. In the past couple of years, four police and crime commissioners and the mayors of London and Greater Manchester have become responsible for their FRSs locally.

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I have already mentioned the sector-wide changes the Grenfell Tower fire will necessitate. The first report from the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry[7] was published on 30 October 2019. We have carefully considered the findings and will include them in our approach to inspection where appropriate. We inspected the London Fire Brigade in July and August 2019 and published our report in December 2019.[8]

Firefighters responded on the night of the Grenfell Tower fire with determination, dedication, courage and commitment.

While several of Sir Martin Moore-Bick's recommendations were directed solely to the London Fire Brigade, they affect every service. These include firefighter and incident commander training; use of risk information; working effectively with other emergency services; communication; and learning lessons from previous incidents.

© Mark Kerrison/Alamy Live News

Firefighters responded on the night of the Grenfell Tower fire with determination, dedication, courage and commitment. They faced a fire of unprecedented severity due to failures in building regulations over the last 20 years. They were also let down by failings in planning and preparation, incident command, communication and working with other emergency services.

It is alarming that, more than two years after the fire, more than 300 buildings still have the same cladding as Grenfell Tower. Remedial work to remove similar cladding systems, including rainscreens with polyethylene cores, should be done by the building owners as quickly as possible. No other fire service should have to tackle a blaze of such severity because of these unsafe materials.

The fire also led to a review by Dame Judith Hackitt[9] on building regulations and fire safety. She said that the current system – of which fire and rescue services are only a small part – is not fit for purpose and that a culture change is needed to make sure buildings are safe, both now and in the future. Her recommendations should lead to fundamental changes in the building regulatory system, of which fire and rescue services are a part.

Finally, Lord Kerslake[10] reviewed the response of the emergency services to the Manchester Arena attack in 2017, in which 22 people were murdered. While several recommendations related to responders in Greater Manchester and the north west, the review also provided crucial lessons for the sector in relation to its preparedness for, and response to, such attacks.

I will now explore some of my principal themes in greater detail.

No other fire service should have to tackle a blaze of such severity because of unsafe materials.

STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
PART 1: OVERVIEW

Government needs to set out clearly its expectations of fire and rescue services and resolve the controversy over the true nature of the firefighter's role.

Significant reform is needed to modernise the sector

The role of the fire sector needs greater clarity

There is a lack of consensus over what the role of a firefighter is, and what a fire and rescue service is responsible for.

The principal functions listed in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 are clear: fire safety; firefighting; rescuing people in road traffic collisions; and responding to emergencies. As well as this, the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 requires services to enforce the provisions of the Order including auditing the fire risk assessment of certain premises. And the Fire and Rescue Services (Emergencies) (England) Order 2007 gives services mandatory functions in relation to responding to certain incidents such as chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear emergencies. But the reduction in the number of fires attended over the past decade has seen services expand their roles into broader areas – in particular, health and wellbeing.

Ministers have made it clear that they expect collaboration to be at the heart of how services operate. As the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England says, services should work with their local partners to carry out a range of public safety work to protect their local communities, when it is in the interests of efficiency and effectiveness to do so. But – and this is crucial – this must not be at the expense of services' core functions in relation to fire prevention, protection, response and resilience. Many services are making considerable contributions to improve and promote safety locally. In others, this balance isn't right.

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Government needs to set out clearly its expectations of fire and rescue services and resolve the controversy over the true nature of the firefighter's role. Each service may need to consider doing less of some things and more of others, especially considering the changes Dame Judith Hackitt proposed in 2018 to help services make sure premises comply with fire safety regulations.

STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
PART 1: OVERVIEW

Negotiations between the sector, employers and, more recently, central government over pay and the role of a firefighter have been going on for several years.

National terms and conditions need reviewing

Discussions between the sector, employers and, more recently, central government over the role and pay of a firefighter have been going on for several years. Everyone, not least fire and rescue service employees, would benefit from these being satisfactorily resolved. An independent pay review body may have brought a swifter conclusion than current arrangements. In 2016, Theresa May MP, the then Home Secretary, challenged fire and rescue authorities to reform the National Joint Council (the body overseeing pay negotiations), but I have seen nothing since to suggest that any reform has been achieved.

In his review, Adrian Thomas made several recommendations relating to conditions of service for fire and rescue service staff, covering the working environment, terms and conditions, industrial relations, duty systems and management. Three years since publication, few of those recommendations have been implemented. Action should be taken, ideally by local government as the employers, to implement these recommendations and bring about much-needed modernisation in the sector. But, if progress doesn't materialise, central government should mandate it.

With services becoming increasingly localised, it is highly questionable whether the 'grey book' (the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services Scheme of Conditions of Service), which provides the basis for national conditions of service, should be universally applied. It creates national provisions that unnecessarily hinder services from using their resources as they consider necessary to meet local need. I support the view that consideration should be given to whether the 'grey book' is still workable. I make a recommendation to that effect in this report.

Trade union influence is not always in the best interests of the public

I of course recognise the importance of strong trade union representation. The role of unions is to protect and improve members' rights. In the fire sector, the unions have a proud history of doing so.

However, the influence of the FBU is considerable in some services. I believe it goes too far and is sometimes contrary to the public interest. This is not acceptable: the FBU should not unduly dictate how fire services are provided to the public.

For example, there has been much dispute about whether fire staff should provide medical assistance to support local ambulance services. Home Office data shows that the number of medical incidents attended by FRSs in England peaked in 2016/17 at 45,748 (both as first responder and co-responder). After national trials ended, this number fell to 19,898 in 2018/19. If fire staff are medically trained, have the equipment and are available to respond, it is in the interests of their community that they should.

The influence of the FBU is considerable in some services.

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In our public perception survey, when shown a list of non-statutory duties, more than three-quarters of respondents thought that responding to medical incidents (for example, assisting the ambulance service) was an important duty for FRSs to prioritise.

I was also greatly concerned by what we found in Greater Manchester. Staff who had formed a team to respond to marauding terrorist firearms attacks in the city had withdrawn their labour as a result of an ongoing pay dispute between the FBU and the service. As a result, this capability is now being provided by firefighters from Merseyside. A city the size of, and with the risk profile of, Greater Manchester should not have to rely on firefighters from a neighbouring city to provide this function.

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Chief fire officers need operational independence

There are at least eight different governance arrangements in place across England, as well as variations of the same arrangement. Some fire and rescue authorities are a single person – a mayor or a police, fire and crime commissioner – while others are made up of over a hundred members as part of a county council. Each member, regardless of the model, holds a locally elected post.

Variation doesn't necessarily matter. But the public need to know who is responsible for their service locally and what decisions are taken, which isn't always the case. What is important is whether governance arrangements work. This is something we will consider further in the coming years.

Chief fire officers are employees of their fire and rescue authorities. Unlike chief constables in policing who have operational independence, chief fire officers do not. This can lead to tension between chief fire officers and their authorities. Some chief fire officers have been prevented by their authorities from implementing changes to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their services, with some authorities making decisions that could be considered operational.

Chief fire officers should have operational independence to run their services effectively and efficiently to meet the priorities and commitments in their integrated risk management plans. In this report, I am recommending that the Home Office should issue clear guidance on the demarcation between governance and operational decision making to clarify and protect the role of chief fire officer.

The effect of fire and rescue authorities on the work of chief fire officers is something we will consider further in our next round of inspections, including whether it should form part of a thematic review into the sector's leadership.

Chief fire officers should have operational independence to run their services effectively and efficiently to meet the priorities and commitments in their integrated risk management plans.

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Operational response is strong, but many services need to improve their protection work

The sector's strength lies in its response

The response of services when called is certainly one of their greatest strengths. We have seen highly trained, well-equipped, generally well-led firefighters respond to a range of incidents.

But what constitutes a job well done? There has been little evaluation of whether an incident was resolved effectively and efficiently, with learning disseminated across the sector. FRSs need a better understanding of what constitutes an effective and efficient response.

In our second cycle of inspections, we will further consider the level of fire engine availability in services. We were surprised that, in some services, the number of engines available at any given time was lower than the number the service said it needed to meet its foreseeable risk and protect the public. Some services are regularly having to relocate engines to fill gaps where other engines are unavailable. These services are carrying too much risk in this area, which is unacceptable for the public.

Services are not doing enough to ensure compliance with fire safety regulations

FRSs provide education and support to businesses and, if necessary, use enforcement powers to make premises compliant with fire safety legislation. However, how services discharge this duty has commonly fallen below the standard we had expected.

This has been due to a few factors.

Primarily, while services have maintained the levels of operational staff available to respond to incidents, protection teams have been reduced.

The response of services when called is certainly one of their greatest strengths.

STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
PART 1: OVERVIEW

We have seen considerable variation between services as to what constitutes high-risk premises and how frequently such premises should be inspected.

Every service should have a risk-based inspection programme. But some are failing to meet their own set targets with the resources they have allocated.

We have also seen considerable variation between services as to what constitutes high-risk premises and how frequently such premises should be inspected. Services have their own locally derived definition of a high-risk premises. Whereas one service might inspect each high-risk premises annually, another may not for up to five years. This stark variation could have adverse implications for public safety.

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Following Dame Judith Hackitt's review of building regulations and fire safety, there is also an opportunity for services to have a greater role in the building control process. When consulted, most services respond promptly, but some don't. For many, responding to the consultation is the end of the process. Services should have a role later in the process to make sure the building complies with fire safety regulations. I recognise that this may require additional resources. It is something for Government to consider.

The degree of variation between services is undesirable

Over the past 15 years, the direction from central government to the fire sector has been towards localism.

Earlier this year, we recommended greater consistency in four aspects of the service to the public. This was to address the significant variation across services which, in my opinion, is undesirable in some respects. While services consider a number of factors when determining their response standards, we have been surprised how much difference there is between comparable services.

I am not advocating a return to national response standards. Services do need to be sensitive and responsive to local risk, which will necessitate some degree of variation. But there are areas where national consistency is sensible and efficient, such as professional standards, training, how services identify and determine risk, and identifying and measuring emergency response standards.

There is limited capacity nationally to support and promote sector-wide change. There is no equivalent to the centrally funded College of Policing. The NFCC is a small but growing organisation, but it mostly relies on staff volunteering to lead projects on top of their day jobs. The recently created Fire Standards Board has the same problem.

Earlier this year, we recommended greater consistency in four aspects of the service to the public.

STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
PART 1: OVERVIEW

Almost every service we inspected that employs on-call firefighters faces problems.

Services are under no legal duty to comply with standards produced by the Fire Standards Board. While the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England requires services to do so, this requirement is less than an obligation to comply. Also, some services are still some way from implementing National Operational Guidance. This guidance is intended to standardise how services respond to operational incidents, which is vital when it comes to cross-border working and responding to major incidents with others. Services should intensify their efforts to implement these national arrangements. Otherwise, Parliament should make them do it.

The future of the on-call model needs attention

The on-call model needs attention to make it work now and in the future.

In most services, on-call firefighters are essential to make sure the service has enough firefighters to crew engines to meet its foreseeable risk. Only three services – all in metropolitan areas – don't have stations crewed by on-call firefighters.

I admire the commitment of these firefighters, whose dedication to their local communities is commendable. I also appreciate the need for them. They provide cover in areas and at stations where demand is generally too low to sustain a full-time crew. But almost every service we inspected that employs on-call firefighters faces problems.

Most have a shortage of crews available at their on-call stations. This low availability – mainly during office hours – makes it a risk for most services to include on-call crewed engines as part of their minimum crewing arrangements.

The on-call model depends on having enough appropriately trained firefighters within a few minutes of the fire station when the call comes in. There needs to be a continued, concerted effort from services and Government to attract enough firefighters to crew engines when they are needed. This includes providing greater flexibility in working arrangements and considering other incentives, such as financial.

Making sure these firefighters also have the right training is another challenge for services. Services usually only run one paid drill night a week at which – unless called to respond to an emergency – on-call firefighters receive training. While we recognise the difficulties involved, services need to find more innovative ways to develop and maintain the skills of these firefighters. The public need to know that, regardless of whether a wholetime or on-call crew responds to an incident, the response will be of the same standard.

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The sector would benefit from a code of ethics.

Staff need to be treated better

There is a toxic culture in too many services

I have already spoken at length about the need to resolve the pay award and clarify the role of a firefighter. The ongoing threat of industrial action doesn't help anyone, least of all the public.

Of our three inspection pillars (effectiveness, efficiency and people), I have been surprised at how low some of our people grades have been. The fire sector refers to itself as humanitarian, yet firefighters in some services don't treat their colleagues with enough humanity.

We have come across some outstanding examples of culture in some services. The best cultures are inclusive and diverse, with committed staff working to common goals.

But the culture in some services is toxic. We have come across cases of active bullying and harassment. Disturbingly, some people we spoke to seemed to find the poor treatment of staff by other colleagues amusing. We have received allegations of unlawful discrimination and we know that diversity among firefighters is woeful. Some services don't have a defined set of values that people are expected to follow, and that people can use to challenge unacceptable behaviour.

In the staff survey we conducted, 24 percent[11] reported feeling bullied or harassed at work in the past 12 months. The level of perceived bullying or harassment varied between services. In one service, as many as 46 percent of respondents reported feeling bullied or harassed at work in the past 12 months. The sector should do more to understand the reasons for this.

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The sector would benefit from a code of ethics. That way, everyone will know how they should be treated and how they should treat others, and staff at all levels will be empowered to challenge any behaviour contrary to the code.

The response of services to the recently implemented NFCC's people strategy should start to address the people problems we came across.

STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
PART 1: OVERVIEW

In some services, watches have created their own subcultures, which are contrary to service values.

Better performance and talent management is needed

All effective organisations need robust performance and talent management processes. Too many services are poor at this, with low completion rates for performance appraisals. The perception from staff across several services is that these appraisals are only relevant to those seeking promotion. This shouldn't be the case. Many on-call firefighters were simply included as part of a group appraisal, so they weren't given individual feedback on their performance, or on how they could improve and develop.

Likewise, we found a lack of talent management processes almost universally across services. In too many cases, possible future leaders are not being identified or developed.

As in any sector, there continues to be a considerable churn of leaders. For various reasons, chief fire officers are usually replaced by their deputies. The deputy may well be the best person for the job, but services may be missing an opportunity to bring in different talent – either from a different service or new sector – to challenge established ways of thinking. All too often we have found senior management teams being an echo chamber for people who sound and think the same.

The NFCC and others should rapidly put in place mechanisms to better manage, support and develop staff.

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Some watches develop their own culture, sometimes to the detriment of the service

I am concerned about the effect of watches on a service's culture.

I recognise that watches are a traditional element of the fire service. I also know they have benefits, forging a close group of people who look after one another, recognising each other's strengths and weaknesses to provide the best response.

However, in some services, watches have created their own subcultures, which are contrary to service values and have proved impenetrable for new staff. In others, where teams have worked together for many years, working practices haven't modernised. The sector should carefully consider the future of watches and the advantages of alternative working arrangements.

More needs to be done to attract, recruit and, most importantly, retain women and BAME people into the sector.

Diversity must be addressed

The lack of diversity across the sector is striking.

As at 31 March 2019, out of a workforce of just under 44,200 employees, 16.7 percent are female and 5.0 percent are from a black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) background. Of those who are firefighters, 6.4 percent are female and 4.3 percent from a BAME background. Indeed, there are fewer firefighters from a BAME background now than there were in 2011.

More needs to be done to attract, recruit and, most importantly, retain women and BAME people into the sector. To provide the best possible response to the public, services need to be able to choose from the widest talent pool possible. That pool is currently restricted, with many people feeling excluded.

While some services are now making efforts to widen their appeal, this is having limited tangible effect and more needs to be done. It is true that the percentage of female firefighters is increasing. But, until 2018/19, this was largely because more men were retiring, rather than because more women were being appointed.

Any barriers preventing women and BAME people from seeking a career in the fire service must be tackled for the sector to be a truly inclusive employer. The sector should make sure its recruitment processes are appropriate, reasonable and not a potential barrier to greater diversity.

This includes revisiting fitness tests. Firefighting is physically demanding, and so high levels of fitness are needed for some roles. Services need to make sure their fitness tests reflect the actual demands those responding to emergencies will face.

More and more wellbeing provision is being made available

Services are rapidly expanding the range of wellbeing support available to their staff, in particular for mental health problems. The psychological effects of major incidents such as the Grenfell Tower fire on firefighters and control staff cannot and should not be underestimated.

The range of support now in place is commendable and services should be congratulated for this. It includes support to help staff return to the workplace after an injury or severely traumatic event, and helping prevent injuries or ill health.

© Nottinghamshire FRS

Services are rapidly expanding the range of wellbeing support available to their staff, in particular for mental health problems.

Some services are financially strapped; others are inefficient

It is commonly held that the sector is short of money. This is not the case everywhere. But services such as Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Northumberland are operating in a very tight financial environment. This is having a detrimental effect on the services they provide to their communities.

That being said, the Government should review the financial model against which services operate, not least because it has created a degree of financial disparity between services and is based on an outdated system. Fire funding is complex. Fire and rescue authorities receive funding from three sources: central government, locally retained business rates and council tax. The proportion received from each source differs between services and some are more reliant on one source than others.

© South Yorkshire FR

Services are also working to little medium-term financial certainty, with their financial settlements only set for the coming year. While they can make prudent assumptions as to what funding they may receive, this lack of certainty doesn't help longer-term planning.

But most services aren't struggling financially. Financial reserves held by the 28 (out of 45) combined fire and rescue authorities increased by 80 percent to £545.1m between 31 March 2011 and 31 March 2018.

Services need to do more to make sure their workforces are productive. For example, the 2:2:4[12] shift system is not always the most effective and efficient.

Overall, services have reduced their workforces by 21 percent between 2011 and 2019. The number of incidents attended has also fallen over this period, but services need to maintain enough firefighters to make sure they can respond to incidents when they occur. However, further efficiencies can be made across services: some waste money. Certainly, more innovation is needed, not least to overcome the prevalence of inefficient paper-based systems.

Many services are active partners in collaborations with other emergency services, and this is to their credit. However, some collaborations don't go far enough. There are opportunities to do more, not least in seeking greater economies of scale and engaging in joint procurement. Services also need to evaluate their collaborations better, especially to consider whether they were money well spent and whether they achieved their anticipated benefits.

Services need to do more to make sure their workforces are productive.

STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
PART 1: OVERVIEW

We have seen some innovative examples of how services are using virtual reality to train staff, as well as educate the public on the dangers of fire and other risks.

The sector is missing opportunities to use data and technology effectively

Understanding risk is fundamental to how FRSs operate. This includes understanding when and where demand may be at the highest to make sure enough resources are available, as well as identifying vulnerable members of the community at whom to target fire safety work.

How services use data varies hugely, with no overall national strategy to bring consistency and promote innovation. Work is now under way by the NFCC to enhance how the sector uses data: its collection, use and expansion have the potential to improve the ways services work. I look forward to seeing how this develops.

That said, we have seen some innovative examples of how services are using virtual reality to train staff, as well as educate the public on the dangers of fire and other risks, including reckless driving.

Some of this work has been developed with local universities.

Significant savings could be achieved through combining services

As I said earlier, the number of services has changed considerably over the years. We currently have 45 in England (44 once Hampshire and Isle of Wight combine in 2021).

Services have been making worthwhile savings. There has been some innovation to achieve efficiencies. But, in my view, one of the most significant opportunities for future savings may be an overall reduction in the number of separate services: 45 is probably too many. For example, I question why one police force can cover the Thames Valley area but needs three separate fire services: three chiefs, three headquarters, three sets of support infrastructure and so on (albeit one single control room).

Recommendations

Setting expectations to create modern fire and rescue services fit for the future

1. By June 2020, the Home Office, in consultation with the fire and rescue sector, should review and with precision determine the roles of: (a) fire and rescue services; and (b) those who work in them.

As with any public service, the fire and rescue sector needs to evolve to reflect changes to how people live and work, as well as capitalise on the opportunities provided by ever-improving technology.

© Suffolk FRS

Changing demand has since seen services provide different things to their communities, and no two services are now alike.

The role of fire and rescue services was last defined in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. Changing demand has since seen services provide different things to their communities, and no two services are now alike. Mostly, this broader work meets local priorities in IRMPs. However, in some services, the functions their firefighters routinely perform are in our view outside the service's principal role. This includes some commercial activity. In some cases, this is diverting resources away from where they should be focused.

There has been much discussion about the proper roles of FRSs and those who work in them. The Home Office needs to determine – in consultation with the fire sector – whether the functions specified in the 2004 Act are still current. If not, it should set out clearly its expectations of FRSs and what the responsibilities of a firefighter now encompass. This needs to resolve the controversy over the firefighter's role.

Potential reform of employment arrangements

2. By June 2020, the Home Office, the Local Government Association, the National Fire Chiefs Council and trade unions should consider whether the current pay negotiation machinery requires fundamental reform. If so, this should include the need for an independent pay review body and the future of the 'grey book'.

The employment arrangements of the fire sector are longstanding and, in our view, too often hindering services from modernising to best meet the needs of the public.

It is for the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services (the NJC) to determine firefighter pay. This is a national body covering the United Kingdom.

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In England, discussions between the sector, local government and, more recently, central government over pay – including about the role of a firefighter – have been going on for several years. Despite pressure for reform of the NJC, nothing has materialised. An independent pay review body may have brought a swifter conclusion than current arrangements. The Home Office, the Local Government Association, the NFCC and trade unions should consider whether these arrangements are effective.

The NJC oversees conditions of service for firefighters (included in what is known as the 'grey book'). Despite calls for reform, this book hasn't been reviewed for years. While it provides standard terms and conditions for firefighters, it has also established a rigid, national set of arrangements. Some services have been able to put arrangements in place to meet local circumstances; others haven't and consider the 'grey book' a barrier. It should be reviewed to consider whether it is still fit for purpose and if it establishes, maintains or intensifies intended or unintended barriers.

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Operational independence for chief fire officers

3. By September 2020, the Home Office should consider the case for legislating to give chief fire officers operational independence. In the meantime, it should issue clear guidance, possibly through an amendment to the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, on the demarcation between those responsible for governance and operational decision making by the chief fire officer.

Chief fire officers are employees of their fire and rescue authorities. While fire and rescue authorities come in different shapes and sizes, they are political entities charged with overseeing their fire and rescue services.

Unlike chief constables, who have operational independence, chief fire officers do not. This has led to tension between some chief fire officers and their authorities, when authorities have prevented them from making decisions to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their services.

Chief fire officers are best placed to determine the operational workings of their services. They should be given substantially greater freedom to run their services as they see fit so that they are able to meet the priorities in their IRMPs.

Fire and rescue authorities have an important role in setting priorities, and holding chief fire officers to account to make sure services work effectively and efficiently, appropriately meeting the priorities set. But this should not extend to giving operational direction.

A code of ethics for fire and rescue services

4. By December 2020, the National Fire Chiefs Council, with the Local Government Association, should produce a code of ethics for fire and rescue services. The code should be adopted by every service in England and considered as part of each employee's progression and annual performance appraisal.

While some services have a positive culture, with staff working to accepted behaviours, the culture in others is poor. This needs to be urgently addressed. Most – but not all – services have an established set of values, although it varies how embedded they are.

In our view, FRSs would benefit from a national code of ethics which specifies and establishes the exemplary standards of behaviour for all staff. This code should be at the heart of everything services do and make it clear to staff what behaviour is acceptable in their everyday work. This will allow poor behaviour to be challenged regardless of people's positions and roles. It will also give new recruits clear expectations of, and confidence in, what behaviour is acceptable.

To make sure they become part of everyday working life, services should include these values as part of staff performance appraisals and consider them if people seek promotion.

In our view, FRSs would benefit from a national code of ethics which specifies and establishes the exemplary standards of behaviour for all staff.

STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
PART 1: OVERVIEW

For these reforms to materialise, leaders need to make bold, long-term decisions.

Looking ahead

We will shortly embark on our next cycle of inspections. We will inspect every service again on the same questions to build a comprehensive set of benchmarks.

This will be supported by new arrangements to monitor what progress services are making against the recommendations we have made. During this cycle, we may also choose to carry out a thematic inspection on an issue or issues of cross-sector relevance and importance.

We will also devise and consult on a methodology to inspect fire and rescue authorities, if we have concerns that the governance may be negatively affecting the effectiveness and efficiency of a service.

Conclusion

I have set out in this assessment my view on the state of fire and rescue in England. I have identified many areas of strength and good practice, of which the sector should be proud. But I have also identified several areas where profound reform is needed and made several recommendations. For these reforms to materialise, leaders in central government, local government, fire and rescue authorities of all shapes and sizes, trade unions and the operational leads of fire services need to make bold, long-term decisions.

To bring about change in fire and rescue is complex. It is essentially an arm of local government. National government oversees it, but fire and rescue authorities are the employers and responsible for the terms and conditions of fire staff. It is, in the first instance, for national government to set its expectations of the sector, including being more specific about what it wants the fire and rescue service to do. But it is then for local government to work with fire and rescue services to bring about change. If this doesn't materialise, it is for national government to mandate reform.

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Without reform, the sector will continue to be beset by barriers that prevent progress, perpetuating outdated ways of working and ineffective and inefficient practices. Ultimately, it is the service to the public that suffers.

But there are opportunities to be seized. English FRSs are seen around the world as being some of the best. If the reforms I have suggested in my assessment are carried out fully, they will secure major improvements for the sector and cement it as world-leading in the years to come.

STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
PART 1: OVERVIEW

Part 2: Our inspections

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Our inspections

This report covers our first full cycle of 45 fire and rescue service (FRS) inspections in England. As part of our inspection programme, we assess and make graded judgments on the effectiveness and efficiency of each FRS, and on how well it looks after its people.

Our assessments are designed to enable the public to see each FRS's performance, as well as how this compares with the performance of other services. In future, the public will also be able to see changes over time.

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Effectiveness

We assess how effectively each FRS operates. This includes how well the service understands its current and future risks, works to prevent fires and other risks, protects the public through the regulation of fire safety, responds to fires and other emergencies, and responds to national risks. We also consider how well the service works with others: both other FRSs and other emergency responders.

Efficiency

We assess whether the FRS is affordable and providing value for money. This includes how well the service understands and matches its resources to the risks and demands it faces, the extent to which it collaborates with others, and the sustainability of its financial plans.

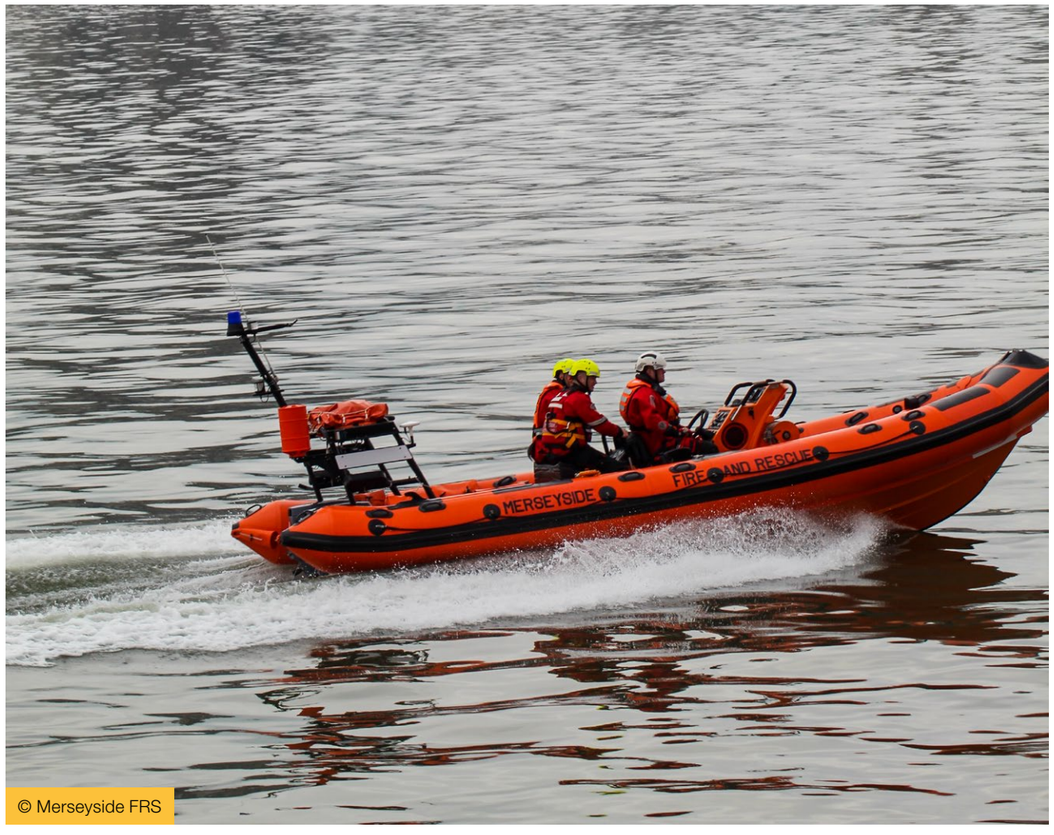
People

We assess how well the FRS looks after its people. This includes the values and culture of the service, how it trains its staff and ensures that they have the necessary skills, how it promotes fairness and diversity for its workforce, and what it is doing to develop leadership.

STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
PART 2: OUR INSPECTIONS

The operating context

The challenges each individual service faces vary considerably across England and can be affected by many things. These include the service's size and financial position, as well as local factors such as geography, road networks, levels of affluence and deprivation, industries and employment patterns, and – most importantly – the people who live, work and spend time there.



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Three services have mostly full-time – known as 'wholetime' – firefighters. These are in metropolitan areas and have stations that are crewed on a continuous basis, allowing them to mobilise a fire engine immediately when a call is received. Most other services use both wholetime and 'on-call' firefighters. On-call firefighters are fully trained, part-time firefighters who may have other jobs but respond to calls when summoned. These firefighters mostly crew stations that have less demand and where having a full-time crew may not represent good value for money.

Each fire and rescue service is required by the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England to produce an integrated risk management plan. This plan should:

- set out the main risks in the service's area;
- show how it will use prevention, protection and response activities to prevent fires and other incidents, and mitigate the effects of risks on its communities; and
- outline how resources will be allocated.

Taken together, these and other factors can be considered the operating context of the service. We take account of this context and recognise that differing operating contexts create different needs for, and demands of, services. We have explained the operating context of each service within its service report.

The challenges each individual service faces vary considerably.

STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
PART 2: OUR INSPECTIONS

We take into account a range of factors when giving a grade.

Understanding our graded judgments

It is important to emphasise that FRSs aren't in competition with each other. Inevitably, some people may want to compare gradings to form a league table. But considering the breadth and complexity of FRS performance, while taking account of each operating context, needs a more sophisticated approach.

Similarly, it is important to read beyond the headlines and consider why some services have been graded higher than others. We take into account a range of factors when giving a grade, and there is no direct link between larger budgets and higher grades. The nuances are in the individual service reports on our website.

In each service report, we have identified 'areas for improvement' and, in some cases, 'causes of concern'. If we consider that an aspect of a service's practice, policy or performance falls short of the expected standard, we will report this as an area for improvement. If we identify a more serious, critical or systemic shortcoming in a service's practice, policy or performance, we will report it as a cause of concern.

A cause of concern will always be accompanied by one or more recommendations. The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England requires the fire and rescue authority receiving a recommendation to prepare, update and regularly publish an action plan detailing how it will take action. If we identify a cause of concern relating to effectiveness, we will always revisit the service after a set period to assess whether the service is taking action to address the risk to public safety.

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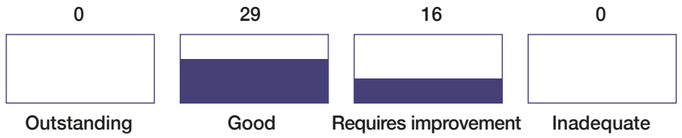
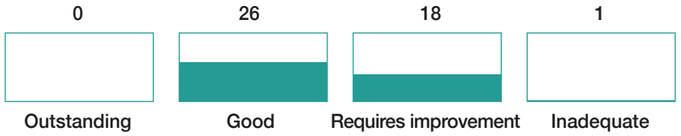
We have outlined the grades of each service against each question in the following pages. This is the first time we have inspected services, so we don't have a benchmark to measure against. When we inspect services a second time, we will be able to consider their progress and whether or not they are improving.

Summary of grades

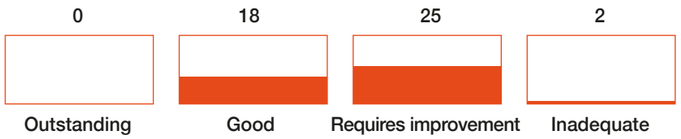
On **effectiveness**, we didn't grade any service as outstanding overall, nor inadequate. We graded 29 as good and 16 as requiring improvement.



On **efficiency**, we graded 26 services as good, 18 as requiring improvement and 1 as inadequate. We didn't grade any as outstanding.



On **people**, we graded 18 services as good, 25 as requiring improvement and 2 as inadequate. We didn't grade any as outstanding.



Our findings

Overall, we found that most services we inspected are keeping people safe and secure from fires and other emergencies, and are using their resources efficiently.

But some services need to improve how well they look after their people. We found pockets of outstanding practice in some services and areas where improvement is urgently needed in others. Services haven't been independently inspected for over a decade, so it is perhaps not surprising that some areas need improving.

We have summarised our findings from every inspection over the next few pages, divided into our three inspection pillars of effectiveness, efficiency and people.

We found that most services we inspected are keeping people safe and secure from fires and other emergencies.

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Our judgments

Service	Effectiveness Judgment	How well does the FRS understand the risk of fire and other emergencies? Judgment	How effective is the FRS at preventing fires and other risks? Judgment	How effective is the FRS at protecting the public through the regulation of fire safety? Judgment	How effective is the FRS at responding to fires and other emergencies? Judgment	How effective is the FRS at responding to national risks? Judgment
Avon	**Requires improvement**	Good	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Requires improvement	Good
Bedfordshire	**Good**	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Good
Buckinghamshire	**Requires improvement**	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good
Cambridgeshire	**Good**	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Cheshire	**Good**	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Cleveland	**Good**	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Cornwall	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Good
Cumbria	**Good**	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Derbyshire	**Good**	Requires improvement	Good	Good	Good	Good
Devon & Somerset	**Good**	Good	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Good
Dorset & Wiltshire	**Good**	Requires improvement	Good	Good	Good	Good
Durham & Darlington	**Good**	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Good
East Sussex	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Good
Essex	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Good
Gloucestershire	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Greater Manchester	**Requires improvement**	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement
Hampshire	**Good**	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Good
Hereford & Worcester	**Good**	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Good	Good
Hertfordshire	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Good	Good
Humberside	**Good**	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Good
Isle of Wight	**Good**	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Good
Isles of Scilly	**Good**	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Not inspected
Kent	**Good**	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Good
Lancashire	**Good**	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Leicestershire	**Requires improvement**	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good
Lincolnshire	**Good**	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Good

Our judgments continued

Service	Effectiveness Judgment	How well does the FRS understand the risk of fire and other emergencies? Judgment	How effective is the FRS at preventing fires and other risks? Judgment	How effective is the FRS at protecting the public through the regulation of fire safety? Judgment	How effective is the FRS at responding to fires and other emergencies? Judgment	How effective is the FRS at responding to national risks? Judgment
London	**Requires improvement**	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good
Merseyside	**Good**	Good	Outstanding	Good	Good	Outstanding
Norfolk	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Good
North Yorkshire	**Good**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Good	Good
Northamptonshire	**Requires improvement**	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Requires improvement
Northumberland	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good
Nottinghamshire	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Good
Oxfordshire	**Good**	Requires improvement	Good	Good	Good	Good
Royal Berkshire	**Good**	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Shropshire	**Good**	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Good
South Yorkshire	**Good**	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Staffordshire	**Good**	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Suffolk	**Good**	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Good
Surrey	**Requires improvement**	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good
Tyne and Wear	**Good**	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Good	Good
Warwickshire	**Good**	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Good
West Midlands	**Good**	Good	Good	Good	Outstanding	Good
West Sussex	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
West Yorkshire	**Good**	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good

Totals

Outstanding	0	0	1	0	1	1
Good	29	31	26	20	32	39
Requires improvement	16	14	18	22	10	4
Inadequate	0	0	0	3	2	0

Our judgments

Service	Efficiency Judgment	How well does the FRS use resources to manage risk? Judgment	How well is the FRS securing an affordable way of managing the risk of fire and other risks now and in the future? Judgment
Avon	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Good
Bedfordshire	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Buckinghamshire	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Cambridgeshire	**Good**	Good	Good
Cheshire	**Good**	Good	Good
Cleveland	**Good**	Good	Good
Cornwall	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Good
Cumbria	**Good**	Good	Good
Derbyshire	**Good**	Good	Good
Devon & Somerset	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Good
Dorset & Wiltshire	**Good**	Good	Good
Durham & Darlington	**Good**	Good	Good
East Sussex	**Good**	Good	Good
Essex	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Good
Gloucestershire	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Greater Manchester	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Good
Hampshire	**Good**	Good	Good
Hereford & Worcester	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Good
Hertfordshire	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Humberside	**Good**	Good	Good
Isle of Wight	**Good**	Good	Good
Isles of Scilly	**Good**	Good	Requires improvement
Kent	**Good**	Good	Good
Lancashire	**Good**	Good	Good
Leicestershire	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Good
Lincolnshire	**Good**	Good	Good

Our judgments continued

Service	Efficiency Judgment	How well does the FRS use resources to manage risk? Judgment	How well is the FRS securing an affordable way of managing the risk of fire and other risks now and in the future? Judgment
London	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Merseyside	**Good**	Good	Good
Norfolk	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Good
North Yorkshire	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Northamptonshire	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Northumberland	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Nottinghamshire	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Oxfordshire	**Good**	Good	Good
Royal Berkshire	**Good**	Good	Good
Shropshire	**Good**	Good	Good
South Yorkshire	**Good**	Good	Requires improvement
Staffordshire	**Good**	Good	Good
Suffolk	**Good**	Good	Good
Surrey	**Inadequate**	Inadequate	Requires improvement
Tyne and Wear	**Good**	Good	Requires improvement
Warwickshire	**Good**	Good	Good
West Midlands	**Good**	Good	Good
West Sussex	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
West Yorkshire	**Good**	Good	Good

Totals

Outstanding	0	0	0
Good	26	26	31
Requires improvement	18	18	14
Inadequate	1	1	0

STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
PART 2: OUR INSPECTIONS

Our judgments

Service	People	How well does the FRS promote its values and culture?	How well trained and skilled are FRS staff?	How well does the FRS ensure fairness and diversity?	How well does the FRS develop leadership and capability?
	Judgment	Judgment	Judgment	Judgment	Judgment
Avon	**Inadequate**	Inadequate	Good	Inadequate	Requires improvement
Bedfordshire	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Buckinghamshire	**Good**	Good	Good	Good	Requires improvement
Cambridgeshire	**Good**	Good	Good	Good	Good
Cheshire	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Good
Cleveland	**Good**	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Good
Cornwall	**Good**	Good	Good	Good	Requires improvement
Cumbria	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Derbyshire	**Good**	Outstanding	Good	Good	Requires improvement
Devon & Somerset	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Dorset & Wiltshire	**Good**	Good	Good	Good	Good
Durham & Darlington	**Requires improvement**	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
East Sussex	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Essex	**Requires improvement**	Inadequate	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good
Gloucestershire	**Requires improvement**	Inadequate	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Greater Manchester	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Requires improvement
Hampshire	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Hereford & Worcester	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Hertfordshire	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Humberside	**Requires improvement**	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Isle of Wight	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Isles of Scilly	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Kent	**Good**	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Good
Lancashire	**Good**	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good
Leicestershire	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Lincolnshire	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement

Our judgments continued

Service	People	How well does the FRS promote its values and culture?	How well trained and skilled are FRS staff?	How well does the FRS ensure fairness and diversity?	How well does the FRS develop leadership and capability?
	Judgment	Judgment	Judgment	Judgment	Judgment
London	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Merseyside	**Good**	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Good
Norfolk	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
North Yorkshire	**Requires improvement**	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Northamptonshire	**Requires improvement**	Good	Inadequate	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Northumberland	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Nottinghamshire	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Oxfordshire	**Good**	Outstanding	Good	Good	Requires improvement
Royal Berkshire	**Good**	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Good
Shropshire	**Good**	Good	Good	Good	Requires improvement
South Yorkshire	**Good**	Good	Good	Good	Good
Staffordshire	**Good**	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good
Suffolk	**Good**	Good	Good	Good	Requires improvement
Surrey	**Requires improvement**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Tyne and Wear	**Good**	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement
Warwickshire	**Requires improvement**	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
West Midlands	**Good**	Requires improvement	Good	Good	Requires improvement
West Sussex	**Inadequate**	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Requires improvement
West Yorkshire	**Good**	Good	Good	Good	Good

Totals

Outstanding	0	4	0	0	0
Good	18	18	28	16	12
Requires improvement	25	20	15	26	33
Inadequate	2	3	2	3	0

Effectiveness

In this pillar, we ask five questions:

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

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Our findings

How services respond to fires and emergencies is one of their principal strengths, but there is too much variation in response

Responding to fires and other emergencies is one of the sector's principal strengths. Most FRSs have effective arrangements in place to respond to emergency incidents such as fires and road traffic incidents within their areas. They have highly skilled teams that are well equipped and able to tackle a wide range of incidents.

There are noticeable differences in how effectively services respond to incidents. The Home Office collects and publishes data on response times by measuring the time between the call being made and the first fire engine arriving at the scene. This provides consistent data across all 45 services. However, services measure their own response times in various ways.

There are also differences in the commitment each service makes to its community. This includes how quickly the service aims to respond to a call and how many fire engines and firefighters will attend. Services are most commonly responding with either four or five firefighters on a standard fire engine. But we also saw examples of smaller fire engines responding with two or three firefighters, which can be appropriate for smaller incidents.

There are noticeable differences in how services respond to incidents.

STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
PART 2: OUR INSPECTIONS

Some services don't have a good enough understanding of the logic behind their response standards.

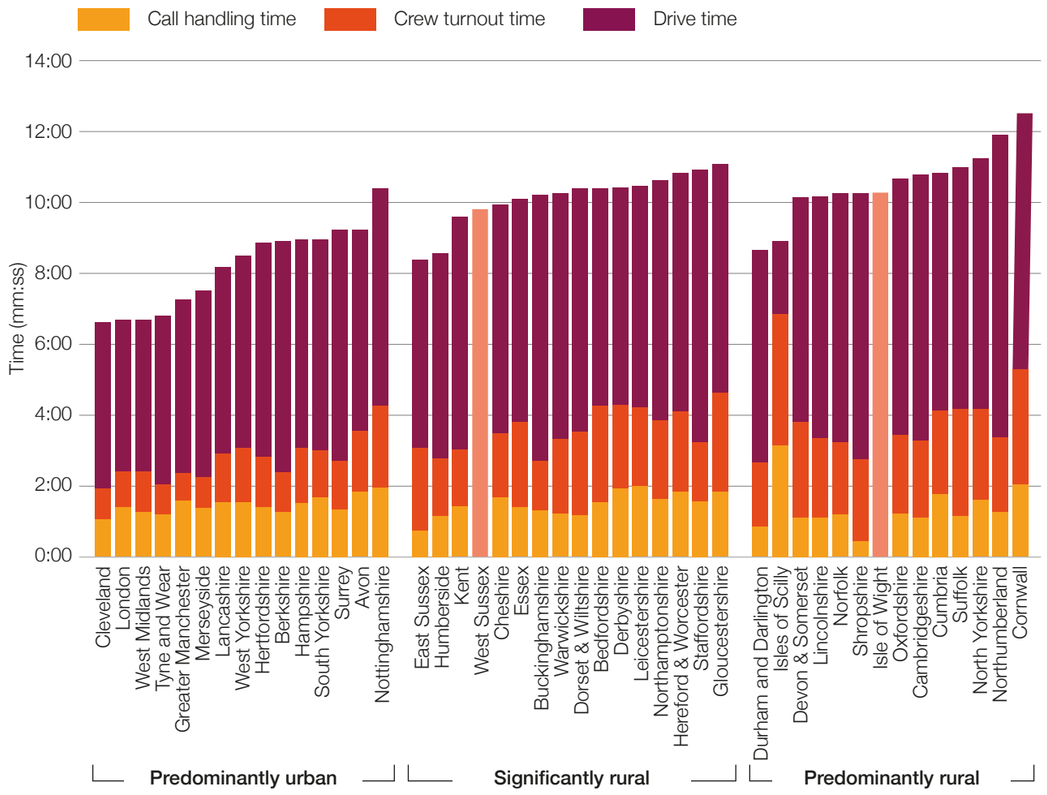
There are no nationally established response standards based on the risk of an incident or the likelihood of surviving it. This is even the case for the most common incident types such as a two-vehicle road traffic collision or a house fire. Most services have given public commitments to a response standard, namely that the first engine will get to the scene in so many minutes. But some services don't even do this and give no time commitment.

All FRSs must produce an integrated risk management plan (IRMP). This plan is the foundation for how each service works. It should explain to the public how its prevention, protection and response activity will reduce the risk from fire and other emergencies.

Some services haven't used their IRMP process to explain well enough to the public the risk assessments that should underpin these different response standards. This means it is unclear to the public what emergency response they can expect to receive from their fire service when they dial 999. Some services also don't have a good enough understanding of the logic behind their response standards.

Figure 2 illustrates the differences across services in their average response times to primary fires. It shows that, when comparing similar services' attendance times to primary fires, they can vary by up to 3 minutes and 52 seconds (the difference between the fastest and slowest times for services within predominately rural areas).

Figure 2:
Average response times (minutes and seconds) to primary fires by fire and rescue service and type of area, 2017/2018



Source:
Average response time to primary fires: Home Office FIRE1001: 2017/2018
Note: Isle of Wight and West Sussex FRSs didn't provide a breakdown of average response times, so the graph shows total average response time to primary fires.
Full information about how call time, crew turnout time and drive time are calculated available at:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/771245/response-times-fires-england-1718-hosb0119.pdf
Full information about the DEFRA categories available at:
www.gov.uk/government/statistics/2011-rural-urban-classification-of-local-authority-and-other-higher-level-geographies-for-statistical-purposes

The number of fire engines available differs hugely across services

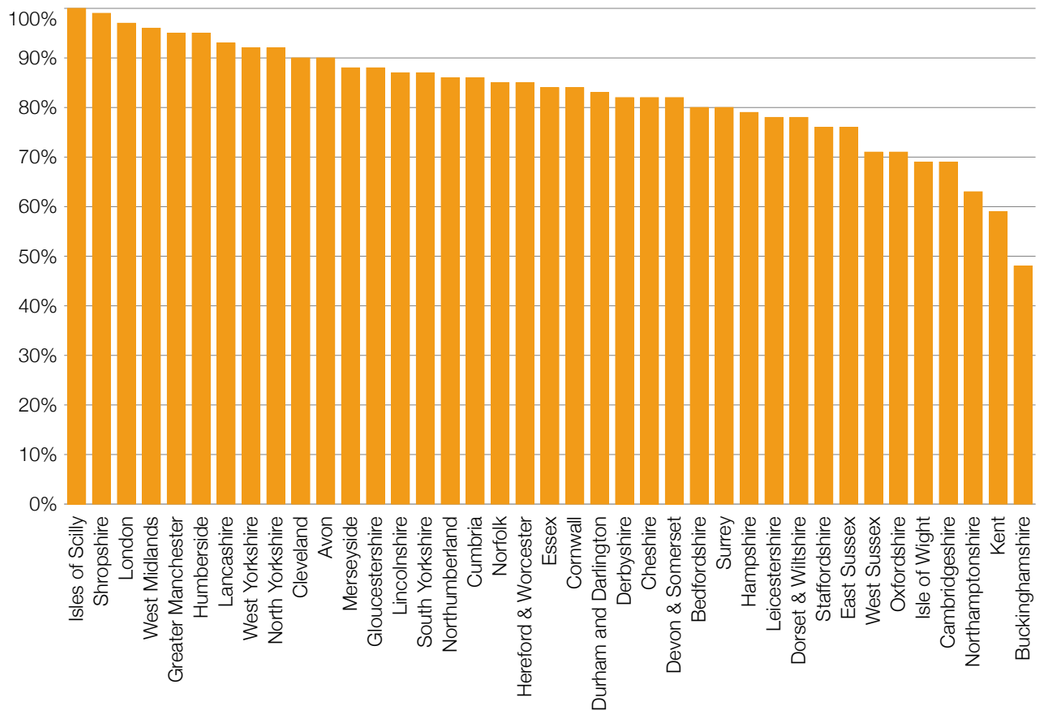
Services should know how many fire engines they need to have available at any one time to meet the risks they believe they face.

There is a considerable challenge in making sure that engines crewed by on-call firefighters are available. As shown by figure 3, the level of availability across services varies hugely.

There are several reasons for this. Engines may be unavailable because of staffing shortages, crews being on training courses or exercises, or engines needing repair. It is clear that there are significant operational differences across services in how ready they are to respond to incidents.

Services that have a lot of wholetime firefighters (for example, services in metropolitan areas) should have high availability because crews are based on stations ready to respond. Services that have many stations that depend on on-call staff often have lower availability. Buckinghamshire FRS's low availability is because it often uses on-call staff to fill gaps on wholetime engines. As a result, a high percentage of on-call crewed engines are unavailable.

Figure 3:
Overall fire engine availability percentage by fire and rescue service, 2018/19



Source:
Overall fire engine availability percentage for the year ending 31 March 2019: HMICFRS data collection
Royal Berkshire, Hertfordshire, Nottinghamshire, Suffolk and Warwickshire FRSs did not provide data.
Tyne and Wear FRS did not provide data in the correct format.

The viability of the on-call crewing model is of concern

On-call firefighters are part-time firefighters whose primary employment normally isn't with the service. All but three services – Greater Manchester, London Fire Brigade and West Midlands – have stations that are crewed by on-call firefighters to provide fire cover. We recognise the valuable contribution on-call firefighters make. Without them, the public may face longer response times from wholetime crews based further away.

However, there are not enough on-call firefighters in most services. While recruitment is continuous (and the recent joint Home Office/sector campaign aims to attract more), there are still gaps. A requirement to be so many minutes (usually five) away from a fire station to respond promptly makes attracting and retaining these staff ever more difficult. In 2019, only 30 percent (9,563) of full-time equivalent firefighters were on-call.

With a few exceptions, services are finding it difficult to recruit and retain on-call firefighters. This is particularly difficult in remote rural locations. In many cases, on-call engines are unavailable to respond to emergency calls for long periods of the day because they don't have enough trained staff. In the year to 31 March 2019, the overall fire engine availability at on-call stations in one service was as low as 13.6 percent.[1]

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While some services have started making these posts more flexible and therefore more attractive, most continue to recruit on-call staff to rigid working requirements. Services need to be innovative at reaching out to the widest possible pool, to make sure they have enough staff to keep this model viable.

On-call firefighters usually attend one drill night per week, at which they receive training and other information. To become a fully competent firefighter is therefore a challenge in such limited time. They often have to commit other time to complete further training.

Services need to be creative and supportive in how they train these firefighters. This will help them be sure that, when a fire engine arrives at an incident, there is no difference between the skills and abilities of the firefighters on that engine. We have seen some examples of services trying something different, including more tailored communications to on-call staff, flexible ways of working, and engagement with local businesses to attract their staff to volunteer.

There are not enough on-call firefighters in most services.

Services have taken steps to achieve greater operational consistency

Most services have adopted, or are adopting, national operational guidance. This guidance helps services use a common approach to commanding incidents, recognising hazards and putting control measures in place. The sector has developed this national guidance based on up-to-date technical expertise. It explains how the sector can work together to deal with incidents. However, the extent to which services have implemented this guidance varies. We believe services need to address this to help them work together better.

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PART 2: OUR INSPECTIONS

Most services are good at responding to help other fire services outside their own fire authority borders.

There are good examples of the use of operational discretion at incidents in most – but not all – services. This covers incidents where firefighters step outside operational procedures to save lives where existing procedures would be a barrier to doing so, or where no appropriate procedures exist. As part of our inspection process, we asked staff in every service to complete a survey. According to the survey, 62 percent of firefighters (crew manager and above) agreed they were confident that, if the incident required it, their service would support them if they used unauthorised tactics, or used tactics in a novel way.[2]

Services can work together to respond to major incidents

To work effectively when responding to major emergencies, fire services must make sure they have arrangements in place to work with others. As well as other fire services, this includes other emergency services and organisations such as utility companies and local authorities. These partnerships exist across the country through arrangements known as local resilience forums.

Almost all local resilience forum partners hold their fire services in high regard. Services are often active members and positively contribute to make sure they are prepared for major emergencies. In some cases, the fire service chairs these local resilience forums.

We found that most services are good at responding to help other fire services outside their own fire authority borders. They do this on a regular basis through mutual aid agreements with neighbouring services, as well as by responding to large-scale emergencies as part of national resilience arrangements. Several fire services have been given equipment – such as high-volume pumps – to provide a specialist response in times of extreme need. They must deploy them anywhere across the UK as needed.

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Some services exchange lessons they have learned from responding to emergencies with other services on a national basis. We saw some informative examples that services have learned from and changed their response arrangements as a result.

But we also found that services aren't doing enough joint exercises with neighbouring services to make sure their equipment and ways of working are aligned. This would help them provide a more effective response when they need to work together. According to our staff survey, only 27 percent of firefighters and specialist staff agreed that they train and exercise regularly with neighbouring services (19 percent didn't know). Only 57 percent agreed that their service is fully interoperable with their neighbouring services (16 percent didn't know).[3]

Many services don't do enough to make sure premises comply with fire safety regulations.

Blue light responders have agreed Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles to make sure they can work seamlessly together when responding to emergencies. We found that, in most services, middle and senior managers are familiar with and confident in applying these principles. But, in too many cases, supervisory managers who command smaller-scale incidents don't understand them so well.

When fire services respond outside their own areas, it is essential that they receive relevant risk information so they know what they are dealing with. This helps make sure their response is as effective as possible. It also means firefighters know the risks they are likely to face, which helps keep them and others safe. In most services, we found cross-border risk information was either missing or not being kept up to date. Services need to address this.

Where services haven't trained their crews to respond to terrorist incidents, we found considerable knowledge gaps. Services need to address these, because firefighters sometimes won't know what they are responding to until they arrive at the scene of the incident.

Central government has funded some services to provide a specialist response to marauding terrorist incidents. Except for one service, we found that these specialist arrangements are in place and staff sufficiently trained. Services also have trained liaison officers who are vetted and equipped to work closely with police and military partners during incidents of this type.

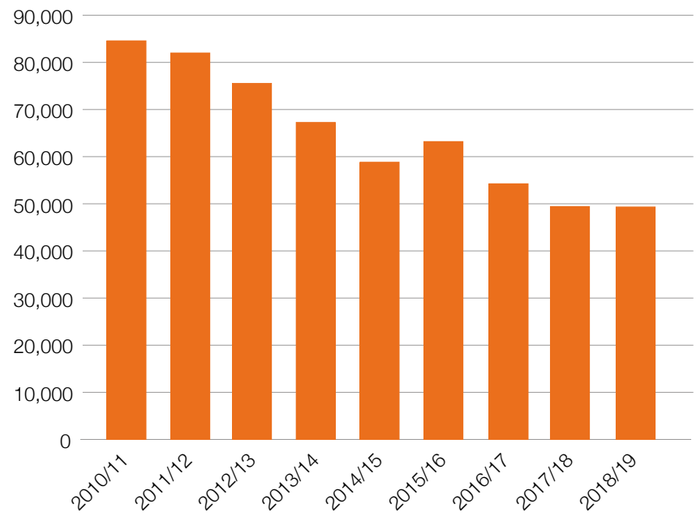
Services aren't doing enough to enforce fire safety

We are concerned that many services don't do enough to make sure premises comply with fire safety regulations. These regulations are designed to protect the public. In some services, they don't consider this a high enough priority in their IRMPs and they allocate their resources elsewhere.

FRSs are responsible for enforcing fire safety legislation in premises where it applies. This covers non-domestic premises, as well as the communal parts of multi-occupant premises such as flats and tower blocks.

As illustrated by figure 4, the total number of fire safety audits completed by FRSs has declined by around 40 percent since 2010/11.

Figure 4:
Total fire safety audits carried out by fire and rescue services in England, 2010/2011 to 2018/2019



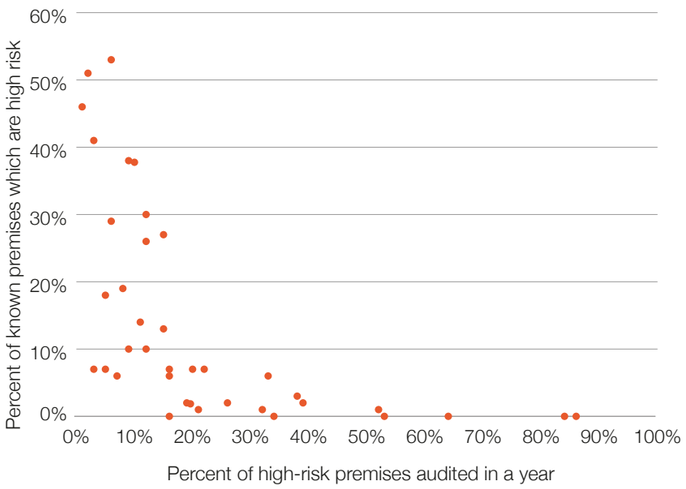
Source:
Total number of fire safety audits carried out by fire and rescue services: Home Office FIRE1202: 2018/2019
Note: 2018/19 refers to the financial year, from 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019. Other years follow the same pattern.

To make sure premises comply with fire safety legislation, services should have a risk-based inspection programme targeted at those premises that present the highest risk. However, there is no national approach as to what constitutes a high-risk premises. As a result, services define this differently. Some do it by using sophisticated risk-assessment tools. Others use historical definitions or simple local trend analysis. We recommended to the sector in June 2019 that it should seek greater consistency in this area.

There is an inconsistent approach to the number of inspections services carry out.

Figure 5 shows the percentage of premises that services consider high risk against how frequently they audit them. It shows the variation in the percentage of premises in each service area that are defined as high risk, ranging from more than 50 percent to less than 1 percent. Often, the services that have a high percentage of high-risk premises audit them less often than those with a lower percentage.

Figure 5:
Percentage of high-risk premises audited in a year against percentage of known premises that are high risk



Sources:
Number of known premises: Home Office FIRE1202: 2018/2019
Number of known high-risk premises: HMICFRS data collection: as at 31 March 2019
Number of high-risk premises audited: HMICFRS data collection: 2018/2019
Notes: Cleveland, East Sussex, Isle of Wight, Isles of Scilly, Hampshire, Nottinghamshire and West Yorkshire FRSs have been excluded for not providing a complete set of data.
Percentages are shown on the graph, but it is important to consider the raw numbers that are behind these percentages.

There is also an inconsistent approach to the number of fire safety audits services carry out. In the year to March 2019, the rate of fire safety audits carried out per 100 known premises covered by the legislation ranged from a low of 0.5 to a high of 12.9. The England rate was 2.6 per 100 known premises.

Alongside this, the number of audits services record as being satisfactory varied widely from 23 percent at the lowest to 96 percent at the highest. The average across all English services was 67 percent.

We are concerned that, taken together, this data indicates that many services' risk-based inspection programmes don't have enough resources. It also suggests that they are targeting the wrong premises, where fire safety measures are already in place and are satisfactory. In some services, the quality assurance process of audits isn't good enough, which may also contribute to this high discrepancy.

When services have needed to reduce budgets over recent years, protection has often been the first cut. As a result, the number of specially trained competent staff dedicated to fire safety has reduced. In the 27 services that provided comparable data, the number of appropriately trained staff who were allocated to protection work had reduced from 655 in 2011 to 450 in 2019. Another problem the sector faces is the number of qualified protection staff who move to more lucrative posts in the private sector. With qualifications taking at least 18 months to complete, services don't have a quick fix to fill staffing shortfalls.

In the short term, one way to overcome these problems is to make protection a cross-service endeavour. Some services have equipped their operational crews to do low-risk protection visits to free their specialist staff to focus on the higher-risk visits. However, this isn't commonplace. Although some services have re-introduced fire safety to the role of their frontline firefighters, most are no longer training or directing firefighters to do even simple fire safety audits. We believe this is a missed opportunity.

Most services are good at responding to requests for building regulation consultations, such as those of local authority building controls for planning applications. In the year to 31 March 2019, most services responded to most building regulation consultations within the required timeframe.

When services have needed to reduce budgets over recent years, protection has often been the first cut.

STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
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The lack of fire safety enforcement is a concern

Over the past few years, government policy is that public services should support businesses to comply with legislation rather than take enforcement action through the courts. The sector has adopted the Regulators' Code, issued by the Better Regulation Delivery Office, with services giving advice to business owners on what steps they need to take to be compliant with fire safety regulation.

But, in trying to be more proportionate and accountable to those businesses they regulate, services aren't always striking the right balance. There are times when compliance work is no longer appropriate – for example, when a business has had numerous opportunities to take the required steps but has failed to act properly. In these circumstances, enforcement and prosecution may be better. Across all services in England, the number of successful prosecutions increased from 64 in 2010/11 to 99 in 2015/16, but it has since declined to 45 in 2018/19. Four services haven't brought a successful prosecution for over eight years. We expected that more enforcement work would be taking place.

False alarms continue to be the biggest demand services face

In 2018/19, across England 40.1 percent (231,067) of all incidents attended by FRSs were fire false alarms. The percentage differs across services. Over the same period, the percentage of all incidents attended that were fire false alarms ranged from 23.7 in Lincolnshire to 50.1 in West Sussex.[4]

There are several reasons for these fire false alarm calls: nearly two-thirds (65 percent, 150,967) were due to apparatus such as a smoke alarm or sprinkler being triggered; just under a third (32 percent, 72,940) were made with good intent, but later discovered to be false alarms; 3 percent (7,160) were malicious reports.

Services should have adopted the NFCC's best practice guidance for dealing with these false alarms. But we found that not all had. In line with this guidance, most services do challenge calls to some degree. This means that control operators try to find out whether there is an actual fire before sending a fire engine. On occasions, a small number of services send a smaller vehicle, often with one or two firefighters, rather than sending a fully equipped fire engine to check whether there is a fire.

We expected that more enforcement work would be taking place.

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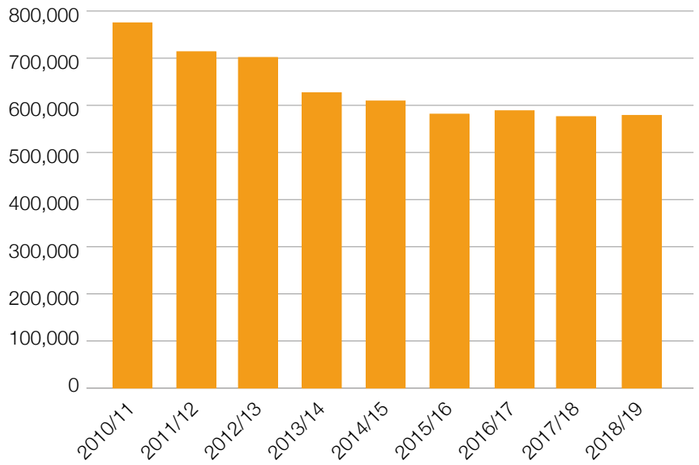
Services are doing less prevention work and don't always target it effectively

Preventing incidents occurring in the first place is the best and most cost-effective outcome for the public. Fire and rescue services have a legal duty under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 to promote fire safety. But there is no set national approach and there is considerable variation across services. The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, which services must have regard to, requires them to target their prevention work at:

- people or households who are at greatest risk from fire in the home;
- people most likely to engage in arson or deliberate fire setting; and
- non-domestic premises where the life safety fire risk is greatest.

Despite this, the number of home fire safety checks (including safe and well visits) carried out by FRSs has reduced by a quarter since 2011. As shown in figure 6, the number of home fire safety checks carried out by FRSs has reduced by 25.3 percent between 2010/11 and 2018/19. More positively, the number of checks carried out on elderly and disabled people has increased. But there is considerable variation between services and some need to target their prevention work better.

Figure 6:
Total number of home fire safety checks carried out by fire and rescue services in England, 2010/11 to 2018/19



Source:
Total number of home fire safety checks carried out by FRSs: Home Office FIRE1201: 2018/2019
Notes: 2018/19 refers to the financial year, from 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019. Other years follow the same pattern.
Home fire safety checks are also known in some services as safe and well checks.

The number of home fire safety checks carried out by fire and rescue services has reduced by a quarter since 2011.

There was variation in the rate of home fire safety checks that services complete from fewer than 2 per 1,000 population to over 40 per 1,000 population in 2018/19. The England rate is 10 per 1,000 population.

Some services' approach to prevention was unclear. We expect a service's IRMP to explain its priorities and the rationale behind them. Too often, this wasn't the case.

© Lincolnshire FR

We saw some outstanding practice during our inspections where people and households are targeted for fire safety advice because of their increased risk from fire. Similarly, we have seen the benefits of services working closely with partners, such as the police, to tackle arson and deliberate fire setting. In some instances, this has led to the successful prosecution of offenders.

There is no set way for services to identify vulnerability and target their prevention visits. Some use a range of health, consumer and historical fire data, and proactively visit targeted households. Others rely almost exclusively on referrals from partners and so only do reactive work. While having strong working links with local partners is positive, this needs to go both ways, which isn't always the case.

The trust that the public have in FRSs allows fire staff to access people's homes. Most services are good at identifying people who may be vulnerable for reasons other than fire, such as exploitation or abuse. They are also good at referring those individuals to appropriate agencies for help and support.

Over the past few years, every service has expanded the range of prevention activities it provides. All services identify and take action to reduce fire risks in the home by making sure properties have working smoke alarms. Some go further and cover things such as health and lifestyle (for example, smoking and drinking). But, in some services, some staff don't feel equipped to discuss the wider spectrum of issues. Services need to make sure their staff are confident and trained to cover prevention topics the service wishes them to.

Most services also do non-statutory prevention work, such as water and road safety education. This is positive and illustrates how services can adapt their focus to respond to local needs. But this work shouldn't be at the expense of carrying out their primary functions.

Greater evaluation of prevention activities is needed

Over the past decade, the type and breadth of prevention work have significantly increased. But not enough evaluation has been done to consider the effect or benefit of this work. As a result, services don't know what works, nor can services learn from what others are doing. This makes it harder for services to make evidence-based decisions on what future work they should do to meet local risk, as well as the volume of that work and who they should target.

Most services are good at identifying people who may be vulnerable for reasons other than fire, such as exploitation or abuse.

STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
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The inconsistent use of IRMPs stops services being as effective and efficient as they could be.

There is an inconsistent approach to identifying risk

With no current national guidance, the content and quality of IRMPs vary. This variation is undesirable in the context of risk that the public faces. In June 2019, we recommended that services should be more consistent in how they identify and determine risk as part of the IRMP process. We are not advocating a return to national standards of fire cover. But having so many ways of assessing risk is, in our view, detrimental.

In some services, the IRMP is integral to how they work, with day-to-day work clearly aligned to their main risks and priorities. But in many services, prevention, protection and response work takes place in isolation, with little rationale for what the service is doing.

Despite risks evolving, most services have based the location of their fire stations on historical data. We recognise that services often don't receive much public and political support when they propose to close fire stations or alter cover levels, but some have. One service recently opened a fire station near a major motorway in response to the growing number of accidents nearby. Another has reviewed all its response vehicles to assess whether they are still needed, increasing or reducing the number and type depending on the nature of risk and the extent of demand each station deals with. Services should make sure their resources are designed to meet their changing local risk, and review this regularly.

The use of risk information needs improvement

Services rely on up-to-date risk information to protect people and property before, during and after fires and other emergencies. While there is no consistent way of doing this, most use a range of data to build their risk profiles. But few have combined the relevant information they hold into one central data system from which they can co-ordinate and prioritise prevention, protection and response activity.

This approach duplicates effort. It increases the likelihood of services not sharing relevant risk information, or it not being available when most needed. Services need to make sure that the risk information they hold on higher-risk people and properties is immediately available, regardless of where it is held within the organisation. At the very least, services should merge their own different databases to provide a single view of risk.

Firefighters also need accurate risk information when responding to incidents. Information is usually provided on mobile data terminals in engines, and in some cases as paper files. We were concerned to find that, in some services, the risk information firefighters have is out of date, superseded or missing. This needs to be urgently improved so that firefighters are given all the risk information the service holds. This will help keep them and others safe, and enable the most effective response.

Services hold and have access to a range of data. They need to make the most of the opportunities this brings.

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Services could do more to engage with their local communities

Services must consult with their communities, their workforces and representative bodies throughout the development of their IRMPs and at all review stages. How services do this, and their success in doing so, varies. Some are proactive, attending community events, visiting local forums and making innovative use of social media. Others do very little.

In 2019, we carried out a public perception survey of over 10,000 members of the public across England. It showed the following:

- Most respondents are interested in knowing what their local FRS is doing in their area (78 percent).
- Compared with a similar previous survey we did, fewer respondents feel informed about what their local FRS is doing (52 percent in 2018, compared with 57 percent in 2019).
- The main reason respondents don't feel informed is because they haven't seen any information about their service (79 percent of those who don't feel informed stated this).
- Only a small proportion of respondents have been asked about their views on FRSs in the past 12 months (8 percent).
- Respondents were asked about their knowledge of the staffing arrangements for stations in their local FRS. The respondents had low awareness of this (42 percent gave an incorrect answer and a further 28 percent said they didn't know).

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Efficiency

In this pillar, we ask two questions:

1. How well does the FRS use its resources to manage risk?

2. How well is the FRS securing an affordable way of managing the risk of fire and other risks, now and in the future?

Our findings

Resources aren't always aligned to risk

FRSs need to understand the foreseeable risks they face and use their resources to mitigate them. Nearly all the FRSs we inspected understand their risks, which they outline in their integrated risk management plan (IRMP).

Through their IRMPs, services commit to their local communities to provide the level of service they consider necessary to keep them safe. We were surprised to find that some services couldn't explain why they need the number of fire engines they have committed to in their IRMPs, nor the rationale behind why they have set the response standards they have. In June 2019, we recommended that services should adopt a consistent approach to how they measure response standards and define risk.

At the time of our inspection, some services had far fewer engines available than they said they needed in their IRMPs. So, either their IRMPs overestimated the resources they needed to meet their foreseeable risks, or they had too few engines and firefighters available, which may have put their communities at risk. How services identify and plan for their risks is something we will focus on when we next inspect services.

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Workforce plans could be more ambitious and better linked to risk

The quality of workforce plans varied hugely across services and some services' plans lacked ambition. Nearly a third of services couldn't show how their financial and workforce plans addressed the risks they had identified in their IRMPs. More often than not, services were looking to keep as close as possible to the same number of firefighters year on year, regardless of whether their risk was changing. We saw examples of:

- a service allocating its resources based on largely historical decisions to meet response standards set over a decade ago;
- a service providing the same level of emergency response across its service area regardless of the community risk; and
- services where availability of fire engines significantly and consistently outstrips demand.

Many services are under-resourcing prevention and protection

Two-thirds of services were either under-resourcing their protection and prevention teams or couldn't give a clear rationale for disproportionally low levels of activity in these areas. Data we collected from services supports this and shows that the number of appropriately trained staff who are allocated to protection work has fallen. The protection team in one service halved from having 64 appropriately trained staff who were allocated to protection work in 2011 to 32 in 2019.

Some services were simply doing the levels of protection and prevention work they could afford, while others that could afford to do more weren't making it a priority. We saw protection teams that didn't have enough resources to carry out the service's risk-based inspection programme.

© Nottinghamshire FRS

Some services are trying to address the under-resourcing of prevention and protection work by involving staff from across the service. For example, in Derbyshire FRS, both wholetime and on-call firefighters carry out safe and well visits. The service has committed an extra £300,000 to enable on-call firefighters to help complete these visits. Wholetime watch managers have been trained to a level 3 certificate in fire safety, allowing them to carry out some protection work. Some staff told us they felt empowered to use their discretion and focus on local priorities, be that prevention, protection or operational demands. Operational crews have also carried out 3,700 hazard spots. These are low-level protection visits that reduce the demand on trained protection staff.

Most services have made savings, but more could be done

The scale of savings services have been required to make has varied considerably. However, nearly all the services we inspected had managed to make savings over the past five years. Some services had only needed to make very modest savings, so hadn't felt the effects of austerity in the same way as others.

The governance model under which a fire and rescue service operates can affect its financial position. County council-run services allocate their budgets based on their local priorities. So, while some FRSs have had their budgets protected by their county councils, others have faced significant cuts to allow the council to fund other things, including adult and children's social care. This has resulted in considerable financial disparity across services.

We were concerned to find Northumberland and Northamptonshire FRSs operating in a very difficult financial environment, while Buckinghamshire FRS couldn't afford the number of firefighters it said it needed. At the time of inspection, both Northamptonshire and Northumberland FRSs were governed by their county council or unitary authority (although governance of Northamptonshire FRS has since transferred to the police, fire and crime commissioner).

Nearly all the services we inspected had managed to make savings over the past five years.

STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
PART 2: OUR INSPECTIONS

The level of reserves held by most services continues to rise year on year.

Northumberland FRS has already achieved significant savings (£4.5m) since 2016 but is being required by the county council to make more, despite already having a lean operating model. At the time of our inspection, it didn't have an approved plan for how these further savings would be made without compromising the service it provided to the public.

The financial difficulties of Northamptonshire County Council are well documented. While under the control of the council, the fire service had been required to make savings of £4.5m. It only managed to achieve this by making substantial staff reductions, which subsequently affected its operational performance. It often had fewer engines available than it said it needed, and its prevention and protection teams were too small to meet the service's own targets.

Reserves have grown significantly over recent years, but their intended use may not be sensible or sustainable

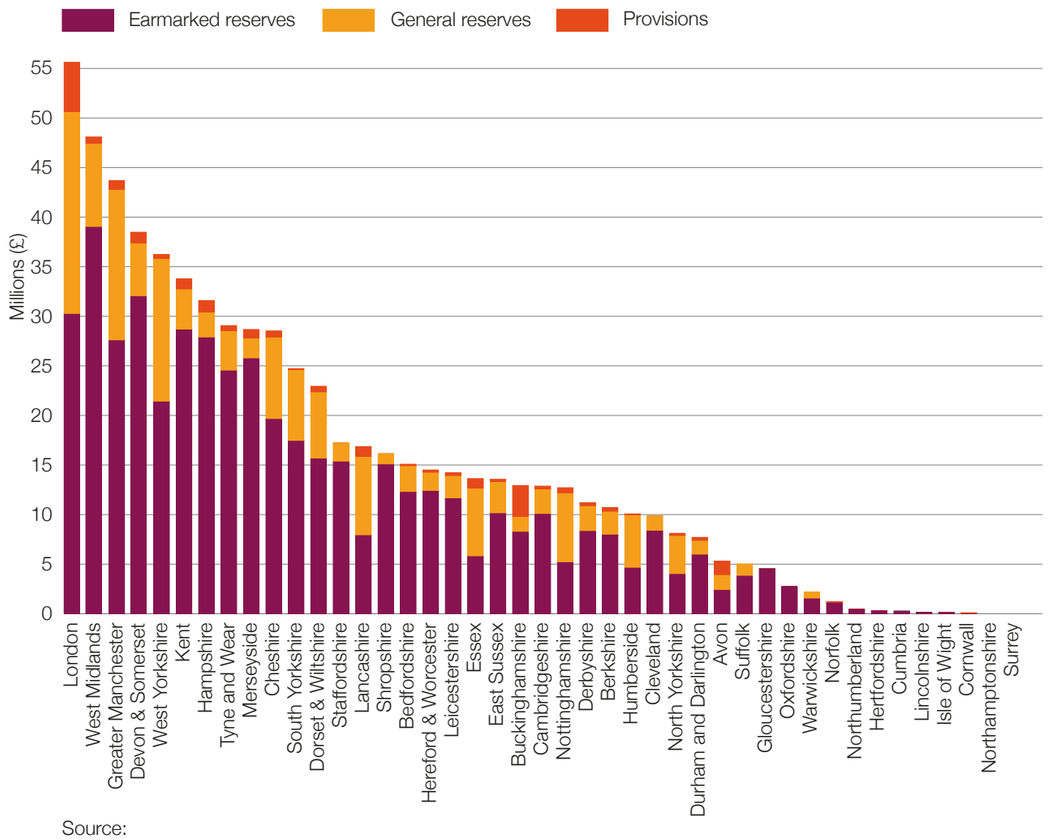
Fire and rescue authorities (other than county council-led fire and rescue authorities) can keep part of their funding as financial reserves. Most fire and rescue services have reserves or have access to county council reserves.

Reserves should be used to manage financial risk, fund major future costs (such as change programmes) and cover unforeseen pressures. They can also be earmarked for a specific purpose, such as investment in technology or estate. It is surprising that the level of reserves held by most services continues to rise year on year, despite calls from some that the sector is underfunded. Overall, across the 28 (out of 45 fire and rescue authorities in total) combined fire and rescue authorities, reserves equalled 42 percent of their annual budgets in March 2018.

Some services have decided to use their reserves to plug budget gaps. This means they delay making efficiencies, such as revising staffing structures, changing ways of working or investing in technology to improve efficiency and productivity. In some cases, this is not a sustainable use of reserves. By delaying making efficiencies, these services are failing in their duty to give the public value for money.

Figure 7 shows that the levels of reserves, and what they are intended to be used for, vary considerably from service to service.

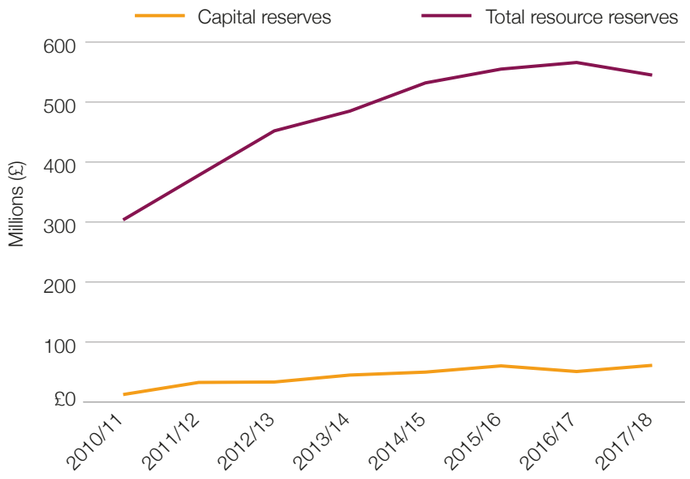
Figure 7:
Reserves and provisions by fire and rescue service as at 1 April 2018 (£ million)



Source:
Annual financial data returns to CIPFA
Notes: Isles of Scilly and West Sussex FRSs did not provide data.
Northamptonshire and Surrey FRSs reported having no reserves.
Suffolk FRS did not provide provisions data.

Financial reserves held by the 28 (out of 45) combined fire and rescue authorities increased by 80 percent to £545.1m between March 2011 and March 2018 (see figure 8). Financial data for the other fire and rescue services is not as clear because fire functions are part of a larger organisation (for example, county councils or combined mayoral authorities).

Figure 8:
Trends in combined fire and rescue authority reserve levels, March 2011 to March 2018 (£ million)



Source:
All figures taken from audited fire and rescue authority (FRA) statements of accounts
Notes: Figures may not sum due to rounding.
The 2018 figures do not include Greater Manchester FRA due to the transfer of fire responsibilities to the metro mayor. For comparability, we have removed Greater Manchester FRA from previous years.
Dorset and Wiltshire & Swindon FRAs merged on 1 April 2016 to form Dorset & Wiltshire FRA. Resource reserves held by Dorset & Wiltshire FRA as at March 2018 are compared to those held by Dorset and Wiltshire & Swindon FRAs as at March 2011.

There are barriers to workforce reform

For FRSs to be efficient in serving the public, they need to be able to adapt and do things differently. Services have acknowledged through their IRMPs that the risk to the public is constantly changing, so the service they provide needs to adapt accordingly.

We are concerned that some services face substantial barriers to implementing change. This may mean that they are being prevented from improving both their efficiency and the service that they provide to the public. One barrier is trade unions. Often, national bargaining is needed to bring about local change. Some services are more successful than others in implementing change, in part due to the relationships they have built with the Fire Brigades Union (FBU).

We inspected services against a backdrop of ongoing negotiations between the sector and local, and more recently central, government over pay and the role of a firefighter. As a result, some services to the public, such as supporting the ambulance service in responding to medical emergencies, have reduced or stopped in many FRSs.

During the course of our inspection, a local industrial relations dispute also led to Greater Manchester FRS losing its tactical capability to work alongside police and ambulance responders in the event of terrorist attacks. Despite attempts by the service to resolve this locally, firefighters with the appropriate training and equipment now have to come from Merseyside FRS. We are concerned about the implications of this arrangement for public safety. A delay in any emergency service responding to such an incident could very well cost lives.

Many services are being prevented from implementing more efficient shift patterns and crewing models, or widening the responsibilities of firefighters to include prevention and protection work. With far fewer fires to attend to and a squeeze on public finances, unions need to work with services to consider the greater contribution firefighters can make in protecting their local communities.

We are concerned that some services face substantial barriers to implementing change.

STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
PART 2: OUR INSPECTIONS

We saw several different types of collaboration.

Services are willing to collaborate with others

Nearly all the services we inspected have a positive attitude towards collaboration with other emergency services, and all meet their statutory duty to consider it. However, we are concerned that more than half the services we inspected weren't consistently or effectively evaluating, reviewing or monitoring collaboration activities to assess whether they were beneficial and cost-effective.

Collaboration between emergency services has the potential to improve their efficiency and effectiveness. Sharing buildings can reduce property costs for all agencies involved, giving the public better value for money. It can also help emergency personnel get to know each other, work together better and improve both performance and the service they give the public. We saw several different types of collaboration, including sharing estates, equipment and control rooms, joint procurement and work on behalf of the police and the health services.

Buckinghamshire FRS is leading a partnership with South Central Ambulance Service and Thames Valley Police that will see all three services moving into one purpose-built 'blue light hub'. The move to the hub will see all three services leaving five different sites to work under one roof, thereby reducing running costs. We also saw Thames Valley Fire Control bringing command and control for three Thames Valley fire services under one roof in Royal Berkshire, which saves £1m a year for the three services (Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire FRSs).

However, too many services are entering into expensive collaboration projects without processes in place to make sure they are achieving value for money or making them operate more efficiently. We found examples of projects underperforming, and no formal process in place to learn why they had failed to achieve the benefits the service had anticipated.

Services need better financial data

FRS leaders need to understand their true costs to be able to manage budgets, use resources efficiently and effectively, and explore opportunities to reduce costs. Too often, we found that services lacked access to accurate data. Sometimes, FRSs that were part of the county council weren't given information on how the council calculated and allocated charges for their support services, making it difficult for them to find out whether they were getting value for money.

However, there are also occasions when services could do more to understand the cost of their activities – for example, by evaluating the cost-effectiveness of large collaboration projects. FRSs also need to work together as a sector to improve the data they provide to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA). We have been working with CIPFA and the sector throughout 2019 to get better data. There have been new guidelines asking for consistent responses and validation checks by CIPFA, which should lead to improvements.

© Cleveland Fire Brigade

Nearly half the services we inspected use flexible workforce patterns and have altered their crewing models to become more efficient.

Services need to keep their continuity plans up to date

FRSs need robust continuity arrangements. Otherwise, they risk service failure during an unexpected incident. We were pleased to find such arrangements in nearly all the services we inspected. However, around half the services we inspected weren't regularly testing or updating their plans.

In one service, we found that the main continuity plan had passed its review date, annual tests weren't always happening, and there was no formal training given to those with continuity responsibilities. The service wasn't always learning from interruptions to mitigate the impact of this happening in other, similar, areas of the organisation.

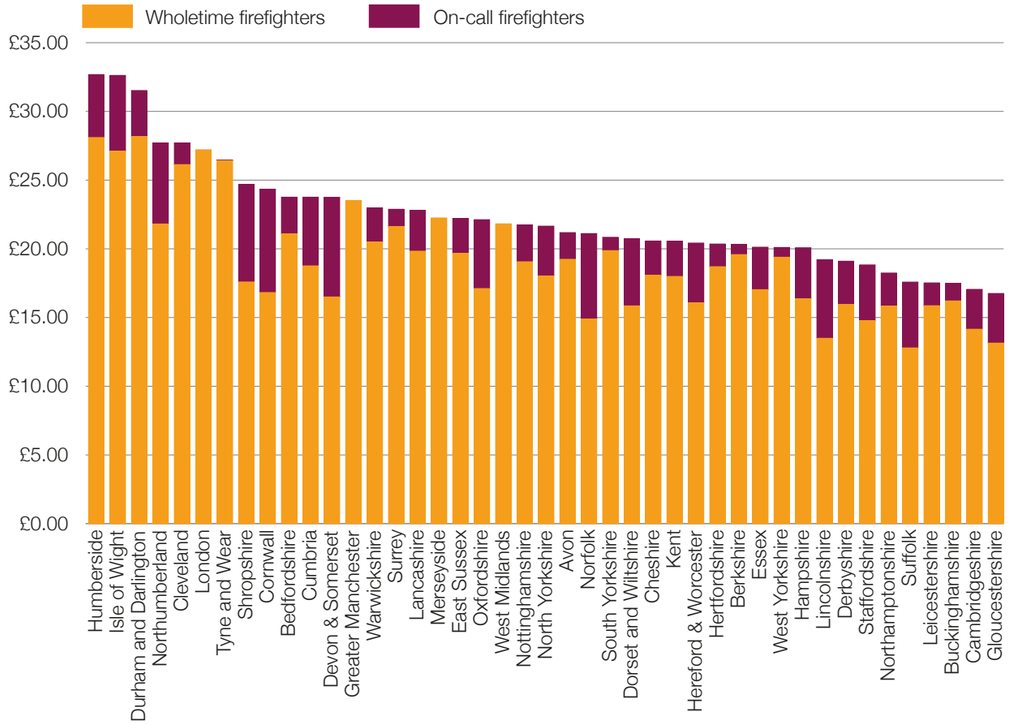
Another service had continuity plans to make sure it could provide critical services during times of disruption but, other than fire control evacuation, these haven't been tested or exercised. We found that some of the plans were out of date and some crucial staff couldn't locate plans for their area of work. Services should make sure there is a testing programme for their continuity plans, particularly in high-risk areas of the service such as control.

Services need to make sure their workforces are productive

An efficient service will make sure its workforce's time is productive, making use of a flexible workforce and flexible working patterns. Nearly half the services we inspected use flexible workforce patterns and have altered their crewing models to become more efficient. Some services have also reduced the number of firefighters needed to crew a fire engine.

However, there is significant variation in the cost per head of population for each firefighter (see figure 9). It is difficult to explain, let alone justify, why in the year ending 31 March 2019, three services spent more than £30 per head of population on a firefighter and another spent just under £17.

Figure 9:
Firefighter cost per head of population, 2018/19



Source:
Annual financial data returns to CIPFA for 2018/2019 and ONS mid-2017 population estimates
Note: All figures should be considered alongside the proportion of firefighters who are wholetime and on-call/retained within a service.
Isles of Scilly and West Sussex FRSs didn't provide data.

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Durham and Darlington FRS has moved some of the work carried out by central teams to operational crews, with the aim of making better use of firefighter capacity. This has resulted in a notable increase in productivity levels. In the year to 31 March 2018, the service carried out around three times the England rate per 1,000 population for home fire safety checks and more than four times the England rate for fire safety audits per 100 known premises.

The service has a performance regime that guides work in priority areas. For example, station-based staff have targets for work such as home fire safety checks, safe and well visits, and fire safety inspections. They also have targets for incident numbers, relevant to their station areas, to guide prevention activities. District managers actively review and report against these targets. This information is then passed to a meeting of senior managers, and sometimes the fire authority, to provide scrutiny on performance levels.

Cleveland Fire Brigade has carried out a productivity review of its response firefighters. It analysed the total working hours available to firefighters and deducted the essential elements of the role, such as training and responding to incidents, to identify time left over for prevention and protection work. The service set annual targets for stations and its performance management was robust.

Unfortunately, this is not the case for every service. We found examples of services introducing new shift patterns without evaluating their efficiency or effectiveness, and relying on overtime to make sure there were enough staff on duty. One service had carried out a pilot scheme across several of its stations, which showed that wholetime staff had the capacity to carry out prevention work, but the service wasn't taking enough advantage of this. All services should be considering how to use their wholetime workforce to achieve their targets.

The use of technology varies considerably.

While there are pockets of innovation, services and the sector as a whole need to use technology better

All the FRSs we inspected have the operational equipment they believe they need to keep the public safe. However, the use of technology varies considerably. Some services are investing in technology to improve their effectiveness and efficiency. We found examples of services that procured mobile data terminal software jointly with other services, allowing the swift transfer of risk information across the services. Others had developed digital applications that streamline and create efficiencies: for example, managing premises risk information and the home fire safety check processes.

However, some services have been slow to exploit opportunities for more productive ways of working presented by technology. Nearly half the services we inspected were using broken, dated or unreliable IT systems and had inefficient paper-based systems. Many computer systems that services rely on are slow and don't work together. This was a common source of frustration among staff we spoke to.

Nearly all the fire and rescue services we inspected have been able to support their budgets by generating an income from external sources.

It is clear that the current lack of investment in IT in some services is making them less productive. The systems being used to record information are, too often, producing poor-quality data, which in turn affects how well a service can effectively manage its performance and productivity.

While work is now under way through the NFCC to develop a cross-sector IT strategy, this is still in its early stages and there is much work to do before there is a vision that services can work to.

Services are exploiting opportunities to generate an income

Nearly all the FRSs we inspected have been able to support their budgets by generating an income from external sources. For example, they can charge neighbouring services for maintaining their vehicles; responding to incidents on their behalf; providing training to the public, county council and private businesses; leasing estates; and monitoring CCTV. They can use this income to improve their financial sustainability.

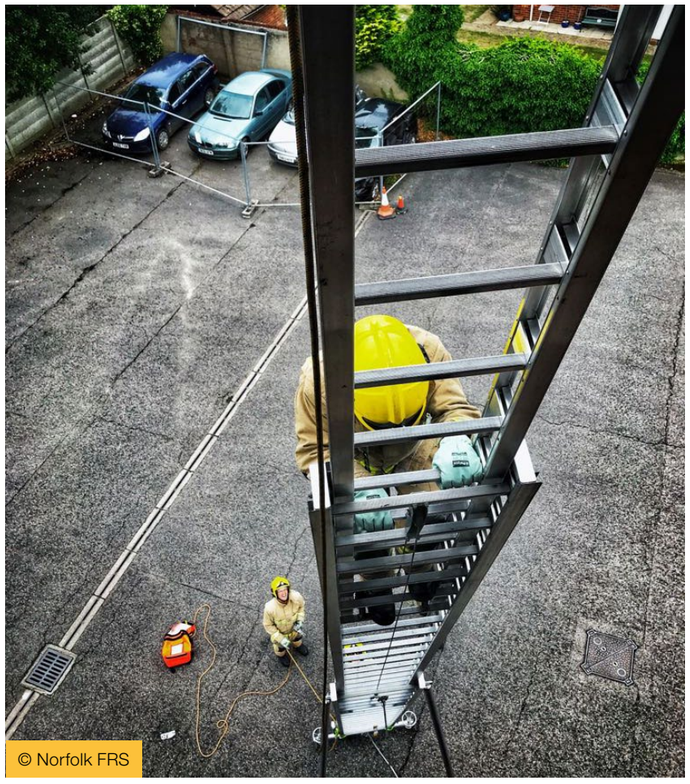
The amount of income that FRSs bring in varies a great deal. For example, Northumberland FRS reported an income from other FRSs of £2.7m, while West Midlands Fire Service reported an income from 'other sources' (for example, charges for shared training centres and vehicle maintenance centres) of £4.8m in the year to 31 March 2018. While all services reported receiving at least some income from other sources, a small number reported receiving no income from other FRSs.

We were concerned that some services risked prioritising opportunities to generate an income over their main duties. For example, there were services with short-staffed prevention and protection teams assigning staff to provide training on a cost-recovery basis. Although it is admirable for services to look for ways to improve their financial sustainability, their priority should always be to make sure they have enough resources to carry out their core functions.

Services are now planning for the future

Most services understand the financial climate they are operating in and consider a range of financial planning scenarios. These include changes in government funding, future pay awards and the uncertainty surrounding employers' obligations after the recalculation of the cost of public sector pensions.

But the financial planning in some services is limited in scope. Despite being able to identify the size of potential shortfalls, they haven't carried out suitable contingency planning for worst-case assumptions. There is also very little evidence of real financial and resource planning past 2020. While we recognise the short-term nature of the fire funding settlement, services should seek to gain a better understanding of the likely financial difficulties they may face in the coming years.



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Most services understand the financial climate they are operating in and consider a range of financial planning scenarios.

STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
PART 2: OUR INSPECTIONS

People

In this pillar, we ask four questions:

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

Our findings

The values and culture in some services must be improved

Most services have much work to do to promote their values and culture at all levels of their organisations.

Almost without exception, FRS staff across England are proud of the work they do. They are strongly committed to keeping the public safe from fires and other emergencies.

More than half of services still don't manage to foster enough of a culture that truly welcomes and includes all staff in all parts of the organisation. Services still have much work to do to improve workplace behaviour.

Services still have much work to do to improve workplace behaviour.

© Merseyside FRS

STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
PART 2: OUR INSPECTIONS

In many services, we found examples of unacceptable behaviour, such as bullying and harassment, discrimination and language unsuitable for an inclusive workplace.

We repeatedly heard about overbearing or autocratic management styles. Many services don't train their managers in people skills, such as leadership, motivation, challenging inappropriate behaviour and managing performance. As a result, we found staff and managers behaving and leading the same way they themselves have always been led. However, we do of course fully accept that, when responding to incidents, command and control with authority and directness are needed.

We graded a small number of services outstanding for their values and culture. These services have clear, unambiguous values and frameworks for behaviour in place. Their senior leaders demonstrate the service's values and promote them throughout the workplace. Not only could staff tell us about the values, they could also link the values to their roles in practical terms. The values and behaviours often featured in wider service activities, such as development programmes and processes for promotion and recruitment.

We were pleased to see that services are trying new approaches. For example, Staffordshire FRS removed rank markings from day-to-day uniform, which staff welcomed. This was done to remove perceived barriers and foster a more inclusive environment that values all staff equally.

Disappointingly, in many services, we found examples of unacceptable behaviour, such as bullying and harassment, discrimination and language unsuitable for an inclusive workplace. This behaviour hadn't always been dealt with strongly enough by line managers.

According to our staff survey, 24 percent of respondents felt they had been harassed or bullied at work in the past 12 months.[5]

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Most of this group reported that this was by someone senior to them; the most common reason given by respondents for the bullying or harassment was their role, level or rank. Of those who had felt bullied or harassed, 54 percent didn't report it, 36 percent reported it informally and just 10 percent reported it formally. Reasons for not reporting it included believing nothing would happen, fearing being victimised or labelled a troublemaker, and concerns about confidentiality.

The prevalence of bullying in the sector has been known for some time. It was included in Adrian Thomas's independent review of conditions of service for fire and rescue staff in England, which was published in 2016.[6] Senior leaders have much more to do to improve culture across the sector, and to eradicate behaviour, language and attitudes that have no place in inclusive and modern workplaces.

We witnessed significant negative characteristics of the watch system.

Services need to think hard about the consequences of a watch culture

Most FRSs base their staffing on operational watches. These are small groups of staff who work closely together in tight-knit teams, often training, dining and spending rest periods together.

We saw undeniable benefits to staff working in this way. Operational watches often work well as teams because of the amount of time they spend together. They communicate effectively at incidents and are familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of their colleagues. We heard of many examples where this watch ethos drove team members to work harder so as not to let their colleagues down. This can sometimes translate into better outcomes for the public. Watches also often turn to each other for support after traumatic incidents.

© Staffordshire FRS

However, we witnessed significant negative characteristics of the watch system. Very often, staff stay on the same watch for many years, in some cases for their whole careers. Because of a lack of movement between watches or stations, old attitudes and working practices can become entrenched. In some cases, inappropriate language and behaviour go unchallenged by line managers. Those who join a watch may feel under pressure to fit into its established culture.

In services that failed to promote and model their values and behaviours effectively, we saw watches that had developed their own subcultures, often not in line with the culture of the service. This at times led to a resistance to change or to commit to new ways of working. And although staff on the same watch looked after one another, they would be less likely to seek professional support outside their watch. They were reluctant to seem weak or to be putting their head above the parapet. As a result, staff may not get the help they need.

Services should consider how to address these problems to make sure the culture on watches is positive, progressive and welcoming.

Services take staff wellbeing seriously

A healthy and content workforce is likely to be more productive and effective. We found that, in most services, senior leaders prioritise and promote the wellbeing of their staff in many ways. Most services provide specialist support for staff via an occupational health department, such as physiotherapy, psychological counselling and medical screening.

We were encouraged to see more services beginning to address and promote positive mental health. This includes engaging with the mental health charity Mind's Blue Light Programme and the Oscar Kilo initiative, which provide resources and guidance to help services plan their wellbeing provision. We also heard many positive examples of the work done by the Fire Fighters Charity to support the physical and mental wellbeing of current and retired members of fire service staff.

In most services, senior leaders prioritise and promote the wellbeing of their staff in many ways.

STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
PART 2: OUR INSPECTIONS

Most services have a positive health and safety culture.

Most services have a positive health and safety culture, in which staff and managers are well trained and understand their responsibilities for keeping workplaces safe.

Most services monitor statistics about accidents to learn from trends, reduce the risk of further harm and find out where they can improve how they work. According to our staff survey, 84 percent agreed that their personal safety and welfare are treated seriously at work.[7] Despite the high number, services should consider why some staff disagree.

Services need to monitor staff working hours more closely

The traditional 2-2-4 model (2 days, 2 nights, 4 days off) is designed to provide a reliable service to the public both day and night, while making sure firefighters have enough rest between shifts. It also allows firefighters to have other jobs on their days off. Of the 40 services who gave us data,[8] around a quarter of their wholetime firefighters have registered secondary employment.[9] And of the 44[10] services that gave us data, 11 percent of wholetime firefighters are also on-call firefighters in the same service.

Several services have no oversight or control of the hours that staff work. This is a concern. Most had policies in place that state the maximum number of hours staff can work, and the rest periods needed before and after shifts. But these hours are often monitored only by the member of staff, without management being aware. We saw several examples of staff working many hours of overtime or going straight from a wholetime shift to an on-call shift with little or no rest.

While we recognise that services are keen to promote individual responsibility, not knowing the demands on their staff time carries considerable risk, particularly if working excessive hours leads to an accident or injury.

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Better workforce planning is needed

FRSs, like all employers, need workforce plans that identify the skills and capabilities they need, both now and in the future. Services should be able to explain how their workforce planning arrangements align to the overall workforce capabilities specified in their integrated risk management plans. They also need to make sure that staff leaving doesn't disrupt the service to the public.

In the year to 31 March 2019, 1,460 staff retired from the FRS (due to normal retirement or early retirement). Most of those who retired were wholetime firefighters (1,119 or 76.6 percent). The average age of firefighters has gradually increased from 40 in 2011 to 42 in 2018, before falling back to 41 in 2019.

© Cleveland Fire Brigade

We found a mixed picture of workforce planning across services. Most services make their operational workforce a priority. They actively monitor projected retirement dates, the effect of vacancies on skills and capabilities, and the need to recruit and train new staff. The more effective services regularly update their workforce plans so they can respond quickly to unforeseen circumstances.

But many services give less attention to their non-operational workforces. Here we found a lack of effective planning. This was most troubling when staff had specialist skills and capabilities, such as protection. We frequently saw large backlogs in workloads caused by a lack of specialist staff. Building regulation consultation responses and proactive fire safety engagement with businesses are two such examples. Services should make sure their workforce and succession planning arrangements take full account of specialist roles and functions.

Staff are generally well trained and equipped to provide the best response possible to the public

Most services prioritise training for operational, station-based staff. They have good systems in place for training in risk-critical skills, such as incident command, using breathing apparatus and rescuing from height.

This training is provided mainly by specialist staff who are skilled and accredited, which means it is likely to be to a high standard. So we are reassured that, when the public need FRSs, they will get a response from crews who are competent and able to respond. In our staff survey, 73 percent agreed that they have received sufficient training to enable them to do the things asked of them.[11] Services should consider why over a quarter of staff don't feel they are appropriately trained.

Firefighters must maintain an ever-increasing range of skills. For example, they must know how to rescue casualties from road traffic collisions and respond to hazardous situations involving water, such as flooding and drowning. They are also called upon to deal with incidents involving hazardous chemicals and to administer life-saving first aid.

But because training centres have limited capacity, much of the refresher training for these skills is provided locally at stations, often by watch or crew managers. In several services, these managers hadn't received any training in how to provide training themselves. This includes what techniques to use and how to recognise whether those being trained understand the content. Services often assumed that a manager could provide training based on their knowledge and experience – which vary greatly – rather than any recognised effective practice.

Firefighters must maintain an ever-increasing range of skills.

STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
PART 2: OUR INSPECTIONS

We were very disturbed to find that some services didn't have the right facilities or provide appropriate uniform for women.

This is a risk to these services and their staff. Without being certain of the quality of the training being provided, it is difficult for a service to guarantee its consistency and effectiveness. Some managers we spoke to said they lack confidence in their ability to give effective training sessions, and staff expressed concern at the inconsistent approach between watches.

Some services gave less priority to training for non-operational members of staff, including those in control and corporate services. Often, these staff had no structured training plan in place and few opportunities available to them. Every member of staff should have development and training opportunities to enhance their abilities and potential.

Diversity remains an aspiration, with much work still to do

Despite most services saying they are increasingly committed to improving diversity and inclusion, in this respect change in the sector is woefully inadequate.

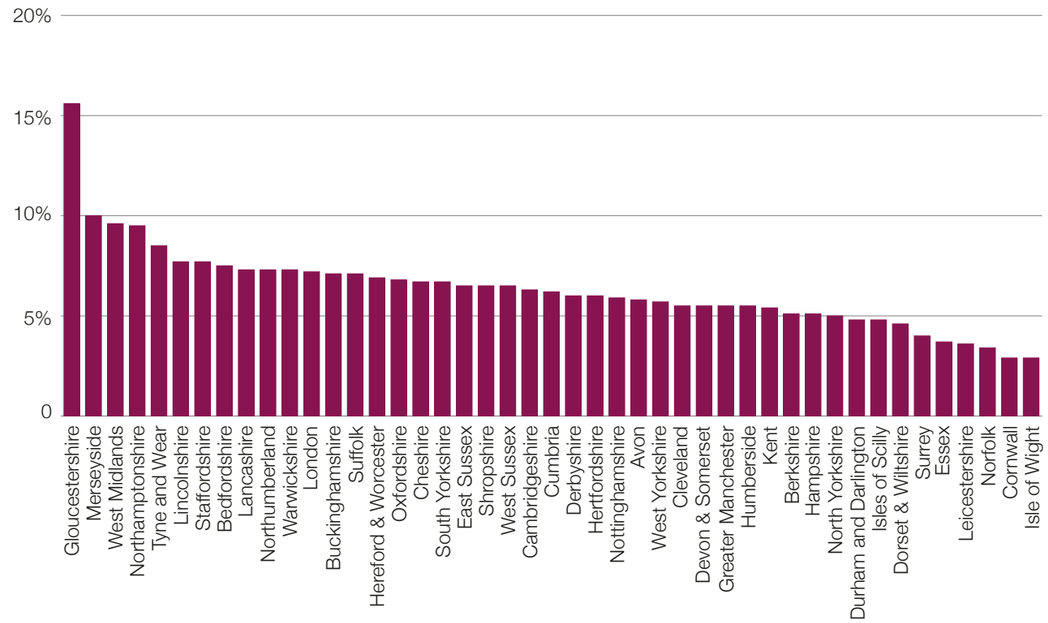
FRSs should be inclusive and meet the needs of their whole workforce. They should represent their local communities. A diverse workforce should offer a broad range of experiences and backgrounds. Diversity can help to improve innovation, decision making and service to the public. Services also need a diverse workforce to be able to draw from the widest possible pool of available talent.

The number and proportion of female firefighters has slowly increased since 2002, the first year for which comparable data is available. In 2002, just 1.7 percent (753) of all firefighters were female. This increased to 6.4 percent (2,231) in 2019. Even so, fewer than seven in every 100 firefighters are women.

But since 2011, the main reason behind this percentage increase isn't more female firefighters being recruited: it is that more men are leaving. The number of female firefighters has increased only by around 450 over this time, while the number of male firefighters decreased by almost 8,800.

The percentage of firefighters who are women varies hugely across services. In 2019, the percentage ranged from 2.9 percent (Isle of Wight and Cornwall) to 15.6 percent (Gloucestershire) of all firefighters (see figure 10).

Figure 10:
Percentage of female firefighters as at 31 March 2019



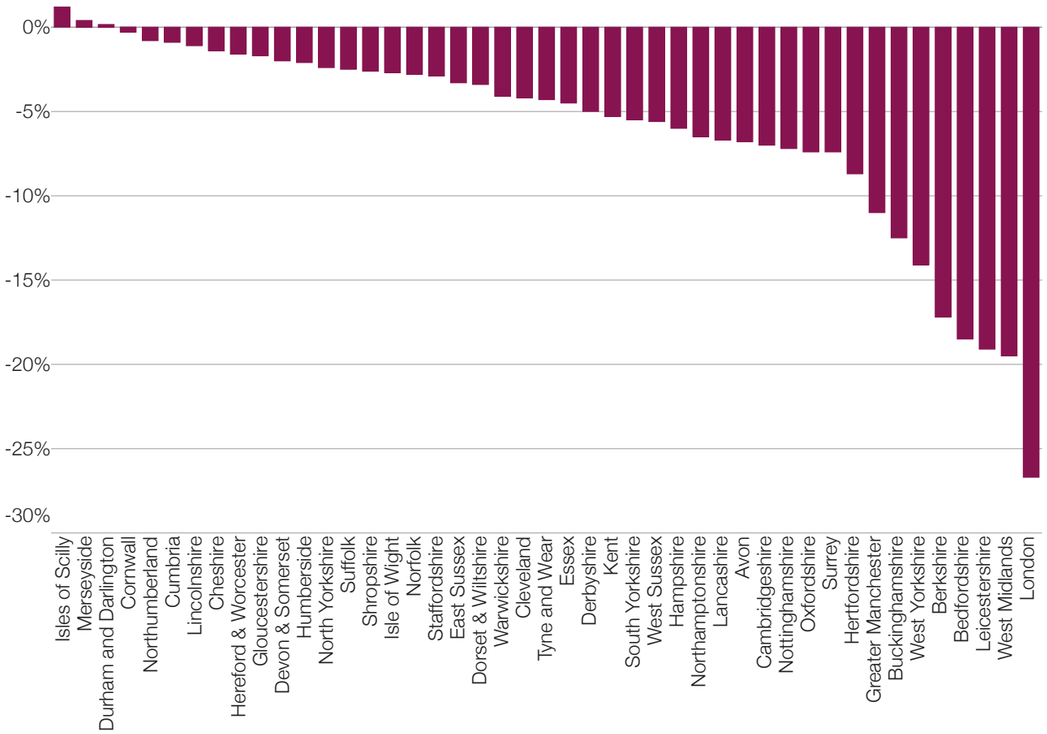
Source:
Staff headcount (firefighters) by gender: Home Office FIRE1103: 2018/2019
Note: Data is as at 31 March 2019.

We were also very disturbed to find that some services didn't have the right facilities or provide appropriate uniform for women.

There were 10 fewer firefighters from a black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) group in 2019 than there were in 2011. Because of the large number of white firefighters who have left the service, the proportion of firefighters from a BAME group[12] has increased only slightly since 2011 (the first year with comparable data available), from 3.5 percent to 4.3 percent in 2019. This is unacceptable, and services need to find a way to attract more people from this minority group.

According to the 2011 Census, 14.6 percent of the English population were from an ethnic minority group. A very small number of services are representative of the communities they serve in terms of ethnicity, but the vast majority are not (see figure 11).

Figure 11:
Percentage point difference between the service's BAME residential population and its BAME firefighters as at 31 March 2019



Source:
Staff headcount (firefighters) by ethnicity: Home Office FIRE1104: 2018/2019
Notes: BAME residential population data from ONS 2011 census data
Workforce data is as at 31 March 2019.
The percentage of BAME firefighters does not include those who opted not to disclose their ethnic origin.
There are large variations between services in the number of firefighters who did not state their ethnic origin.

We recognise that women and people from BAME groups also work elsewhere in services rather than being firefighters. In 2019, 53.2 percent of support staff (and 77 percent of control room staff) were female. But these members of staff often don't come into contact with the public, so the public doesn't see this diversity.

We came across services that are trying to change this, and some have had early successes. It is also encouraging that the sector as a whole is starting to promote itself as a career open to a diverse range of people. Services are challenging the stereotypical image of a firefighter and are focusing more on communication and interpersonal skills. The NFCC and the Local Government Association continue to support services to be more diverse and inclusive workplaces. But far more needs to be done.

It is one thing recruiting a diverse workforce: it is quite another retaining it. Most – but not all – services have staff networks in place, which we welcome. But there need to be more role models and career pathways so that no one faces a 'glass ceiling' because of any characteristic.

In some services, we found either indifference to diversity and positive action or, on a small number of occasions, outright hostility. If services want to foster a welcoming and inclusive culture for a new diverse workforce, they must do more to educate their people, and challenge and dispel myths, about positive action.

In many services, equality, diversity and inclusion are discussed only once a year as part of online training. We heard frequently that it was viewed as a 'tick box' exercise by staff and was something to be endured rather than learned from. Services should consider whether they can make significant cultural improvements in this way alone.

In some services, we found either indifference to diversity and positive action or, on a small number of occasions, outright hostility.

STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
PART 2: OUR INSPECTIONS

Diversity in senior leadership positions is even more limited than in the wider workforce.

We were encouraged that Kent FRS aims to make diversity and inclusion part of its everyday business, rather than topics that are only promoted during recruitment campaigns. We look forward to seeing the results from services that are increasingly committed to making their organisations more diverse.

Firefighting is a physical job and high levels of fitness are needed. To become a firefighter, recruits need to pass a range of tests, including physical ones. With the role of a firefighter evolving and newer equipment becoming available that is less physically demanding to use, services need to make sure their fitness testing remains reasonable for the role and that it is not unintentionally discriminatory.

In a small number of services, we were concerned to find a large proportion of the workforce unwilling to disclose their diversity information in workforce and monitoring returns. We don't know why this information is being withheld. FRSs need to gather this information to determine:

- how they compare with the communities they serve;
- whether their recruitment activity is having an effect; and
- whether they need to take positive action and, if so, how to target their resources.

But staff should be encouraged to provide this information away from any fear of victimisation. The percentage of staff not stating their ethnicity within services ranged from 0 percent (Isles of Scilly) to 49.6 percent (Essex) in 2019.

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There is a lack of diversity among leadership

Diversity in senior leadership positions is even more limited than in the wider workforce. This is the case not only in terms of gender, ethnicity and other protected characteristics, but also in terms of diversity of background and experience.

The sector needs to do more to support future leaders. As part of our inspection, we considered the work services do to identify and develop talented staff with high potential to be senior leaders of the future. In almost all cases, services don't consider high potential. Instead, they use very traditional models of development and progression, often linked to time served. Departing chiefs are often replaced by their deputies, rather than by talent from outside the service, including other sectors. These processes have been in place, unchanged, for many years.

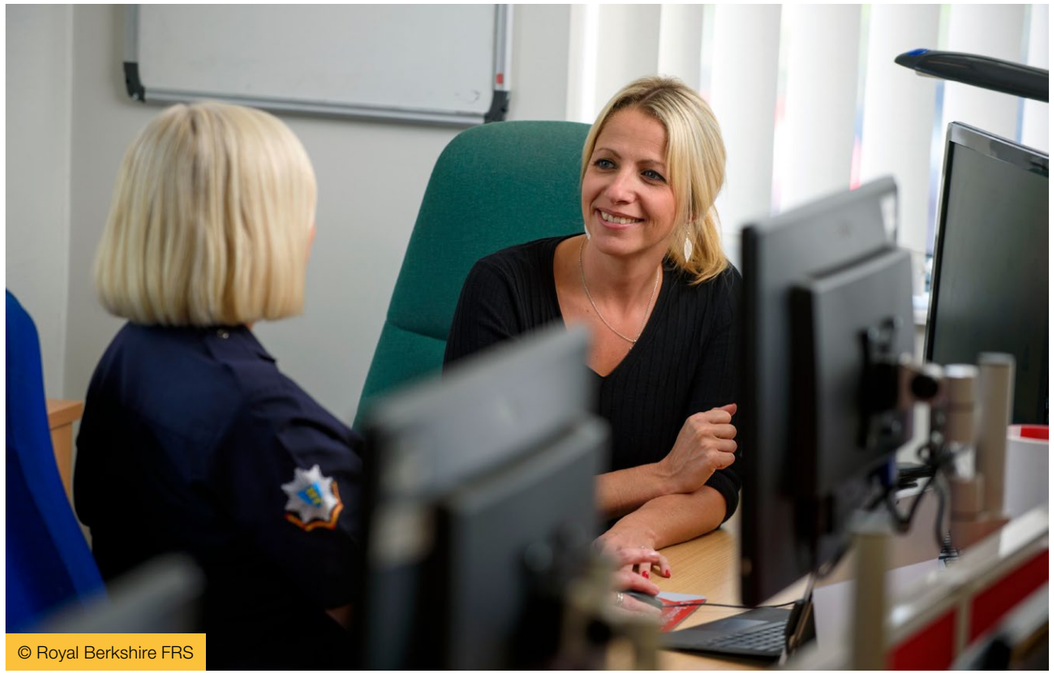
A few services have been willing to look beyond the fire and rescue sector to recruit talented people with more diverse backgrounds, either from industry or from other public sector bodies. These services recognise the value of diversity of thought and experience that other sectors can bring. We hope that more services are willing to identify and develop high-potential staff, both from within and outside the fire sector. This would help make sure that the vacancies created by current senior leaders retiring are filled with the most talented and capable staff available.

Inequality between operational and non-operational staff

FRSs are made up of operational staff (for example, firefighters) and non-operational staff. Both staff groups have a crucial role in each service's success.

We heard consistently throughout our inspections that non-operational staff feel less valued than their operational colleagues. Common themes were less opportunity for development, less focus on their training needs, and having less of a voice than others.

Many told us that this had led them to seek opportunities outside the fire and rescue service. In 2019, support staff made up 18.2 percent of all staff but 22.2 percent of those leaving the fire and rescue service. This could be because some services have reduced their 'back office' functions, but it could also be a result of support staff feeling they are treated less favourably than operational staff. Services that don't look after all their staff and give them opportunities are at risk of losing talent to other organisations and sectors.



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There is much variation in how services seek and use feedback from their staff

As well as establishing an open and inclusive culture, FRS leaders should seek to foster an environment where there is effective communication both to and from leaders. Staff should feel their leaders are open to challenge, and leaders should seek feedback in meaningful ways.

Almost all the services we inspected have mechanisms for staff to give their views to senior leaders. These ranged from service-wide staff surveys to online engagement forums, focus groups and station visits. We also saw variation in how effective these feedback methods were. Services in Shropshire, Kent, Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire have regular feedback and engagement events, which staff value and trust. These services could show us what they had changed in response to staff feedback. Staff felt listened to and taken seriously by leaders.

Many other services hadn't taken enough action on feedback or communicated outcomes well. According to our staff survey, 68 percent agreed they had opportunities to communicate their views upwards in their service. But only 50 percent agreed that their ideas or suggestions would be listened to.[13]

In a few services, a culture of mistrust had developed between leaders and the workforce. Staff didn't engage in staff surveys or provide feedback for fear they would be identified, or that their views could harm their future career prospects. In our staff survey, only 50 percent of staff agreed that they felt able to challenge ideas without any detriment to how they might be treated afterwards.[14] We encourage services to consider how staff feedback mechanisms might affect their culture, especially staff morale and motivation. They should model their approaches to feedback on positive examples from other services.

In a few services, a culture of mistrust had developed between leaders and the workforce.

STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
PART 2: OUR INSPECTIONS

In too many services, staff we interviewed considered the performance review process as a tick-box exercise.

Managing and developing individual performance need to improve

We considered the work that fire service leaders do to assess and improve the knowledge, skills and behaviours of their workforces. This might be as part of a formal, periodic performance review or more informal conversations about future potential and ambition.

We saw a wide range of methods that services adopt to do this, with varied effectiveness. Overall, we consider that services require improvement in this area. In too many services, staff we interviewed considered the performance review process as a tick-box exercise of little value unless seeking promotion.

We recognise the view of senior human resource managers that line managers can have regular meaningful conversations about performance in other ways: for example, in a more modern informal context than the traditional annual appraisal. But in many circumstances where the annual performance development review wasn't favoured, other forms of informal performance conversations between line managers and staff weren't taking place either.

Royal Berkshire, Merseyside and Staffordshire FRSs make effective use of their respective performance review systems. They see them as a way for managers and staff to discuss performance, career aspirations and wellbeing. These systems give staff personal objectives that have a clear link to departmental and organisational objectives. Merseyside and Staffordshire services assess staff behaviours against each service's behavioural framework, and Royal Berkshire plans to do so soon too.

Staff in these services consider that the performance review process makes them feel more valued in the workplace, whether or not they are considering promotion. We found this wasn't the case in most other services. We hope that more services will use their performance management processes more effectively to promote cultural change.

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Part 3: Our reports

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reports published

Our reports

In July 2017, our remit was extended to include inspections of England's fire and rescue authorities. This is Her Majesty's Chief Inspector's first annual report on the fire and rescue inspections we have carried out.

Between 20 December 2018 and 17 December 2019, we published 47 reports. These reports fulfil our statutory obligation to inspect and report on the effectiveness and efficiency of fire and rescue authorities in England.

Every report has been published in full on our website and given to the fire and rescue service it relates to.

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STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
PART 3: OUR REPORTS

Publications

December 2017 to January 2020

Published:
20 December 2018, 20 June 2019 and 17 December 2019

Fire and Rescue Service: Effectiveness, efficiency and people 2018/19
Forty-five individual reports on each fire and rescue service in England

All HMIs

Published:
20 December 2018 and 20 June 2019

Fire and Rescue Service inspections 2018/19 – summary of findings
Two reports summarising the findings from our first two tranches of service inspections. The first report covered findings from our first 14 inspections. The second covered the findings from our next 16 inspections

Lead HMI:
Zoë Billingham

Revisit letters

When we identified a cause of concern relating to any element of effectiveness, we required the service to produce an action plan to resolve the concern. We then carried out a revisit to assess progress against each plan. Following each revisit, we provided written feedback from the appropriate HMI to the chief fire officer. Each letter was published in full on our website. We sent and published revisit letters for:

- Avon FRS
- Cornwall FRS
- Essex FRS
- Gloucestershire FRS
- Northamptonshire FRS
- Surrey FRS
- West Sussex FRS

Non-inspection publications

Published:
19 December 2017

Proposed fire and rescue services inspection programme and framework 2018/19
Consultation document seeking views on our proposed inspection programme and framework

Lead HMI:
Sir Thomas Winsor

Published:
29 March 2018

HMICFRS fire and rescue service inspection programme and framework 2018/19
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services' 2018/19 inspection programme and framework prepared under section 28A of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004

Lead HMI:
Sir Thomas Winsor

Published:
15 June 2018

Developing the fire and rescue service inspections: learning report
Report on the findings from our three pilot inspections and the outcome of our public and sector consultation on our proposed inspection programme and framework

Lead HMI:
Zoë Billingham

Published:
20 December 2018

Public perceptions of fire and rescue services in England 2018
Results of the BMG Research survey we commissioned of the public's views and experiences of fire and rescue services

Lead HMI:
Zoë Billingham

Published:
22 October 2019

Proposed fire and rescue services inspection programme and framework 2020/21
Consultation document seeking views on our proposed inspection programme and framework

Lead HMI:
Sir Thomas Winsor

Published:
15 January 2020

Public perceptions of fire and rescue services in England 2019

Results of the BMG Research survey we commissioned of the public's views and experiences of fire and rescue services

Lead HMI:
Zoë Billingham

References

Part 1

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11 Our staff survey was carried out on August 2018 to August 2019 and received 7,182 responses.
12 The 2:2:4 working arrangement consists of two day shifts, two night shifts and four days off.

Part 2

1 Excluding Isles of Scilly FRS.
2 Our staff survey was carried out between August 2018 and August 2019. Overall the survey received 7,182 responses and 2,407 responses from those who stated they were a firefighter.
3 Our staff survey was carried out between August 2018 and August 2019. Overall the survey received 7,182 responses and 4,928 responses from those who stated they were a firefighter or specialist staff.
4 Excluding Isles of Scilly FRS.
5 Our staff survey was carried out between August 2018 and August 2019 and received 7,182 responses.
6 Independent review of conditions of service for fire and rescue staff in England, Adrian Thomas, Home Office, 3 November 2016. Available at: gov.uk/government/publications/conditions-of-service-for-fire-and-rescue-staff-independent-review
7 Our staff survey was carried out between August 2018 and August 2019 and received 7,182 responses.
8 Cleveland, Hampshire, Humberside, Norfolk and Suffolk FRSs didn't provide data.
9 Excluding on-call (retained) staff within their FRS or other FRS. As at 31 March 2019.
10 Staffordshire FRS didn't provide data.
11 Our staff survey was carried out between August 2018 and August 2019 and received 7,182 responses.
12 The Operational Statistics data collection assembles ethnicity information using five groups: white, mixed, Asian or Asian British, black or black British and Chinese or other ethnicity. The other option is 'not stated' and we have removed these responses from the calculations above.
13 Our staff survey was carried out between August 2018 and August 2019 and received 7,182 responses.
14 Our staff survey was carried out between August 2018 and August 2019 and received 7,182 responses.

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Annexes

Annex A: Fire and rescue service areas

Annex B: About us

Our history

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary – as it then was – was established in 1856 to "inquire into the state and efficiency of the police". Our role and influence have evolved over the past century and a half.

In 2017, we saw the biggest change in our remit with our expansion to take on inspection of fire and rescue services in England. This was one element of the Government's fire reform programme announced in 2016, enacted in the Policing and Crime Act 2017.

We are independent of Government, as well as fire and rescue authorities and police forces. Both our independence and inspection rights are vested in Her Majesty's Inspectors, who are Crown appointees (section 28(A1), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004).

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HMIC was established in

1856

Fire and Rescue Services Act

2004

Our statutory responsibilities

We must inspect and report on the efficiency and effectiveness of fire and rescue authorities in England (section 28(A3), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004).

The Secretary of State may at any time direct us to carry out an inspection of one or all fire and rescue authorities in England (section 28A(3), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004).

We can carry out an inspection that hasn't been set out in our inspection programme. We must consult with the Secretary of State before we do so (section 28A(5) and (6), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004).

We don't have any statutory responsibility to inspect any other fire and rescue service, other than fire and rescue services in England.

Publishing reports

We must publish our reports (section 28B(1), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004).

We must not publish anything the inspectors believe would be against the interests of national security or might put anyone in danger (section 28B(2), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004).

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) of Fire & Rescue Services must each year submit to the Secretary of State a report on our inspections carried out in that period. A copy of this report must be laid before Parliament (section 28B(6), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004). The report must include HMCI's assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of fire and rescue authorities in England for the period the report covers (section 28B(5), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004). This is his State of Fire and Rescue report.

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Producing our inspection programme and framework

HMCI must prepare and publish an inspection programme (section 28A(1)(a), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004) and framework (section 28A(1)(b), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004).

The chief fire and rescue inspector for England must obtain the approval of the Secretary of State to an inspection programme or inspection framework before we can act in accordance with it (section 28A(2), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004).

Fire and rescue authorities are responsible for the fire and rescue services in their areas.

Acting as a check on the removal of senior officers

Fire and rescue authorities are responsible for the fire and rescue services in their areas. Authorities differ in size and governance arrangements. For authorities that are run by the police, fire and crime commissioner, arrangements for the dismissal of the chief fire officer are similar to those covering the dismissal of a chief constable.

If a police, fire and crime commissioner in England is proposing to dismiss their chief fire officer, they must invite HMCI to give his written views on the proposed removal. The police, fire and crime commissioner must consider his views before they make a decision (Article 18, Fire and Rescue Authority (Police and Crime Commissioner) (Application of Local Policing Provisions, Inspection, Powers to Trade and Consequential Amendments) Order 2017). These written views should be given to the appropriate police, fire and crime panel when considering the police, fire and crime commissioner's decision.

No police, fire and crime commissioner asked for written views during the period covered by this report.

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Our powers

Amendments made by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 to the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 created inspectors of fire and rescue services. They also created a duty to inspect and report on the effectiveness and efficiency of fire and rescue services in England, and created new powers of inspection.

Access to information and premises

Inspectors have powers to obtain any information or documents they reasonably need to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of a fire and rescue service (paragraph 6, Schedule A3, Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004). Inspectors also have powers to access premises used by fire and rescue services or those providing a service to a fire and rescue service. They can seek access for the purpose of assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of the fire and rescue service. This includes obtaining information, documents, evidence and other things on those premises (paragraph 7, Schedule A3, Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004).

Power to delegate functions

Inspectors have the power to delegate any of their inspection functions to another public authority (paragraph 2, Schedule A3, Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004).

Power to act jointly with another public body

We can act jointly with another public body, when appropriate, to work efficiently and effectively (paragraph 5, Schedule A3, Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004).

We can also help another public authority carry out its role, if HMCI considers it appropriate. This includes facilitating a 'best value' inspection under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999.

Amendments made by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 to the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 created inspectors of fire and rescue services.

STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
ABOUT US

Biographies for each of HM Inspectors of Fire and Rescue Services are on our website:

justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/about-us/who-we-are

Who we are

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services

Sir Thomas Winsor
In October 2012, Sir Thomas was appointed Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary. He took on the additional role of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services in July 2017.

Her Majesty's Inspectors of Fire and Rescue Services

Zoë Billingham
Zoë Billingham is Her Majesty's Inspector for the Eastern region.

Phil Gormley
Phil Gormley QPM is Her Majesty's Inspector for the Northern region.

Matt Parr
Matt Parr CB is Her Majesty's Inspector for the Southern region.

Dru Sharpling
Dru Sharpling CBE is Her Majesty's Inspector for three Southern services and also sits on the panel of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse.

Wendy Williams
Wendy Williams is Her Majesty's Inspector for the Western region.

How we are accountable

There are six Inspectors of Fire and Rescue Services.

The first Inspectors of Constabulary were appointed under the County and Borough Police Act 1856. This Act required them to inspect and report on the efficiency and effectiveness of most of the police forces in England and Wales. Substantially the same functions covering the inspection of fire and rescue authorities in England were created by the Policing and Crime Act 2017, which amended the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.

There are six Inspectors of Fire and Rescue Services. These inspectors also hold the separate appointment of Inspector of Constabulary. They are neither civil servants nor fire or police officers, and are appointed by the Crown for a fixed term of up to five years. That means we are independent of fire and rescue services, fire and rescue authorities (and their equivalents), police, Government, police and crime commissioners (and their equivalents), other agencies and all outside parties.

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STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE
ABOUT US

Independence doesn't mean a lack of accountability.

However, independence doesn't mean a lack of accountability. We are accountable in these ways:

- our statutory duties, enforceable through judicial review or by action for breach of statutory duty;
- our obligation to submit an annual report to the Home Secretary under section 28B of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, which must be laid before Parliament;
- our obligation to seek approval to our inspection programme and framework from the Home Secretary;
- written Parliamentary questions;
- our obligation to give written and oral evidence to Committees of Parliament, including the Home Affairs Select Committee, the Public Accounts Committee and any other select committee that may call on us to give evidence;
- our obligation to carry out other duties the Home Secretary directs us to (section 28A(3), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004); and
- our obligation to comply with the rules of administrative law and the rules of good public administration, enforceable in the High Court by judicial review.

As a public body, we are also subject to the legal obligations imposed on public authorities, including:

- Official Secrets Acts 1911 and 1989;
- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974;
- Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (2016/679/EU);
- Human Rights Act 1998;
- Freedom of Information Act 2000; and
- Equality Act 2010.

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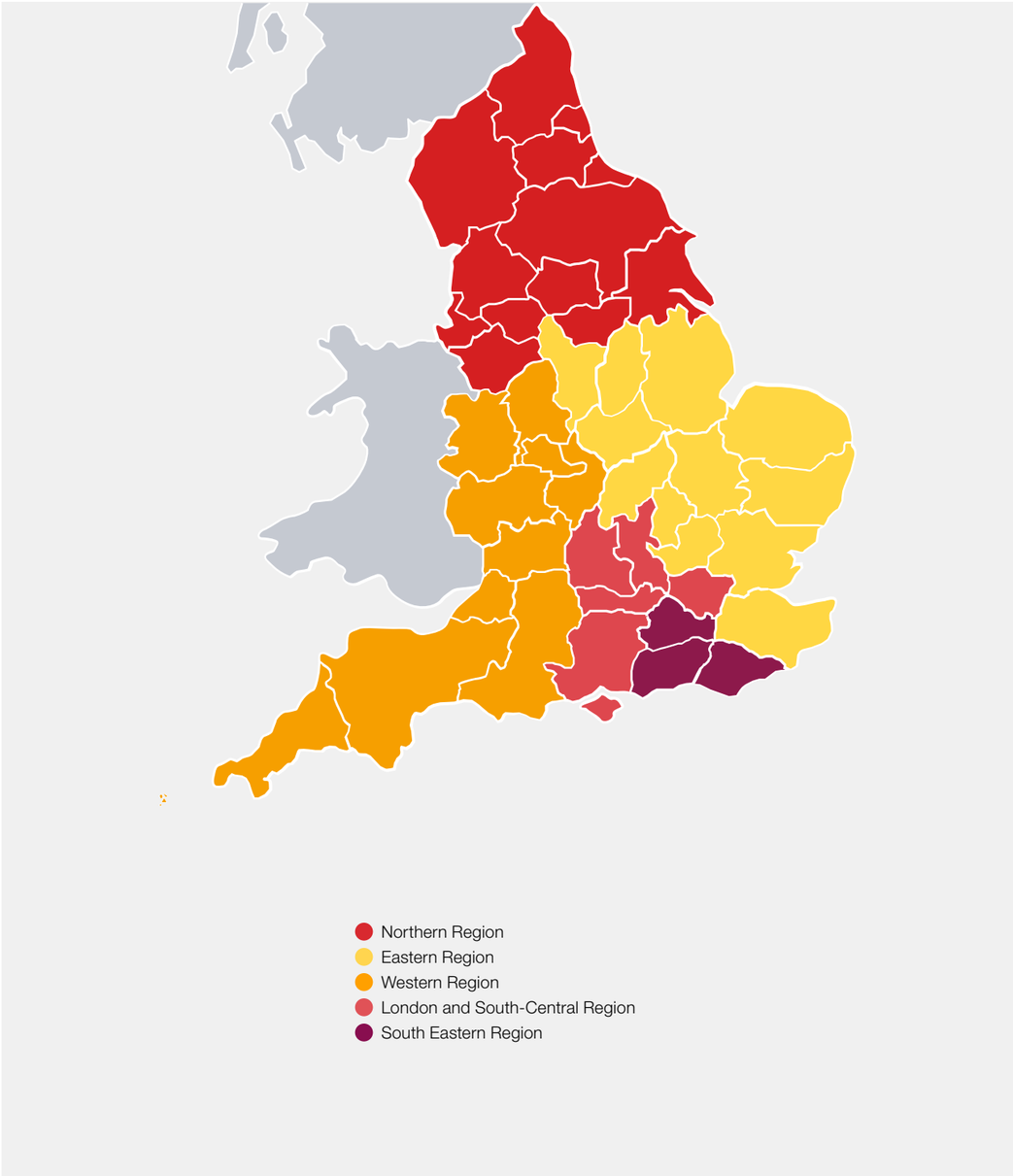
How we work with other organisations

We are mostly funded by the Home Office and are accountable to the Home Office for our spending, even though we are neither a subsidiary nor a part of the Home Office. For fire inspections, all our funding comes from the Home Office.

We have a concordat with the Home Office that explains the material parts of the relationship between our two organisations. The concordat sets out our respective roles, and the responsibilities of the main people involved in running, sponsoring and overseeing our affairs. The concordat is published on our website.

Work is under way to establish a concordat with the recently created Fire Standards Board, which will set out our respective roles and responsibilities, and how we will work together. This concordat will be published on our website.

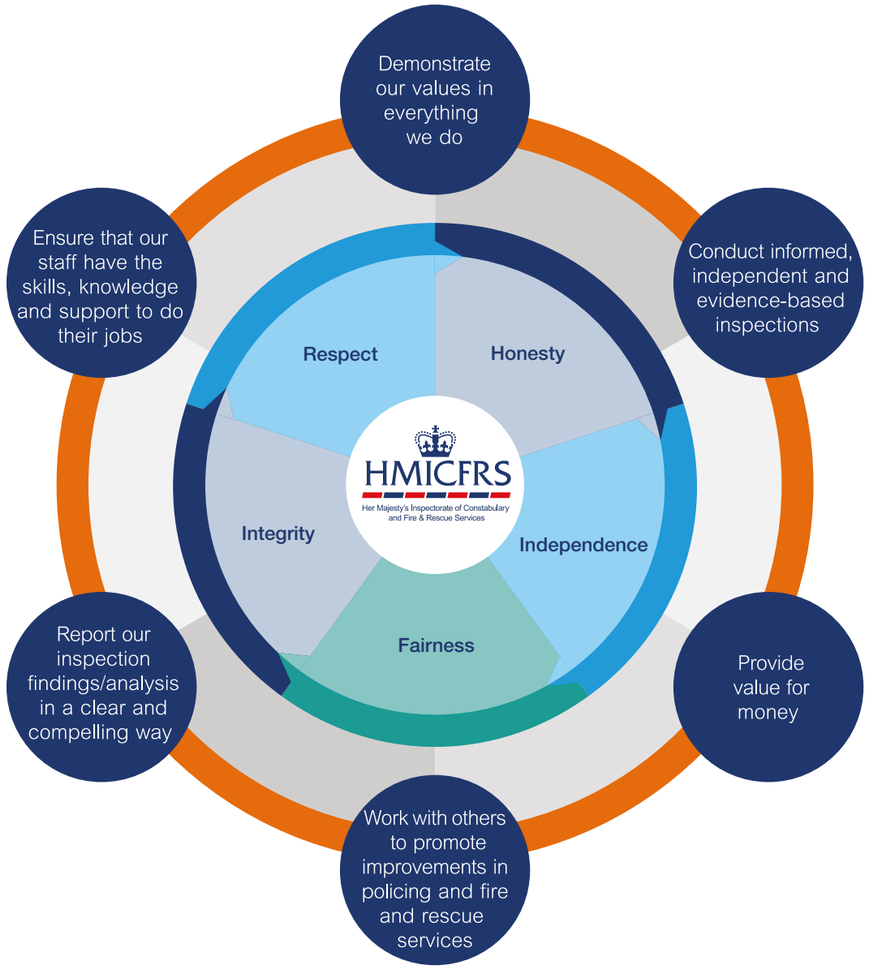
Our regions



Our purpose, values and objectives

Our purpose is to promote improvements in policing and fire and rescue services to make everyone safer.

Our values of respect, honesty, independence, integrity and fairness are at the heart of how we work. They act as a touchstone to help us make decisions – both as individuals and as an organisation.



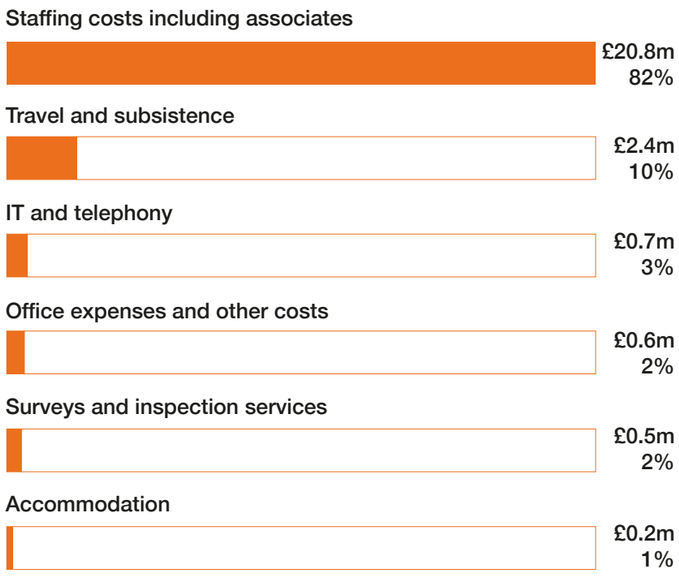
We spend just over 80 percent of our funding on our workforce.

Annex C: Our finances

As an inspectorate, we are mainly funded by the Home Office. All our funding for our fire inspection work comes from the Home Office.

We spend just over 80 percent of our funding on our workforce, with the rest spent on travel, subsistence, accommodation and other expenses.

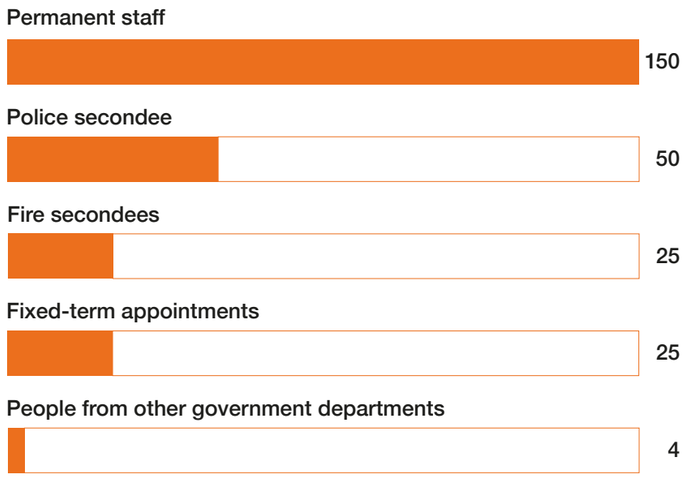
Expenditure breakdown 2018/19



Our workforce

Our workforce comprises the Inspectors of Fire and Rescue Services, civil servants, and secondees from fire and rescue services and police forces. We also have a register of associate inspectors.

Staffing breakdown 2018/19



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members of staff

Promoting improvements in policing and fire and rescue services to make everyone safer

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) independently assesses the effectiveness and efficiency of police forces and fire and rescue services – in the public interest.

In preparing our reports, we ask the questions that citizens would ask, and publish the answers in accessible form, using our expertise to interpret the evidence and make recommendations for improvement.

We provide authoritative information to allow the public to compare the performance of their police force or fire and rescue service against others. Our evidence is used to bring about improvements in the services they provide to the public.

HMICFRS

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