

Fire & Rescue Service

Effectiveness, efficiency and people 2018/19

An inspection of County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service



Contents

About this inspection	1
Service in numbers	2
Overview	4
Effectiveness	7
How effective is the service at keeping people safe and secure?	8
Summary	8
Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies	9
Preventing fires and other risks	11
Protecting the public through fire regulation	13
Responding to fires and other emergencies	16
Responding to national risks	19
Efficiency	22
How efficient is the service at keeping people safe and secure?	23
Summary	23
Making best use of resources	24
Making the fire and rescue service affordable now and in the future	26
People	29
How well does the service look after its people?	30
Summary	30
Promoting the right values and culture	31
Getting the right people with the right skills	33
Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity	35
Managing performance and developing leaders	37
Annex A – About the data	39
Annex B – Fire and rescue authority governance	45

About this inspection

This is the first time that HMICFRS has inspected fire and rescue services across England. Our focus is on the service they provide to the public, and the way they use the resources available. The inspection assesses how effectively and efficiently County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service prevents, protects the public against and responds to fires and other emergencies. We also assess how well it looks after the people who work for the service.

In carrying out our inspections of all 45 fire and rescue services in England, we answer three main questions:

1. How effective is the fire and rescue service at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?
2. How efficient is the fire and rescue service at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?
3. How well does the fire and rescue service look after its people?

This report sets out our inspection findings. After taking all the evidence into account, we apply a graded judgment for each of the three questions.

What inspection judgments mean

Our categories of graded judgment are:

- outstanding;
- good;
- requires improvement; and
- inadequate.

Good is our 'expected' graded judgment for all fire and rescue services. It is based on policy, practice or performance that meet pre-defined grading criteria, which are informed by any relevant national operational guidance or standards.


If the service exceeds what we expect for good, we will judge it as **outstanding**.

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

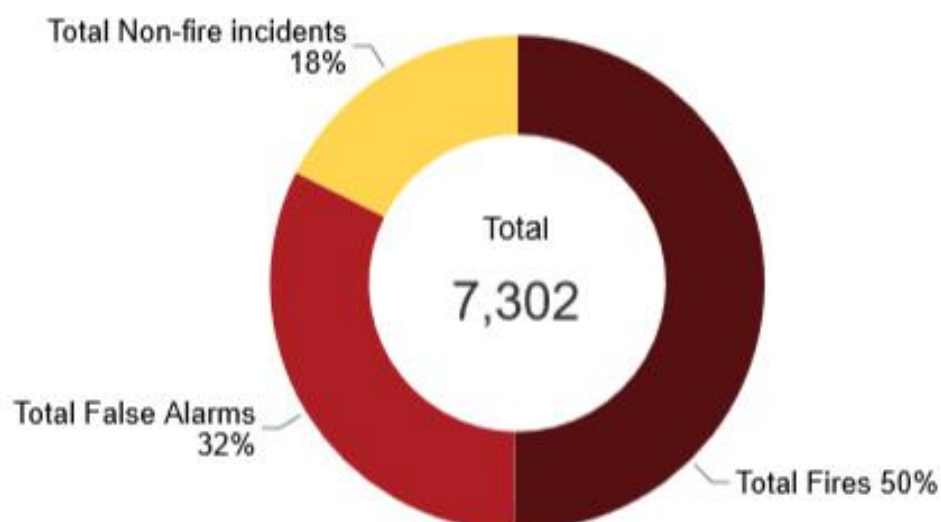
If we find serious critical failings of policy, practice or performance of the fire and rescue service, we will judge it as **inadequate**.

Service in numbers

 Public perceptions	Durham	England
Perceived effectiveness of service Public perceptions survey (June/July 2018)	89%	86%

 Response	Durham	England
Incidents attended per 1,000 population 12 months to 31 December 2018	11.6	10.4
Home fire risk checks carried out by FRS per 1,000 population 12 months to 31 March 2018	31.0	10.4
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises 12 months to 31 March 2018	13.6	3.0

Incidents attended in the 12 months to 31 December 2018





Cost

Durham

England

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

£27.17

£22.38



Workforce

Durham

England

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

0.7

0.6

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

-8%

-14%

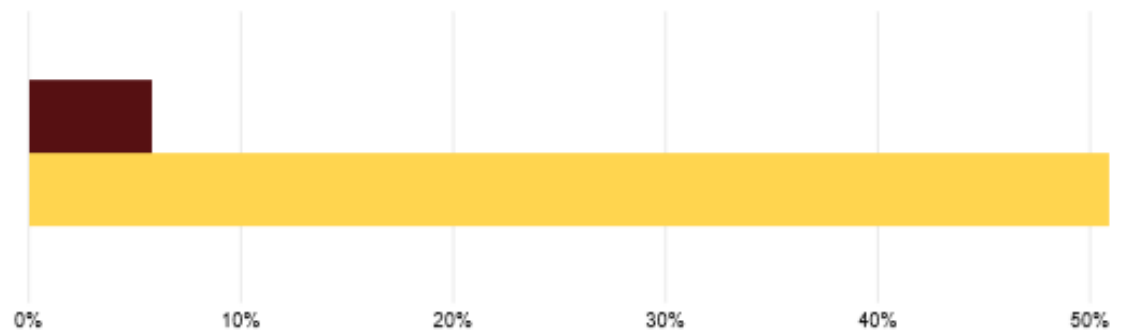
Percentage of wholetime firefighters
As at 31 March 2018

67%

70%

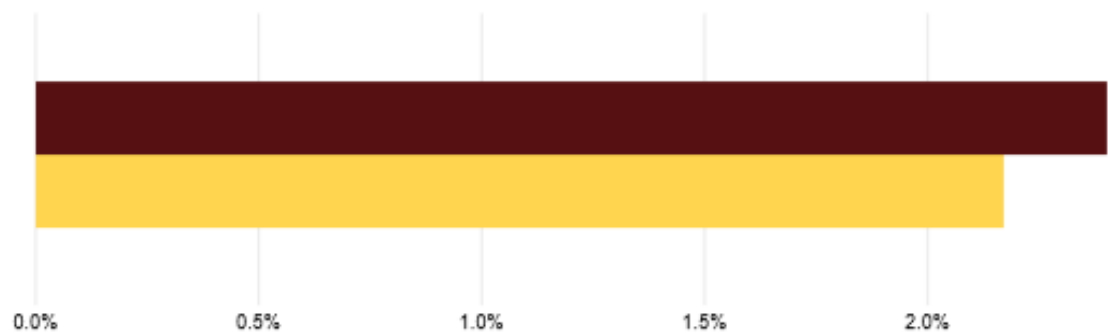
Percentage of female firefighters as at 31 March 2018

● Female firefighters ● Female residential population














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

● BAME Firefighters ● BAME residential population



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

Overview

 Effectiveness	 Good
Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies	 Requires improvement
Preventing fires and other risks	 Good
Protecting the public through fire regulation	 Requires improvement
Responding to fires and other emergencies	 Good
Responding to national risks	 Good
 Efficiency	 Good
Making best use of resources	 Good
Making the fire and rescue service affordable now and in the future	 Good

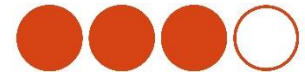


People



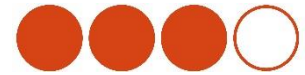
Requires improvement

Promoting the right values and culture



Good

Getting the right people with the right skills



Good

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity



Requires improvement

Managing performance and developing leaders



Requires improvement

Overall summary of inspection findings

We are pleased with most aspects of the performance of County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service in keeping people safe and secure. But it needs to improve how it looks after its people, to give a consistently good service.

County Durham and Darlington FRS is good at providing an effective service to the public. It is good at:

- preventing fires and other risks;
- responding to fires and other emergencies; and
- responding to national risks.

But it requires improvement to the way it understands the risk of fire and other emergencies. And it requires improvement to the way it protects the public through fire regulation.

The service is good in the efficiency of its services. It is good at making the best use of resources and at making its services affordable now and in the future.

County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement to the way it looks after its people. It requires improvement at:

- ensuring fairness and promoting diversity; and
- managing performance and developing leaders.

But the service is good at:

- promoting the right values and culture; and
- getting the right people with the right skills.

We are encouraged by the positive aspects we have identified. We look forward to seeing a more consistent performance over the coming year.

Effectiveness



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



Good

Summary

An effective fire and rescue service will identify and assess the full range of foreseeable fire and rescue risks its community faces. It will target its fire prevention and protection activities to those who are at greatest risk from fire. It will make sure businesses comply with fire safety legislation. When the public calls for help, the fire and rescue service should respond promptly with the right skills and equipment to deal with the incident effectively. County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service's overall effectiveness is good.

The service is good at preventing fires and other risks. It is clear about how it prioritises its work, and its community safety strategy focuses on prevention activity. Both specialist prevention and operational staff understand [safeguarding](#) practices well. It is particularly good at making considerable numbers of [safe and well visits](#) but should prioritise those most at risk, such as [vulnerable people](#).

The service is also good at responding to fires and other emergencies. It gets firefighters to the most serious fires quicker than other mainly rural services. This response, however, isn't based on a thorough enough understanding of local and community risk of fire and other emergencies. Crucially, its risk management planning includes only limited detail on main priorities, such as keeping the public safe. And the service couldn't explain how its community risk profile shapes its work, now or in the future.

Staff are well trained for dealing with a range of major incidents and have a practical understanding of joint working principles with other emergency services. The service's response to national risk is good. It is an important partner in the local resilience forum (LRF). It has plans in place to test scenarios for the high-risk buildings it has identified.

The service requires improvement in how it protects the public through fire regulation. Inspections of risk sites and information recorded about them aren't consistent, and protection work is under-resourced because of a lack of fully qualified inspectors.

The service doesn't make full use of the range of enforcement powers available to it in supporting businesses to comply with legislation.

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure its integrated risk management plan is informed by a comprehensive understanding of current and future risk. It should use a wide range of data to build the risk profile and use operational data to test that it is up to date.
- The service should ensure its firefighters have good access to relevant and up-to-date site-specific risk information.

All fire and rescue services should identify and assess all foreseeable fire and rescue-related risks. They should also prevent and mitigate these risks.

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

Understanding local and community risk

The service's [integrated risk management plan](#) (IRMP) covers 2018/19 to 2020/21. We found this isn't based on a thorough understanding of risk.

The risk assessment the service has used to develop its IRMP is unclear and there is no co-ordinated approach or clear owner for this work. It is also unclear how the service uses risk information in its operational modelling to validate its response model. This includes how the service has positioned its resources geographically to meet demand and potential risks.

The service completed an emergency response review in 2017. It further reviewed some of the data in 2018, when it evaluated the potential effect of changes to its operational response model. The reviews examined a wide range of data including:

- previous incident data;
- response times; and
- a range of societal and community data.

The service used this information to inform consultation proposals for a change in its operational response model. The consultation took place in early 2019 and received 790 responses. The service made good use of social media to promote it, using videos to explain the effect of potential changes and invite feedback. It published responses to all the feedback it received on its website and used this feedback to help shape the final proposals. The service consults well with the public.

The service recently created a community risk profile (CRP) for 2018/19 to 2020/21. This will inform a new IRMP, which will replace the existing one in April 2020. The CRP reviews a wide range of data sources – including incident and societal data, and national and local risk registers – to determine the top 20 incident risks. Information from the CRP could inform operational planning assumptions and focus areas for prevention teams. However, during our inspection it was unclear how this will inform future organisational direction or help align activities to risk.

The service should ensure that it bases its new IRMP on a thorough understanding of risk and demand.

Having an effective risk management plan

The service doesn't have an effective integrated risk management planning process and there is a lack of clarity in relation to the IRMP. The life span of the IRMP was unclear and managers had a mixed understanding of its origin and how it was informing organisational business. The service's strategic plan also does not link to the IRMP.

Strategic documents, such as the response and business safety strategies, contain more detailed information about the IRMP's focus areas. However, these documents don't cover all areas of the organisation, some had outdated information, and some managers had no, or only limited, knowledge of them. We couldn't see how information in the IRMP supports the allocation of resources to prevention, protection and response activities.

Fire stations have district plans. Station-based staff are clear on important performance areas and report on them. However, staff we interviewed weren't always clear how these plans contributed to meeting the service's strategic objectives.

The service is an important and valued partner of the LRF and uses its community risk register to inform its awareness of risk.

Maintaining risk information

All fire services are required to gather information about buildings that may pose a risk in the event of an emergency. This is a legislative duty that also helps keep firefighters safe. The service couldn't assure us that all relevant buildings had appropriate risk plans. Quality assurance for this process is ineffective. Our review of these plans identified issues such as inconsistent risk rating, and in some cases, important information such as hazards and control measures didn't align.

We were pleased to see that the service has a system in place that allows it to quickly communicate temporary safety-critical risk information, such as when a building's sprinkler system is faulty. The service has a process in place to prepare and manage a response to a temporary risk. For example, it has plans for annual events, including festivals.

The service communicates general risk information well across the service. Staff have a good understanding of communication processes, including handovers between [watches](#) and emails and bulletins containing more formal risk information.

Preventing fires and other risks



Good

County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service is good at preventing fires and other risks. But we found the following areas in which it needs to improve:

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure staff have received appropriate training on all the issues covered during a safe and well visit.
- The service should evaluate all its prevention work, so it understands the benefits better.

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

Prevention strategy

The service has a community safety strategy that details how it will focus its prevention activity, such as reducing fire deaths and injuries in the home and tackling deliberate fire setting. The strategy is clear and sets out priorities for prevention work, but we found that some staff didn't have a good awareness of it. Similarly, staff couldn't explain how the risk assessment in the service's CRP was being used to develop or prioritise prevention activities.

The service concentrates much of its prevention work on its statutory responsibility to protect the public from the risks of fire. It also works with partners to support education in a range of non-statutory prevention work, such as road and water safety.

The service undertakes high numbers of safe and well visits.

In the year to 31 March 2018, the service completed 19,545 safe and well visits (also known in some services as [home fire safety checks](#)). This is 31 safe and well visits per 1,000 population, over three times the England rate of 10.4.

It has a clear process for identifying people at greatest risk of fire and making them a priority for its home safety visits. It has five priority levels, ranging from unscheduled visits to high-risk partner referrals. The service aims to make 80 percent of all safe and well visits to those in the highest risk levels.

In the year to 31 March 2018, the service completed 36.2 percent of these visits to households occupied by an elderly person and 6.1 percent to households occupied by a person registered with a disability. These are below the England rates of 54.1 percent and 24.7 percent, respectively.

As well as proactive targeting and partner referrals, the service has good relationships with local social housing providers. It has introduced a scheme where all new tenants receive a safe and well visit. So far, it has completed about 800 visits.

Our sampling of safe and well case files found many examples where staff didn't give wellbeing advice. Staff told us they use professional judgment to decide whether it is relevant to the occupant. However, guidance for when to give wellbeing advice is vague. Some staff said that although they had completed online training, they didn't feel it was enough and so they lack the confidence to ask wellbeing-related questions.

The service has commissioned two evaluations of its safe and well programme. A local university did one and a local authority scrutiny committee did the other. The evaluations resulted in an action plan of potential improvement areas which the service is implementing.

We found strong local ownership of prevention activity throughout the organisation. The service has created information systems that allow crews to access data to focus their prevention activities effectively. One system gives trend information, such as where and when fires are likely to be deliberately set. Being able to see data on performance – such as the number of safe and well visits undertaken and the number of deliberate fires – means each station is aware of its priorities and can target resources effectively.

Promoting community safety

Operational managers regularly attend and take part in local partnership meetings that allow partners to share relevant data. This enables the service to work on joint initiatives, for example to reduce anti-social behaviour and deliberate fire setting.

The service works with a range of partners on the annual Safer Futures Live event. This reaches about 7,500 schoolchildren each year, giving safety advice related to fire, roads, water, electrics and the internet. Staff are passionate about the event and the service informed us that feedback from schools is always positive.

The service takes part in campaigns to promote safety messages using the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) national campaigns calendar. Much of its campaign work is done on social media, although some practical education is provided, such as for road and water safety. The service encourages stations to run local community safety campaigns. This means prevention activities align to local risk, but there is a lack of central oversight to monitor and evaluate their effect.

Both specialist prevention and operational staff have a good knowledge of safeguarding practices. Staff we spoke to had completed their annual online training and were confident about identifying safeguarding concerns and making referrals.

In 2018, the service formed a dedicated arson reduction team, but we were surprised to find the team doesn't have any specific objectives. The service frequently attends deliberate fires. In the year to 31 March 2018, the service attended 2,817 deliberate fires. This is an increase of 1,630 since the year ending 31 March 2013. Deliberate fires accounted for 74.5 percent of all fires that the service attended in the year ending 31 March 2018.

The service has worked with the charity Crimestoppers UK on a campaign to reduce deliberate fire setting. There were fewer deliberate fires during the campaign than in the same period the previous year. The campaign has now been broadened to cover the whole service area and two other fire and rescue services are jointly running it in the North East.

Road safety

The police and local authorities tend to lead road safety education activity, but the service works with them and other local partners to support this work. This includes taking part in national road safety campaigns and weeks of action, and it also provides the service with access to information on accidents and other data. However, the service's arrangements are informal and lacking a clear strategy. The service's education activity, such as giving road safety advice and accident demonstrations to groups including schools, doesn't seem to be centrally co-ordinated. Crews have autonomy to carry out local initiatives, but the service doesn't review or evaluate the effect of these activities.

Protecting the public through fire regulation



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure operational staff are trained to carry out fire safety audits competently.
- The service should ensure it has an effective quality assurance process for its audit process.
- The service should ensure that protection staff have the capacity and skill to use the full range of its available enforcement powers.
- The service should ensure it works proactively with local businesses to support compliance with fire safety regulations.

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

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

Risk-based approach

The service uses a business safety strategy to guide its fire protection activities. Some staff we spoke to within the protection department weren't aware of this document, or how it affected them.

The service's risk-based inspection programme identifies high-risk buildings that it needs to audit. On review, we found that the information used to identify high-risk buildings is limited. Protection staff informed us that they aren't confident that its risk-based inspection programme includes all the buildings that fall under the legislative requirements for inspection.

In the year to 31 March 2019, the service audited 53.3 percent of the 60 premises it identified as high risk. The service aims to audit each of these premises every one to three years.

The service has a team of six centrally based inspectors who audit the highest risk premises. Fire crews complete the low and medium-risk audits.

The overall number of audits in the year to March 2018 has increased by 72 (compared with the previous year's 2,066 audits). This equates to 13.6 audits per 100 known premises and is notably higher than the England rate of 3.0.

Data provided by the service shows, of the 2,184 audits completed in the year to April 2019, 1,844 were low and medium-risk audits done by crews.

As well as the risk-based inspection programme, the service has a proactive approach to so-called themed audits. It defines its themed audits by incident data and national trends. Data and trends have led the service to inspect premises types including care homes and schools. It reviews its themed audit programme every year.

The service received 411 requests for building regulation consultations in the year to 31 March 2019. Of these, it completed 87.3 percent on time. This is an improvement on the previous year, when it completed 69.1 percent on time.

At the time of our inspection, the service only had two members of staff sufficiently qualified to the relevant standard to undertake the full range of inspection activity. The service recognises that this is an insufficient number to enable it to fulfil its risk-based inspection programme. Other staff members are working towards achieving the relevant qualifications, but until such time the department has reduced capacity. Staff told us that with a small inspection team there are concerns about resilience.

The limited amount of specialist protection skills within the service means that there are times when no specialist is working. If an urgent matter occurs, the service needs to recall staff to duty if an out-of-hours response is needed.

The service has been using operational staff to do fire safety audits since 2012. We found that it has only trained a small percentage of operational staff to undertake protection audits in line with the current national guidance (Level 4 certificate). The service informed us that a number of operational staff completed an internal two-day training course in 2012, and that it had provided some refresher training.

However, some staff told us they hadn't received any refresher training for several years and are not confident conducting audits.

The service's future approach to training for crews is positive and it has made a significant investment in this area. At the time of our inspection, 32 additional staff were in training to attain the relevant qualification to conduct fire safety audits.

The service has a quality assurance process of sampling one audit per watch for each district each month. For the specialist team, the fire protection lead samples the work of other inspectors. We reviewed a sample of these quality assurance reports and found they lacked detail about overall performance and any learning identified. The service should ensure it has a robust quality assurance system especially as operational staff conduct most audit activity, with some conducting full audits despite only having completed limited training.

The service receives feedback from customer satisfaction surveys after audits that identify a problem. Although only few surveys are returned, every responder reported they were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the level of service they had received.

Enforcement

The service works with local businesses to make sure they comply with fire safety regulations. In the year to 31 March 2018, the service issued 353 informal notifications and four [prohibition notices](#). It didn't issue any alteration notices or enforcement notices, or bring any prosecutions.

The service has informed us that it would rather not undertake formal enforcement unless it had to. The service should make sure it strikes the right balance between working with, and supporting, businesses and using its enforcement powers, so businesses comply with legislation.

The service has issued 13 prohibition notices and undertaken 2 prosecutions over the last 3 years. This limited level of enforcement activity and new team members means the service has very few inspectors who have direct experience in prosecution or investigating and preparing for a prosecution.

The service should make sure staff are trained and confident to undertake formal [enforcement actions](#) if required. The service has recently appointed a new legal adviser who has provided legal awareness training for fire safety inspectors.

We found that the service has done some joint enforcement work with partner organisations – including the police, environmental health and immigration teams – to visit premises of mutual interest.

Working with others

The service is trying to reduce the burden of attending false alarms. In the year to 31 March 2019, it attended 816 automatic fire alarm calls to non-domestic premises due to apparatus. This is an increase on the previous year when it attended 753.

Since a policy review, the service introduced charging from April 2019 to recover its costs from businesses for attending repeated false alarms. At the time of our inspection, the service had invoiced four premises. It hasn't yet been possible to formally assess whether this new approach is reducing attendance at false alarms.

The service uses social media and its website to promote business safety. Its direct engagement with local businesses, such as attending business seminars or hosting workshops on fire safety compliance, is limited and it has chosen not to engage with any prime authority schemes. The service is working to increase activity in this area, which it says has been limited by capacity.

Staff from the protection department meet regularly with other regulatory authorities, such as environmental health and trading standards, to share information and discuss matters of mutual interest. This can result in them working together, for example, on joint inspections where regulatory powers fall across two agencies.

Responding to fires and other emergencies



Good

County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service is good at responding to fires and other emergencies. But we found the following areas in which it needs to improve:

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure it has an effective policy to determine how it aligns its resources to risk during periods of low fire engine availability.
- The service should ensure it has an effective system of debriefing to enable staff to learn from operational incidents and to improve future response and command.
- The service should assure itself that it has procedures in place to record important operational decisions made at incidents and that these procedures are well understood by staff.

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

Managing assets and resources

The service has a response strategy but couldn't show us how it has based it on a thorough understanding of risk. It struggles to maintain fire engine availability, notably during the daytime. During times of reduced fire engine availability, the service had no clear policy of how it aligns its remaining resources to the perceived risks. Despite this, the service has a quicker average response time to [primary fires](#) than other predominantly rural services.

The service has 26 fire engines across 15 fire stations. The service has an optimum availability of 26 fire engines during the day and 24 at night. On each day we sampled, significantly fewer engines were available. Our samples of daytime cover consistently showed that between 8 and 15 fire engines were unavailable, largely due to the unavailability of [on-call](#) staff.

On most days, there are staff who take on second contracts to cover staffing shortfalls and maintain fire engine availability. Data from the service shows that in 2018/19 it covered 2,336 wholetime shifts in this way. It also covered 196 shifts using on-call staff. Despite this, there were still times when the service didn't maintain optimum availability.

In the year to 31 March 2019, overall fire engine availability was 83.4 percent.

The service has deemed 13 of the 15 fire stations across the county essential for maintaining fire cover. Since managing operational resources is a continuing challenge, we were surprised to find that the service doesn't have a degradation policy. This would give a consistent, risk-based approach to maintaining fire cover at times of staff and fire engine unavailability. While the service moves fire engines to designated stations to try to maintain an initial response standard, it couldn't explain how this approach was based on an understanding of risk.

The service has identified several high-risk buildings that would need many fire engines to attend a fire. However, the service couldn't explain its operational planning assumptions, such as how it would maintain the right level of fire cover if it had to deal with an incident needing at least ten fire engines.

[Wholetime](#) and on-call operational staff are trained to the same level which is positive. Some stations have enhanced training aligned to local risks, such as working at height or water rescue. Our sample showed staff were up to date for all areas of risk-critical training and staff were complimentary about the operational training they receive. The service's modern training centre has a range of facilities to develop and test operational competencies.

Response

The service has completed a gap analysis for adopting [national operational guidance](#) (NOG). It is aware that it has not fully adopted all elements of the incident command guidance and still needs to implement a number of areas. The service told us that lack of capacity is the reason for its slow adoption of NOG.

The service has a set of response standards that it monitors and reports on. These include attendance at road traffic collisions, and at house and building fires. It narrowly misses its response standard for house fires but meets the standards it sets for building fires and road traffic collisions.

The service hasn't clearly communicated its response standards to the public. They aren't detailed in its IRMP or easily found on its website. The standards reported via the service's website don't include call handling times, which give a more accurate response standard. The service should look to publicise better its commitment to the local community.

In the year to 31 March 2018, the service's average response time to primary fires was 8 minutes and 39 seconds. This is quicker than the average response time of 10 minutes and 32 seconds for other predominantly rural services.

We visited several fire stations during our inspection. We found that firefighters can quickly and confidently access risk information using fire engine [mobile data terminals](#). This includes information relating to premises risk, chemicals, water supplies and vehicle data for use at road traffic collisions.

The service doesn't effectively record incident decisions at small and medium-sized incidents. Incident logs provide an accurate record of the critical decisions made by the commander at the scene of operations. Without the use of a decision log it is difficult to ascertain a clear rationale for what actions were taken and why. Although supervisors have notebooks, we found that they aren't using them to record decisions. The service did inform us that staff record decisions at larger incidents when a command vehicle is present.

Command

The service has a process in place to make sure it assesses all incident commanders in accordance with national guidance. All the records we sampled showed that all staff are currently up to date with incident command training.

Staff we interviewed showed good knowledge of most of the important areas of command. But supervisor-level commanders were often unaware of, or had only limited technical knowledge of, the command decision-making process.

Control staff have the discretion to change the number and type of resource they send to an incident based on the information they receive. For example, they can [mobilise](#) additional fire engines when their professional judgment suggests this is needed.

Keeping the public informed

The service proactively communicates incident information on its social media channels. Officers have had training and are confident in dealing with the media at incidents.

Staff were confident at recognising and dealing with safeguarding concerns, both at operational incidents and during day-to-day activities. They were able to explain how they would refer people to other organisations, such as social services, if needed.

The staff we spoke to in [fire control](#) were confident taking emergency calls and interacting with the public in times of need. They were also confident offering survival advice should somebody be trapped in a building by fire.

Fire control staff have an easy-to-access language translation tool that helps them if they receive a call from a non-English speaker. Staff we interviewed had received training and were confident using the tool.

Evaluating operational performance

The service doesn't have robust arrangements in place for operational assurance and doesn't always identify and implement learning to promote continuous improvement.

We found a mixed picture when we reviewed the service's debrief processes. [Hot debriefs](#) that follow smaller incidents take place, with many staff having a good knowledge of the process. The service communicates any learning in its bulletins or the intranet. But the service should assure itself that staff read and understand this information.

Formal debriefs after larger incidents don't include an effective way to identify and implement learning.

A sample of records from formal debriefs showed an inconsistent approach to identifying and recording information. The areas the service identifies as needing improvement don't always align with the stated learning outcomes. Nor are we confident that the service is identifying and implementing learning to promote continuous improvement. Each debrief we sampled showed that identified learning hadn't been implemented, or that it hadn't been implemented on time. For example, 12 months after a large incident that involved a firefighter injury, the service hadn't taken all the relevant actions.

Officers monitor incidents to support and review incident commanders' performance. They do this using a mobile app, which staff view positively. Incident commanders get feedback and a central team monitors any trends.

The service monitors learning in the fire sector through the [national operational learning](#) forum. It also shares information with other services through this forum. Learning from other emergency services is reviewed through the joint operational learning process which is well managed.

Responding to national risks



Good

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

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

Preparedness

The service is prepared to deal with a range of potential incidents and scenarios. It is an important partner of the LRF, chairing the strategic board as well as several other groups. It is an active partner on all sub-groups. It also provides meeting venues and training facilities when needed. Partners spoke positively about the role that the fire service has in the group.

Overall, operational staff have a good practical understanding of the [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles](#) (JESIP). These principles enable emergency services to work together at incidents. Fire control staff have had training in JESIP. They know how to call on specialist advice and resources from national resilience arrangements.

The service has arrangements with its neighbouring fire and rescue services to supplement its resources at large and major incidents. It trains staff to prepare for these types of incident. However, the service should make sure these arrangements are formalised.

It needs to develop a better approach to identifying its highest risk buildings. For example, there are two top-tier [COMAH sites](#) in the county, but the service has chosen not to give these premises the highest risk rating. The service tests its COMAH plans annually usually as a table-top exercise rather than a scenario on site.

The service has identified four buildings which it has categorised as highest risk. It has produced plans that identify the greatest risks on those sites. This will inform decision making in the event of an emergency incident. However, awareness of these plans among some operational staff was limited and the service couldn't provide evidence of when it has last tested these plans.

Working with other services

The service has been working with other fire and rescue services in the region to share premises risk information. It recently added operational risk plans for neighbouring counties to its fire engine data terminals. However, not all crews are aware of this.

The service conducts exercises with neighbouring fire and rescue services to make sure they can work effectively with each other. We found that its approach has been ad hoc, although we note that it has improved this over the last 12 months.

As part of our inspection, we surveyed fire and rescue service staff to get their views of their service (please see Annex A for more details). Of the 182 firefighters or specialist support staff to respond, 54.6 percent stated that the service has regularly trained or done exercises with neighbouring fire and rescue services in the last 12 months. In the year to 31 March 2019, the service completed six training sessions and exercises with neighbouring fire and rescue services.

To enable the service to prepare for national response incidents, it undertakes regular national resilience training sessions and exercises. In the year to 31 March 2019, the service completed 64 of these.

The service has deployed resources to support national incidents. In summer 2018, the service sent fire engines to support the large-scale wild fires at Winter Hill, Lancashire, which was declared a major incident. It has also used resources from other fire and rescues services to support local incidents.

Working with other agencies

The service is an important LRF partner and works well with other responders. The LRF has a programme of six exercises a year to test scenarios from the community risk register. Exercises in the last 12 months included testing plans for a terrorist attack, a major transport crash, and a high-rise fire.

The service uses its training centre for several multi-agency training events and exercises. This includes police firearms training and the ambulance service being involved in a large simulated transport incident. In the year to 31 March 2019, the service completed 31 multi-agency training sessions and exercises.

As well as emergency responders, the service works well with other agencies. For example, joint working with the Environment Agency revealed a lack of compatibility between fire service and Environment Agency pumps. The service developed a fix that has changed the national ways of working between the two organisations.

The service is funded by the Home Office for marauding terrorist attack capability. However, early in the inspection process we found the service couldn't always guarantee full capability and hadn't updated its policy and mobilisation procedures after a change in staffing models at one of its fire stations. The service has now taken steps to address this.

Efficiency



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



Good

Summary

An efficient fire and rescue service will manage its budget and spend money properly and appropriately. It will align its resources to its risk. It should try to keep costs down without compromising public safety. Future budgets should be based on robust and realistic assumptions. County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service's overall efficiency is good.

The service is good at managing its budgets, investing wisely, making savings and working with its partner organisations. But it could use information better to measure its activities, such as the benefits of collaborations.

The service has made sensible assumptions about savings requirements. It has identified several changes it could make to realise them. It has a good track record of making savings and has saved £3m since its last savings plan. But it isn't always clear how it aligns resources to risk or its stated priorities.

The service has moved much of its work from central teams to operational crews. This helps it keep costs down and increase the productivity of its operational crews. It frequently uses staff on second contracts to fill vacant shifts. This keeps the staffing structure flexible and provides savings. But the service should monitor the increasing use of this approach, as costs are rising.

Business continuity plans are in place to cover all foreseeable business interruptions, although the service should ensure they are tested regularly.

The service exploits opportunities presented by changes in technology. It has invested in a state-of-the-art training centre and is trialling the Home Office's new communication system. It is proactive in identifying additional funding sources and has a trading company that it uses to support its revenue budget.

Making best use of resources



Good

County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service is good at making best use of resources. But we found the following areas in which it needs to improve:

Areas for improvement

- The service needs to show a clear rationale for the resources allocated between prevention, protection and response activities.
- The service should ensure that it is reviewing, monitoring and evaluating all collaboration activity.
- The service should ensure it has good business continuity arrangements in place that take account of all foreseeable threats and risks. It needs to review and test plans thoroughly.

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

How plans support objectives

The service has a good grasp of the financial challenges it faces. It has built its plans on sound assumptions and subjects them to external scrutiny. Over recent years, it has developed a good track record of reducing its spending to match available funding. The service's revenue budget for 2019/20 is £28.4m, which is £3m lower than for 2010.

The service's 2016/17 to 2018/19 efficiency plan identified £3m savings, although to the service's credit it managed to save £3.19m. It achieved these savings by making changes to all levels of the organisational structure. For example, it reduced central support teams and passed their work to stations to make better use of firefighter capacity. Information and communications technology (ICT) investments also created some efficiency savings.

The service has [reserves](#) in place to manage contingencies over the short and medium term. Data provided by the service shows that as of 31 March 2019, the service has a general reserve of 5 percent of its budget (£1.4m). It also has earmarked reserves of £5.9m. The service has a reserves strategy as part of its medium-term financial plan. To date, the service has never used reserves to balance revenue budgets and has no intention to. The service also has no external debt.

The service couldn't give a rationale for how it allocated resources to prevention, protection and response and how its financial planning aligns to the priorities in its [IRMP](#). The service must ensure its high-level financial planning addresses the risks and priorities within its IRMP.

Productivity and ways of working

The service has been moving some of the work undertaken by central teams to station-based operational crews since 2010 to make better use of firefighter capacity. It has resulted in a notable increase in productivity levels. For example, the service makes over three times the national rate for [safe and well visits](#) and over four times the national rate for fire safety audits.

In 2015, due to financial uncertainty, the service did not fill some of its operational staff vacancies. Instead, it uses existing staff working a second contract to cover vacant shifts. Data provided by the service demonstrates it covered 2,336 shifts this way in the year ending 31 March 2019, at a cost of £495,333. This was about £132,000 less than the amount it would have spent if the vacancies had been filled. However, it is an increase of £158,826 compared with the previous year. Therefore the service needs to ensure that it continues to monitor this approach to ensure its continuing sustainability.

The service has a performance regime that guides organisational activity in important areas. For example, station-based staff have targets in areas such as safe and well 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. They pass this information to a meeting of senior managers and quarterly to the Fire Authority to scrutinise performance levels.

Staff across several central departments told us that capacity was a problem since the reduction in staff numbers. While staff still meet the principal elements of their role, they feel they struggle to find the time to check and evaluate the effectiveness of their work. We saw examples of this including:

- inconsistent quality assurance of premises' risk files;
- many open cases of safe and well files;
- a lack of evaluation of safe and well returns; and
- limited quality assurance within the protection section.

Several of the service's corporate documents are either missing, contain inaccurate information, or have passed their review dates. This includes strategic documents, policies and procedures. It isn't always clear therefore how the service meets its main priorities and governs important areas of business.

To respond to the increase in the number of deliberate fires, the service has reinvested some of its savings in a dedicated arson reduction team. This approach should help the service target its prevention resources better and could provide efficiencies through it attending fewer incidents of this type.

Collaboration

The service is discharging its duty to collaborate with other emergency partners. It has several collaborative arrangements in place, although it would benefit from evaluating them more formally.

The service has a governance structure to manage and monitor its collaborative arrangements. It reviews all new opportunities and may choose not to proceed if it doesn't feel there will be benefits. This is good practice. However, once a collaboration has commenced, we found limited evidence to show any evaluation of benefits achieved.

Examples of collaboration we saw include:

- the service's Barnard Castle quad station, housing emergency teams from the fire, police and ambulance service as well as mountain rescue;
- tri-service responders who respond to incidents on behalf of the main emergency services in the Stanhope area; and
- sharing sites with the police.

The service sees collaboration as a means to improve future working practices and create efficiencies. It would like to explore more collaboration opportunities with the police. It is also exploring several opportunities with neighbouring fire and rescue services in the areas of protection, [fire control](#) and human resources.

Continuity arrangements

Individual staff have been given responsibility for managing the service's business continuity arrangements. However, business continuity isn't included in any of the service's departmental strategies. Nor does the service give training to managers who have business continuity responsibilities.

The service has plans in place to cover foreseeable interruptions. All plans should be subject to an annual test, although this doesn't always happen. We found several plans that the service hadn't tested, including its main business continuity plan. We also found that the service doesn't always use the learning from a business interruption to mitigate the effect of it happening in other, similar areas of the organisation. The service should make sure it reviews and tests its plans annually in line with stated timescales.

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



Good

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

Improving value for money

The service has a good track record of achieving savings and has plans in place to meet predicted savings requirements. Its medium-term financial plan runs until 2023, by which time it predicts it will need to save £1.5m from its current budget. It has based this on realistic assumptions. The service has a savings plan that identifies about £2.1m savings that it can implement over the next four years. This prudent model therefore provides some flexibility.

The service has a good understanding of its main financial risks and has made plans to mitigate them, including predicting a potential £4m savings needed for the worst-case scenario.

The service introduced the first part of its current savings plan in April which saw a change to the operational response model. The service has identified several options for changing its operational model over the next three years to meet potential future savings targets and requirements.

The service has realised savings across all areas. For example:

- a review of all non-staff budgets to eliminate non-essential expenditure produced savings of £369,000;
- a reduction in vehicle fleet and changes to the officer car provision saved £194,000; and
- collaborative activity, such as sharing the estate, has saved about £175,000.

The service considers capital expenditure its biggest future challenge. It has plans to rebuild Darlington fire station and after that it only needs to refurbish one more station to complete its estate. The service has invested heavily in modernising its estate in recent years and is now able to reduce running costs to make savings.

Innovation

The service looks for opportunities to improve how it works. It was an early adopter of mobile working and its crews have access to tablets to support the administration of safe and well visits. But the technology is dated and unreliable and staff find it frustrating. The service has plans in place to update it.

The service is always keen to try new technology or innovate. It is trialling the Home Office's Emergency Services Network, which it has on five fire engines. It is the first fire service in the country to trial it.

The service invested significantly in a state-of-the-art training centre. It received £600,000 funding from the police innovation fund for this, sharing the incident command suite with the local police force.

The service has earmarked financial reserves for improving ways of working. The service's 'modernisation reserve' has money allocated to replacing one of its fire stations. Another reserve has money allocated to support adopting the government's new emergency services communication system.

Future investment and working with others

The service will often explore opportunities to work with others to improve ways of working. We saw examples of the service working with:

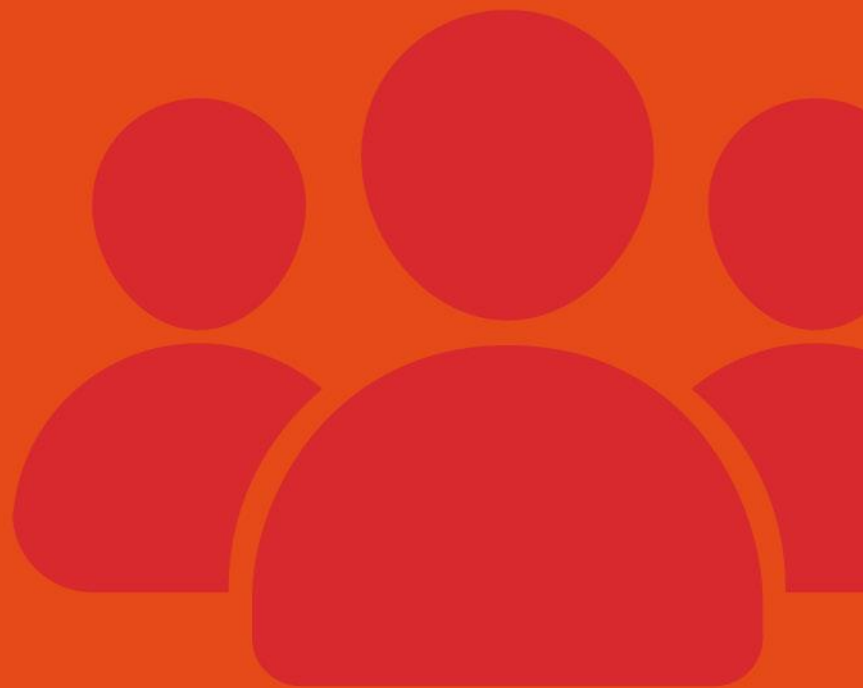
- a local university to better understand its culture;
- an external company to develop its new appraisal process; and
- a range of partners (through its collaboration arrangements) to improve areas of service provision.

The service has a good track record of securing grants to help fund different areas. One example is building the Barnard Castle quad station for emergency services. The service also receives rent from the partners who share fire service premises.

The service introduced a new policy on 1 April 2019 to charge businesses that have had repeated false alarms, allowing it to reduce the costs associated with a fire engine responding needlessly. Based on previous years' figures, the service has predicted it could recover nearly £40,000 per annum through this scheme.

The service has established a trading company to provide training and compliance services for private companies. The company has no direct staff or assets. It uses fire service staff and resources and is designed to make the best use of latent capacity. We found there is very little financial risk to the fire service in the way it has set up the company, though it has yet to make a profit. The service also benefits through recharge costs and last year received approximately £100,000. It adds these recharge costs to its central revenue budget to address future savings needs.

People



How well does the service look after its people?



Requires improvement

Summary

A fire and rescue service that looks after its people should be able to provide an effective service to its community. It should offer a range of services to make its communities safer. This will include developing and maintaining a workforce that is professional, resilient, skilled, flexible and diverse. The service's leaders should be positive role models, and this should be reflected in the behaviour of the workforce. Overall, County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at looking after its people.

The service could do more to win the trust of its workforce. This would help them be more confident giving feedback and accessing support. It would also help them believe in the fairness of the promotions process. The service should also address staff perceptions in relation to resilience contracts.

There are gaps in the service's workforce plan. There should be a clear link between operational staffing and fire engine availability. The service should monitor the number of staff working extra shifts to cover vacancies, to make sure this remains an effective means of providing cover.

Staff view the training provision positively. In general, they are well trained and up to date for all risk-critical training areas. They benefit from the service's recent investment in a state-of-the-art training centre, as well as good access to health and wellbeing support services.

The service has done well to create a health and safety reporting culture. But it needs to make sure it follows up on learning recommendations promptly.

The service's work to increase diversity is good. For example, it has adapted its apprenticeship scheme to help recruit under-represented groups.

A newly introduced appraisals process should promote personal development and cultural improvement. Managers and staff would benefit from additional training in this.

Promoting the right values and culture



Good

County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service is good at promoting the right values and culture. But we found the following area in which it needs to improve:

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure that required actions arising from health and safety investigations happen on time and any identified learning is implemented.

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

Workforce wellbeing

The service has several provisions in place to support the physical and mental wellbeing of staff. This includes support for non-related problems which can affect performance in the workplace.

Staff we spoke to were complimentary about the service's occupational health services and access to support such as physiotherapy. The service also has good access to physical fitness facilities. Operational staff undertake regular fitness assessments.

The service proactively promotes health and wellbeing, with activities including:

- themed health promotions throughout the year;
- mental health champions; and
- Blue Light, a mental health support service for emergency responders, provided by Mind.

It has used videos featuring staff to try to break down the stigma of accessing mental health support.

The service has only recently implemented a trauma support service to support staff after traumatic incidents. This has been commonplace in other fire and rescue services for several years. Some staff had only limited awareness about the new service. The service should continue to promote staff understanding of the trauma support to embed it in the workplace.

Health and safety

The service has a dedicated adviser to manage health and safety arrangements. It trains staff in health and safety awareness and responsibilities. These range from induction training to formal qualifications, which are enhanced for more senior roles.

The service has a computer-based system to manage health and safety events such as [near misses](#) and accidents. Although the service aims to complete investigations within a set time, it doesn't always meet these.

We reviewed an investigation that followed a firefighter injury at an operational incident. We found that the service hadn't implemented some of the recommendations 12 months after the incident. The service should assure itself that recommendations that affect the health and wellbeing of operational staff and members of the public, following such an investigation, are carefully considered and the appropriate action taken where necessary.

The service has seen an increase in accident reporting. It assured us that this is because of increased staff awareness of the reporting process following recent training. Our survey results support this. Of the 245 respondents to our staff survey, 84.1 percent stated that they have been encouraged to report all accidents, near misses and dangerous occurrences in the last 12 months. Some 94.3 percent stated that they know how to report accidents, near misses and dangerous occurrences in the last 12 months.

Culture and values

The service's staff have developed its values and behaviours which the service has promoted well. Overall, staff have a good awareness and understanding of them. The service's values statement of 'being the best' resonates with staff. Most see it as a sign of ambition and feel it is motivational.

We recognise the work the service is doing to understand and continually develop its culture. It has worked with a local university to develop a cultural survey, which occurs every 18 months. It feeds recommendations from the cultural survey into an action plan. However, we found the service collects limited information on respondents which makes understanding the results and implementing targeted improvements more difficult.

Staff are divided in their opinion of the service's culture. Some describe a culture that is positive and supportive; others describe a culture of low morale and mistrust in management. We found that some staff are not confident in raising concerns. We cover this in more detail later in the report.

Of the 245 respondents to our staff survey, 28.6 percent reported feeling bullied or harassed and 24.5 percent reported feeling discriminated against at work in the last 12 months. This is in line with the England average.

The service offers additional resilience contracts to operational staff to provide availability at times of low staffing, such as during industrial action. Some staff have strong views on this, perceiving that the service treats those who sign these contracts more favourably than those who don't. The service is aware of this perception and has

taken action to address concerns. However, it should continue to take steps to reassure staff that those who don't sign a contract are not put at a disadvantage.

Some staff we spoke to were positive about senior leaders, saying they enact the service's values and are now more visible. They welcomed senior leader visits to stations and leadership forums for managers. They also value the fact that leaders communicate to all staff via bulletins and through a monthly vlog.

Representative bodies we interviewed feel they have good relationships with the service and its senior management.

Getting the right people with the right skills



Good

County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service is good at getting the right people with the right skills. But we found the following area in which it needs to improve:

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure the effectiveness of its workforce planning to enable it to meet operational and organisational needs.

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

Workforce planning

The service has a three-year strategic workforce plan. The plan details workforce planning considerations such as retirement profiles. However, the link to staffing numbers, and ultimately fire engine availability, isn't clear. For example, a daily challenge for the service is to maintain fire engine availability. On each day we sampled, several fire engines were unavailable, mainly because [on-call](#) staff were unavailable. There is nothing in the workforce plan specifically about how the service intends to increase the number of on-call firefighters. The action plan only has a general action for retaining on-call staff.

The service's workforce plan and our interviews with managers didn't show us how the plan would meet the needs of the service's operational model. Similar to many other services across the country, the service has difficulties recruiting and retaining on-call firefighters. The workforce plan should specify how the service will address this problem.

In 2015, the service decided to maintain several vacancies for operational posts. This was to allow flexibility in the future workforce model. Some staff now work on second contracts, working additional shifts when required. Data from the service shows that on average in the year to April 2019, it covered 194 shifts per month in this way. The service is using this system more than originally anticipated and the

administration involved is significant. Despite this, the service doesn't always maintain optimum staffing numbers. The service should make sure it doesn't overuse this system and that it manages vacancy numbers.

On reviewing fire engine availability, there were periods when its fire engines, as well as a specialist vehicle, weren't always available. There was also an occasion when the officer rota wasn't fully staffed. The service should ensure its workforce planning meets the requirements of its operational response model. Some staff we spoke to felt operational staffing lacks resilience.

The service has a three-year apprenticeship scheme where successful apprentices become operational firefighters. The service is currently employing its third group of apprentices. Over the next few years, about 30 apprentices may qualify as firefighters.

The service has taken several on-call firefighters into the wholetime system to increase wholetime numbers. This is an efficient way of employing [wholetime](#) staff, particularly when only small numbers are needed. However, the service should continue to consider the effect on on-call fire engine availability.

The service recruited wholetime trainees in 2017 and is recruiting further wholetime trainees this year. These trainees, alongside apprentices transferring to operational roles, should result in fewer staff working extra shifts to cover vacancies.

Certain areas of the service have teams with specialist knowledge and training where workforce planning should be an important consideration. At the time of our inspection, the service only had two fully qualified fire safety inspectors available from a team of six. Workforce planning for this team hasn't been effective.

Learning and improvement

The service has invested heavily in training and development, most notably in its state-of-the-art training centre. Staff we spoke to were very complimentary about the facility and standard of central training they receive.

Of the 245 respondents to our staff survey, 81.2 percent were satisfied with their level of learning and development in the service in the last 12 months.

During our inspection, we sampled records for risk-critical operational training, such as breathing apparatus and incident command. All the records we sampled showed that staff had received training within the required timeframes.

All staff have good access to the service's online training system. Staff must complete training modules at a set frequency relevant to their role. We found high levels of completion for training areas including [safeguarding](#), and equality, diversity and inclusion.

The service manages training for control staff well. An annual plan directs training in important areas, such as fire survival guidance that is issued every six months. The training plan is updated every year. We reviewed a sample of training records and found them to be up to date.

The service is good at co-ordinating its station-based training. Operational crews have a monthly plan that details the essential training areas that they must cover in the month ahead.

Staff told us that they are confident operationally because of the training they received, but less confident in other areas such as prevention and protection. We heard mixed views about the training for [safe and well visits](#) and wellbeing advice. Some staff said they hadn't had any recent training in building inspections and that they weren't confident in this area. We note that the service has made a significant investment to formalise the level of training in fire protection in future.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service should assure itself that staff are confident using its feedback mechanisms.
- The service should assure itself that it has effective grievance procedures which staff are confident in using.
- The service should improve understanding of positive action among staff.

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

Seeking and acting on staff feedback

The service has a variety of methods to gather feedback, although some staff lack trust in the process.

The service communicates information to staff in several ways, including through briefings, bulletins and computer screensavers. The senior leadership team holds a monthly online briefing. Staff we interviewed saw this as positive and can pose questions beforehand.

The service undertakes staff cultural surveys and communicates the findings. It has an action plan to make improvements, responding to comments received through surveys. We reviewed the action plan and several actions had been completed.

During our inspection we found some staff lack trust in the service's feedback processes. Some staff are sceptical about the survey. We heard the view that questions are phrased so you can't give a true answer, or the answer you want to give. The service needs to ensure its staff understand how the survey is developed to prevent this misunderstanding.

The service told us that due to staff feedback it purposely only asks for very limited personal data for the survey, so respondents are confident their anonymity is preserved. The service would be able to implement better targeted actions if it collected more specific data on respondents.

During our inspection, we identified some staff don't feel confident raising concerns. Some believe that if they challenge ideas, managers may perceive them as negative and hold this against them which will damage future career opportunities. Of the 245 respondents to our staff survey, 60 percent felt that they were unable to challenge ideas without any detriment to how they would be treated afterwards, and 56 percent didn't feel confident that their ideas or suggestions were listened to in the last 12 months.

The service is aware that some staff have these views and measure these through their staff survey. The service's survey is more positive in these areas and indicates an improvement between surveys. We look forward to seeing the service's further work to address these staff views.

The service has received very few grievances over recent years. We found that some staff across many staff groups mistrust the grievance system. Their feeling is that it could inhibit future development or career opportunities. The service knows it needs to address this and members of the human resources team visit stations to talk to staff to help break the stigma around raising concerns.

Representative bodies we spoke to feel included in the service's communications and said they can raise ideas and concerns through access to managers, meetings and policies. We heard examples of how senior leaders had considered and adopted some of the suggestions made.

Diversity

The service's equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) strategy outlines how the service intends to improve the diversity of its workforce. The service has an EDI group which a senior leader chairs. The service informed us that a member of the fire authority also attends to provide scrutiny. The group spoke positively about EDI within the service which recently appointed champions for each of the nine protected characteristics. The service has some staff groups and is planning to introduce others to provide support and networking opportunities.

We were pleased to see the service is examining ways to make its workforce more diverse. As at 31 March 2018, 2.4 percent of firefighters were from a black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) background. This compares with a BAME residential population of 2.2 percent. While the number of BAME firefighters the service has is low, it is one of only two English fire and rescue services whose percentage of firefighters from a BAME background is above the percentage of the local population. The number of female firefighters within the service is 5.8 percent.

The service has taken positive steps to address potential barriers to recruitment for under-represented groups. It has developed an apprenticeship programme with the aim to allow apprentices working in non-operational roles to progress to become firefighters. The scheme allows apprentices to learn at a slower pace while building up strength, endurance and fitness to achieve the recognised standards

for firefighters. As a result, more women progress through to interview stage. In the last two years, the service has recruited three cohorts of apprentices. There have been 14 female apprentices appointed out of 30.

Currently the programme has a succession rate of 82 percent for females progressing to become operational firefighters.

Staff we spoke to understand the value of having a diverse workforce, but some did not understand this positive action to improve diversity. Some staff think that there are different recruitment standards for apprentices. Others feel it has tipped the balance from positive action to positive discrimination. The service should ensure staff understand the value of positive action and tackle misconceptions that have emerged.

Managing performance and developing leaders



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure its selection, development and promotion of staff is open, accessible and fair.
- The service should put in place an effective process to identify, develop and support high potential staff and aspiring leaders.

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

Managing performance

The service recently introduced a new appraisal system, which it intends to use to promote personal development and cultural improvement. The new system has an online format that is more focused on behaviours than the previous one, which was more of a traditional skills review. This is a positive step for the service. However, the service hasn't trained all managers on how to conduct effective appraisals. It also hasn't briefed them so that they understand what the new system is trying to achieve. The service should consider further training to maximise the effectiveness of its new appraisals system.

Staff views of the new appraisals process are mixed. Some staff feel it is an improvement. Others expressed views that the form is now too long; that managers often lack the time to do an appraisal properly; and the focus is on 'getting it done' rather than a meaningful conversation about performance.

Positively, the service now has the means to review completion levels, which wasn't available through the previous system. Appraisals and progress against objectives have now been embedded in other development areas such as the promotion process.

Developing leaders

The service has a process to identify, develop and support staff with high potential to be senior leaders in the future. It does have development routes and courses that develop staff at each level. This includes management courses relevant to an individual's role in the organisation.

The service has a 'fast track' scheme that is open to operational and corporate staff who want to progress to middle management. Before our inspection, it had just launched its latest programme. Uptake was low and the service is reviewing its processes.

We found strong views across operational staff that the promotion process isn't fair. This is mainly because staff perceive that the service is more favourable towards people who sign resilience contracts. Of the 245 respondents to our staff survey, only 51 percent felt that they were given the same opportunities to develop as other staff in the service in the last 12 months.

The service should ensure it has a policy that details all aspects of the promotion process to ensure fairness, consistency and openness. This would help build trust and confidence in the process. For example, the service hasn't updated its promotion policy since 2011, even though its promotion process has changed several times since then.

Annex A – About the data

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

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

Where we collected data directly from FRSs, we took reasonable steps to agree the design of the data collection with services and with other interested parties, such as the Home Office. This was primarily through our Technical Advisory Group, which brings together representatives from the fire sector and the Home Office to support the inspection's design and development, including data collection.

We give services several opportunities to validate the data we collect to make sure the evidence presented is accurate. For instance, we asked all services to:

- check the data they submitted to us via an online application;
- check the final data used in each service report; and
- correct any errors they identified.

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

Methodology

Use of data in the reports and to form judgments

The data we cite in this report and use to form our judgments is the information that was available at the time of inspection. Due to the nature of data collection, there are often gaps between the timeframe the data covers, when it was collected, and when it becomes available to use.

If more recent data became available after inspection, showing a different trend or context, we have referred to this in the report. However, it was not used to form our judgments.

In a small number of cases, data available at the time of the inspection was later found to be incorrect. For example, a service might have identified an error in its original data return. When this is the case, we have corrected the data and used the more reliable data in the report.

Population

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

2018 survey of public perception of the fire and rescue service

We commissioned BMG to survey attitudes towards FRSs in June and July 2018. This consisted of 17,976 surveys across 44 local FRS areas. This survey didn't include the Isles of Scilly, due to its small population. Most interviews were conducted online, with online research panels.

However, a minority of the interviews (757) were conducted face-to-face with trained interviewers in respondents' homes. A small number of respondents were also interviewed online via postal invitations to the survey. These face-to-face interviews were specifically targeted at groups traditionally under-represented on online panels, and so ensure that survey respondents are as representative as possible of the total adult population of England. The sampling method used isn't a statistical random sample. The sample size in each service area was small, varying between 400 and 446 individuals. So any results provided are only an indication of satisfaction rather than an absolute.

[Survey findings are available on BMG's website.](#)

Staff survey

We conducted a staff survey open to all members of FRS workforces across England. We received 3,083 responses between 8 March and 9 August 2019 from across the 15 Tranche 3 services.

We view the staff survey as an important tool in understanding the views of staff who we may not have spoken to, for a variety of reasons, during fieldwork.

However, you should consider several points when interpreting the findings from the staff survey.

The results are not representative of the opinions and attitudes of a service's whole workforce. The survey was self-selecting, and the response rate ranged from 7 percent to 40 percent of a service's workforce. So any findings should be considered alongside the service's overall response rate, which is cited in the report.

To protect respondents' anonymity and allow completion on shared devices, it was not possible to limit responses to one per person. So it is possible that a single person could have completed the survey more than once.

Each service was provided with a unique access code to try to make sure that only those currently working in a service could complete the survey. However, it is possible that the survey and access code could have been shared and completed by people other than its intended respondents.

We have provided percentages when presenting the staff survey findings throughout the report. When a service has a low number of responses (less than 100), these figures should be treated with additional caution. Percentages may sum to more than 100 percent due to rounding.

Due to the limitations set out above, the results from the staff survey should only be used to provide an indicative measure of service performance.

Service in numbers

A dash in this graphic indicates that a service couldn't give data to us or the Home Office.

Perceived effectiveness of service

We took this data from the following question of the 2018 survey of public perceptions of the FRS:

How confident are you, if at all, that the fire and rescue service in your local area provides an effective service overall?

The figure provided is a sum of respondents who stated they were either 'very confident' or 'fairly confident'. Respondents could have also stated 'not very confident', 'not at all confident' or 'don't know'. The percentage of 'don't know' responses varied between services (ranging from 5 percent to 14 percent).

Due to its small residential population, we didn't include the Isles of Scilly in the survey.

Incidents attended per 1,000 population

We took this data from the Home Office fire statistics, '[Incidents attended by fire and rescue services in England, by incident type and fire and rescue authority](#)' for the period from 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2019.

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

- There are seven worksheets in this file. The 'FIRE0102' worksheet shows the number of incidents attended by type of incident and fire and rescue authority (FRA) for each financial year. The 'FIRE0102 Quarterly' worksheet shows the number of incidents attended by type of incident and FRA for each quarter. The worksheet 'Data' provides the raw data for the two main data tables (from 2009/10). The 'Incidents chart - front page', 'Chart 1' and 'Chart 2' worksheets provide the data for the corresponding charts in the statistical commentary. The 'FRS geographical categories' worksheet shows how FRAs are categorised.
- Fire data, covering all incidents that FRSs attend, is collected by the Incident Recording System (IRS). For several reasons some records take longer than others for services to upload to the IRS. Totals are constantly being amended (by relatively small numbers).
- We took data for Service in Numbers from the August 2019 incident publication. So, figures may not directly match more recent publications due to data updates.

Home fire safety checks per 1,000 population

We took this data from the Home Office fire statistics, '[Home Fire Safety Checks carried out by fire and rescue services and partners, by fire and rescue authority](#)' for the period from 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018.

Each FRS figure is based on the number of checks it carried out. It doesn't include checks carried out by partners.

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

- Dorset FRS and Wiltshire FRS merged to form Dorset and Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire FRSs before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.
- Figures for 'Fire Risk Checks carried out by Elderly (65+)', 'Fire Risk Checks carried out by Disabled' and 'Number of Fire Risk Checks carried out by Partners' don't include imputed figures because a lot of services can't supply these figures.
- The checks included in a home fire safety check can vary between services. You should consider this when making direct comparisons between services.
- Home fire safety checks may also be referred to as home fire risk checks or safe and well visits by services.
- After inspection, East Sussex FRS resubmitted data on its total number of home fire safety checks and the number of checks targeted at the elderly and disabled in the year to 31 March 2018. The latest data changes the percentage of checks that were targeted at the elderly (from 54.1 percent to 54.9 percent) and disabled (from 24.7 percent to 25.4 percent) in England. However, as noted above, in all reports we have used the original figures that were available at the time of inspection.

Fire safety audits per 100 known premises

Fire protection refers to FRSs' statutory role in ensuring public safety in the wider built environment. It involves auditing and, where necessary, enforcing regulatory compliance, primarily but not exclusively in respect of the provisions of the [Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005 \(FSO\)](#). The number of safety audits in Service in Numbers refers to the number of audits services carried out in known premises. According to the Home Office's definition, "premises known to FRAs are the FRA's knowledge, as far as possible, of all relevant premises; for the enforcing authority to establish a risk profile for premises in its area. These refer to all premises except single private dwellings".

We took this from the Home Office fire statistics, '[Fire safety audits carried out by fire and rescue services, by fire and rescue authority](#)' for the period from 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018.

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

- Berkshire FRS didn't provide figures for premises known between 2014/15 and 2017/18.
- Dorset FRS and Wiltshire FRS merged to form Dorset and Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire FRSs before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.

- Several FRAs report ‘Premises known to FRAs’ as estimates based on historical data.

Firefighter cost per person per year

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

You should consider this data alongside the proportion of firefighters who are wholetime and on-call.

Number of firefighters per 1,000 population, five-year change in workforce and percentage of wholetime firefighters

We took this data from the Home Office fire statistics, ‘[Total staff numbers \(full-time equivalent\) by role and by fire and rescue authority](#)’ as at 31 March 2018.

Table 1102a: Total staff numbers (FTE) by role and fire authority – Wholetime Firefighters and table 1102b: Total staff numbers (FTE) by role and fire authority – Retained Duty System are used to produce the total number of firefighters.

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

- We calculate these figures using full-time equivalent (FTE) numbers. FTE is a metric that describes a workload unit. One FTE is equivalent to one full-time worker. But one FTE may also be made up of two or more part-time workers whose calculated hours equal that of a full-time worker. This differs from headcount, which is the actual number of the working population regardless if employees work full or part-time.
- Some totals may not aggregate due to rounding.
- Dorset FRS and Wiltshire FRS merged to form Dorset and Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire FRSs before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.

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

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

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

- We calculate BAME residential population data from ONS 2011 census data. This figure is calculated by dividing the BAME residential population by the total population.
- We calculate female residential population data from ONS mid-2017 population estimates.
- The percentage of BAME firefighters does not include those who opted not to disclose their ethnic origin. There are large variations between services in the number of firefighters who did not state their ethnic origin.

- Dorset FRS and Wiltshire FRS merged to form Dorset and Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire FRSs before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.

Annex B – Fire and rescue authority governance

These are the different models of fire and rescue authority (FRA) governance in England. County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service is a combined FRA.

Metropolitan FRA

The FRA covers a metropolitan (large urban) area. Each is governed by locally elected councillors appointed from the constituent councils in that area.

Combined FRA

The FRA covers more than one local authority area. Each is governed by locally elected councillors appointed from the constituent councils in that area.

County FRA

Some county councils are defined as FRAs, with responsibility for fire and rescue service provision in their area.

Unitary authorities

These combine the usually separate council powers and functions for non-metropolitan counties and non-metropolitan districts. In such counties, a separate fire authority runs the fire services. This is made up of councillors from the county council and unitary councils.

London

Day-to-day control of London's fire and rescue service is the responsibility of the London fire commissioner, accountable to the Mayor. A Greater London Authority committee and the Deputy Mayor for Fire scrutinise the commissioner's work. The Mayor may arrange for the Deputy Mayor to exercise his fire and rescue functions.

Mayoral Combined Authority

Only in Greater Manchester. The Combined Authority is responsible for fire and rescue functions but with those functions exercised by the elected Mayor. A fire and rescue committee supports the Mayor in exercising non-strategic fire and rescue functions. This committee is made up of members from the constituent councils.

Police, fire and crime commissioner FRA

The police, fire and rescue commissioner is solely responsible for the service provision of fire & rescue and police functions.

Isles of Scilly

The Council of the Isles of Scilly is the FRA for the Isles of Scilly.

December 2019 | © HMICFRS 2019 | ISBN: 978-1-78655-920-3

www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs