

State of Fire and Rescue – The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2021

**Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire
and Rescue Services**

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

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Foreword

This is my third and final report to the Secretary of State under section 28B of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. It contains my final assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of fire and rescue services in England, based on the inspections carried out between February and August 2021. I report separately every year on the efficiency and effectiveness of police forces in England and Wales, and in early 2022 I will be publishing my final report.

I am also taking this opportunity to reflect on the overall progress made since July 2017, when the inspectorate's remit was extended to include inspections of England's fire and rescue services.

This report's structure and purpose

Part 1 contains my assessment of the state of fire and rescue services in England. In making my assessment, I have drawn on all the fire and rescue service inspection activity carried out since our first round of inspections in 2018.

The 13 inspections between February and August 2021 have informed my assessment of the progress made by the sector, including progress against national recommendations. These 13 inspections formed the first tranche of our current second round of inspections. The second inspection round resumed in

February 2021, having been postponed in 2020 as a result of the pandemic.

I have also used the findings and reports of other organisations, and other information and analysis, made available to me.

Part 2 is an overview of the gradings and findings from the 13 inspections between February and August 2021.

Part 3 contains the full list of our fire and rescue reports in the period covered by this report.

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

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

Senior staffing changes

My term as Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services ends on 31 March 2022. It has been a privilege to report on the effectiveness and efficiency of the fire and rescue services in England since the inspectorate's remit was extended in 2017, and to discharge my other national duties. I am grateful to my colleagues both in and outside the inspectorate for their support.

Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) have joint responsibility for inspecting fire and rescue services and police forces. HMI Zoë Billingham left the inspectorate in September after 12 years of distinguished service. Zoë has my deep gratitude for her dedication to the inspectorate and for her work with the fire and rescue sector. I wish her every success in the future.

Zoë's successor is HMI Roy Wilsher OBE QFSM, who was the first chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC). I extend to him the warmest welcome as he assumes his responsibilities as the inspectorate's senior lead for the fire and rescue inspection programme and domestic abuse, and the HMI with primary responsibility for the fire and rescue services and police forces in the Eastern region.

Our approach to inspecting fire and rescue services

The pandemic required us to adapt our approach to inspections of fire and rescue services. In my last annual report, I explained that the inspectorate temporarily suspended all inspection work needing appreciable engagement by services. We postponed last year's planned inspection programme for the second round of our fire and rescue service inspections by 12 months.

In 2020, the Home Secretary commissioned us to inspect how each service had responded to the first phase of the pandemic. We found that many services had adapted well and had provided very valuable additional support to the public.

The pandemic and remaining public health restrictions continue to place strain on public services and on our inspection programme. Firefighters and other service staff continue to go above and beyond their roles to help their communities. Home Office data shows 518,263 incidents were attended by fire and rescue services in England in the year ending 31 March.¹ Of all incidents attended by fire and rescue services, fires accounted for 29 percent, fire false alarms 42 percent, and non-fire incidents 29 percent.

¹ [*Detailed analysis of fires attended by fire and rescue services, England, April 2020 to March 2021*](#), National statistics, Home Office, 30 September 2021.

This year, some services faced and responded to additional difficulties caused by flooding and wildfires. Home Office data shows fire and rescue services responded to 14,921 incidents of flooding in England between April 2020 and April 2021. Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service attended 451 flooding incidents, which represents a 273 percent increase from 2020, and Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service attended more than twice as many flooding incidents (236) as in the previous year. In addition, in the year to March 2021, there were 13.3 percent more secondary fires attended in grassland, woodland and crops in England (25,345) compared to the previous year.

In February 2021, we resumed inspections and started our second full round of inspections. This time we inspected 44 fire and rescue services, following the formation of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service.

Between February and August 2021, we carried out our first tranche of inspections and graded 13 services. These inspections were carried out almost entirely virtually as a result of pandemic restrictions. Our inspection teams and the fire and rescue services they inspect have shown fortitude and resilience in doing this. This was the first time we inspected this way; it presented many difficulties.

Since the second round of our inspections was postponed, services have had longer to improve, albeit while also dealing with the pandemic response.

While some services have made material efforts to make improvements, serious problems persist in others.

Our second round of inspections of all 44 services will continue into 2022. We recognise the difficulties of virtual inspections. Depending on how the pandemic develops, we are reintroducing some on-site inspection activity as we complete the remainder of our inspections. Our full findings from our inspection of all 44 services will therefore be available in the 2022 *State of Fire and Rescue* report.

We regularly monitor all services in order to promote improvements. If we identify a serious, critical or systemic shortcoming in a service's practice, we will report it as a 'cause of concern',² which is always accompanied by one or more recommendations. If a cause of concern is identified, it is raised with the fire and rescue service and authority so they can take appropriate action. We conduct a number of follow-up inspections throughout the year.

The inspection programme was designed to follow substantially the same approach as our first round of inspections. We did this to assess the improvements services are making, in respect of effectiveness, efficiency and people.

We have continuously improved our process of design, monitoring and reporting. The sector,

² More information on causes of concern is available in Part 2, Understanding our graded judgments.

particularly our expert reference and technical advisory groups, have continued to provide useful feedback on and support for our ideas, which have led to appreciable improvements. In particular, for our second round of inspections we have made improvements to how we assess risk, protection, and equality and diversity.

I extend my warmest appreciation to all those involved in our work: from our staff who designed inspection processes or spent numerous hours collecting evidence virtually and analysing it, those who contributed to my assessment, and to those services that have facilitated our inspections so well in testing circumstances. This continues to be a difficult time for us all, and I am grateful for everyone's efforts.

Sir Thomas P Winsor

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services

Part 1: Overview

Overview

This year's report begins with my final assessment of the state of the fire and rescue sector in England in 2021. I also take this opportunity to comment on the progress made by the sector since the inspectorate's first round of fire and rescue service inspections in 2018. Considerable efforts have been made by local and national organisations to improve the sector, but there is still much more to be done.

All safety-critical, essential public services benefit from the scrutiny of inspection and reporting. Our inspections are valuable for both the public and the fire and rescue sector: we have seen evidence of how services have improved and staff have told us that they have seen worthwhile changes for the better.

The fire and rescue services and the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) have welcomed our inspections. We have acted on feedback from services, the NFCC and others, and with the benefit of that advice we have developed our inspection methodology for our second round of inspections. This has enabled us to get a more detailed view of the state of the sector.

In August 2020, the Home Secretary commissioned us to inspect how all 45 fire and rescue authorities in England responded to the pandemic. We completed

those inspections in November 2020. This means that, since 2018, every service has been inspected at least twice. There is now a benchmark against which the inspectorate can monitor progress.

Progress has been made in some areas

It is encouraging to see many services that had received causes of concern in our first round of inspections have taken steps to improve and act on our recommendations.

Many services have done more to prioritise fire protection; this was an area we criticised heavily in our first round. This focus on protection has intensified alongside the national response to the [Grenfell Tower Inquiry \(Phase 1\)](#).

The Home Office has also provided fire and rescue services with additional funding for protection work. There has been a 17 percent increase in competent protection staff.

In many respects, the sector is well prepared when it comes to responding to routine and major emergency incidents, and this has been the case throughout the pandemic. In their responses to the questions we asked as part of last year's pandemic inspections, local resilience forums (which are made up of representatives from local public services) were overwhelmingly positive about the sector's response to the pandemic. This year, its pandemic response has continued to be good.

Most services we inspected are better at promoting a positive professional culture: 84 percent of respondents to the staff survey (part of our inspections) told us they are treated with dignity and respect at work (which is 3 percent more than in the first round of inspections). Staff wellbeing and health and safety are clearly being prioritised, with 91 percent of respondents telling us they are satisfied their personal safety and welfare are being treated seriously by their service (7 percent more than in Round 1).

But more change is urgently required

Too many services have failed to act sufficiently, if at all, on the areas for improvement³ we issued in Round 1 of our inspections. Of the 184 areas for improvement we issued across these 13 services in Round 1, one third remain open.

While all 10 existing causes of concern from Round 1 have now been closed, we issued 11 new causes of concern for the 13 services inspected between February and August 2021. Seven of these relate to effectiveness and four relate to people.

Too many services aren't taking enough action on prevention. This is despite the range of areas for improvement in respect of prevention that we issued in our first round of inspections. In many cases, we found a clear disconnection between what is in

³ More information on areas for improvement is available in Part 2, Understanding our graded judgments.

public-facing service plans and what is actually being done by public-facing staff.

Good intentions to promote equality, diversity and inclusion generally haven't resulted in tangible improvements, and many services don't clearly define what they are working towards. There remains a woeful lack of representation of both women and people from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds. In our most recent public perceptions survey,⁴ 78 percent of 1,981 respondents said that fire and rescue services being representative of local populations was either fairly or very important. The sector must do much more in this respect, and must learn from experiences in other sectors. Not only should it recruit staff from a diverse range of backgrounds, but it should also foster environments and cultures that will keep those people in their jobs and develop them professionally.

The responsibility to make these changes does not lie solely with chief fire officers and their senior teams; political leaders must also take action to resolve both new and long-standing problems.

⁴ [For more information about our public perceptions survey and the data used in this report, please see our website.](#)

Our national recommendations need to be brought in faster

We have made national recommendations:

- the Home Office should precisely determine the role of fire and rescue services, to remove any ambiguity;
- the sector should remove unjustifiable variation, including in how they define risk;
- the sector should review and reform how effectively pay and conditions are determined;
- the Home Office should invest chief fire officers with operational independence, whether through primary legislation or in some other manner;
- there should be a code of ethics; and
- the Home Office should ensure that the sector has sufficient capacity and capability to bring about change.

The full details of each recommendation are contained in Annex D. They are designed to promote reform of the sector and address the barriers we have found in every service since we started inspecting. I reiterated this need in last year's assessment and explained the adjusted new dates for completion.

Four of our national recommendations still have not been implemented. These relate to reducing variation in standards, determining the role of services and firefighters, reviewing the machinery determining

terms and conditions, and providing operational independence for chief fire officers.

In October 2021, I wrote to the named bodies (the Home Office, the NFCC, the Local Government Association and National Employers) requesting an update on the progress of implementing our recommendations. I received comprehensive responses from each named body and acknowledge and welcome the progress made in this respect. I have provided a status update on the progress made against each recommendation in Annex D. These responses will allow me to revise the completion dates for two of the recommendations, where the current dates either have expired or are very shortly due to expire.

Although the pandemic has understandably delayed progress, the public and the fire and rescue services cannot wait any longer. In some respects and some levels, there has been a conspicuous failure to give due priority to the essential reform of the fire and rescue sector.

Our national recommendations are still relevant. This is why I will not be setting any new recommendations this year, as the sector must continue to act on the ones I have already made, and at a more urgent pace. My frustrations grow, on behalf of the public, at the lack of progress being made to reform this vital public service.

The windspeed of national reform has dropped

In March 2021, the Home Secretary announced her plans to further reform fire and rescue.⁵ I welcomed these plans and hope to see the subsequent Home Office White Paper published soon.

Many services that wrote to me about the state of fire and rescue services described the reforms they believe are necessary. These changes included the implementation of our recommendations; many hoped the White Paper would be the catalyst for this.

The case for reform remains

The sector continues to be admired by the public, as our most recent public perception survey showed: 57 percent of 1,981 respondents said they were satisfied with their local service and most said that they believed that the service provided by their local service has stayed the same.

Almost universally, the focus of fire staff is to protect the communities they serve. Their dedication to protect life and property is highly commendable, and their efforts throughout the pandemic have saved many lives.

It is unarguable that firefighters deserve fair pay; everyone does. But the continued threat of industrial

⁵ [*Concluding Part One of the Police and Crime Commissioner Review*](#), Home Office, 16 March 2021.

action doesn't help anyone, least of all the public. Many services have told us that the threat can significantly adversely affect their ability to respond to incidents and that it is costly for them to provide contingency arrangements, particularly when, in some cases, resources are already scarce. We were also told that many firefighters are often conflicted in their choices; dissenting from union positions takes courage. The influence of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) is considerable in some services. Sometimes, it goes too far and is contrary to services' values and behaviours, and to the public interest.

The threat of industrial action isn't the only thing that is hindering progress. The outdated and ineffective structures for negotiating pay, terms and conditions are where reform is most needed. A significant number of periods of industrial action have taken place since 2001; two were national strikes. These were largely as a result of failed negotiations on pay and terms and conditions.

Too often, the public haven't been served as they should because of the restrictive industrial relations arrangements in place. We provided examples of these in our report [*Responding to the pandemic: The fire and rescue service's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020*](#), such as the limited ability of firefighters to support the vaccination programme or carry out wellbeing checks when delivering food to the most vulnerable.

How services establish the necessary capability to respond to marauding terrorist attacks (MTAs) is another example of industrial relations impeding the ability of services to serve the public. As I have [publicly set out](#)⁶ this year, it is of course extremely important that every fire and rescue service has the capacity and capability of dealing with an MTA. Training for an MTA as well as attendance at and the performance of fire and rescue functions in respect of an MTA, are squarely within the established role of a firefighter. However, the FBU's position on the matter has led services to consider paying twice for that essential service – a service the public both needs and properly expects – out of fear the FBU will direct firefighters to withdraw this capability. The FBU position has also led firefighters to incorrectly believe that they would be ineligible for a pension or compensation scheme pay-out if they were to die in the line of duty while responding to an MTA – a suggestion that lacks merit.

Chief fire officers do not have the same operational independence as chief constables, something I recommended in an earlier *State of Fire and Rescue* report. Many services that wrote to me about this were broadly supportive of this. It is a pressing matter. Deployment decisions and operational preparedness, such as the location of fire engines and the duty systems worked by firefighters, get tangled in

⁶ [Letter from Sir Thomas Winsor: marauding terrorist attacks](#), HMICFRS, 28 September 2021.

protracted local, regional and national differences to the detriment of the public interest.

Out of the 35 letters I received from services about the state of fire and rescue services, 25 specifically said that the Government needs to provide a much clearer specification of the role and purpose of the sector. The sector's response to the pandemic has demonstrated the capability of many services to do much more in responding to emergencies and the public's needs. Many of those who replied said that firefighters should be allowed to do more in response to medical emergencies. The public and those who work in the sector deserve greater clarity on these important matters.

In our most recent public perceptions survey, "responding to storms and other natural disasters" was selected most frequently as the work that respondents felt their fire and rescue services have responsibility for, other than extinguishing fires (56 percent of 1,981). Other work included "responding to water rescue incidents" (50 percent of 1,981) and "responding to medical incidents" (40 percent of 1,981).

The current pay structure does not give experienced firefighters a sufficient financial incentive to stay in their roles; to get higher pay, they need promotion to command or management responsibilities. This fails to provide a fair reflection of their levels of experience. Unlike the police, who receive progression pay each year, firefighters only move between two levels for

most roles: from trainee to competent. They usually move on from the trainee stage within 18 months, which means that most firefighters see minimal pay progression beyond this, irrespective of additional skills and contributions. This places firefighters at a disadvantage.

The primary focus of the National Joint Council (NJC) should be to reform pay structures to introduce much greater levels of fairness. Almost all services that wrote to me commented on the ineffectiveness of the NJC. I have previously recommended that the NJC be abolished and subsumed into the independent pay review body that already covers police officers.

In the interests of public safety, I urge policy-makers, legislators, employers and the wider fire sector to take steps to consider what useful improvement could be made to current terms and conditions and pay negotiation machinery. This work should include a consideration of the removal of the right of firefighters to strike.

Insufficient action to develop prospective future chief fire officers

Recently, we have seen a high turnover of chief fire officers. The lack of clarity on the Government's reform of the sector has had an unsettling effect on fire and rescue service leadership.

In too many recruitment campaigns, the pool of prospective candidates for the role of chief fire officer

has been very small. Applicants may be dissuaded from applying for the role as a result of changes in terms and conditions for pensions, which have moved from final to average salary. Chief fire officers, unlike chief constables, do not have the ability to freeze their pensions, and they can be put at a financial disadvantage if they stay in service for more than 30 years. Many therefore leave the role prematurely.

There is a reluctance in the sector to open up the most senior jobs to people other than those who have worked their ways up from firefighter. This limits the diversity and volume of candidates. And this is particularly worrying given the fact that processes for appointing chief fire officers aren't always open and that there is a current lack of diversity at senior level.

In my 2019 assessment, I commented on how all too often we have found senior management teams to be echo chambers for people who look, sound and think the same. I welcome the work of the NFCC, including its direct entry scheme, to establish mechanisms to better manage, support and develop staff.

Investment is needed for the full benefits of this work to be felt.

In some circumstances, the deputy chief fire officer may well be the best person for the top job, but if there isn't a range of candidates, and services don't at least consider appointing candidates from outside the sector, there is no guarantee that the best appointment will be made. I have said before that services sometimes miss opportunities to bring in

new talent. If leadership quality is not the highest it can be, staff, services and those they serve are at a disadvantage.

Progress seen elsewhere

The NFCC has carried out some commendable work on developing national fire and rescue policy on areas such as leadership, data and digital. The NFCC is also working with National Employers and the Local Government Association on the [‘Fit for the Future’](#) initiative. When completed, Fit for the Future will set out all three organisations’ joint objectives for the future of fire and rescue in England, as well as what is needed to achieve them. The three organisations will also establish how they will work together to best serve the public.

In May 2021, the Local Government Association, the NFCC and the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners published the [Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services](#). I am pleased to see the publication of the code and I look forward to services adopting it. The code has also become one of the eight standards published by the Fire Standards Board.

I welcome the focus of the Government and the sector on fire and building safety. In early 2021, the Fire Safety Act 2021 received royal assent. This is an important piece of legislation that will ensure that the person responsible for building safety, as well as the fire and rescue services, know their roles and

responsibilities when it comes to reducing the risks posed by external wall systems. This legislation will also make sure that due consideration is given to fire safety in multi-occupied residential buildings.

I also welcome the introduction of the [Building Safety Bill](#), which is designed to improve building and fire safety practices in high-rise residential buildings (HRRBs) buildings over 18 metres or eight or more storeys tall. When brought into force, this legislation will establish a new building safety regulator for HRRBs. The legislation will also introduce a new regime that requires an accountable person to prepare a safety case for HRRBs in occupation. It is anticipated that representatives from fire and rescue services will contribute to this work by being part of multi-disciplinary teams.

The legislation will also strengthen some of the most important aspects of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. These changes will help those who are responsible for fire protection to hold the person or persons responsible⁷ – usually the landlord,

⁷ According to Article 3 of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005/1541, “responsible person” means:

- (a) in relation to a workplace, the employer, if the workplace is to any extent under his control;
- (b) in relation to any premises not falling within paragraph (a):
 - (i) the person who has control of the premises (as occupier or otherwise) in connection with the carrying on by him of a trade, business or other undertaking (for profit or not); or
 - (ii) the owner, where the person in control of the premises does not have control in connection with the carrying on by that person of a trade, business or other undertaking.

employer or the building manager – for buildings to account.

2021 inspections

The 13 service inspections we completed between February and August 2021 have given a clear picture of the sector's current state and the progress it has made since our first round of inspections, and our inspections of how services responded to the pandemic (which are still being carried out). We assessed services' work and their ability to continuously improve.

We made changes to our methodology for our second round of inspections on the basis of feedback from services. These changes included:

- a greater focus on diversity, and in particular race and how services are trying to overcome inequalities;
- considering the productivity of services;
- assessing how services are identifying and planning against known risks to their communities; and
- more case file reviews, particularly in relation to protection and the role carried out by services in fire safety regulations.

We paid great attention to how services collect and make sure all those who need risk information to serve the public have access to it when they need it. This includes making available to response crews the risk information gathered during services'

prevention activity. For example, response crews need information about someone who has restricted mobility in order to rescue that individual. We are worried that some services aren't doing enough to make the availability of such information a priority.

We have seen some services make improvements this year, with both local successes and moderate improvements in some but not all areas. There have also been the continuing problems faced by services and the sector, with some services receiving lower grades on their effectiveness, efficiency and people assessments. In particular, so far in this round of inspections we have seen more causes of concern relating to the effectiveness of services.

Services are making good progress on protection

In my 2019 and 2020 assessments, I said that many services needed to improve their protection work. It has therefore been encouraging in our 2021 inspections to see that many services have made protection and risk planning more of a priority.

This is, in part, a result of increased government investment in protection in fire and rescue services and the NFCC. That investment needs to be sustainable and sustained. I am pleased to see an increase in the number of competent protection staff, who have the right knowledge and skills to carry out audits at premises at highest risk. This is making a difference, but it takes time to train and develop confident and competent fire safety inspectors, and a

concerted effort to retain them. Leaders need to keep a relentless focus on protection, and develop, train and accredit their staff to maintain this progress and for the public to feel the safety benefits.

Services need to do more on prevention

Despite this renewed focus on protection, we found that many services hadn't done enough work on prevention.

If we consider that an aspect of a service's practice, policy or performance falls short of the expected standard, we will report this as an 'area for improvement'.⁸ In our first round of inspections, many of the areas for improvement we issued relating to prevention focused on how well services identify those most at risk from fire. We were disappointed to find a general lack of progress made to address those areas for improvement in many of this year's inspections.

A very small number of services hadn't planned well enough and hadn't allocated sufficient resources to be able to help those most at risk of fires. This was accompanied, in some cases, by a disconnection between what is in public-facing service plans and what is actually being done by public-facing staff.

It is understandable that services may change their focus to meet the needs of their communities, including at times of crisis such as during a pandemic.

⁸ More information on areas for improvement is available in Part 2, Understanding our graded judgments.

However, the three statutory functions of fire and rescue services are response, prevention and protection; they must all be resourced and prioritised continuously and appropriately for them to safely serve the public.

Inconsistent funding and governance arrangements persist

In previous assessments, I have spoken of the inconsistencies of funding arrangements, with some services financially strapped and others relatively flush but inefficient. Many services are still operating with a lack of financial certainty, which is caused by differences in their governance models. Most services that wrote to me about the state of fire and rescue services said the current year-to-year funding arrangements are a constraint on their ability to be efficient and effective. Many noted that short-term funding settlements continue to make medium and longer-term planning difficult.

Simply put, services need to know how much money they will receive every year. Funding comes to fire and rescue authorities in different ways depending on their governance models. Those services that are not part of councils or other organisations receive their funding directly from local government settlements and from increased rates of council tax. Fire services that are part of a wider authority (such as county, unitary and mayoral services) receive their funding from the authority it sits under. Almost a third of those who wrote to me said that they wanted to see the fire

funding formula reviewed. The fire funding formula is the model used by the Government to allocate funding to all 44 fire and rescue services in England.

This year, we continued to find short-term funding arrangements for services, which makes it difficult for them to plan ahead and to invest to make efficiencies. These include the one-year government funding settlements. The amount they receive varies year on year, and this makes it even more difficult for them to plan ahead.

The Government should review the way services are funded to address this problem. While the future of fire reform and future governance remains unclear, many services are vulnerable to a lack of investment or even the ability to work with other public sector organisations. Some services told us that some public sector organisations were reluctant to consider working with them as a result of their future financial uncertainty.

And while many services do not struggle financially, some services rely too much on their financial reserves. Fire and rescue authorities (other than county council-led fire and rescue authorities) can keep part of their funding as reserves. But these should be used to manage financial risk, fund major future programmes and cover unforeseen pressures. They shouldn't be used to plug budget gaps in the long term or to put off making efficiencies. If a service relies on its reserves, this means that it may delay

making efficiencies, such as investing in technology to improve efficiency and productivity.

Those services in strong financial positions must become more efficient, and most services could do more to make sure their workforces improve their productivity. For instance, we found examples of ineffective ICT structures hampering the productivity of staff, operational crews not carrying out protection work, and low levels of prevention and protection activity.

Some services don't allocate resources appropriately

During our first round of inspections, we established that some services were spending too much on their response functions and not enough on prevention and protection. While some progress has been made since then, fewer than half of the services we inspected in 2021 were able to demonstrate they were allocating resources appropriately across their response, prevention and protection functions. This casts doubt on their ability to achieve sufficient operational performance.

Over half of the services we inspected had problems with capacity, in particular when it came to prevention, protection and control functions. They don't always have enough of the right people available to carry out these functions. We saw a range of problems, such as an over-reliance on overtime and a lack of qualified staff in certain areas. This is not a new problem; this

is something we have mentioned in previous reports. In many services, while response functions are well resourced and maintained, this is often at the expense of other statutory functions.

Many services rely on dual contracts and overtime, which can create inefficiencies

On-call firefighters account for 35 percent (12,498 of 35,291) of firefighters nationally. They are essential to make sure services have enough firefighters to crew engines to meet foreseeable risks. During the pandemic, they have been invaluable as they have done some work that the FBU discouraged its members from doing. For example, they drove ambulances, packaged and repackaged food supplies for vulnerable people, and delivered personal protective equipment and other medical supplies.

Despite this, over a third of services that wrote to us about the state of fire and rescue said they had misgivings about the sustainability of the on-call model and said – as I have said previously – that there needs to be a national solution.

Most services have a shortage of crews available at their on-call stations. This low availability – mainly during office hours – makes it a risk for most services to include on-call crewed engines as part of their minimum crewing arrangements. The on-call model depends on having enough appropriately trained firefighters within a few minutes of the fire station when the call comes in.

There needs to be a continued, concerted effort by services and policy-makers to create and maintain the conditions necessary to attract and retain enough firefighters to crew engines when they are needed. This includes providing greater flexibility in working arrangements and establishing other financial incentives. Making sure these firefighters also have the right training is another difficulty for services. Services usually only run one paid training night a week for on-call firefighters. While I recognise the difficulties involved, services need to find more innovative ways to develop and maintain the skills of these firefighters. The public need to know that, regardless of whether a wholetime or on-call crew responds to an incident, the response will be of the same standard. The on-call model still needs attention to make sure it works now and in the future.

Many services use alternative working models because they don't have enough crew members available at on-call stations. These models include employing staff on dual-contract⁹ and overtime arrangements (approximately 12 percent of wholetime firefighters have dual-contracts). Only 35 percent of services regularly monitor staff secondary

⁹ A dual contract in this context is an arrangement in which a firefighter not only has a full-time contract with a fire and rescue service, but also an on call contract with either the same or another service. This means that not only can they work their usual full-time working pattern, but that they can also be on call at certain times. This means that they can be on call during some of their rest days from their full-time job. Of course, safety is paramount and the employing service needs to assure itself that those who are coming to work are safe and sufficiently rested to do so.

employment, and some services don't monitor it at all. If these arrangements aren't monitored properly – or aren't monitored at all – this model runs the risk of being inefficient at best, and unsafe at worst. Managers need to be confident that those being deployed to emergencies are safe to work. It was therefore disconcerting to find examples of staff working for long periods without a break.

This is yet another example of the need for terms and conditions and the pay model to be reformed to better reflect the work firefighters do.

Good intentions to promote equality, diversity and inclusion aren't always successful

We found that most services were better at promoting their values. This is an aspect of operations which varied considerably across services in our first round of inspections, and led to us issuing eight areas for improvement. These have now largely (six out of eight) been addressed and every service inspected had established clearly defined values; virtually all (96 percent) of the respondents to our staff survey stated they were aware of them. Generally, we found that staff behaved consistently with their services' values and demonstrated respect for one another.

Two services took no or little action to improve equality, diversity and inclusion. Many services have acted with good intentions to promote equality, diversity and inclusion, although this hasn't always led to actual improvements being made. In our most

recent public perceptions survey, respondents said that fire and rescue services should hold open days for the public and careers events for children, as well as promote the different types of roles available in services, in an effort to make services more inclusive.

In our 2021 inspections, we found a lack of training on equality, diversity and inclusion, including among managers, and a poor understanding by staff.

We continue to find evidence that fire and rescue service staff with protected characteristics, including women, aren't always given opportunities to be heard, and we still find that the number of women working in the sector is very low. The sector must work with its staff in this respect. It should take steps to get rid of the unfair barriers experienced by women and Black and other ethnic minority staff and ensure they do not suffer unlawful discrimination in the workplace.

Diversity and race equality in the fire sector continues to be woeful. We have seen continued low joiner rates from groups with protected characteristics. New recruits will only be attracted by, and must be able to join, a workforce that is fair, open and inclusive. Although many services welcome a greater diversity of staff and are taking steps in this respect, they must ensure these are not just tokenistic efforts and that their actions are part of a sound strategy. Services must make sure that current staff are aware of the value of having an inclusive workforce and the benefits it can bring for the service and the community it serves.

Future of inspection

We will continue to improve what we do and listen to what services, policy-makers and the public tell us. We will also evaluate the effect of our inspections on the sector and the degree to which services are improving as a result of our findings.

From September 2021, we have continued to inspect as part of our Round 2 inspections, which will conclude in 2022. We have reintroduced some on-site inspection activity for the remainder of these inspections.

The findings from our inspection of all 44 services will be in the 2022 *State of Fire and Rescue* report.

Conclusion

The fire and rescue services continue to be an enormous asset to our communities. In many respects, the sector's response to the pandemic has been exemplary. Services have had to adapt many aspects of how they operate as a result of the new requirements and restrictions brought in to reduce the transmission of the virus.

The dedication and expertise of the fire and rescue services have provided an invaluable source of security. But the sector faces significant obstacles that are hampering its progress. These include: rigid national terms and conditions that stop services from fully exploiting their resources to meet local needs; out-of-date working practices; a lack of diversity; and,

in some respects, weaknesses in leadership development.

While improvements have been made at local and national levels, including in recent reforms, much more needs to be done. Policy-makers and legislators need to raise the priority of fire reform considerably. The service, its staff and the public deserve no less.

Part 2: Our inspections

Our inspections

This report covers the first 13 inspections of our second full cycle of all 44 fire and rescue service (FRS) inspections in England, known as our Round 2 inspections. We have divided all 44 inspections into three phases of inspection, known as ‘tranches’. Tranche 1 was carried out between February and August 2021, during which we inspected the 13 services in question. We will complete Tranches 2 and 3 in the remainder of 2021 and through 2022, when we will report our findings in full.

As part of our inspection programme, we assess and make graded judgments on three principal areas, known as ‘pillars’. For each FRS, we assess:

- its effectiveness;
- its efficiency; and
- how well it looks after its people.

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

Effectiveness

We assess how effectively each FRS operates. This includes how well the service: understands its current and future risks; works to prevent fires and other risks; protects the public through the regulation of fire safety; responds to fires and other emergencies; and responds to major incidents.

Efficiency

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

People

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

The operating context

The difficulties each service continues to face vary considerably across England and can be affected by many things. These include the service's size and financial position, as well as local factors such as geography, road networks, levels of affluence and deprivation, industries and employment patterns, and – most importantly – the people who live, work and spend time there. The pandemic continues to create additional difficulties for services, their staff and communities.

Few services have mostly full-time – known as 'wholetime' firefighters. These are in metropolitan areas and have stations that are crewed on a continuous basis, allowing them to mobilise a fire engine immediately when a call is received.

Most other services use both wholetime and 'on-call' firefighters. On-call firefighters are fully trained, part-time firefighters who may have other jobs but respond to calls when summoned. These firefighters mostly crew stations that have less demand and where having a full-time crew may not represent good value for money.

Each FRS is required by the [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England](#) to produce an integrated risk management plan (IRMP).¹⁰ This plan should:

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

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

¹⁰ Under section 21 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, the Secretary of State is required to produce the *Fire and Rescue National Framework for England*. The framework establishes that each FRS must produce an integrated risk management plan. Each plan must specify, among other things: all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks; how the service will allocate resources to prevention, protection and response; what service it must provide, including resource allocation for mitigating risks; and its management strategy and risk-based programme for enforcing the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

Understanding our graded judgments

It is important to emphasise that FRSs aren't in competition with each other. Inevitably, some people may want to compare gradings to form a league table. But considering the breadth and complexity of FRS performance, while taking account of each operating context, needs a more sophisticated approach. Similarly, it is important to read beyond the headlines and consider why some services have been graded higher than others. We take into account a range of factors when giving a grade, and there is no link between larger budgets and higher grades.

The nuances are in the individual service reports on our website. In each service report, we have identified 'areas for improvement' and, in some cases, 'causes of concern'. If we consider that an aspect of a service's practice, policy or performance falls short of the expected standard, we will report this as an area for improvement. If we identify a more serious, critical or systemic shortcoming in a service's practice, policy or performance, we will report it as a cause of concern. A cause of concern will always be accompanied by one or more recommendations. The *Fire and Rescue National Framework for England* requires the fire and rescue authority receiving a recommendation to prepare, update and regularly publish an action plan detailing how it will take action. If we identify a cause of concern relating to a potential risk to public safety, we will always revisit the service

to assess whether the service is taking action to address the potential risk.

We have outlined the grades of each service against each question in the following pages. Including our pandemic inspections, this is the third time we are inspecting services. We now have a benchmark against which we can measure the 13 services inspected between February and August 2021. We don't, however, yet have the same benchmark for the remaining 31 services. As we continue to inspect the remaining services, we will be able to consider their progress and the extent to which they have made improvements.

Summary of grades

On **effectiveness**, we didn't grade any service as outstanding overall, or inadequate. We graded four as good and nine as requiring improvement.

On **efficiency**, we graded one service as outstanding, two as good and ten as requiring improvement. We didn't grade any as inadequate.

On **people**, we graded five services as good and eight as requiring improvement. We didn't grade any as outstanding or inadequate.

Our findings

The majority of the 13 services we inspected between February and August 2021 are continuing to discharge their primary obligations in respect of the safety of their communities. However, with seven causes of concern issued across our effectiveness pillar, some services need to do more in relation to prevention. Fewer than half of the services we inspected could confidently demonstrate that they are sufficiently aligning their plans and resources to mitigate risk. However, many have significantly improved how well they look after their people. We continued to find both excellent and worrying practices across services, and we hope the more positive examples provided in this report will inspire innovation and improvement throughout the sector.

We have summarised our findings from every inspection from February to August 2021 over the next few pages, divided into our three inspection pillars of effectiveness, efficiency and people.

Our judgments

Effectiveness

Service	Judgment
Avon	Requires improvement
Bedfordshire	Good
Buckinghamshire	Requires improvement
Cambridgeshire	Good
Cheshire	Good
Cornwall	Requires improvement
Greater Manchester	Requires improvement
Hereford & Worcester	Requires improvement
Lincolnshire	Requires improvement
Merseyside	Good
Northumberland	Requires improvement
Surrey	Requires improvement
Warwickshire	Requires improvement

Totals:

- 0 Outstanding
- 4 Good
- 9 Requires improvement
- 0 Inadequate

How well does the FRS understand the risk of fire and other emergencies?

Service	Judgment
Avon	Requires improvement
Bedfordshire	Good
Buckinghamshire	Requires improvement
Cambridgeshire	Good
Cheshire	Good
Cornwall	Requires improvement
Greater Manchester	Good
Hereford & Worcester	Requires improvement
Lincolnshire	Requires improvement
Merseyside	Good
Northumberland	Requires improvement
Surrey	Requires improvement
Warwickshire	Requires improvement

Totals:

- 0 Outstanding
- 5 Good
- 8 Requires improvement
- 0 Inadequate

How effective is the FRS at preventing fires and other risks?

Service	Judgment
Avon	Requires improvement
Bedfordshire	Requires improvement
Buckinghamshire	Requires improvement
Cambridgeshire	Good
Cheshire	Good
Cornwall	Requires improvement
Greater Manchester	Requires improvement
Hereford & Worcester	Requires improvement
Lincolnshire	Requires improvement
Merseyside	Outstanding
Northumberland	Requires improvement
Surrey	Good
Warwickshire	Inadequate

Totals:

- 1 Outstanding
- 3 Good
- 8 Requires improvement
- 1 Inadequate

How effective is the FRS at protecting the public through the regulation of fire safety?

Service	Judgment
Avon	Requires improvement
Bedfordshire	Requires improvement
Buckinghamshire	Requires improvement
Cambridgeshire	Good
Cheshire	Good
Cornwall	Requires improvement
Greater Manchester	Requires improvement
Hereford & Worcester	Good
Lincolnshire	Requires improvement
Merseyside	Good
Northumberland	Good
Surrey	Good
Warwickshire	Requires improvement

Totals:

- 0 Outstanding
- 6 Good
- 7 Requires improvement
- 0 Inadequate

How effective is the FRS at responding to fires and other emergencies?

Service	Judgment
Avon	Good
Bedfordshire	Good
Buckinghamshire	Good
Cambridgeshire	Good
Cheshire	Good
Cornwall	Requires improvement
Greater Manchester	Good
Hereford & Worcester	Requires improvement
Lincolnshire	Good
Merseyside	Good
Northumberland	Requires improvement
Surrey	Requires improvement
Warwickshire	Requires improvement

Totals:

- 0 Outstanding
- 8 Good
- 5 Requires improvement
- 0 Inadequate

How well prepared is the FRS to respond to major and multi-agency incidents?

Service	Judgment
Avon	Good
Bedfordshire	Good
Buckinghamshire	Good
Cambridgeshire	Good
Cheshire	Good
Cornwall	Good
Greater Manchester	Requires improvement
Hereford & Worcester	Good
Lincolnshire	Good
Merseyside	Outstanding
Northumberland	Good
Surrey	Requires improvement
Warwickshire	Good

Totals:

- 1 Outstanding
- 10 Good
- 2 Requires improvement
- 0 Inadequate

Efficiency

Service	Judgment
Avon	Requires improvement
Bedfordshire	Requires improvement
Buckinghamshire	Requires improvement
Cambridgeshire	Good
Cheshire	Good
Cornwall	Requires improvement
Greater Manchester	Requires improvement
Hereford & Worcester	Requires improvement
Lincolnshire	Requires improvement
Merseyside	Outstanding
Northumberland	Requires improvement
Surrey	Requires improvement
Warwickshire	Requires improvement

Totals:

- 1 Outstanding
- 2 Good
- 10 Requires improvement
- 0 Inadequate

How well does the FRS use resources to manage risk?

Service	Judgment
Avon	Requires improvement
Bedfordshire	Requires improvement
Buckinghamshire	Requires improvement
Cambridgeshire	Good
Cheshire	Good
Cornwall	Requires improvement
Greater Manchester	Requires improvement
Hereford & Worcester	Requires improvement
Lincolnshire	Requires improvement
Merseyside	Outstanding
Northumberland	Requires improvement
Surrey	Requires improvement
Warwickshire	Requires improvement

Totals:

- 1 Outstanding
- 2 Good
- 10 Requires improvement
- 0 Inadequate

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

Service	Judgment
Avon	Good
Bedfordshire	Good
Buckinghamshire	Requires improvement
Cambridgeshire	Requires improvement
Cheshire	Good
Cornwall	Requires improvement
Greater Manchester	Good
Hereford & Worcester	Requires improvement
Lincolnshire	Good
Merseyside	Good
Northumberland	Requires improvement
Surrey	Good
Warwickshire	Requires improvement

Totals:

- 0 Outstanding
- 7 Good
- 6 Requires improvement
- 0 Inadequate

People

Service	Judgment
Avon	Requires improvement
Bedfordshire	Good
Buckinghamshire	Requires improvement
Cambridgeshire	Good
Cheshire	Good
Cornwall	Requires improvement
Greater Manchester	Good
Hereford & Worcester	Requires improvement
Lincolnshire	Requires improvement
Merseyside	Good
Northumberland	Requires improvement
Surrey	Requires improvement
Warwickshire	Requires improvement

Totals:

- 0 Outstanding
- 5 Good
- 8 Requires improvement
- 0 Inadequate

How well does the FRS promote its values and culture?

Service	Judgment
Avon	Good
Bedfordshire	Good
Buckinghamshire	Requires improvement
Cambridgeshire	Good
Cheshire	Good
Cornwall	Good
Greater Manchester	Good
Hereford & Worcester	Requires improvement
Lincolnshire	Good
Merseyside	Good
Northumberland	Requires improvement
Surrey	Good
Warwickshire	Requires improvement

Totals:

- 0 Outstanding
- 9 Good
- 4 Requires improvement
- 0 Inadequate

How well trained and skilled are FRS staff?

Service	Judgment
Avon	Requires improvement
Bedfordshire	Good
Buckinghamshire	Requires improvement
Cambridgeshire	Good
Cheshire	Good
Cornwall	Requires improvement
Greater Manchester	Good
Hereford & Worcester	Requires improvement
Lincolnshire	Requires improvement
Merseyside	Good
Northumberland	Requires improvement
Surrey	Good
Warwickshire	Requires improvement

Totals:

- 0 Outstanding
- 6 Good
- 7 Requires improvement
- 0 Inadequate

How well does the FRS ensure fairness and diversity?

Service	Judgment
Avon	Requires improvement
Bedfordshire	Good
Buckinghamshire	Requires improvement
Cambridgeshire	Good
Cheshire	Good
Cornwall	Requires improvement
Greater Manchester	Good
Hereford & Worcester	Requires improvement
Lincolnshire	Requires improvement
Merseyside	Requires improvement
Northumberland	Requires improvement
Surrey	Requires improvement
Warwickshire	Requires improvement

Totals:

- 0 Outstanding
- 4 Good
- 9 Requires improvement
- 0 Inadequate

How well does the FRS develop leadership and capability?

Service	Judgment
Avon	Requires improvement
Bedfordshire	Good
Buckinghamshire	Requires improvement
Cambridgeshire	Good
Cheshire	Requires improvement
Cornwall	Requires improvement
Greater Manchester	Requires improvement
Hereford & Worcester	Requires improvement
Lincolnshire	Requires improvement
Merseyside	Good
Northumberland	Requires improvement
Surrey	Requires improvement
Warwickshire	Requires improvement

Totals:

- 0 Outstanding
- 3 Good
- 10 Requires improvement
- 0 Inadequate

Effectiveness

In this pillar, we ask five questions:

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

Our findings

Most services are prioritising protection work

When services carry out protection work, they comply with the provisions established in the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 which is concerned with the safety of premises from the risk of fire.

This includes working with businesses to educate and support them in connection with the risks of fire in their buildings. If necessary, they use enforcement powers to require that premises are made compliant with fire safety legislation.

This is different from prevention work, which services must also carry out. This type of work focuses on the people most at risk of fire. Preventing incidents occurring in the first place is the best and most

cost-effective outcome. Services carry out a range of prevention activities, such as safe-and-well visits in people's homes, and educate the public on matters relating to road, water and fire safety.

In the first round of inspections, which we carried out between June 2018 and August 2019, we had material concerns about the extent to which services were adequately prioritising protection work. There had been an observable underinvestment over a prolonged period, as well as a reduction in the number of specialist staff and fire safety audits.¹¹

Services are responsible for enforcing fire safety legislation in relevant premises. Regrettably, our inspections revealed a reduction in the level of enforcement and prosecution work in many services. Most services didn't have enough qualified fire safety inspectors. These problems were made worse by a lack of focus and prioritisation of protection in services' IRMPs.

Although we have inspected fewer than a third of services during our 2021 inspections, the improvements we have seen so far indicate that the sector has responded positively to our concerns. This is reflected by the overall improved grades we have given to the 13 services in relation to their

¹¹ A fire safety audit is an examination of premises and its documentation to make sure that it complies with the requirements of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

effectiveness in protecting the public through the regulation of fire safety.

Avon FRS was the only service whose protection work we considered to be inadequate during Round 1. Since then, it has made material efforts to improve, and in Round 2 we graded it as requiring improvement. Northumberland and Surrey FRSs have had their grades lifted to good. And although their grades have remained the same, we have observed significant improvements in both Buckinghamshire and Merseyside FRSs. These improvements include increasing the numbers of fire safety inspectors, developing their risk-based inspection programmes¹² – which are used to determine which buildings should be prioritised for full fire safety audits, such as hospitals, care homes and some high-rise residential buildings – and ensuring that protection activity is a main strategic priority. This increased focus on protection activity must be maintained.

Most services have increased their number of fire safety inspectors; as a result, they have more capacity to carry out fire safety audits at high-risk premises. On 31 March 2021, there were 221 members of staff working in protection roles in the 13 services we inspected, which means that there were 44 more

¹² Fire and rescue authorities must have a risk-based inspection programme to make sure that they comply with Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. *Approved Standards: Code of Ethics*, Fire Standards Board, May 2021. Available at 2(1) and (2) of the Home Office *Fire and Rescue National Framework* establish that fire and rescue authorities must assess all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks that could affect their communities.

members of staff than in 2020. Between 31 March 2019 and 31 March 2021, the median number of staff working in protection roles in services rose from 12.5 to 14. Most of the services we inspected have reviewed their risk-based inspection programmes and made improvements to ensure they are auditing high-risk premises regularly. We also found that many services are responding more quickly to planning applications from local authority building controls (9 out of 13 services had responded to more planning applications within the required timeframe than they had in previous years).

All services have also adopted the [Competency Framework for Fire Safety Regulators](#), which was published by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC). It establishes the required level of skills, knowledge and understanding for a fire safety inspector to be considered competent.

The Home Office has provided the sector with additional funding for investment in staff, training and technology. This funding is also intended to be used to help services cope with their additional workloads following the Grenfell Tower fire and the recommendations made in Phase 1 of the inquiry.¹³ This is making a difference, but it takes time to train and develop confident and competent fire safety inspectors, and it takes a material effort to retain them. It will be some time before the numbers

¹³ [Grenfell Tower Inquiry: Phase 1 Report](#), Grenfell Tower Inquiry, October 2019.

of fire safety inspectors reach the numbers required in England.

We welcome the Fire Standards Board's new protection standard, which was published in September 2021.¹⁴ This standard is designed to make services more consistent in their protection work, improve the quality of that work, and reduce the risks of fires starting in buildings. Protection must continue to be a priority.

Building risk review work is on track

The building risk review programme is a government-funded scheme to review the safety of all high-rise residential buildings in England by the end of 2021. At the time of our 2021 inspections, the 13 services we inspected told us that they had either completed this work already or were on track to do so.

In July 2021, the [Building Safety Bill](#) was introduced in the House of Commons. The bill establishes how high-rise residential buildings should be constructed and maintained, and provides for the creation of a new building safety regulator. The regulator will be set up by and form part of the Health and Safety Executive; it is currently operating as a shadow body. It will monitor compliance with and enforce the legislation. Once fully operational, we expect the regulator to place additional demands on services' already stretched protection teams.

¹⁴ [Approved Standards: Protection](#), Fire Standards Board, September 2021.

Services must carry out careful workforce planning to make sure these potential additional demands don't have a detrimental effect on their other work. This includes their risk-based inspection programmes and other statutory responsibilities.

Services aren't giving prevention work sufficient priority

In our Round 1 inspections, 11 of the 13 services had at least one area for improvement in respect of their prevention work. These services also needed to do more to improve how they established who was at greatest risk of fire and other emergencies. They also needed to prioritise prevention work and make sure that they were meeting the needs of those who were most vulnerable. All these services also needed to improve how they evaluated which interventions were most effective at helping those in need.

In our 2021 inspections, we were disappointed to find that many services hadn't made enough progress to address these areas for improvement; more than half needed further work. In three cases, we were troubled by the lack of progress made and have issued a cause of concern in this respect to each of the services in question. We will monitor progress made by these services closely.

An effective fire and rescue service must give a sufficient level of priority to its three principal responsibilities: prevention, protection and response.

Neither one should be prioritised at the expense of the other; the cost to public safety is too great.

Levels of prevention activity are declining, and targeting is poor

Some services are carrying out unjustifiably low levels of prevention work; this does not reflect the level of priority set out in their IRMPs. In the year ending 31 March 2020, an average of 12 home safety checks per 1,000 people were carried out by the 13 services we inspected. In the year ending 31 March 2021, this number dropped to four. While the pandemic was largely the reason, it wasn't always. In some services, we found that they had little or no adequate strategy in place to carry out prevention work.

We were encouraged to see that some services have continued to make improvements to the ways of working they introduced in response to the pandemic. These have included securing access to more comprehensive health data to help those who are most vulnerable, better use of technology to prioritise those individuals who would benefit most from meeting face to face, and assisting with vaccine clinics.

In 9 of the 13 services we inspected, we recommended that they proactively improve the way they identify and target members of the public who are most at risk from fire. It is essential, particularly when face-to-face prevention activity is carried

out, that services are able to reach those who are most vulnerable.

It is unacceptable that some fire and rescue services don't take a sufficiently targeted approach to their prevention work. While some services rely solely on referrals from other organisations, others wait for members of the public to get in touch with them for support. Services can and should use the range of technology available so they can work with other organisations to establish who are the most vulnerable and target their resources accordingly.

Evaluation remains a weakness for the sector

Many services are still not doing enough to evaluate their prevention activities. Some of these activities include home fire safety checks (HFSCs). During an HFSC, a service visits a person's home to give advice on how to reduce the risk of fire. Safe-and-well visits are a more comprehensive type of HFSC, during which a service will provide advice on how to protect the home from fire, as well as general health advice. They will also refer people for specialist support if needed.

We found that services carry out their prevention activity in different ways. Most of the services we inspected had insufficient knowledge of what are the most effective interventions to mitigate the risk of fire. And only 3 of the 13 services we inspected (Cambridgeshire, Cheshire and Merseyside) had adequately evaluated their prevention activity.

The remaining ten services we inspected had carried out either no or limited evaluation. This is not a new problem; we drew attention to it during our first round of inspections. More needs to be done and more urgently.

The NFCC is currently designing a method that services can use to evaluate objectively their prevention, protection and response activities, although it will not be ready for quite some time. Services must do more to make sure that information is available to their prevention, protection and response functions. They must also do more to make sure that each function is aware of how their actions could be beneficial when the service discharges one or both of its other functions. For example, firefighters responding to a house fire should be able to access information gathered during a prevention visit that explains if and how the occupant might be vulnerable and in need of help.

Safeguarding awareness has improved

When fire and rescue staff carry out prevention work, they often come face to face with the most vulnerable in society. It is therefore essential that they have the confidence to deal with those who are vulnerable and that they are aware of what can make a person vulnerable. Their awareness should go beyond matters relating to fire and should extend to problems such as human trafficking, domestic abuse and radicalisation. While we wouldn't expect fire services to have the skills to resolve these problems, they

should have robust arrangements in place to recognise vulnerability and be able to refer people to the relevant authorities.

We are therefore encouraged by the fact that all but one of the services we inspected have good safeguarding arrangements in place. This is a significant improvement from our first full round of inspections. Avon, Bedfordshire, Greater Manchester, Hereford and Worcester, and Surrey FRSs have addressed the areas for improvement we gave them relating to safeguarding. However, we encourage all services to provide safeguarding awareness training to all staff, and not only to frontline firefighters and specialist prevention teams who are most frequently in contact with the public.

Proactive action is being taken to tackle fire-setting behaviour

Working with people who are more likely to engage in fire-setting behaviour is an effective way of reducing the likelihood of their entering into the criminal justice system as arsonists. They are often vulnerable young people with complex ranges of needs.

We are therefore encouraged to see that all but one of the services we inspected have good arrangements in place to work with other organisations to identify and rehabilitate these individuals at an early stage.

Work is being done at national level to improve prevention work

Despite the general lack of emphasis on prevention activities by services, we are pleased that national work is underway to promote improvements. In July 2021, the Fire Standards Board published a [prevention standard](#) which is designed to help services take a consistent approach to their prevention work and to help them educate their communities to adopt safer behaviours, reduce community-related risks and work collaboratively with others where appropriate.

The NFCC has also published guidance¹⁵ which encourages services to focus on people in their prevention activities. The guidance is designed to support services to take a more standardised and evidence-based approach to prevention. Once services have adopted the standard and made the NFCC's guidance part of their prevention work, they should be better placed to take effective action at the appropriate time.

But more should be done by the sector to standardise the data sets used by different services.

Services should be able to plan their prevention work on the basis of comparable data. At present, many services have difficulty sufficiently understanding the primary risk factors in their communities. In some services, there is an unnecessary duplication of work.

¹⁵ [Person-centred framework](#), NFCC, 2021.

Services should also use their prevention data to assist with their protection and response planning.

Services are well prepared to respond to routine incidents

Responding to fires and other emergencies continues to be a strength of the sector. Most services we inspected had appropriate arrangements in place that enabled them to respond to emergency incidents efficiently and effectively.

In Round 1, we were concerned that many services didn't update their mobile data terminals (MDTs) in fire engines regularly enough. This meant that firefighters couldn't always access the most up-to-date risk information when they went to emergencies.

Some services had MDTs that were unreliable. So far during our 2021 inspections, we have found that many firefighters now have better access to risk information when they attend emergencies. We are pleased that many services have taken steps to make these improvements.

We are encouraged to see an improvement in the availability of trained and competent incident commanders who can deal with a wide range of emergencies. In the 13 services we inspected, the proportion of incident commanders who were trained and assessed increased from 93 percent on 31 March 2020 to 99 percent on 31 March 2021. The proportion who are accredited nationally is 92 percent.

National guidance says that services should assess

the continued competence of incident commanders every two years. This should include refresher training and an assessment.

Fire and rescue services don't take a sufficiently common approach to explaining to the public how many fire engines are required and how long it takes to respond to an incident. And with no national response standards in place, there isn't a way for the public to compare their service with others.

The NFCC, through its ['Definition of Risk'](#) project, has begun work to provide a risk rating for each service on the basis of its response to a range of common incidents. We are interested to see how services use this tool in the future to mitigate the risks they face.

We are concerned that some services cannot sufficiently assure themselves that their control rooms are adequately set up to handle multiple fire survival guidance calls or are able to adequately exchange real-time risk information with incident commanders.¹⁶ It is important that control rooms are resourced appropriately, and that services have fallback arrangements in place. Services must also make sure that control staff are well trained and equipped with the technology they need to work effectively. All too often we see that control staff aren't sufficiently included in training plans, and that support is prioritised for their response colleagues instead.

¹⁶ These problems were covered in the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 report.
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Other services have used technology to improve arrangements in their control room. For example, Bedfordshire FRS control staff use technology effectively to pinpoint the location of callers and to access live images from incidents. They use this information to inform their assessments of risk and response. The service can also access a live video feed once they have had permission from the caller. Footage from the feed can also be passed on to incident commanders and the other emergency services.

More needs to be done to improve the on-call crewing model

We continue to be worried that the sector has not been able to significantly improve the recruitment, retention and availability of on-call firefighters. These are firefighters who generally provide fire cover in remote and rural areas. They respond from their home addresses or their primary places of employment. The requirement to be within a set number of minutes away from a fire station (usually five) to respond to incidents promptly makes it difficult to attract and retain these staff.

During the pandemic, the availability of on-call firefighters improved when the country was in lockdown. Many on-call firefighters were furloughed from their primary employments. But the sector has not found a longer-term, more sustainable solution.

During our 2021 inspections, we found that some services have been more creative and flexible in relation to their use of on-call firefighters.

For example, Buckinghamshire FRS uses its on-call staff to respond to larger incidents that are further away from on-call fire stations, instead of using them to respond to local incidents. This means on-call staff do not need to be immediately available to respond to an incident.

On-call firefighters are important: they are used to provide additional support when multiple fire engines are required to respond to an incident. But more needs to be done by services to attract on-call firefighters and make best use of them.

Services are well prepared to respond to major and multi-agency incidents

In our first inspections, we found that services were well prepared to respond to major and multi-agency incidents. This is one of the sector's strengths; all services have good arrangements in place to work with other emergency services and organisations such as utility companies and local authorities. They are also good at helping other fire and rescue services and will respond to incidents outside their own fire authority borders.

All services and firefighters must be prepared to respond to a marauding terrorist attack (MTA). But we are worried about the resilience of the MTA arrangements in place at some services.

Services must make sure that they are able to respond, quickly and effectively, to an MTA.

Their procedures for responding to an MTA must be understood by all staff and properly tested.

Currently, not all services have in place sufficiently robust arrangements to pay for this capability.

Some services use overtime while others resort to additional responsibility allowances.

Responding to major incidents of terrorism is part of the role of the firefighter and is set out in the 'grey book' (the *National Joint Council for Local Authorities' Fire and Rescue Services Scheme of Conditions of Service*¹⁷). The NFCC has confirmed that fire and rescue services will be part of the emergency service response to all types of terrorist incident. In January 2020, we recommended that the Home Office should clearly set out its expectations of fire and rescue services and what the responsibilities of a firefighter are. This recommendation is now urgent as there is too much variation in the ways services approach establishing and paying for this capability.

¹⁷ *National Joint Council For Local Authorities' Fire and Rescue Services, Scheme of conditions of service. The Grey Book, 6th edition, Local Government Association.*

Local resilience forums (LRFs) are made up of representatives from local public services. They are responsible for planning and preparing for localised incidents and catastrophic emergencies. During our pandemic inspections, LRF members told us that they appreciated the valuable contributions made by fire and rescue services.

The Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP) establish that the emergency services must work together as effectively as possible during major, serious and catastrophic incidents and events. In our Round 1 inspections, we found that supervisory managers who command smaller-scale incidents didn't understand the principles as well as middle and senior managers. Following our latest inspections, we are pleased to see that most of the supervisory managers we spoke with now have a better understanding of the principles.

Cross-border training is still below pre-pandemic levels

In Round 1, we found that services weren't doing enough joint exercises with neighbouring services to make sure their equipment and ways of working were aligned. As might be expected, fewer cross-border training exercises took place as a result of the restrictions put in place during the pandemic.

In the year ending 31 March 2020, a total of 21 joint training exercises with neighbouring services were carried out by one service (Hereford and Worcester

FRS); however, some services didn't carry out any at all. In the same period, on average, services carried out ten joint training exercises.

In the year ending 31 March 2021, the average number of joint training exercises dropped to 5.6 – this was mainly a result of pandemic restrictions. In the Round 1 Tranche 2 staff survey, 75 percent of firefighters and specialist staff told us that they hadn't participated in training or exercising with neighbouring services in the past 12 months. Our expectation is that cross-border training will increase as the pandemic restrictions are lifted.

Services disseminate what they have learned widely

We are pleased that services are learning from significant emergencies and that they are disseminating what they have learned widely. Two platforms are used for this purpose: the joint operational learning platform, which is used by all emergency responder organisations, and the national operational learning platform, which is used by all fire and rescue services in the United Kingdom.

But we were disappointed to find that, in all but 4 of the 13 services we inspected, there was a need to improve the ways services debrief and learn from routine emergency incidents.

Home Office data shows in the year ending March 2021, 518,263 incidents were attended by fire and rescue services. This was a 7 percent decrease compared with the previous year (558,013), a 2 percent decrease compared with five years ago (529,674) and a 20 percent decrease compared with ten years ago (647,362). As we see a steady decrease in the number of emergency incidents attended by fire services, it is essential that the lessons learned from the incidents that do occur are widely disseminated within and by each service, and that improvements to operational preparedness are made as a result.

There is still an inconsistent approach to identifying and mitigating risk

In Round 1, we found too much variation in how services identified and mitigated risk. The content and quality of IRMPs and how services consulted their communities on their IRMPs also varied significantly. In our most recent public perceptions survey, 14 percent of respondents (1,981) said they didn't know what their fire and rescue services should be responsible for other than extinguishing fires. We have not seen any significant change during our 2021 inspections.

In May 2021, the Fire Standards Board published a standard¹⁸ on community risk management planning,

¹⁸ [*Approved Standards: Community Risk Management Planning*](#), Fire Standards Board, May 2021.

which is the process a service follows to assess foreseeable risks and decide how to best use its resources to mitigate them. The standard was published during our 2021 inspections, so the services we inspected haven't yet incorporated it into their plans. We encourage services to adopt the standard as quickly as possible, as it will help the sector to meet our June 2019 recommendation that services should be more consistent in how they identify and determine risk as part of the IRMP process. We encourage the NFCC to provide a set of tools to further support services. It is important that the standard is applied consistently throughout the country.

In many of the services we recently inspected, prevention, protection and response work continue to take place in isolation. These principal areas of work are generally not sufficiently co-ordinated with each other to mitigate the main risks set out in IRMPs.

In our staff survey, 71 percent of those surveyed told us that they felt their service was extremely or very effective at identifying foreseeable risks faced by the community. We found that some services have made improvements in their approach to identifying and mitigating risk. But we are disappointed that too many services have not made any adequate progress since Round 1. These services have not acted sufficiently on the specific areas for improvement we gave them during their first inspection.

Data used by services to build risk profiles varies too much

Services use a range of data to build their risk profiles and to produce their IRMPs. This includes historical incident data, public health data and commercially available consumer data. But services use different data sets, and often the data isn't used effectively in their prevention, protection and response work. This includes the work they do to make sure their home fire safety visits are targeted at the right people, and to decide on the rationale for risk-based inspection programmes and where fire stations should be located.

There will always need to be some variation in the data used by services. Local risk must be understood, and this includes identifying high-impact but low-likelihood emergencies, such as train crashes, terrorist attacks and emergencies at nuclear power sites. But most data used is common to all services. This includes historical incident data, the locations of people most at risk from fire, and the locations of the highest risk buildings regulated by fire safety legislation. Services could be more efficient by making their data sets available to one another.

In its 'Definition of Risk' project, the NFCC has begun work to make sure that services use data more consistently. One aim of the project is to provide a comparable view of risk in each service by drawing on the same types of data. This will allow individual services to then consider and compare how efficiently

they are allocating resources to prevention, protection and response.

Some services need to improve how they collect and disseminate risk information

During our 2021 inspections, we examined in detail the range of risk information that was collected and passed on to firefighters, incident commanders and control room staff. This is an area where we have placed great emphasis, following the recommendations made in the Grenfell Tower Inquiry's Phase 1 report.

We were pleased to find that most services were collecting good-quality risk information, including for high-risk and high-rise buildings. But we are concerned that some services haven't sufficiently prioritised making sure up-to-date risk information is available for firefighters, incident commanders and control room staff.

Disappointingly, in some services, we also found that control room staff didn't have immediate access to the same risk information available to incident commanders at the incident in question. A lack of consistent risk information could very well materially lower the quality of fire survival guidance provided by control room staff to people who may be trapped in a fire. And it could have an adverse effect on communication and co-ordination between the control room and incident commanders. This puts the public at unnecessary risk of harm.

Efficiency

In this pillar, we ask two questions:

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

Our findings

Services are mitigating financial risks

Most services have a sound understanding of what financial difficulties they are likely to face in the future. We have seen some realistic assumptions made in respect of budgets, as well as examples of scenario planning in service plans and investment in future innovation. For example, Cheshire FRS has developed different scenarios to respond to unanticipated risks. It considers the wider external environment and carries out some scenario planning, while taking into account matters such as government funding, business rates and pay for future spending reductions. All services need to follow suit if they are to cope with future financial pressures.

Financial planning scenarios and future risks considered by other services include changes in pension settlements, future levels of council tax precepts, business rates, inflation and future pay increases for staff. Many services have also made

plans that take into account the Government's comprehensive spending review.

But some services only produce financial plans for the year ahead. Their plans are reactive rather than proactive and make immediate short-term rather than long-term financial decisions. For example, one service's recent IRMP action plans have focused more on achieving immediate and short-term savings rather than on identifying and managing risk.

While short-term funding settlements are unhelpful for longer-term planning, these services should try to understand the future financial pressures they may face. Without doing so, they will not be able to take measures to adequately mitigate their main or significant financial risks.

Some services rely too much on their reserves to support revenue budgets, rather than use this money productively to support new ways of working. One service's plan for its reserves is particularly unclear and unsustainable.

The reserves will shortly be depleted and it is unlikely that the service will be able to invest in future capital projects in fleet, estates and technology.

Services have different levels of reserves, and they don't all use them in the same way. The reason why services have different levels of reserves can be partially explained by the difference in governance models.

Dataset 1: Reserves and provisions as a percentage of total expenditure 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020

Reserves and provisions represented between 9.6 and 47.9 percent of expenditure for a large number of services (27 of the 42 that had data available).

The median average was 31 percent. Cheshire's proportion was the highest, at 72.11 percent.

Lincolnshire, Cornwall, Hertfordshire, and Surrey all had a proportion of less than 1 percent.

Source: Annual financial data returns to Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy

Note: Data is not available for all services

This variation in governance can make financial comparisons between services difficult. While combined¹⁹ council and metropolitan services have specific budgets, it can be difficult to disaggregate the budget for the fire and rescue service from the budget for the larger organisation. Out of the 44 fire and rescue services in England, 24 are combined council or metropolitan, 13 are county council or unitary, 4 are PFCCs, 2 are mayoral, of which London has a separate governance structure called the London Fire Commissioner.

¹⁹ Combined fire and rescue authorities are also known as standalone fire and rescue authorities. This reflects that they are not part of another organisation such as a county council.

England fire and rescue services by governance type

Combined services:

- Avon
- Bedfordshire
- Berkshire
- Buckinghamshire
- Cambridgeshire
- Cheshire
- Cleveland
- Durham
- Derbyshire
- Devon and Somerset
- Dorset and Wiltshire
- East Sussex
- Hampshire
- Hereford and Worcester
- Humberside
- Kent
- Lancashire
- Leicestershire
- Nottinghamshire
- Shropshire.

Metropolitan services:

- Merseyside
- South Yorkshire
- Tyne and Wear
- West Midlands.

County council services:

- Cumbria
- Gloucestershire
- Hertfordshire
- Lincolnshire
- Norfolk
- Oxfordshire
- Suffolk
- Surrey
- Warwickshire
- West Sussex.

Unitary services:

- Cornwall
- Isles of Scilly
- Northumberland.

PFCC services:

- Essex
- North Yorkshire
- Northamptonshire
- Staffordshire.

Mayoral services:

- Greater Manchester
- West Yorkshire.

London is managed by the London Fire Commissioner.

Services are making use of new ways of working

Many services have introduced positive changes to their working practices. This has been partly out of necessity as a result of the pandemic. But other changes have been made to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of services.

During the pandemic, many services quickly adapted many aspects of how they worked in order to enable staff to work from home. Some services plan to keep certain arrangements in place to allow for flexible working. In some services, staff in protection roles have carried out remote fire safety audits for businesses from their desktops. And some services have continued to provide training to staff virtually.

Buckinghamshire FRS has introduced a 'flexi firefighter contract', which enables staff to work more flexible shift patterns. Surrey FRS has reviewed the crewing models it uses to make sure appropriate numbers of staff are available when needed. Overtime is now being used far less to maintain fire engine availability.

During the 2019/20 financial year, £14.2 million was spent on ICT by services. This represented 9.1 percent of all capital expenditure, although this varied quite considerably across services. Despite this, we continue to find numerous examples of ineffective ICT structures which hamper staff productivity and the ability of services to provide effective fire safety. We are disappointed that, in some cases, problems with technology that we identified in our last inspection have not been resolved. This is particularly troubling considering that some services didn't give a sufficiently clear explanation of how they were intending to replace and update their ICT infrastructure.

In the services which have given us most cause for concern about their protection work, we have also found that they have unreliable ICT systems. For a service to promote fire safety effectively, it must be able to risk assess, plan and carry out audits, and maintain robust records of the buildings in its local area. It must also be able to easily disseminate risk information within the service and with local authorities and organisations.

These services have ICT systems that are difficult to retrieve information from, unwieldy to use and often aren't connected to other risk databases. This isn't satisfactory. As a result, staff find it difficult to use their time productively and to determine how useful are the audits that have been done.

Some services do actively exploit the opportunities arising from changes in technology. For example, Cambridgeshire FRS has improved the efficiency and effectiveness of its asset management system. Staff use scanners and tablet computers when carrying out equipment and fire engine checks, and when maintaining inventories. As a result of these automated processes, staff are spending less time on administration work.

More needs to be done to make sure workforces are productive

Overall, progress made by fire and rescue services to make sure that their workforces are productive is slow and limited.

Of the 13 services we inspected, we found that only 4 were improving the productivity of their workforces. For example, Cheshire FRS is reviewing some existing shift patterns and expanding its fleet of rapid response rescue units to all primary on-call fire stations to improve the availability of its staff.

Merseyside FRS monitors the performance of each fire station and what its firefighters do.

Ineffective and inefficient ICT systems undermine some services' attempts to improve their productivity. During the initial stages of the pandemic, one service allocated periods of time to its staff during which they could access the service's ICT system remotely.

However, this meant that they could only access the system at specific times of the day, and some

members of staff told us that, at times, they had to work outside their contracted working hours – in the evenings or at weekends – to access the system. Some services could use firefighter time more productively by using them to help with prevention and protection work.

Resources aren't always aligned to risk

In their IRMPs, services establish what foreseeable risks they face and how they will allocate their resources between prevention, protection and response to mitigate those risks. In our 2021 inspections, we found that some services weren't able to adequately demonstrate that their budget and resource allocation were aligned to their IRMPs.

For example, one service reduced the number of staff in its prevention team. This was done to save money rather than to reflect reduced community risk. Other services allocated resources on the basis of previous funding allocations or historical information. And, in one case, a service couldn't guarantee that it had enough resources to meet the priorities in its IRMP.

Too many services have plans which aren't consistent with the risks and priorities in their IRMPs. This is significantly hindering their efficiency.

Many services can't fully cope

In Round 1, we found that, as budgets and staffing levels had been reduced, operational response was protected at the expense of prevention and protection. The majority of services have allocated more staff and funding to protection, but most services still don't have enough fire safety inspectors to carry out fire safety audits and other protection work. We are particularly worried by the reduction in the number of prevention visits, which are now below pre-pandemic levels.

Some services rely too much on dual contracts and overtime to maintain operational response cover. In some services, staff need to work extra hours or carry out multiple functions. However, some positive steps have been taken by some services. For example, Bedfordshire FRS is making more effective use of on-call firefighters to cover staffing shortfalls at wholetime fire stations.

We are concerned that most services don't have sufficient capacity and capability to make the changes they need to improve their digital technology. We saw examples of staff having to use multiple ICT systems or programmes to access the information they needed to carry out their protection work. In one service, staff said that the ICT programme they use is unreliable and that it makes them much less efficient because they have to double-check everything manually.

Services need to make sure that they can make the changes required to enable them to operate more

efficiently and effectively. They also need to make sure they invest enough money and have enough skilled people to bring in the ICT improvements they need.

Services need to better manage the use of dual contracts and overtime

Many services resort to using alternative working models when they have shortages of crews available at on-call stations; these include dual contracts and overtime arrangements. As at March 2020, 21.7 percent of wholetime firefighters had second jobs and 12.1 percent had dual contracts with the same service. However, when unmonitored or monitored ineffectively, this model to provide adequate cover can be inefficient, costly, and at worst, unsafe; it can also be detrimental to staff wellbeing.

Dataset 2: Proportion of wholetime firefighters on dual contracts within their services as at 31 March 2020

The majority of services (41 of 42) had less than 40 percent of wholetime firefighters on dual contracts. The average was 19 percent. Northumberland's proportion was the highest, at 62 percent. Tyne and Wear and Greater Manchester each had a proportion of 1 percent or less.

Services with no staff on dual contract within the same service have been excluded from the graph

Source: HMICFRS data collection

If overtime isn't offered fairly to staff, this can also create inequalities of opportunity and feelings of resentment.

If services can establish shift patterns which both provide effective cover that matches the public's needs and reduce the need for excessive overtime arrangements, they will be more efficient.

All services collaborate with local organisations and authorities to some extent, but evaluation is limited

Many services are generally proactive at looking for opportunities to work with other emergency responders. There are many examples of positive collaboration, particularly from some services that work in the same buildings as other emergency services.

Some services share control rooms to save costs and improve services. Merseyside FRS has a programme under way to develop a new training and development academy with the North West Ambulance Service NHS Trust. The ambulance service plans to base its hazardous area response team at the site.

Other services work together on joint procurement, such as buying new vehicles.

However, some services aren't quite as proactive and some do nothing more than work in the same building. We found that nearly half of the services we inspected were not fully evaluating their collaboration activities.

Collaboration isn't only about making savings or efficiencies. Avon FRS works with the South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust and has provided a community first-responder vehicle at one of its fire stations. The service is also helping the trust by driving ambulances to incidents.

Cornwall FRS has worked with the other two emergency services to set up the new role of a tri-service safety officer. Staff in this position carry out a range of activities to support the fire, police and ambulance services. The new role has led to savings being made and safety benefits for the community.

Too many services don't consistently or effectively evaluate, review or monitor collaboration activities to assess the extent to which they work well and are cost-effective.

Fleet and estate strategies should be aligned to IRMPs

Services must carefully consider any changes to their estates and determine whether such changes could improve the service they provide to the public.

We are disappointed that many services either don't have fleet and estate strategies in place or that these strategies are inconsistent with their IRMPs. For example, we saw that one service had made plans for new training facilities and other changes at three of its sites. But it made very little progress against these plans.

Control room continuity plans need regular testing

It is vital that services, and their control rooms in particular, have robust arrangements in place so that they can continue to provide a service during periods of disruption. These arrangements are known as 'continuity arrangements'. In our 2021 inspections, we found that most services don't test their control room continuity arrangements often enough.

Many services haven't tested a full evacuation of their control rooms since before the pandemic; in some cases, it has been much longer. This means that staff aren't fully aware of what they should do if an evacuation is needed.

Services should test their evacuation plans often. While the pandemic has made it more difficult to test a full evacuation, it is still possible. Some services, such as Avon FRS, have managed to test their evacuation plans throughout the pandemic; it carries out four exercises each year to test its arrangements.

People

In this pillar, we ask four questions:

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

Our findings

Values are better understood and demonstrated

Organisational cultures can have a material effect on staff wellbeing.²⁰ In Round 1, we found few services that had both unambiguous values and a clear indication of acceptable workplace behaviours. In most services, we found that even if such values were in place, they weren't a sufficient part of the working culture and weren't communicated to staff effectively.

As a result, staff didn't properly understand these values and there were many instances of poor behaviour. We were particularly concerned to find outdated practices that prevented some staff from getting the formal help they needed. In several services, we also found evidence of cultures so toxic

²⁰ [‘Culture and behaviour in the English National Health Service: overview of lessons from a large multimethod study’](#), *BMJ Quality and Safety*.

that bullying, harassment and discrimination were commonplace and unchallenged. This included use of inappropriate language, overly autocratic management styles and, most worryingly, staff finding amusement in the poor treatment of colleagues.

In our 2021 inspections, it was encouraging to find services have made the greatest improvement in this area. Work to promote and prioritise values and culture at all levels of fire and rescue services is well under way. Of the 8 areas for improvement related to values and culture that we previously issued in respect of the 13 services we inspected, 6 were closed during our 2021 inspections. In particular, Avon FRS proactively worked with its staff to improve its new values and behaviour framework. The service appointed 'cultural advocates' who were responsible for this work. They promoted these values and set clear behavioural standards for all staff in the service.

Every service we inspected had clearly defined values, of which almost all (96 percent) respondents to our 2021 staff survey said they were aware.

We found that the vast majority of fire and rescue staff are diligent and proud to work for their organisations. They told us they want to do a good job to protect the communities that they serve.

We were pleased to see that, in most services, staff generally behaved in a way that was consistent with the service's values. The majority (84 percent) of respondents to our 2021 staff survey told us they agreed or tended to agree that they were treated with

dignity and respect at work and were involved in decisions that affected them.

The numbers of grievances in services were low. Where there was evidence of poor behaviour, this was limited to small pockets of staff, and sometimes it took the form of a lack of the presence and visibility of members of the service's senior leadership team. We found that all services had some form of grievance resolution process in place, with a correlation between the more robust processes and consistent action taken on the basis of staff feedback. Some services encouraged managers to resolve grievances informally, which in some circumstances is appropriate. However, this sometimes resulted in grievances not being officially recorded, or no record being kept of a problem that had arisen and that needed to be resolved. It was unclear how, in these instances, services could assure themselves that they were able to identify trends in problems affecting their workforces.

We previously recommended that the sector would benefit from a code of ethics. Since then the [Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services](#) has been established by the NFCC, the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners and the Local Government Association; it was published in May 2021. The corresponding standard was published by the Fire Standards Board.²¹ Despite being released

²¹ [Approved Standards: Code of Ethics](#), Fire Standards Board, May 2021.

part way through our 2021 inspections, we are already seeing evidence of services, such as Cornwall and Merseyside, starting to consider how to integrate the code into their values and other policies. We hope all other services follow suit.

Health and safety and wellbeing provision are prioritised

In almost all services we inspected, staff wellbeing and health and safety continue to be priorities; this was also something we found in our pandemic inspections. In almost all services we inspected, we found that, in general, staff had high confidence in the wide range of support available to them and that staff understood procedures and policies well. We also found this in our Round 2 Tranche 1 staff survey.²²

Staff absences are managed in all services and, for the most part, policies are robust. There are, however, some areas where policies on absences fall short; some services may find it difficult to identify trends in absences. Some services would also benefit from management training in order to better deal with staff absences.

We found that there were some inconsistencies and gaps in performance management processes. This means that some opportunities are being missed when it comes to making sure staff have what they

²² According to our 2021 Round 2 Tranche 1 staff survey, 68 percent of respondents have high confidence in services providing wellbeing support and 97 percent understand the policies and procedures in place.

need to be safe and well at work. Services must have continuous open conversations with staff to make sure they provide them with the right tools and support for them to do their jobs.

We previously identified the need for services to better monitor overtime and secondary employment to make sure they and their employees were complying with the Working Time Directive (WTD). Cheshire FRS has a working time group and a health, safety and wellbeing committee, which it developed in response to an area for improvement we issued in Round 1. While there is evidence of some services having systems in place to monitor overtime and secondary contracts, it isn't clear how robust or effective these are. Some services still don't have adequate oversight of the hours their staff are working and staff are expected to manage WTD compliance themselves.

It is imperative that services have systems in place to effectively monitor the secondary employment, dual contracts and overtime arrangements of their workforces, to make sure working arrangements are safe and to minimise work stress.

Good intentions to promote equality, diversity and inclusion aren't always successful

In Round 1, equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) was an area in desperate need of improvement. We found that many services wanted to improve diversity, but there was still a great deal more to do. Three services received an inadequate judgment in this area and five causes of concern were issued.

In the 13 services we inspected, we found shortcomings in the approach two services had taken to improve EDI, and we issued causes of concern as a result. We do not want to inhibit leaders from prioritising and promoting this important area of work, but efforts to improve EDI must lead to positive outcomes for workforces. We found that all other services were promoting EDI in some way, although their methods weren't always effective.

Some members of staff said they had reservations about how successful EDI changes would be. Some of the most important EDI needs for staff were missed. Only three services we inspected (Cheshire, Greater Manchester and Humberside) provided evidence of strong EDI planning. In some cases, it wasn't clear what services hoped to achieve with their EDI strategies. In this respect, services need to work closely with staff to try to understand and meet their needs.

Despite services using a considerable range of feedback channels to communicate with their

workforces, we found only three services that consistently took effective action as a result of staff feedback (Cambridgeshire, Cheshire and Merseyside).

We also found that services either didn't use equality impact assessments and staff networks, or that they used them inconsistently. There was a lack of information and training on EDI, including among managers, and a poor understanding of it by staff. This may explain why we continued to find examples of inappropriate and non-inclusive language. Services must do more to make sure that their people understand the importance of diversity and why it is necessary.

Workforces don't always represent the communities they serve

The workforces of all services remain woefully unrepresentative of many of the communities that they serve, and services should do more to recruit people from diverse backgrounds.

According to Home Office data, as of 31 March 2020, 17 percent of the workforce identify as female. This is slightly higher than in previous years (16.7 percent in 2019, 14.5 percent five years ago and 15.1 percent ten years ago). The majority of female staff work in fire control and support staff roles. Only 7 percent of firefighters identify as female.

Only 5 percent of the workforce identify as being from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) background.

Only 4.4 percent (1,410) of firefighters identified as being from an ethnic minority, compared with 4.3 percent (1,368) in the previous year, and 3.8 percent (1,276) five years ago.

In the three years since 2017/18, only 5 percent of all new firefighters were from a BAME background and only 12 percent identified as female. A high proportion of diversity characteristics were either not recorded or not stated. In the three years since 2017/18, an average of 22 percent of new firefighters and 22 percent of all new joiners did not state their ethnicities.

To truly understand whether progress is being made to attract more diversity into the sector, we need services to gather more detailed data and make sure that staff feel comfortable providing this information. Recruiting a more diverse workforce is only the first step for services; they must make sure they provide the right environment and culture for all staff to flourish and to keep them in the sector in the long term.

Equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives must not be carried out in isolation

A more equal and diverse workforce will make services more efficient and effective because more people of high ability, dedication and commitment, who work hard and effectively, will join from under-represented communities.

Working towards inclusive practice is everyone's responsibility. Evidence from the Chartered Institute of

Personnel and Development establishes that EDI initiatives carried out in isolation do not work, and they will not make workplaces more diverse or inclusive.²³ Inclusive behaviour allows individuals to work together effectively and creates a healthy environment for employees. It enables people, regardless of their differences, to work together effectively and avoid stereotyping. Services should make sure their EDI initiatives are parts of co-ordinated strategies and woven through their day-to-day activities, rather than being standalone actions.

As we continue our second round of inspections, we will continue to assess what services are doing to improve their diversity and equality, how they are tackling unlawful or undue discrimination, educating their workforces, and working with their diverse communities.

Lack of workforce planning

In Round 1, only a third of services had in place sufficiently strong processes to carry out workforce and succession planning in a way that was consistent with their IRMPs. In Round 2 Tranche 1, not much progress had been made in this respect, with still only a third having adequate processes in place (Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Surrey). We are worried that some services continue to operate without a

²³ [*Building inclusive workplaces: accessing the evidence*](#), Chartered Institute of Professional Development, September 2019, p11.

clear understanding of the skills and capabilities of their workforces.

Ineffective, reactive or narrow planning can lead to some areas being understaffed. In their planning, services should anticipate any potential staff shortages and factor these in. For example, Cheshire FRS anticipated that many members of staff would retire, so they proactively recruited in advance. This is simply good management, and it is disappointing that it is not done routinely everywhere.

Not enough is being done to plan for future leaders

Many services are failing to establish adequate succession plans for future leadership. This is particularly important following the recent high turnover of chief fire officers.

It is crucial that succession planning for leaders includes the need to consider a diverse range of individuals. In our 2021 inspections, we continued to find senior management teams, including recent appointments, comprising people who look, sound and think the same. Brigade, area and group managers are all leadership positions in services.

In 2020, only 7.2 percent of brigade managers were female, and approximately 6 percent of all brigade, area and group managers were female. The numbers of staff from BAME backgrounds at these levels were also disappointingly low.

We found services were making efforts to remove the risk of bias from internal recruitment processes; one way this was done was by using independent panel members and assessing applications without the names of the applicants being shown.

However, in some cases, services couldn't always provide evidence of how the latter stages of appointment processes (such as interviews) had been carried out; it wasn't clear whether the measures to remove the risk of bias had always been applied. As such, services couldn't always assure themselves, and others, that the recruitment process in its entirety was fair.

A lack of people with protected characteristics in leadership teams is not the only problem. We found that not enough was being done to attract people from outside the sector; most people who were appointed to senior positions had held traditional firefighter roles. This failure to recruit from elsewhere limits the diversity and volume of suitable candidates.

Services should also develop their staff and provide consistent and fair opportunities as part of their workforce succession planning. This will help to make sure their staff have the skills they need to be able to do their jobs and take on more senior roles in the future. We found that, in some services, operational, corporate and support staff didn't always have the same development and promotion opportunities, with the balance being tipped in favour of operational staff.

In Round 1, we found a lack of talent management programmes. We also found that staff performance and development appraisals were not being done often enough. In Round 2, it was therefore encouraging to find many services had improved their provision of learning and development for staff, and staff reported a high level of confidence that these met their needs. Where we did find problems, these were a result of ineffective manager training, or inequality of training provision between non-operational and operational staff, with the latter having either greater or more structured access to learning and development opportunities, or both.

In the Round 2 Tranche 1 staff survey, 30 percent of those who responded told us they had a conversation with their managers about their performance no more than once a year. Access to development was often linked to appraisals, so it is a matter of concern that we found that 26 percent of on-call firefighters hadn't completed an appraisal or performance development review in 2020/21; many on-call staff didn't feel that they had the same development opportunities as other staff.

Part 3: Our reports

Our reports

In July 2017, the Inspectorate's remit was extended to include inspections of England's fire and rescue services. This is my third annual report on the fire and rescue inspections we have carried out.

On 15 December 2021, we published 13 reports. The reports we publish fulfil our statutory duty to inspect and report on the effectiveness and efficiency of fire and rescue authorities in England.

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

Reports published

February 2021 to December 2021

Fire and Rescue Service: Effectiveness, efficiency and people 2021

Thirteen individual reports on the fire and rescue services we inspected in England from February to August 2021.

All HMIs

Revisit letters

When we identify a cause of concern, we require the service to produce an action plan to resolve it. We monitor progress against this plan. As for causes of concern relating to effectiveness, we usually carry out a revisit – and further revisits if necessary – to assess progress against each plan. Following each revisit, the regional HMI provides written feedback to the chief fire officer. Each letter is published in full on our website. We sent and published revisit letters in respect of:

- Devon and Somerset FRS;
- Gloucestershire FRS;
- Northamptonshire FRS; and
- West Sussex FRS.

We didn't revisit Hampshire and Isle of Wight FRS. We did, however, publish a letter summarising our findings on the progress made by the service after we gave it a cause of concern.

Annexes

Annex A: Fire and rescue service areas

- Avon
- Bedfordshire
- Royal Berkshire
- Buckinghamshire
- Cambridgeshire
- Cheshire
- Cleveland
- Cornwall
- Cumbria
- Durham and Darlington
- Derbyshire
- Devon and Somerset
- Dorset and Wiltshire
- East Sussex
- Essex
- Gloucestershire
- Greater Manchester
- Hampshire
- Hertfordshire
- Humberside

- Hereford and Worcester
- Isles of Scilly
- Isle of Wight
- Kent
- Lancashire
- Leicestershire
- Lincolnshire
- London
- Merseyside
- Northumberland
- Norfolk
- Northamptonshire
- Nottinghamshire
- North Yorkshire
- Oxfordshire
- Staffordshire
- Shropshire
- Suffolk
- Surrey
- South Yorkshire
- Tyne and Wear
- Warwickshire
- West Midlands
- West Sussex
- West Yorkshire

Annex B: About us

Our history

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

In 2017, we saw the biggest material change in our remit with our expansion to take on inspection of fire and rescue services in England. This was one element of the Government's fire reform programme announced in 2016. The Policing and Crime Act 2017 amended the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 to create this jurisdiction.

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

Our statutory responsibilities

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

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

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

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

Publishing reports

We must publish the reports we prepare under section 28B of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (section 28B(1), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004).

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

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

for the period the report covers (section 28B(5), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004). This is my *State of Fire and Rescue* report. My first *State of Fire and Rescue* report was published in January 2020.

Producing our inspection programme and framework

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

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

Acting as a check on the removal of senior officers

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

If a police, fire and crime commissioner in England is proposing to dismiss his or her chief fire officer, he or she must invite HMCI to give his written views on the proposed removal. The police, fire and crime commissioner must consider his views before a decision is made (article 18, Fire and Rescue Authority (Police and Crime Commissioner) (Application of Local Policing Provisions, Inspection, Powers to Trade and Consequential Amendments) Order 2017). These written views must be given to the

appropriate police, fire and crime panel when considering the police, fire and crime commissioner's decision.

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

Our powers

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

They also created a duty to inspect and report on the effectiveness and efficiency of fire and rescue services in England and created new powers of inspection.

Access to information and premises

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

Power to delegate functions

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

Power to act jointly with another public body

We can help another public body exercise its functions, if HMCI considers it appropriate.

This includes facilitating a best value inspection under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999.

We can do these things on any such terms, including payment terms, as HMCI thinks fit (paragraph 5, Schedule A3, Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004).

Who we are

[Biographies for each of the Inspectors of Constabulary are on our website.](#)

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services

Sir Thomas Winsor

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

Her Majesty's Inspectors of Fire and Rescue Services

Zoë Billingham held the role of Her Majesty's Inspector for the Eastern region during the inspected period, but left office in September 2021.

Andy Cooke

Andy Cooke DL QPM is Her Majesty's Inspector for the Northern region.

Matt Parr

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

Wendy Williams

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

Roy Wilsher

Roy Wilsher OBE QFSM is Her Majesty's Inspector for the Eastern region.

How we are accountable

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

We currently have five Inspectors of Fire and Rescue Services. These inspectors also hold the separate appointment of Inspector of Constabulary. They are neither civil servants nor fire or police officers, and are appointed by the Crown for fixed terms of up to five years. That means we are independent of fire and rescue services, police, the Government, police, fire and crime commissioners/ police and crime commissioners (and their equivalents), other agencies in the criminal justice system and all outside parties.

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

- our statutory duties, enforceable through judicial review or by action for breach of statutory duty;
- our obligation to submit an annual report to the Home Secretary under section 28B of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, which must be laid before Parliament;
- our obligation to seek approval to our inspection programme and framework from the Home Secretary;
- written Parliamentary questions;
- our obligation to give written and oral evidence to Committees of Parliament, including the Home Affairs Select Committee, the Public Accounts Committee and any other select committee that may call on us to give evidence;

- our obligation to carry out other duties the Home Secretary directs us to (section 28A(3), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004); and
- our obligation to comply with the rules of administrative law and the rules of good public administration, enforceable in the High Court by judicial review.

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

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

How we work with other organisations

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

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

overseeing our affairs. The concordat is published on our website.

We also have a memorandum of understanding with the Fire Standards Board. This is also published on our website. The memorandum sets out our respective roles and responsibilities, and how we work with each other.

Our regions

Our five geographic regions are the Northern, Eastern, Western, London and South-Central, and South Eastern regions.

Our purpose, values and objectives

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

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

Our objectives are to:

- demonstrate our values in everything we do;
- conduct informed, independent and evidence-based inspections;
- provide value for money;
- work with others to promote improvements in policing and fire and rescue services;

- report our inspection findings/analysis in a clear and compelling way; and
- ensure that our staff have the skills, knowledge and support to do their jobs.

Annex C: Our finances and our workforce

Our finances

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

We spent 92 percent of our funding on our workforce, with the rest spent on travel, subsistence, accommodation and other expenses.

Expenditure breakdown 2020/21 (£)

22.2 million (92% of our funding) on staffing costs including associates

0.7 million (3%) on IT and telephony

0.5 million (2%) on surveys and inspection services

0.3 million (1%) on office expenses and other costs

0.2 million (1%) on accommodation

0.1 million (1%) on travel and subsistence

Note: numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding

Our workforce

Our workforce comprises HM Inspectors, civil servants, and secondees from fire and rescue services and police forces. We also have a register of associate inspectors and other specialist staff.

Staffing breakdown 2020/21

Total workforce: 274

198 permanent staff (72% of our workforce)

41 police secondees (15% of our workforce)

19 fire secondees (7% of our workforce)

11 fixed-term appointments (4% of our workforce)

5 people from other government departments or on loan (2% of our workforce)

Note: numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding

Annex D: Our national recommendations

Recommendation 1

As soon as is practicable the Home Office, National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and the Local Government Association (LGA), in consultation with the Fire Standards Board (FSB) and Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, should establish a programme of work that will result in consistency in the following four priority areas:

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

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

Completion date: December 2021

This date was originally set as December 2020; it will need to be revised again.

Status

The Home Office confirmed it has funded the NFCC's community risk programme, which is designed to develop a single method for services to use so that they identify and assess risk in the same way.

The programme will also provide support to services so that they can use this method successfully.

The NFCC told us that it expected the community risk programme work to be completed by the end of 2021/22.

In February 2021, the Fire Standards Board published the fire standards for operational competence, operational learning and operational preparedness.

In September 2021, the Fire Standards Board published its protection standard. Since then, a range of guidance documents have been published which are designed to support services in their implementation of the standard.

In addition to its continued work on high-risk premises, the NFCC has been co-ordinating the building risk review programme. This programme provides the most up-to-date information on a subset of buildings that will be in the jurisdiction of the new building safety regulator.

These projects are still in progress and the specific requirements of this recommendation must be met in its entirety for it to be considered as complete.

Recommendation 2

As part of the next spending review, the Home Office in consultation with the fire and rescue sector should address the deficit in the fire sector's national capacity and capability to support change.

Completion date

Complete

Status

Complete

Recommendation 3

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

Completion date

Awaiting fire reform implementation plan from Home Office. This date was originally set as June 2020.

Status

The Home Office intends to consult on this matter in its forthcoming White Paper on fire reform.

Recommendation 4

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

Completion date

June 2021. This date was originally set as June 2020; it will need to be revised again.

Status

The Home Office intends to consult on this matter in its forthcoming White Paper on fire reform.

Recommendation 5

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

Completion date

Awaiting fire reform implementation plan from Home Office. This date was originally set as June 2020.

Status

The Home Office is considering ways to make progress against this recommendation.

Recommendation 6

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

Completion date

Complete

Status

Complete

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

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

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

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

December 2021 | ©HMICFRS 2021

ISBN: 978-1-8381248-5-4

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