

Fire & Rescue Service 2023–25

Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service

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Changes to this round of inspection

We last inspected Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service in April 2021. And in December 2021, we published our inspection report with our findings on the service's effectiveness and efficiency and how well it looks after its people.

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

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

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

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

This report sets out our inspection findings for Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service.

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

Overall summary

Our judgments

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

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

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

HMI summary

It was a pleasure to revisit Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service, and I am grateful for the positive and constructive way in which the service worked with our inspection staff.

I am pleased with the performance of Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service in keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks, but it needs to improve in some areas to provide a consistently good service. For example, the service could improve how it gathers up-to-date risk information to help protect

firefighters, the public and property during an emergency. It could also improve how it learns from incidents.

We were pleased to see that the service has made progress since our 2021 inspection. For example, it has improved its staff appraisal process and actively sought feedback from staff on how the organisation could be better.

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

- The service has now produced clearly defined prevention, protection and response strategies that link to its [community risk management plan \(CRMP\)](#). We were encouraged to find that these strategies directed the service's core activity.
- The service has made some additional improvements in prevention since our [cause of concern](#) revisit in November 2022 ([we published this letter in January 2023](#)). These include an increased number of [home fire safety visits \(HFSVs\)](#) and a reduction in the backlog of referrals. But we identified that the service still has further progress to make in prevention.
- It was pleasing to see that the service has continued good performance in protecting the public through fire regulation. We identified [promising practice](#) in how the service works with other enforcing authorities. The service has made advances in fire safety prosecutions.
- The service has made improvements across all the four people-related areas we assessed: promoting the right values and culture; getting the right people with the right skills; ensuring fairness and promoting diversity; and managing performance and developing leaders. But the service shouldn't be complacent about these improvements as there is still more that can be done.

Overall, I am pleased with Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service's performance and the improvements it has made since our last inspection. I encourage it to continue to improve in the areas we have highlighted.



Wendy Williams

HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Service in numbers



Profile

	Hereford and Worcester	England
Area		
Square miles	1,514	50,370
Population (thousands)		
30 June 2021	793	56,536
Population density		
Thousands per square mile	0.5	1.1



Cost

Funding		
Year ending 31 March 2022	£33.3m	£2.5bn
Expenditure per population		
Year ending 31 March 2022	£41.80	£41.88

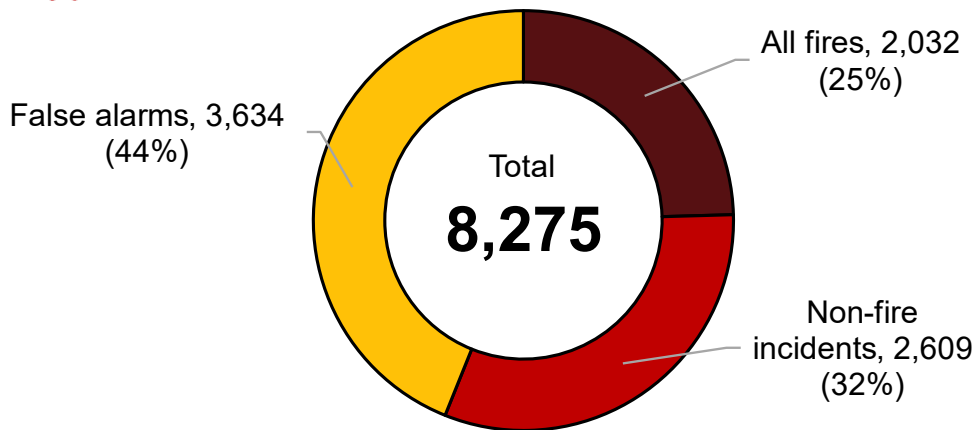


Response

Incidents attended per 1,000 population		
Year ending 31 December 2022	10.4	11.1
Home fire safety checks carried out by fire and rescue service per 1,000 population		
Year ending 31 March 2022	3.3	7.7
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises		
Year ending 31 March 2022	4.4	2.0
Availability of wholetime pumps		
Year ending 31 March 2022	100.0%	
Availability of on-call pumps		
Year ending 31 March 2022	74.1%	



Incidents attended in the year to 31 December 2022



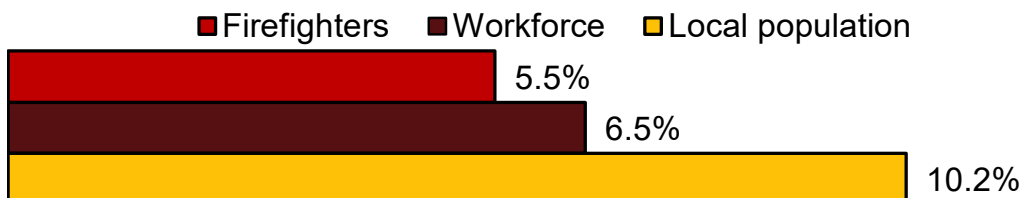
Workforce

	Hereford and Worcester	England
Five-year change in total workforce 2017 to 2022	1.1%	0.2%
Number of firefighters per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2022	0.77	0.62
Percentage of firefighters who are wholetime Year ending 31 March 2022	40.7%	65.2%

Percentage of firefighters, workforce and population who are female as at 31 March 2022



Percentage of firefighters, workforce and population who are from ethnic minority backgrounds as at 31 March 2022



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

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies

Adequate

Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at understanding risk.

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

Area for improvement

The service should make sure its firefighters have good access to relevant and up-to-date risk information.

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

Main findings

The service is effective at identifying risk in the community

The service has assessed a suitable range of risks and threats using a thorough community risk management planning process. In its assessment of risk, it uses the information it has collected from a broad range of internal and external sources and datasets. This includes historical incident data, census information and societal data.

When appropriate, the service has consulted and held constructive dialogue with its communities and other relevant parties to understand risk and explain how it intends to mitigate it. For example, it has spoken with the public about the change to its attendance performance measures.

The service has effective prevention, protection and response strategies that underpin the CRMP

At the time of our last inspection in 2021, the service's CRMP 2021–25 had recently been published. In our report, we identified an area for improvement that the service should make sure the aims and objectives of prevention, protection and response activity are clearly defined in its CRMP. To address this, the service has produced prevention, protection and response strategies. These strategies describe how the service intends to use its prevention, protection and response activities to mitigate or reduce the risks and threats the community faces both now and in the future. For example, in protection, this includes carrying out [intelligence](#)-led fire safety inspections based upon local or national fire trends.

The service's current CRMP is now mid-way through its term. Ahead of its next CRMP, the service is reviewing its response arrangements.

The service needs to review its processes for updating risk information

The service collects some information about the highest-risk people, places and threats it has identified. But some of the information we reviewed was limited, inaccurate or out of date. We found that the service didn't always complete site-specific risk information within the time frame it has set itself.

We sampled a broad range of the risk information that the service collects, including information from HFSVs, site-specific risk information, temporary risk information and protection files.

The service doesn't make the information it collects on risk readily available throughout the service, and not all staff understand it. The service needs to do more so that staff in prevention, protection and response roles can access the information they need.

During our 2021 inspection, we highlighted an area for improvement that the service should make sure that firefighters have good access to relevant and up-to-date risk information. The service has made limited progress in addressing this by increasing the number of staff members who can enter temporary risk information onto the [mobilisation](#) system. But there is still a backlog. And there are delays before information is entered. Therefore, this area for improvement will remain.

However, firefighters at the locations we visited, were able to show us that they can access and use risk information quickly through [mobile data terminals](#) to assist them in resolving incidents safely.

Where appropriate, the service shares risk information with other organisations, such as local authority building control and the [police and crime commissioner's](#) office.

The service uses the outcomes of operational activity effectively to build an understanding of risk

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

The service has dedicated staff for the internal communication of [national operational guidance](#). These staff also communicate lessons learned from national operational work. The service's operational policy team reviews emerging information gathered from operational activity. The team then changes the service's approach to risks where needed.

Preventing fires and other risks

Adequate

Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at preventing fires and other risks.

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

Areas for improvement

The service should make sure staff carry out [home fire safety visits](#) competently.

The service should evaluate its prevention activity so it understands what is most effective.

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

Main findings

The service's prevention strategy clearly links to the risks identified in its CRMP

During our 2021 inspection, we highlighted a cause of concern that prevention activity wasn't a high enough priority for the service and that it wasn't adequately identifying those most at risk from fire. We gave three recommendations for the service. We said it should have plans in place for:

- an effective system to define the levels of risk in the community;
- the development and delivery of a prevention strategy that prioritises the people most at risk of fire and ensures that work to reduce risk is proportionate; and

- the review of systems and processes for dealing with referrals from partner agencies.

We found in our revisit in November 2022, that the service had made sufficient progress in addressing these areas. Therefore, the cause of concern has now been discharged.

The service's prevention strategy is clearly linked to the risks it has identified in its CRMP. The core focus of activity is preventing death and serious injury from dwelling fires and road traffic collisions.

The service's teams work well together and with other relevant organisations on prevention, and they share relevant information when needed. The service uses information to adjust its planning assumptions and direct activity between its prevention, protection and response functions. It works closely with the NHS, local authorities and social care teams to identify individuals most at risk. Prevention staff prioritise HFSVs for at-risk people.

The service is improving how it targets prevention activity

The service uses a risk-based approach to clearly prioritise its prevention activity towards people most at risk from fire and other emergencies. It has developed a risk scoring matrix to effectively assess the risk level of each person. This determines the response. It also informs the decision to deploy a specialist prevention technician or operational crew. It uses a broad range of information and data to target its prevention activity at [vulnerable people](#) and groups.

The service used [National Fire Chiefs Council \(NFCC\)](#) guidance to profile risk in its communities. And it has created station risk profiles using socio-economic and health data. However, we found that several members of staff on fire stations were unfamiliar with station risk profiles and their use.

The service carries out a range of interventions, which it adapts to the level of risk in its communities. Prevention technicians visit people who are at most risk from fire. These technicians may carry out [safe and well visits](#). [Wholetime](#) firefighters make HFSVs for people that the service has assessed as medium risk. Some visits we reviewed weren't within the time frames the service has set itself. It should assure itself that it has the capacity to meet these standards.

We found that the service's post-incident prevention work was inconsistent. We couldn't get a clear picture of its post-incident prevention work processes from the files we sampled and the staff that we talked to.

The service should improve staff competence in carrying out HFSVs

Since our last inspection in 2021, wholetime crews have been making a good contribution to the overall number of HFSVs made. These visits cover an appropriate range of hazards that can put vulnerable people at greater risk from fire and other emergencies. Staff told us that they have the right skills and confidence to carry out HFSVs. And we were encouraged to see that quality assurance visits make sure service is consistent.

However, we did review some HFSVs that weren't appropriately risk assessed, completed within service time frames or suitably referred to the prevention team. This is an area for improvement.

Staff understand how to identify and safeguard vulnerable people

Staff we interviewed told us about occasions when they had identified [safeguarding](#) problems. They told us that they feel confident and trained to act appropriately and promptly. Staff are trained in dealing with safeguarding issues for both adults and children. A safeguarding flowchart helps staff in their decision-making. The service works well with other organisations to reduce risk and prevent fires and other emergencies. These include the NHS, local authority [child](#) and adult mental health services and West Midlands Ambulance Service.

We found evidence that the service routinely refers people at greatest risk to organisations that may better meet their needs. These organisations include Age UK and the Worcestershire Safeguarding Adults Board. Arrangements are also in place to receive referrals from other organisations. In 2021/22, it received 2,502 referrals from other agencies for prevention visits. This is an increase from 1,780 in 2018/19. The service acts appropriately on the referrals it receives.

The service also has dedicated prevention engagement officers. And it uses quality assurance processes to make sure partnerships effectively target risk.

The service routinely exchanges information with other public sector organisations about people and groups at greatest risk. It uses this information to challenge planning assumptions and target prevention activity. Examples of such organisations include Western Power, GP surgeries, dementia services and local audiology clinics. It also gets regular information about oxygen users from Baywater Healthcare, which triggers HFSVs.

The service has arrangements to tackle fire-setting behaviour

The service has a range of suitable and effective interventions to target and educate people with different needs who show signs of fire-setting behaviour. This includes trained 'fire-setter advisers' who work with young people who present a risk around fire.

When appropriate, it routinely shares information with relevant organisations to support the prosecution of arsonists. It uses its website to share arson prevention advice and offers an online virtual safety information and quiz challenge for year six students. The service also participates in the NFCC's annual fire safety campaigns.

Improvements are still required in the evaluation of prevention work

We found limited evidence that the service evaluates how effective its activity is or makes sure that all its communities get appropriate access to prevention activity that meets their needs.

This was an area for improvement when we inspected the service in 2018 and 2021, and it has made limited progress. It uses HFSV customer feedback forms to review quality assurance and has recently introduced a change-of-behaviour evaluation: three months after an HFSV, the service visits again to evaluate how the person's safety awareness has changed. This is a relatively new process and has yet to show its effectiveness.

Without routine systematic and effective evaluation of prevention initiatives and collaboration, the service can't be assured that its prevention work is of the standard it expects. And it can't be sure that it is achieving the expected outcomes.

Protecting the public through fire regulation

Good

Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is good at protecting the public through fire regulation.

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

Area for improvement

The service should make sure it effectively addresses the burden of unwanted fire signals.

Promising practice

The service works effectively with partner agencies to jointly target risk

The multi-agency targeted enforcement partnership is an effective collaboration between Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service and other enforcing authorities.

The partnership allows effective sharing of risk information and joint working between agencies including:

- West Mercia Police;
- local authority housing;
- Trading Standards and other regulatory services;
- His Majesty's Revenue and Customs;
- the Home Office; and
- Border Force.

The strategy provides an effective and efficient approach. It means that enforcing authorities can access premises in a single visit to ensure compliance with relevant legislation, including fire safety. This protects those who are at high risk and makes the communities of Herefordshire and Worcestershire safer.

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

Main findings

The service's protection strategy is clearly linked to its CRMP

The service's protection strategy is clearly linked to the risks it has identified in its CRMP.

Staff across the service are involved in this activity, effectively exchanging information as needed. For example, inspecting officers and firefighters inspect premises and work with local businesses to share information and advice on how they can comply with fire safety regulations. The service then uses information to adjust planning assumptions and direct activity between its protection, prevention and response functions. This means resources are properly aligned with risk.

The service directs its protection activity based on risk

The service's risk-based inspection programme is focused on its highest-risk buildings. The service has redeveloped its programme to take into account best practice from other fire and rescue services in the region. It has also used additional data sources to enhance its risk targeting.

The service carries out intelligence-led audits based on information such as national data sources, coroners' recommendations and outcomes of local and national fire investigations.

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

The service carries out consistent, good-quality audits

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

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

The audits we reviewed were completed to a high standard in a consistent, systematic way and in line with the service's policies. The service makes relevant information from its audits available to operational teams and control room operators. [Fire control](#) learns about action taken on a premises via a temporary action notice of enforcement. It shares this with operational crews.

The service has an effective quality assurance process

During our 2021 inspection, we highlighted an area for improvement related to the quality assurance of fire safety audits. In this inspection, we were pleased to see that the service carries out proportionate quality assurance of its protection activity. Inspecting officers have line manager and peer assessments from other staff members each year. During our inspection, we also saw evidence that files had been quality assured by managers.

The service has good evaluation tools in place to measure how effective its activity is and to make sure that all sections of its communities get appropriate access to the protection services that meet their needs. Neighbouring Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service provides an external review of the effectiveness of the service's protection activities.

The service is good at taking enforcement action when appropriate

When we last inspected the service in 2021, we identified an area for improvement that the service should make sure that its use of enforcement powers prioritises the highest risks and includes proportionate activity to reduce the risk.

In this inspection, we found that the service consistently used its full range of enforcement powers. When appropriate, it prosecutes those who don't comply with fire safety regulations. At the time of our inspection (June 2023), the service had an ongoing fire safety prosecution that subsequently went to court in July 2023.

The responsible person pleaded guilty to fire safety breaches. This is the first prosecution that the service has completed in the five years from July 2018 to July 2023.

In the year ending 31 March 2022, the service issued 13 alteration notices, 451 informal notifications, 22 enforcement notices and 32 prohibition notices.

The protection function is well resourced

The service has enough qualified protection staff to meet the requirements of its risk-based inspection programme. Since 2017/18 the service consistently carries out more fire safety audits (per 100 known premises) when compared to the national rate for England. This helps it provide the range of audit and enforcement activity needed, both now and in the future.

Staff get the right training in protection services and work to appropriate accreditation.

The service is adapting to new legislation

Since our last inspection, the [Building Safety Act 2022](#) and the [Fire Safety Regulations 2022](#) have been introduced to bring about better regulation and management of tall buildings.

The service is supporting the introduction of the [Building Safety Regulator](#). It works closely with housing associations and landlord forums to outline their responsibilities. There aren't many tall residential buildings in Herefordshire and Worcestershire. Therefore, the service expects these arrangements to have a limited effect on its other protection activity.

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

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

The service works well with other enforcement agencies

The service works closely with other enforcement agencies to regulate fire safety and it routinely exchanges risk information with them. The service has a well-established and effective partnership, MATE, which we identified as promising practice.

This partnership has been very successful for the service in carrying out [fire safety enforcement action](#) against non-compliant premises and making the community safer.

The service manages building consultations effectively

The service responds to building consultations on time. This means it consistently meets its statutory responsibility to comment on fire safety arrangements at new and altered buildings. In 2021/22, the service responded to 98.9 percent of building consultations and 100 percent of licensing consultations within the required time frames.

The service could do more to work with local businesses

The service could do more to work with local businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation. The service carries out limited work directly with businesses on how they can comply with their legal fire safety duties. The service relies on its website and social media to inform businesses about fire safety regulations.

The service hasn't taken enough action to reduce unwanted signals

The service is taking only limited action to reduce the number of unwanted fire signals. In 2021/2022, according to Home Office data, 45 percent of incidents were false alarms. This has rarely changed since 2017/18. This means fire engines may not be available to respond to genuine incidents because they are attending false alarms. It also creates a risk to the public if more fire engines travel on the roads to respond to these incidents.

This was identified as an area for improvement at our last inspection in 2021, but the service hasn't taken sufficient action to manage the burden of false alarms. Therefore, this area for improvement will remain.

The service told us that a revised policy for unwanted fire signals would be considered in a [fire authority](#) meeting in October 2023. We look forward to seeing this work progress.

Responding to fires and other emergencies

Adequate

Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at responding to fires and other emergencies.

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

Area for improvement

The service should make sure it has an effective system to learn from operational incidents.

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

Main findings

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

During our 2021 inspection, we highlighted an area for improvement that the service should make sure its response strategy provides the most appropriate response for the public in line with its CRMP.

In this inspection, we found that the service's response strategy was linked to the risks identified in its CRMP. Its fire engines and response staff, as well as its working patterns, are designed and located to help the service respond flexibly to fires and other emergencies with the appropriate resources. For example, the service effectively operates wholetime and [on-call](#) duty systems to maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of its workforce. And it aims to introduce a day-crewing model at three of its fire stations. This means that firefighters will be immediately available for turnout from stations during the day and will be on-call at night.

The service has introduced new attendance performance measures and has plans to improve response times where possible

There are no national response standards of performance for the public. But on 1 April 2023, the service amended its own attendance performance measure as part of a stated aim within its CRMP. These new measures of 10, 15 or 20 minutes are based on incident type, anticipated travel time and location. They replace the previous response standard for fires in buildings, which was for the first appliance to attend within 10 minutes of the receipt of the call on 75 percent of occasions.

It is too early to tell whether the service will consistently meet these new standards. Home Office data shows that in the year ending 31 March 2022, the service's response time to [primary fires](#) was 11 minutes and 32 seconds. This is slower than the average of 9 minutes and 58 seconds for significantly rural services.

The service has good wholetime availability, but it could improve on-call availability

To support its response strategy, the service aims to have 100 percent of wholetime and on-call fire engines available on 100 percent of occasions. The service doesn't always meet this challenging standard for on-call availability.

The service's overall availability for 2021/22 was 75 percent, with wholetime availability at 100 percent and on-call availability at 74 percent. This value is normal when compared to other fire and rescue services in England and considering that the service is predominantly on-call.

Staff have a good understanding of how to command incidents safely

The service has trained incident commanders and a system that makes sure they are assessed regularly and properly. The service assesses command competence every two years. It assesses command at operational incidents and on weekend station audits. On 31 March 2022, all 206 incident commanders who carry out command duties were appropriately accredited. This helps the service safely, assertively and effectively manage the whole range of incidents it could face, from small and routine ones to complex multi-agency incidents.

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

Fire control staff have good involvement in training, exercising and debriefs

We were pleased to see that the service's control staff are integrated into its command, training, exercise, debrief and assurance activity. We found that fire control staff had good involvement in large service training exercises and had been invited to high-rise training with West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service. They are routinely included in the service's debrief and structured debrief processes.

The service should make sure that risk information is accurate and up to date

We sampled a range of risk information at wholetime and on-call stations, including the information in place for firefighters responding to incidents at high-risk, high-rise buildings and the information held by fire control.

The information we reviewed wasn't always up to date or detailed. For example, we found that important risk information on a tall building wasn't promptly made available on the site-specific risk information record. Staff can't always easily access or understand risk information. And it hasn't always been completed with feedback from the service's prevention, protection and response functions when appropriate.

The evaluation of operational performance is still ineffective

As part of the inspection, we reviewed a range of emergency incidents and training events. These included domestic and commercial property fires and a gas explosion.

We were disappointed to find that the service didn't always act on learning it has or should have identified from incidents. This means it isn't routinely improving its service to the public. For example, there were significant incidents, such as fatal fires and motorway collisions involving heavy goods vehicles, which had limited debrief submissions and inadequate tracking of resulting actions.

We identified this as an area for improvement in our last inspection, and as there has been insufficient progress, it will remain.

The service has introduced an effective plan to implement national operational guidance

During our 2021 inspection, we highlighted an area for improvement that the service should make sure it understands what it needs to do to adopt national operational guidance, including joint and national learning, and put in place a plan to do so.

We were pleased to see that the service has introduced an extensive programme of work to make sure that staff command incidents in line with national operational guidance. All national operational guidance has been strategically adopted and the service is producing digital products to inform staff about it. The service is exchanging this information with other fire and rescue services to share best practice and increase efficiency.

The service acts on learning from other fire and rescue services and also contributes towards [national operational learning](#). The service has employed paramedics to improve trauma care training for firefighters. It has shared what it has learned on some aspects of trauma care, including paramedic cardiac arrest procedures.

The service is effective at keeping the public informed

The service has good systems in place to inform the public about ongoing incidents to help keep them safe during and after incidents. This includes sharing information on the internet, social media and local radio broadcasts as well as warning and informing through the [local resilience forum \(LRF\)](#). The service often puts messages out to the public in conjunction with the police. The joint headquarters used by police and fire control helps this process.

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents

Adequate

Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at responding to major and multi-agency incidents.

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

Areas for improvement

The service should make sure it has an effective method to share fire survival guidance information with multiple callers and that it has a dedicated communication link.

The service should make sure it has an overarching cross-border exercise strategy. The strategy should assure the service that exercise objectives are in line with [community risk management plan](#) risks and that learning is recorded, shared and actioned.

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

Main findings

The service is prepared for major and multi-agency incidents

The service has effectively anticipated and considered the reasonably foreseeable risks and threats it may face. These risks are listed in both local and national risk registers as part of its CRMP. The identified risks include a severe weather event, an epidemic and a large-scale waste fire. The strategic risk register is reviewed on a quarterly basis at the senior leadership board meeting to monitor the risks and control measures.

The service is also familiar with the significant risks neighbouring fire and rescue services may face, and which it might reasonably be asked to respond to in an emergency. But it has more to do. We sampled several over-the-border risk information files and found that many had key information missing, such as building plans and identified hazards. The service should consider how it assures the quality of this information.

The service's ability to respond to major and multi-agency incidents could be improved

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

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

At this type of incident, a fire and rescue service would receive a high volume of simultaneous fire calls. During this inspection, we tested the service's systems for sharing fire survival guidance information and reviewed how the fire control room directly communicates with the incident commander.

We were disappointed to find that the service had developed only a limited number of policies and procedures for safely managing this type of incident. It has limited procedures in place for fire survival procedural guidance for operational crews and fire control staff. And the role of the evacuation commander isn't in the service's procedure for fires in high-rise buildings. The service should address these policy gaps as a matter of urgency.

Not all staff at all levels properly understand the policies and procedures the service does have in place. We found a good level of understanding among operational firefighting staff of procedures for fighting a fire in a tall building. But the service's staff as a whole had limited knowledge of fire survival guidance and evacuation procedures when changing from 'stay put' (when residents not affected by the fire stay in their flats) to a simultaneous evacuation (when everyone leaves the building together).

The service has carried out several tall building exercises in collaboration with West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service at its training facility in Oldbury. And in December 2022, it held a large service exercise at a high-rise block in Kidderminster. One of the structured debrief recommendations from this exercise was that the service needs to review its fire safety guidance training and procedures.

We found that the service's systems for managing an incident in a high-rise building weren't robust enough. The service has an electronic method for sharing information. As part of our inspection, we reviewed a simulated fire guidance survival incident at a high-rise building in Worcester. We found that the electronic information-sharing method couldn't be used as the premises wasn't in the system. As a result, the service had to rely on a backup, paper-based system. Paper-based systems are too open to operator error. They also mean that staff in the emergency control room, at the incident and assisting control rooms can't share, view and update actions in real time. These systems could compromise the service's ability to safely resolve a major incident at a tall building. This is an area for improvement.

The service works well with other fire and rescue services

The service supports other fire and rescue services responding to emergency incidents. It has seven neighbouring services and is frequently mobilised to their areas. It is intraoperable with these services and can form part of a multi-agency response.

The service has successfully deployed to other services and has used [national resilience assets](#), such as a high-volume pump during flooding in Derbyshire.

Cross-border exercises lack corporate oversight

We found that the service lacked an overarching cross-border exercise plan that links with neighbouring fire and rescue services to make sure they all work together effectively to keep the public safe.

The service monitors the number of cross-border exercises it has done in its quarterly operational assurance report. And it was encouraging to see that in 2021/22, it completed 18 training exercises with neighbouring fire and rescue services. However, there was a lack of oversight as to exercise locations, aims and objectives. And debriefs weren't completed consistently.

The service should make sure it has an overarching cross-border exercise strategy. The strategy should assure the service that exercise objectives are in line with CRMP risks. And it should make sure it records, shares and acts on learning.

Incident commanders have a good understanding of JESIP

The incident commanders we interviewed had been trained in and were familiar with JESIP.

The service could give us strong evidence that it consistently follows these principles. This includes incident commanders routinely using the [joint decision model](#) when liaising with other agencies. This means that the service can be sure there is shared situational awareness and that everyone is aligning with JESIP effectively.

But the service isn't taking the opportunity to carry out robust debriefs after multi-agency incidents and exercises. This means it may not be identifying any problems it has with applying JESIP. This could compromise the service's ability to respond effectively with other emergency organisations when major incidents do occur.

The service is an active and valued member of the West Mercia LRF

The service has good arrangements in place to respond to emergencies with partners that make up the West Mercia LRF. These arrangements include planning for major incidents, such as an uncontrolled off-site chemical release from an industrial plant.

The service is a valued partner of the LRF. It takes part in regular training events with other members and uses the learning to develop planning assumptions about responding to major and multi-agency incidents. The service has a multi-agency exercise plan with the LRF. Each of the service's three districts is responsible for organising a large-scale, multi-agency exercise at least annually. The service recently participated in Exercise Lemur, which was an LRF-led power outage exercise.

The service shares and contributes to national learning

The service makes sure it knows about national operational updates from other fire and rescue services and [joint organisational learning](#) from other organisations, such as the police service and ambulance trusts. It uses this learning to inform planning assumptions that it makes with the organisations it works with.

The service passes identified learning to the operational policy department to act on. This may involve changes to training, procedures or guidance. A tracker monitors progress. It communicates learning to staff through urgent safety notices or via the weekly staff bulletin.

The service has improved staff training and exercising on marauding terrorist attacks

In our last inspection in 2021, we identified an area for improvement that the service should make sure it is well-prepared to form part of a multi-agency response to a terrorist incident and its procedures for responding are understood by all staff and are well tested.

We were encouraged to find that the service had used different training solutions to improve understanding of marauding terrorist attacks (MTAs) including:

- online training packages;
- in-person training for operational and fire control staff from service national inter-agency liaison officers;
- training for all level two and three commanders from an external specialist provider; and
- MTA training for strategic commanders through multi-agency gold incident command courses.

Incident commanders and fire control have done some MTA training exercises. There are further MTA events planned in 2023/24.

Making best use of resources

Adequate

Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at making best use of its resources.

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

The service's revenue budget for 2023/24 is £39.4m. This is a 7 percent increase from the previous financial year.

Area for improvement

The service should make sure it effectively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and outcomes of any collaboration activity.

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

Main findings

The service has improved how it allocates resources to meet its objectives

In our last inspection, we identified an area for improvement about the need to show a clear rationale for the resources allocated between prevention, protection and response activities, which should reflect and be consistent with the risk and priorities set out in its CRMP. We were encouraged to see the improvements the service has made in this area. Therefore, the area for improvement has now been discharged.

Since our last visit, the service has produced prevention, protection and response strategies that are clearly linked to the CRMP. And it has reviewed the allocation of resources across these three functions. This has improved the service's understanding of its financial and workforce requirements. The service has increased resources in prevention and protection through specialist staff and the use of operational staff in these areas. The service told us that in 2017/18, it spent 4 percent

of its overall budget on prevention and protection but by 2022/23 this figure had increased to 10 percent. The service can now better meet its responsibilities in these areas.

The service has evaluated its mix of crewing and duty systems. It is looking to introduce a new day-crewing model at three of its fire stations to improve efficiency and operational effectiveness. The service is aware that second and third fire engines at some fire stations aren't often used to attend emergencies. They are often unavailable because there isn't enough staff to crew them. The service plans to carry out a resource review before its next CRMP to assure itself that it is deploying its fire engines and response staff to manage risk efficiently.

The service builds its plans on sound scenarios. But its budget is balanced using reserves and the service needs to find savings in the medium term. The fire authority provides overview and scrutiny of the service's budget. Therefore, it can assure itself that it uses public money appropriately.

The service has improved staff productivity with new ways of working

We were pleased to see that the service's arrangements for managing performance clearly link resource use to its CRMP and its strategic priorities. It monitors performance measures across the organisation. The senior leadership board sees the results in a quarterly performance report. Fire authority members get quarterly updates through the service's audit and standards committee. At the time of our inspection, the service was making significant changes to its operating model. It was introducing a new, four-board structure to provide governance for performance, service improvement, change and annual business planning. We look forward to seeing the outcome of these changes during our next inspection.

The service understands how it uses its wholetime firefighters. It collects data on how they spend their time across day and night shifts. It makes the most of its capacity. For example, the service completed a time and motion study of activity on fire stations to see if there was capacity to support prevention and protection activities. This has led to operational firefighters contributing to HFSVs and business fire safety visits.

The service is taking steps to make sure the workforce's time is as productive as possible. This includes putting in place new ways of working. For example, the service has invested in tablet computers for operational staff to increase their productivity both on and off station. Operational staff will be able to use the wi-fi on the fire engines so that they are productive when other crew members are doing community and business safety work. This will improve access to learning opportunities, national operational guidance and service communication.

The service explores collaboration opportunities but still needs to monitor, review and evaluate the benefits

We were pleased to see that the service meets its statutory duty to collaborate. It routinely considers opportunities to collaborate with other emergency responders. It continues to provide operational support to West Mercia Police and West Midlands Ambulance Service. This includes assisting at incidents such as searches for [missing persons](#), gaining entry to buildings and instances when a drone or search and rescue dog is needed.

Collaborative work is aligned with the priorities in the service's CRMP. For example, the service works closely with the West Mercia Police road safety team, National Highways, Herefordshire Council and Worcestershire County Council to reduce the number of deaths or serious injuries from road traffic collisions.

We are satisfied that the service monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and results of its collaborations. But its reviews and evaluations are limited in scope, and the service doesn't use them to learn from or to change decisions. As part of its business planning process, the service is developing an evaluation process tool for reviewing the effectiveness of collaboration. We will be interested to see the results during our next inspection.

However, there hasn't been enough progress in effectively monitoring, reviewing and evaluating the benefits and outcomes of any future collaboration. Therefore, the area for improvement identified in our last inspection will remain.

The service has effective continuity arrangements

We were encouraged to see the improvements the service has made in addressing the area for improvement for business continuity from our last inspection. The service has good continuity arrangements in place for areas in which it considers threats and risks to be high. It regularly reviews and tests these threats and risks so that staff understand the arrangements and their associated responsibilities.

We found robust business continuity plans and testing for events such as industrial action or loss of the mobilising system in fire control.

The service has appropriate business continuity plans for industrial action. It has assured itself and can demonstrate that it has adequate resources available for future periods of industrial action. The last test was carried out in November 2022.

Continuity plans for fire control include the relocation to a secondary control facility and fallback arrangements with Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service. In March 2023, staff in fire control completed an evacuation exercise to secondary control.

The service shows sound financial management

There are regular reviews to consider all the service's expenditure, including its non-pay costs. And this scrutiny makes sure the service gets value for money. For example, Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority reviews expenditure on a regular basis through its policy and resources committee meetings.

The service has made savings and efficiencies, which have caused minimal disruption to its operational performance and the service it gives the public. For example, the service's fire engines are staffed to a minimum of four firefighters as standard. And the service has purchased smaller fire engines that are more cost effective. However, it was evident that the service hasn't fully evaluated these fleet changes to understand and measure their effectiveness.

The service is taking steps to make sure it achieves efficiency gains through sound financial management and best working practices. It is doing this in important areas such as estates, fleet and procurement. The service uses procurement frameworks or collaborates directly with other organisations at a national, regional or local level to get the best possible purchasing power. Examples include:

- buying replacement breathing apparatus sets with three of the other four services in the West Midlands region;
- replacement fire control with three other fire and rescue services – one neighbouring (Shropshire) and two in the north-east region (Durham and Darlington and Cleveland);
- fire engines and other vehicles procured from national frameworks; and
- collaboration with Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service to procure three identical and interchangeable command support units.

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

Adequate

Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at making the service affordable now and in the future.

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

Area for improvement

The service needs to make sure it has adequate plans to close any identified budget gaps.

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

Main findings

The service understands its future financial challenges but needs to develop its savings plan

The service has a sound understanding of future financial challenges. It has some plans to mitigate its main or significant financial risks, but it anticipates a future budget shortfall and is still developing its savings plan. In the short-term, it plans to use its budget reduction reserve to balance the budget.

The underpinning assumptions are relatively robust, realistic and prudent. They take account of the wider external environment and some scenario planning for future spending reductions. These include planning assumptions around pay, government grants, business rates and pensions.

A higher-than-anticipated firefighter pay award has resulted in a projected budget deficit in 2023/24 rather than a budget surplus as previously predicted. There is a projected shortfall in subsequent years and the service forecasts that it needs to find savings of around £750,000 by 2026/27.

The service told us that it would develop a savings plan alongside its next CRMP. However, at the time of inspection, savings options weren't established, evaluated or prioritised. Therefore, this is an area for improvement. The service should identify all the savings it needs to make and have plans to meet these savings requirements.

The service has plans for using reserves

The service has a sensible plan for using its reserves. It currently aims for the general reserve to be maintained at £1.5m, which is equivalent to around 4 percent of its annual revenue budget requirement. Earmarked reserves are reviewed annually, and the service has plans to reduce overall reserves from around £15.5m in 2023/24 to around £3m in 2026/27.

As part of developing its savings plan, the service should consider whether there are any opportunities to use reserves to allow innovation or new ways of working.

The new fleet and estates strategies are clearly linked to its CRMP

In our last inspection, an area for improvement was that the service should regularly review and evaluate its fleet and estates strategies to maximise potential efficiencies.

We were encouraged to see the improvements the service has made since our last inspection. The service has new fleet and estates strategies that have clear links to its CRMP. Therefore, the previous area for improvement has now been discharged.

While the service isn't regularly updating these strategies, we were pleased to see good progress with its plans and investment in these areas. The service is exploiting opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness in both fleet and estates.

The service works with the West Mercia police and crime commissioner for property management. This has resulted in the sharing of construction costs with West Mercia Police on the build of the new fire and police station at Redditch. The service has a governance board and key performance indicators and uses an external auditor from Worcester City Council to assure itself that it is getting best value for money and appropriate service levels from this service agreement.

The service regularly reviews its fleet plans with other fire and rescue services and suppliers. This assures it that the plan is appropriate and achieves value for money. For example, the service told us that it needs to replace its aerial ladder platforms and is exploring joint procurement opportunities with other fire and rescue services.

The service invests in technology to support change and improve efficiency

The service actively considers how changes in technology and future innovation may affect risk. It also seeks to exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness presented by changes in technology. The service has invested in new display screens (known as Tripleplay) in prominent locations to improve communication with staff on a wide variety of content. Prevention, protection and response staff are now provided with tablet computers, which help them to work on the go. Wide area network improvements have increased internet speeds at the service's more rural fire stations. And the service is working with other fire and rescue services to procure a new mobilising system which, the service told us, will provide more resilience.

The service has put in place the capacity and capability it needs to achieve sustainable transformation, and it routinely seeks opportunities to work with others to improve efficiency and provide better services in the future. The service is jointly leading on an NFCC [benchmarking](#) project. The aim is to improve how fire and rescue services compare their costs and services with each other.

External funding and income generation is limited

The service considers and exploits opportunities for generating extra income, although the steps taken are limited and there is scope for considering wider options.

Where appropriate, it has secured external funding to invest in improvements to the service it gives the public. This includes £25,000 that was secured by the prevention team from the electrical safety and household support funds. This funding was used to provide equipment such as oil-filled radiators, flasks and blankets for households struggling in the winter months with the cost-of-living crisis.

Promoting the right values and culture

Adequate

Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at promoting the right values and culture.

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

Area for improvement

The service should monitor secondary contracts to make sure working hours are not exceeded.

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

Main findings

Values are accepted and maintained throughout the service

The service has well-defined values, which staff understand. Of those that completed our staff survey, 96 percent (296 out of 307) said that they are aware of the service's statement of values.

We found staff at all levels of the service showing behaviours that reflect service values. Our staff survey showed that 90 percent (267 out of 296) of staff felt that their managers consistently model and maintain the service's values. This increases to 95 percent (281 out of 296) when describing colleagues.

The service has implemented the [Core Code of Ethics](#) well and staff understand it.

Most staff felt that senior leaders act as role models. For example, the people we spoke to during our inspection felt that senior leaders model the values of the service and are approachable. Of those that completed our survey, 73 percent (215 out of 296) felt that senior leaders consistently model and maintain the service's values. But many members of staff told us that senior leaders aren't always visible on stations.

There is a positive working culture throughout the service, with staff empowered and willing to challenge poor behaviours when they come across them. They have confidence that their concerns will be taken seriously, and concerns can be raised anonymously through Say So, an independent reporting line.

Staff have access to appropriate services to support mental and physical health

The service has well-understood and effective well-being policies in place, which are available to staff. The service has signed up to the mental health at work commitment, which promotes health and well-being. A significant range of well-being support is available for physical and mental health. For example, the service offers confidential welfare support and guidance through a dedicated team of 16 trained members of staff from across the organisation. Staff also have access to mental health advisers, professional counsellors, support after involvement with traumatic incidents and a fitness adviser.

There are good provisions to promote staff well-being. This includes events such as:

- the men don't talk workshop;
- the thriving after the fire service for retirees;
- general men's well-being sessions that cover topics such as prostate cancer; and
- workshops to increase menopause awareness.

Of those that completed our survey, 96 percent (294 out of 307) said that they feel able to access services to support mental well-being.

The service has appropriate health and safety provision

The service has effective and well-understood health and safety policies and procedures in place. Of those that completed our staff survey, 95 percent (293 out of 307) felt that the service has a clear procedure to report all accidents, [near misses](#) and dangerous occurrences.

The service's health and safety committee monitors health and safety performance every three months. It reports the service's performance to fire authority members in the audit and standards committee.

Health and safety policies and procedures are readily available, and the service promotes them effectively to all staff. It monitors accident statistics and shares learning from accidents with staff through health and safety notices (known as flashes). Staff have confidence in the service's health and safety approach.

We were pleased to see the service's work on the area for improvement identified in our last inspection related to the management, monitoring and review of analytical risk assessments. This is the process used to manage and record health and safety while staff are dealing with fires and other incidents. The service has produced a new analytical risk assessments policy, refreshed its training and improved quality assurance via the operational policy team.

However, we found that there had been only limited progress in the monitoring of staff who have secondary employment or dual contracts. The service needs to assure itself that these staff members comply with the secondary employment policy and don't work excessive hours. Therefore, this area for improvement from our last inspection will remain.

The service has clear processes to manage staff absence

We found that there were clear processes in place to manage absences consistently for all staff. There is clear guidance for managers, who are confident in using the process. The service manages absences well and in accordance with policy. Sickness absence is monitored and reported at the service's health and safety committee and by fire authority members. Managers are appropriately trained to manage and record staff absences effectively.

Getting the right people with the right skills

Good

Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is good at getting the right people with the right skills.

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

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

Main findings

The service has improved its workforce planning

The service has good workforce planning in place. This makes sure skills and capabilities align with what it needs to effectively carry out its CRMP. This was an area for improvement in our last inspection in 2021. Since then, the service has developed and published a workforce plan that monitors the skills and capabilities of the workforce. The workforce plan has an associated action plan to make sure that the service has the right number of people with the right skills to meet the demand. HR staff have had workforce planning training, which the service has used to better understand its resourcing challenges. There has been sufficient progress for this area for improvement to be discharged.

Workforce and succession planning is subject to consistent scrutiny in the form of quarterly workforce planning group meetings to discuss requirements. The service intends to incorporate the workforce plan into the annual business planning strategic board meeting.

Workforce skills and capabilities are managed well

Most staff told us that they can access the training they need to be effective in their roles. This wasn't just focused on operational skills but also included management skills. The service's training plans make sure that staff can maintain competence and capability effectively. For example, of those that completed our survey, 82 percent (252 out of 307) said that they can access the right learning and development opportunities when needed.

In our 2021 inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should assure itself that records for risk-critical competencies, such as using breathing apparatus, driving fire engines and incident command, are accurate and up to date.

During this inspection, we found that there had been sufficient progress for this area for improvement to be discharged. The service monitors staff competence using subject leads to monitor the competency recording system. Although it is temporary, pending a new course management system, this manual process is more robust than staff overseeing the whole system. In the wide sample of staff records we reviewed, we found that all staff were in date for their risk-critical competencies.

The service regularly updates its understanding of staff skills and risk-critical safety capabilities through monitoring of the competency database. The senior leadership board gets detailed, quarterly operational assurance reports so that it can review compliance. This approach means the service can identify gaps in workforce capabilities and resilience. It also means it can make sound and financially sustainable decisions about current and future needs.

The service supports staff with learning and development

The service promotes a culture of continuous improvement throughout the organisation, and it encourages staff to learn and develop. For example, the service offers staff the opportunity to apply for courses funded through an external development and sponsorship process. This scheme gives any member of staff the opportunity to receive funding for learning and development. This opportunity is based on a review of future benefits to the individual and the service.

We were pleased to see that the service has a range of resources in place. These include e-learning modules, formal development, training courses, [continuing professional development](#) (such as command seminars), coaching and mentoring.

Most staff from across the service, both operational and support members, told us that they can access a range of learning and development resources. These include leadership and management qualifications and courses from organisations such as the [Chartered Management Institute](#) and [T2](#). This allows them to do their jobs effectively.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity

Good

Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is good at ensuring fairness and promoting diversity.

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

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

Main findings

The service and senior leaders seek feedback from staff

The service has made good progress in the area for improvement from the last inspection that it should make sure it engages appropriately with and seeks feedback from all staff, including those from underrepresented groups.

The service has developed several ways to work with staff on issues and decisions that affect them. This includes methods to build all-staff awareness of fairness and diversity as well as targeted initiatives to identify matters that affect different staff groups.

Some of the service's improvements on staff feedback and challenge include:

- the commissioning of an independent cultural audit;
- a full staff survey with a commitment to complete further surveys in the future to measure improvement;
- pro-active engagement with the two staff networks – one for female staff and the other for neurodivergent members of staff;

- an externally appointed service communications review; and
- introducing a confidential reporting line alongside the service whistleblowing procedure.

The service has taken action to address matters staff have raised such as a new EDI training programme based on the findings of the cultural audit. Staff have received these actions positively. However, some staff did state that two-way communication and the visibility of senior officers could be improved.

Most staff are confident with the service's approach to dealing with bullying, harassment and discrimination

Staff have a good understanding of what bullying, [harassment](#) and discrimination are and their negative effects on colleagues and the organisation.

In this inspection, 13 percent (41 out of 307) of staff responding to our survey told us that they have been subject to bullying or harassment and 10 percent (32 out of 307) to discrimination over the past 12 months. Of these staff, 41 percent (17 out of 41) didn't report the bullying or harassment. The main reason for this was that they felt it could make the situation worse. And 56 percent (18 out of 32) didn't report the discrimination, mainly because they felt that no action would be taken.

But most staff are confident in the service's approach to tackling bullying, harassment and discrimination, grievances and disciplinary matters. Representative bodies that responded to our survey agreed that the service has appropriate processes to eliminate, bullying, harassment and discrimination. The service has made sure that all staff are trained and clear about what to do if they encounter inappropriate behaviour.

The service plans in the future to communicate to staff the outcomes and circumstances of serious conduct (discipline) cases that have been heard and deemed fully closed. The purpose of this is to share the learning and to demonstrate that the service does take these matters extremely seriously and, when necessary, will act. The service won't identify individuals in this process and the specific details will be kept confidential. However, it plans to publish the outline circumstances and outcomes. We will be interested to review this during our next inspection.

The service acts positively to improve diversity in recruitment

There is an open, fair and honest recruitment process for staff or those wishing to work for the fire and rescue service. The service has an effective system to understand and remove the risk of disproportionality in recruitment processes. It has a good understanding of the diversity of its workforce. In 2021/22, unknown ethnicities within its staff profile were 2.5 percent compared to the England rate of 8.8 percent. Reports are provided quarterly to the senior leadership board so that it fully understands the demographic of its employees and where improvements are required to improve diversity.

The service has put considerable effort into developing its recruitment processes so that they are fair and potential applicants can understand them. It has provided taster sessions for candidates so that they know what to expect. The service has also put in reasonable adjustments for neurodiverse applicants to help them overcome potential barriers to entry. The recruitment policies are comprehensive and cover opportunities in all roles. The service advertises recruitment opportunities both internally and externally, including through [Women in the Fire Service UK](#), the NFCC, Total Jobs and social media platforms. This has encouraged applicants from diverse backgrounds, including into middle and senior management roles.

The service has made some improvements to increase staff diversity at all levels of the organisation. In 2021/22, 10 percent of new joiners self-declared as being from an ethnic minority background.

The proportion of firefighters that are from an ethnic minority background has stayed the same from 5.4 percent (32 people) in 2017/18 to 5.5 percent (33 people) in 2021/22. The proportion of female firefighters has increased from 6.7 percent (40 people) to 8.2 percent (50 people) over the same period.

For the whole workforce, in 2021/22, 6.5 percent are from an ethnic minority background compared to 10.2 percent in their local population and 8 percent throughout all fire and rescue services. And 17.4 percent are women, compared to a rate of 18.6 percent throughout all fire and rescue services. In 2021/22 the proportion of female staff in service roles was as follows:

- fire control – 67 percent
- support staff – 55 percent
- wholetime firefighters – 10 percent
- on-call firefighters – 7 percent.

The service has taken steps to improve diversity. For example, it used [positive action](#) in its latest wholetime social media recruitment campaign, and work continues with external partners, such as the [Asian Fire Service Association](#) and Women in the Fire Service UK, to try and improve disproportionality. The service has used videos to communicate internally with staff about why positive action is needed and what it does and doesn't include. The workforce supports this.

The service promotes EDI

The service has improved its approach to EDI. It makes sure it can offer the right services to its communities and can support staff with [protected characteristics](#). It has developed policies and procedures and has made several improvements to support EDI since our last inspection. These include:

- a new EDI policy and service code of conduct, which incorporate the [NFCC Core Code of Ethics](#) principles;

- a culture and ethics steering group with representatives from across the organisation;
- good relationships with external EDI networks, such as Women in the Fire Service UK and the Asian Fire Service Association;
- a response rate of around 65 percent to its staff survey; and
- service-specific EDI training for all staff based on the findings from the service's independent cultural audit.

The service has some measures to monitor staff awareness of EDI. It incorporates EDI into the operational assurance process when it reviews fire station [watches](#). This includes questions on understanding of service EDI principles, such as positive action. The feedback informs the service about what further training it should provide.

The service has a process to carry out people impact assessments (PIAs) on each protected characteristic. It provides staff with training, guidance and toolkits to make sure assessments are consistent. PIAs are quality assured by the service's EDI officer before being added to the service's PIA library. However, we found that many service policies and procedures hadn't yet had a PIA completed. The service should develop a process for responsible departments to complete PIAs on their policies and procedures on a prioritised basis.

Managing performance and developing leaders

Good

Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is good at managing performance and developing leaders.

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

Area for improvement

The service should make sure it has mechanisms in place to manage and develop talent within the organisation.

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

Main findings

The service effectively manages individuals' performance

Our last inspection identified an area for improvement that the service should improve all-staff understanding and application of the appraisal review process. During this inspection, we found evidence to show that the service has made progress in addressing this. Therefore this area for improvement has now been discharged.

There is a good performance management system in place, which allows the service to effectively develop and assess the individual performance of all staff. For example, we were pleased to see that in 2022/23, the proportion of staff who completed an appraisal increased to between 90 and 100 percent in different workforce groups. This is an improvement from 2021/22 when completion rates ranged between 25 and 63 percent.

Through our staff survey, 93 percent of staff reported that they had an appraisal with their manager in the last 12 months. Most of these staff felt they were useful. Each staff member has individual goals and objectives and regular performance assessments. Staff feel confident in the performance and development arrangements.

The service needs to do more to assure the workforce that promotion and progression processes are fair

The service has put considerable effort into developing its promotion and progression processes so that they are fair and all staff can understand them. But, of those that completed our survey, only 60 percent (184 out of 307) felt that promotion processes are fair. The promotion and progression policies are comprehensive and cover opportunities in all operational roles, but they contain limited guidance for support staff.

The service has succession-planning processes in place, which allow it to effectively manage the career pathways of its staff, including roles needing specialist skills.

It manages selection processes consistently. And it uses temporary promotions appropriately to fill short-term resourcing gaps. The service has reduced the number of staff on temporary promotions from 54 as of 31 March 2021 to 44 as of 31 March 2022. However, the average length of temporary promotions has increased in the same period from 346 days to 415 days. This could indicate resourcing issues. The England average length of temporary promotion in 2021/22 was 300 days.

The service has diversified its leadership, but it could do more

The service has made some improvements to increase workforce diversity. The service told us that as of 31 August 2023, approximately 35 percent of the 57 people it defined as senior managers were female. This includes both operational and non-operational female senior managers, including at assistant chief officer and area commander levels.

But it knows it needs to go further to increase workforce diversity at all levels and has plans to address this. These include external recruitment advertising and professional development sponsorship opportunities for all staff.

The service should improve plans to develop leadership and high-potential staff at all levels

The service needs to improve the way it actively manages the career pathways of staff, including those with specialist skills and those with potential for leadership roles.

It has some schemes to develop future leaders. We were told about the aspiring executive leaders' and aspiring supervisory managers' programmes. In these, staff can experience the roles before committing fully to the development process. We also heard about the new appraisal process that will include a career conversation, which is yet to be fully rolled out.

The service should consider more formal arrangements to identify and support members of staff to become senior leaders. There has been limited progress with the area for improvement identified in our last inspection that the service should make sure it has processes to manage and develop talent within the organisation. Therefore, this area for improvement will remain.

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