HMICFRS

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

Fire & Rescue Service 2023–25

Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service

Contents

Changes to this round of inspection

We last inspected Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service in October 2021. And in July 2022, 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 Staffordshire 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 Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service has performed in 11 areas. We have made the following graded judgments:

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

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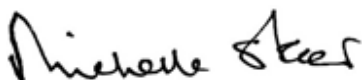
HMI summary

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

I congratulate Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service on its performance 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 has recently restructured its prevention and protection departments. This will make sure that their work is focused on the people and premises most at risk of fire and other emergencies, but the benefits have yet to be fully realised. And all the service's staff should improve their knowledge and understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion, and the benefits they can bring to an organisation.

We were pleased to see that the service has made progress since our 2021 inspection. For example, it is working with seldom-heard people and groups in its local community to build a comprehensive risk profile. It is collaborating with other local emergency services to support vulnerable members of the community. And it is investing time and energy in shared services, such as the joint emergency transport service, occupational health, estates and HR, to better support its people.

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

- The service is outstanding at responding to major and multi-agency incidents, and works actively with partners to take pre-emptive action to prevent incidents from occurring.

- The service's falls response and home from hospital teams, run in collaboration with Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care Board, supports vulnerable members of the community and reduces unnecessary use of health services.

- The service has improved its culture at all levels of the organisation, and we found that staff were comfortable challenging and reporting unacceptable behaviour.

- The restructured prevention and protection departments now target people and premises most at risk of fire and other emergencies, though it is too early to know if these changes will provide a consistently good service.

- A shared equality, diversity and inclusion service with Staffordshire Police will provide more capacity for this work, but there is more to be done to make sure staff understand the benefits of it.

Michelle Skeer
HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Service in numbers

Profile

Profile	Staffordshire	England
Area Square miles	1,049	50,370
Population (thousands) 30 June 2022	1,146	57,106
Population density Thousands per square mile	1.1	1.1

Cost

Cost	Staffordshire	England
Funding Year ending 31 March 2023	£44.7m	£2.5bn
Expenditure per population Year ending 31 March 2023	£41.77	£46.66

Response

Response	Staffordshire	England
Incidents attended per 1,000 population Year ending 30 September 2023	7.2	10.4
Home fire safety checks carried out by fire and rescue service per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2023	17.0	9.3
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises Year ending 31 March 2023	1.4	2.0
Availability of wholetime pumps Year ending 31 March 2023	98.8%	
Availability of on-call pumps Year ending 31 March 2023	62.2%	

Incidents attended in year ending 30 September 2023

False alarms, 2,964 (36%)

Total
8,259

All fires, 2,951 (36%)

Non-fire incidents, 2,344 (28%)
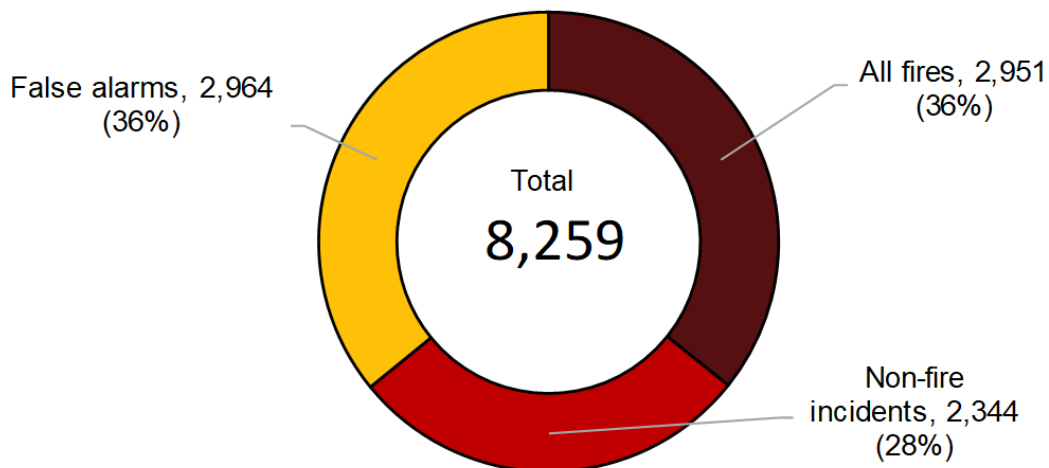
Workforce

	Staffordshire	England
Five-year change in total workforce 2018 to 2023	-11.6%	1.4%
Number of firefighters per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2023	0.54	0.61
Percentage of firefighters who are wholetime Year ending 31 March 2023	48.3%	65.5%

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

■ Firefighters ■ Workforce □ Local population

8.5%
18.6%
50.5%
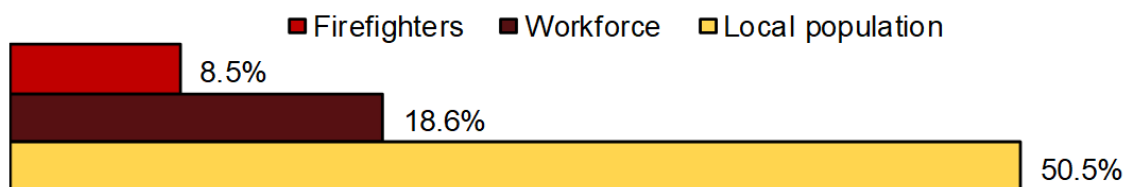
Percentage of firefighters, workforce and population who were from ethnic minority backgrounds as at 31 March 2023

■ Firefighters ■ Workforce □ Local population

5.5%
5.1%
12.1%
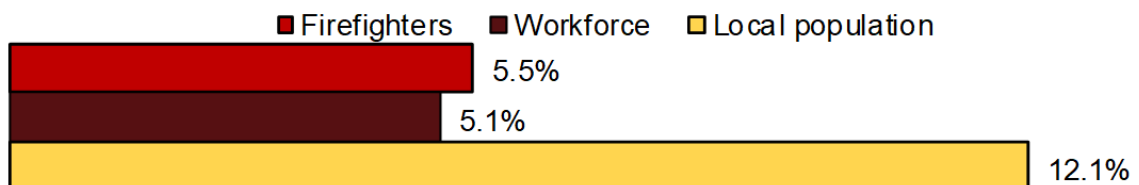
References to ethnic minorities in this report include people from White minority backgrounds but exclude people from Irish minority backgrounds. This is due to current data collection practices for national data. For more information on data and analysis in this report, please view the 'About the data' section of our website.

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies

Good

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service is good at understanding risk.

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

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

Main findings

The service effectively identifies and understands 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 information it has collected from a broad range of internal and external sources and datasets.

For example, the service is part of a risk assessment group, where 24 public sector organisations share information to help build a common understanding of risk within the county. This group is supported by the Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU), a small team of specialist planners based in Stafford that supports local public sector partners to prepare for emergencies and major incidents.

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 recently completed a consultation over the extension to its Safety Plan, which included staff, partners and the public.

The service has improved how its oversees its work with the local community to help it target hard-to-reach people and communities. This has resulted in an increased number of responses to its consultation process, which has helped inform its risk profile.

The service has an effective community risk management plan

The service refers to its community risk management plan (CRMP) as its Safety Plan. This records the findings of the service's assessment of risks in an easily understood format. It identifies four priorities, which link to the Staffordshire Commissioner's Fire and Rescue Plan 2021–24.

The Safety Plan describes 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, it is using new technology to improve the way it shares prevention messages with children and young people, using interactive pods which provide immersive learning to encourage them to be safe.

The service has an effective process for gathering, maintaining and sharing a good range of risk information

The service routinely collects and updates the information it has about the highest-risk people, places and threats it has identified. For example, it works with other organisations to identify temporary risks such as festivals and the annual 'Ironman' sporting event. These are discussed at safety advisory groups and risk awareness groups to make sure there is a multi-agency risk plan in place for them.

We sampled a broad range of the risk information the service collects. This included information about premises that would require a multi-agency response or a tactical plan, such as residential tall buildings or very high-risk premises, and short-term and temporary risk information.

This information is readily available to the service's prevention, protection and response staff. This means these teams can identify, reduce and mitigate risk effectively. Where appropriate, the service shares risk information with other organisations. For example, a multi-agency meeting was set up to address a fire safety issue at a residential premises above a shop to share information and take action to mitigate the risk.

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

We found that some staff experienced issues when accessing risk information on fire engine systems. The service has introduced new tablets to make sure all staff have online and offline access to all risk information.

Training is available for staff in how to gather risk information consistently. However, we found that the implementation of this training is inconsistent, with some staff receiving it face-to-face while others learn on the job.

The service uses operational activity to help inform its risk profile

The service records and communicates risk information effectively. It also routinely updates risk assessments and uses feedback from local and national operational activities to inform its planning assumptions. For example, following incidents involving electric vehicles, the service has an agreement in place with a local organisation to use its electric vehicle containment unit. This applies a constant stream of water and allows the vehicle to be relocated so it can be extinguished safely.

Preventing fires and other risks

<div style="background-color:#C0450A; color:white;">Adequate</div>

Staffordshire 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.

Area for improvement

The service should make sure all staff understand how to identify vulnerability and safeguard vulnerable people.

Promising practice

The service supports vulnerable individuals in Staffordshire by providing a falls response team and a home from hospital team

The service works with West Midlands Ambulance Service and Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care Board to provide a team of specialist Fire and Health Partnership Technicians. These respond to non-critical incidents for those who have fallen in their home, and support them after their discharge from the Royal Stoke University Hospital.

Between 7 December 2022 and 30 April 2024, the falls response team attended 1,197 incidents. The average time it took them to attend was 38 minutes. Between 4 December 2023 and 30 April 2024, the home from hospital team helped 599 patients return home.

This work links directly to the priorities of the service's Safety Plan for prevention, including early intervention and targeting those most at risk of fire and other emergencies. The falls response team attending non-critical incidents allows the West Midlands Ambulance Service to focus their resources on incidents where life is at risk. The home from hospital initiative helps avoid unnecessary re-admissions to hospital of people who have been discharged.

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 the Safety Plan

The service's prevention strategy is clearly linked to the risks it has identified in its Safety Plan and its four strategic priorities:

- prevention and early intervention
- protecting Staffordshire and its people
- public confidence
- service reform.

Its overarching strategic vision is to "make Staffordshire the safest place to be".

At the time of our inspection, we found that the prevention department had recently been restructured and had its strategy refreshed. While the new strategy is clearly linked to the Safety Plan, there is still work to be done to make sure its benefits are fully realised.

We found that some prevention work happens in isolation, and activity isn't consistently provided across the county. We look forward to seeing how the new structure and strategy help activity be provided more consistently in future.

We found some evidence that the service's prevention, protection and response functions exchange relevant information through various boards and meetings.

The service only targets some of its prevention activity to those most at risk of fire and other emergencies

The service uses a risk-based approach to prioritise some of the work of its prevention team towards people most at risk from fire and other emergencies. The contact centre triages requests using a risk matrix to identify high and very high risk. The service also receives referrals from partner agencies, such as local authorities and social care. And it completes safe and well visits after incidents that were attended by the falls response and home from hospital teams.

The service uses a broad range of information and data to target its prevention activity at vulnerable individuals and groups. The service's risk factor checklist uses 24 categories to determine those at highest risk. These categories reflect the National Fire Chiefs Council's Person Centred Framework.

However, we found that the prevention activity carried out by operational firefighters is based on basic data, which doesn't clearly prioritise those most at risk of fire and other emergencies.

Staff are adequately trained to complete safe and well visits

Staff told us that they have the skills and confidence to complete home fire safety visits. Community support officers must complete a portfolio of evidence before they are deemed competent to carry these out. This includes several visits with a competent technician to make sure they are completing the process correctly.

These visits cover an appropriate range of hazards that can put vulnerable people at greater risk from fire and other emergencies. For example, the safe and well form that staff complete covers questions around benefits, care needs, fire hazards, difficulty responding, fire safety, evidence of disorganised living, winter warmth, employment, mental health, physical health, lifestyle behaviours, and additional risks such as oxygen use or pets.

Not all staff understand how to identify vulnerability and safeguard vulnerable people

The dedicated prevention staff we interviewed told us about occasions when they had identified safeguarding problems. They told us they feel confident and trained to act appropriately and promptly. Community support officers are also appropriately trained so they can identify and report issues if necessary. And all staff knew there was a reporting process in place for referrals.

However, while most staff had completed mandatory safeguarding training, we found that operational crews didn't understand well enough how to identify vulnerability and safeguard vulnerable people. And some staff weren't aware of what safeguarding training was available or how often it should be completed.

The service collaborates well with others to support those most at risk of fire and other emergencies

The service works with a wide range of other organisations to prevent fires and other emergencies. These include West Midlands Ambulance Service (WMAS), Staffordshire Police, child and adult social services, Canal & River Trust, local authorities, and Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care Board.

A good example of collaborative working for mutual benefit is the service's collaboration with Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care Board and the University Hospitals of North Midlands NHS Trust. It has created a falls response team

which provides a non-critical response to those who have fallen within the home. Callers to 999 or 111 are initially triaged by WMAS. WMAS then passes suitable calls to the Unscheduled Care Coordination Centre, where further triage takes place and the appropriate team is assigned to assist the member of public.

Members of the team have received bespoke training and have access to specialist equipment for lifting. After they have assisted the individual, they offer a safe and well visit, providing fire safety advice and equipment if necessary. When not carrying out falls response work, staff complete safe and well visits for high- and very high-risk individuals, so their time is used productively throughout the day. From the introduction of the falls response team on 7 December 2022 until 30 April 2024, it attended 1,197 incidents, with an average response time of 38 minutes.

The service is also working with Royal Stoke University Hospital to collect patients who have been discharged and take them home. Service staff give personalised care and attention to make sure they are safe in their home. Fire and Health Partnership Technicians make sure the patient is seated appropriately and comfortably, and has access to a toilet. They check lighting, heating and water, test the lifeline alarm system (if one is in place), and carry out basic security checks. They also make sure the patient has access to a phone, remove trip hazards, and provide refreshments, and if necessary they complete a safe and well check and fit smoke alarms. From its introduction on 4 December 2023 until 30 April 2024, this initiative supported 599 patients.

We found some evidence that the service routinely refers people at greatest risk to organisations that may better meet their needs. These include organisations which provide support for alcohol concerns, debt advice, dementia and other mental health issues, domestic violence, people who are deaf or hard of hearing, hoarding, housing issues, and installing a lifeline alarm system. The service gets consent from individuals to make the referral as part of their safe and well form.

Arrangements are also in place for the service to receive referrals from other organisations. We found evidence of referrals from local authorities, social care, and housing officers. The service acts appropriately on these.

The service routinely exchanges information with other public sector organisations about people and groups at greatest risk. It uses this information to challenge its planning assumptions and target its prevention activity. For example, the service is part of the risk assessment groups chaired by the CCU.

During our previous inspection, we found the service had a backlog of safe and well visits due to COVID-19. However, at the time of this inspection, the backlog had been reduced to a small number, and the longest any of the incomplete visits had been waiting was two weeks from the initial contact. These had all been booked into staff diaries for completion.

The service works well with partners to tackle fire-setting behaviour

The service carries out some suitable and effective interventions to target and educate children with different needs who show signs of fire-setting behaviour. These include education programmes carried out by operational crews, which include information about deliberate fires, and the fire safety intervention referral form, which organisations and the public can complete. This work is carried out during home fire safety visits by community safety officers. They tailor sessions to each child's abilities and needs using a variety or resources and techniques.

The service also works with housing, police and local authorities on a multi-agency approach when appropriate.

The service carries out some evaluation of its prevention activity

We found some evidence that the service evaluates how effective its activity is, and makes sure all communities get appropriate access to prevention activity to meet their needs. For example, it has carried out a full evaluation of the falls response work, and it plans to discuss the winter campaign Be Warm Be Safe to see how it can be improved.

As part of its prevention strategy, the service is hoping to develop evaluation tools to measure the outcomes and quality of its interventions. It plans to request feedback from those who it has provided a service to. We look forward to seeing how this evaluation improves in the future.

Protecting the public through fire regulation

Adequate

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

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

Area for improvement

The service should make sure it has an effective quality assurance process, so staff carry out audits to a consistent standard.

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 linked to the risks identified in its Safety Plan

The service's new protection strategy is clearly linked to the risks it has identified in its Safety Plan. However, our inspectors found that the strategy and its priorities aren't understood across the protection department.

At the time of our inspection, the protection department was transitioning to a new strategy and structure. This is designed to make sure there is a focus on RBIP audits, prioritising the highest-risk premises. However, the new strategy and restructure hadn't yet been fully implemented, so some work was still happening in isolation.

We found that there are sufficient governance boards and regular meetings between the service's protection, prevention and response functions, and that they routinely exchange information.

The service has improved how it aligns its activity to risk

The service's RBIP is now focused on the highest-risk buildings. The RBIP has been refreshed so that it is now based on local risk factors and on the risk methodology developed by the National Fire Chiefs Council and ORH, a company that works with emergency services to help make them more efficient and effective. This approach means that risk scores automatically update in response to new data, for example when an incident is recorded.

Following the refresh of the RBIP, the service found that some premises it was previously unaware of and hadn't audited were now rated high or very high risk. It also found that some premises were now overdue for an audit according to the service's time frames.

We found the service has a plan to clear this backlog, prioritising high- and very high-risk premises, with a target date of December 2024. This plan takes account of the service's need to carry out its statutory functions while completing these audits. And it accounts for the increase in the team's capacity due to the increase in staff numbers and skills.

The service completes some audits in a consistent, systematic way

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 RBIP;
- after fires at premises where fire safety legislation applies;
- after enforcement action had been taken; and
- at high-rise, high-risk buildings.

Some of the audits we reviewed were completed in a consistent, systematic way and in line with the service's policies. These were carried out with other agencies and responsible owners, and used nationally recognised models to achieve a consistent approach on whether enforcement action should be taken following the inspection, and if so, what type.

However, we also found examples where formal notices weren't uploaded to the National Fire Chiefs Council website following the audit. And some premises had records that were incomplete – for example, they didn't have unique reference numbers attached to them, or they didn't describe the audit in enough detail.

We found some evidence of the service making relevant information from its audits available to prevention, response, and control room operators. This was helped by the physical proximity of the teams, and by a shared inbox that information about the audits is sent to. The service also has strategic governance boards where risk information is shared.

Quality assurance processes are new and not yet fully implemented

The service has introduced a new quality assurance process for its fire safety audits. Each inspection officer will be accompanied on a visit by their line manager every six months. The officer's competence will be reviewed in areas such as whether they follow process maps, their interaction with responsible owners, and whether they record information correctly and complete the correct paperwork.

However, this process was introduced in February 2024 and wasn't yet fully implemented at the time of our inspection.

The service plans to evaluate this approach and make any necessary changes in due course.

The service doesn't use its full range of enforcement powers

The service doesn't make consistent use of its full range of enforcement powers. We found that this was partly due to a lack of capacity. It also prioritises supporting responsible owners to help them achieve compliance, rather than using enforcement.

In the year ending 31 March 2023, the service issued 2 alteration notices, 41 informal notifications, 16 enforcement notices and 5 prohibition notices, and undertook no prosecutions.

The service will have enough capacity to achieve its RBIP, as long as it retains enough staff

The service has enough qualified protection staff to meet the requirements of its RBIP. At the time of our inspection, it had 15 staff within the team, 8 of whom were considered competent in their role and could carry out high- and very high-risk audits. Another seven are working towards their qualifications, which they will complete throughout the year. The service is also recruiting another 5 staff, whose development programme will take approximately 18 months to complete. This will help the service provide the range of audit and enforcement activity that is needed, both now and in the future.

However, the service has found it difficult to retain protection staff, as higher wages are available in the private sector. To mitigate this risk, the service has increased the pay bands for non-operational fire safety officers.

Staff get the right training and work towards the appropriate accreditation. They are trained to the standard of the Level 4 Diploma in Fire Safety to make sure they can complete high- and very high-risk complex audits. They can then carry out additional development to become a fire safety engineer.

The service has provided resource to support the introduction of the Building Safety Regulator, but doesn't know the impact

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

The service is supporting the introduction of the Building Safety Regulator. The service has seconded one staff member to carry out training and work with the Health and Safety Executive. It is unknown what impact this will have on protection activity at present.

The Fire Safety (England) 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 has good arrangements in place to receive this information. When it doesn't receive the right information, it acts accordingly and updates the risk information it gives its operational staff.

The service does some work with other enforcement agencies to regulate fire safety, but this could be improved

The service works with some enforcement agencies to regulate fire safety, but it does so inconsistently. We saw examples of memorandums of understanding with Trading Standards and joint visits at waste sites, but they didn't include enough detail.

The service consistently meets its duty to respond to building and licensing consultations

The service responds to nearly all building and licensing consultations on time. This means it consistently meets its statutory responsibility to comment on fire safety arrangements at new and altered buildings. In 2022/23, 98.2 percent of building consultations and 100 percent of licensing consultations were completed within the required time frames.

The service could do more to work with businesses to support fire safety

The service recognises it could do more to work with local businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation. While the service offers information online for businesses, we saw limited evidence of any face-to-face interaction.

While the service is part of a primary authority scheme, we found this only included three organisations.

The service has an effective approach to reducing unwanted fire signals

The service has an effective risk-based approach in place to manage the number of false alarms, known as unwanted fire signals. It has policies that it will only attend alarms at premises that provide sleeping accommodation, and to make sure that calls are appropriately challenged by the joint control room. In 2023, the service attended 87 fewer false alarms calls compared to 2022. Fewer unwanted calls mean that fire engines are available to respond to genuine incidents. It also reduces the risk to the public if fewer fire engines are travelling at high speed on the roads.

Responding to fires and other emergencies

Good

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

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

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

Main findings

The service has aligned its response resources to risk and improved their availability

The service's response strategy is linked to the risks it has identified in its Safety Plan. Its fire engines and response staff, as well as its working patterns, are designed and located to help it respond flexibly to fires and other emergencies with the appropriate resources.

The service has improved how it monitors the availability of its resources, and has effective reporting processes in place to hold managers accountable for decreases or increases. It has a range of shift systems for its wholetime, on-call and day crewed stations, which are aligned to risk.

The service regularly meets its response standards

There are no national response standards of performance for the public. But the service has set out its own response standards.

The service has three separate attendance standards based on the level of risk in the area of the call. Areas are defined as high, medium or low risk based on frequency of life-risk incidents, number of people with mobility-limiting long-term illness, amount of rented accommodation, data from the index of multiple deprivation, population density, and the number of lone elderly people and single parents. For high-risk areas, the target is arrival within 8 minutes; for medium-risk areas, within 10 minutes; and for low-risk areas, within 18 minutes.

The service's overall goal is for 80 percent of its calls to meet the target arrival time. In 2022/23, it achieved this goal, meeting the response standard in 82 percent of calls.

Response times are monitored monthly, and a rationale is recorded for any increase or decrease. They are also provided to the Staffordshire Commissioner at public performance meetings.

Home Office data shows that in the year ending 31 March 2023, the service's average response time for primary fires was 11 minutes and 30 seconds.

The service has a plan for improving the availability of its fire engines

We identified the availability of fire engines as an area for improvement in our last inspection. The service has an 11-point plan in place to support its response strategy and improve availability. This covers areas such as targets, recruitment, skills, training, competency recording, recognition, contracted hours, the time it takes on-call firefighters to arrive at the station, equipment, fire control and productivity.

The service aspires to achieve 100 percent availability for all engines, although this is an ambitious target given that it is a predominantly on-call service. During 2022/23, wholetime availability was 98.8 percent, and on-call availability was 62.2 percent.

As part of its 11-point plan, at the time of our inspection, the service was reviewing setting availability targets based on a designation of areas according to factors such as population density and level of risk. It has proposed targets of 95–100 percent for urban primary areas (the most dense and high-risk areas), 80–90 percent for urban secondary areas, and 60–80 percent for rural areas.

As another part of this plan, the service has reduced the minimum number of crew members per engine. For wholetime engines, it has reduced the minimum to four, and for on-call engines, it has reduced the minimum to three for some incident types. We look forward to seeing how this work progresses.

Incident commanders are trained effectively to support incident management

The service has trained incident commanders who are assessed regularly and properly. It uses training systems to notify individuals every 24 months that their incident command requires revalidation. It also has a process to allow firefighters to act up to crew manager, completing an assessment every 12 months. This helps the service to safely, assertively and effectively manage the whole range of incidents it faces, 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 and the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP).

Joint fire control is integrated into the service

The service has a joint control function with West Midlands FRS. It has a single point of contact for control to create consistent knowledge, understanding and management of the function.

We were pleased to see that the service's control staff are integrated into its command, training, exercise and debrief activity. We found automatic triggers on certain incident types to make sure debriefs are recorded and learning is shared through control managers.

While we found some faults with the mobilising system, this was something both services in the joint control were aware of. A Teams channel has been created between strategic and tactical leaders and IT staff. Control staff report faults through this channel, and we saw quick responses from the IT team. The staff told us that the service is taking a proactive approach and monitoring the issues, which made them feel supported.

The service regularly reviews the service level agreement to make sure it is receiving its share of the function.

The service has improved its risk information process

We sampled a range of risk information at wholetime and on-call fire stations, such as long- and short-term risk, multi-agency plans and 'over the border' information. This included information for firefighters responding to incidents at high-risk and high-rise buildings, and information held by fire control.

The information we reviewed was up to date and detailed. Staff could easily access and understand it. Encouragingly, it had been completed with input from the service's prevention, protection and response functions when appropriate.

While we heard of faults with some equipment used to access risk information, the service has introduced an additional removable tablet and smartphone on its engines to make sure staff have online and offline access.

The service has improved how it monitors and learns from operational performance

As part of our inspection, we reviewed a range of emergency incidents and training events. These included internal debriefs and external debriefs carried out by the CCU.

We were pleased to see the service routinely follows its policies to make sure that staff command incidents in line with operational guidance. We found that managers carry out an operational assurance role at some incidents when they aren't acting as incident commander. Operational assurance forms are filled in on tablets and

forwarded to the operational assurance team, who review them and use them to update internal risk information.

The service has used learning from incidents to improve its service to the public. For example, following an incident where a fire was thought to be out but then reignited, the service amended its training on the limitations of the thermal imaging camera, and introduced SnakeEye equipment to inspect empty areas.

We found processes and structures in place so the service can contribute to, and act on, learning from other FRSs and operational learning gathered from emergency service partners.

The service has good systems in place for keeping the public informed of incidents

The service has good systems in place to inform the public about ongoing incidents and help keep them safe during and after. These include a shared communications team with Staffordshire Police that is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Senior managers are all media trained. This is part of the incident command assessment, and was tested at a multi-agency exercise (Fortitude) supported by the CCU.

The service also uses social media outlets for 'warn and inform' processes. These were seen during a large incident at a factory, when they were used to advise residents to keep windows and doors closed.

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents

<div style="background-color:green;color:white">Outstanding</div>

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service is outstanding 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).

Promising practice

The service works well with the Civil Contingencies Unit on both prevention and reactive response for major and multi-agency incidents

Civil Contingencies Unit staff are locally integrated within the fire and rescue service, which allows mutually beneficial support. They write and maintain the Staffordshire multi-agency plans on behalf of the Staffordshire category 1 responders, including emergency services. They provide multi-agency training and exercises for the Staffordshire local resilience forum. They offer an operational call-out capability 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, providing a response or support and guidance. They also provide secretarial support for the local resilience forum. They work with stakeholders to prevent major or multi-agency incidents by facilitating meetings where action can be taken.

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 well prepared to respond to major and multi-agency incidents

The service has effectively anticipated and considered the reasonably foreseeable risks and threats it may face. These risks are listed in both local and national risk registers as part of its community risk management planning. The service works with the CCU to share information about risk with partners, to make sure there is common understanding across category 1, category 2 and voluntary responders. For example, the community risk register is broken down into accidents and system failures, natural and environmental hazards, human and animal disease, societal risks, local risks and malicious threats. These are assessed according to their impact, likelihood and what mitigation is currently in place.

The CCU also facilitates a safety awareness and risk assessment group, where stakeholders are encouraged to bring forward any concerns, issues or risks that partners should be aware of, creating a common understanding of risk.

The service is also familiar with the significant risks its neighbouring FRSs may face, and which it might reasonably be asked to respond to in an emergency. These include wide area flooding and wildfire incidents. Firefighters have access to risk information from neighbouring services, which is obtained from the Resilience Direct system four times a year, and available on service equipment.

The service is ready to respond to major and multi-agency incidents at tall buildings

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

We found the service has well-developed policies and procedures in place for safely managing this type of incident. Staff at all levels understand them, and robust training and exercises have taken place to test them.

During our inspection, we observed that the app the service has in place to manage the transfer of information between the joint emergency control room and the scene of an incident when a tall building is involved in a fire. The app records incident, time, location, contact number, floor and flat number, occupants, confirmed fire location, conditions and fire control advice given, and has a comments section. Incident commanders can add comments and amend the above elements to reflect when rescues have been made.

We were able to see the app working live at an exercise, with information flowing from the joint emergency control room to the incident to the bridgehead (the position where firefighters are carrying out firefighting operations) and back. We saw that the risk information for the building used included flat and floor numbers, and was up to date.

The service has taken a priority-based approach to make sure those who will be required to access and use the app have been trained. The remaining staff were receiving training at the time of our inspection.

At a major or multi-agency incident at a tall building, an FRS would receive a high volume of simultaneous fire calls. We found that the systems in place in the service are robust enough to receive and manage this volume of calls. Staff in the emergency control room, at the incident and in assisting control rooms can share, view and update the actions that result from the individual fire calls.

The service works well with other FRSs

The service supports other FRSs in responding to emergency incidents. It has arrangements in place for responding to incidents in neighbouring FRS areas. For example, it has attended wildfire incidents in neighbouring areas. It is interoperable with these services and can form part of a multi-agency response.

The service has successfully deployed to other services and has used national assets such as high-volume pumps.

The service carries out exercises with neighbouring services and other organisations, supporting a multi-agency response

The service has a cross-border exercise plan with neighbouring FRSs. This helps them work more effectively together to keep the public safe. In 2022/23, the service completed five training exercises with neighbouring FRSs.

The CCU organises numerous training events and exercises for stakeholders throughout the year. Over the past 12 months, the CCU has organised 30 exercises and 30 'lunch and learn' sessions, which included carrying out multi-agency exercises at higher tier COMAH sites and reviewing severe weather plans.

JESIP is well understood across the service

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. Staff at all levels have knowledge and understanding of these principles and how to apply them at incidents. We also found that the principles were incorporated into areas such as the safety awareness, risk assessment and preventative meetings supported by the CCU.

The service works well with partners

The service has good arrangements in place to respond to emergencies with its partners in the Staffordshire local resilience forum and the CCU. These include being an active member of both forums and acting as chair or co-chair at a strategic and tactical level. The service also provides some administrative support for the CCU, which is located at its headquarters, such as HR, occupational health and payroll. Being located at the service headquarters, the CCU works to the same Core Code of Ethics followed by the FRS.

The service takes part in regular training events with other members of the Staffordshire local resilience forum and uses the learning to develop its plans for responding to major and multi-agency incidents. Following a marauding terrorist exercise, the CCU made some changes to the multi-agency plans and policies.

The service has a process for capturing and sharing national learning

The service makes sure it knows about national operational updates from other FRSs, 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 partner organisations.

The service has single points of contact to review national and joint organisational learning. There is also a contact in the joint emergency control room who reviews control-specific learning.

The service works with partners to carry out preventative action around possible major or multi-agency incidents

While the service can respond to major and multi-agency incidents, it also carries out preventative action when necessary, with support from the CCU. For example, the CCU was approached by the service with a concern about a residential property above a commercial premises, for which a planning application had been submitted. The fire safety team had identified a potential risk of rough sleepers, following a fatality in a similarly disued building. Working with the service, the CCU facilitated meetings with key stakeholders to mitigate the risk. The CCU believes the joint preventative approach has saved time and money for all those involved.

Making best use of resources

Good

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

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

The service's revenue budget for 2024/25 is £50.07m. This is a 3.9 percent increase from the previous financial year.

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

Main findings

The service effectively reviews and allocates resources to risk

The service's financial and workforce plans, including allocating resources to prevention, protection and response, are consistent with the risks and priorities it has identified in its Safety Plan. The service is aware of where it has gaps, and is actively recruiting to fill vacancies in protection and IT.

The service has evaluated its mix of crewing and duty systems. It regularly analyses its response cover and can show that it deploys its fire engines and response staff to manage risk efficiently. Alongside the service's transformation work, it has developed an 11-point plan to improve the availability of fire engines and response staff. This includes reducing minimum crewing for on-call and wholetime fire engines, and making use of on-call support officers to improve training. The service has seen a decrease in its overtime expenditure.

At the time of the inspection, the service told us that it would soon be carrying out its next fire cover review, using an external organisation to review its response model.

The service builds its plans on sound scenarios. These help make sure the service is sustainable, and they are underpinned by financial controls that reduce the risk of misusing public money. The service has an Ethics, Transparency and Audit Panel,

made up of members of the public who are qualified professionals such as accountants, which scrutinises and audits its plans.

The service has improved how it monitors the productivity and performance of its workforce

We were encouraged to see the improvements the service has made since we last visited, as this was identified as an area for improvement during our previous inspection. We were pleased to see that the service's arrangements for managing performance clearly link its use of resources to its Safety Plan and its strategic priorities.

The service collects data on how wholetime firefighters spend their time across day and night shifts to understand how these staff are used. For example, each watch has targets for prevention activity, risk visits, hydrant maintenance, and training and exercises. The data and targets are reviewed monthly with line managers to better understand what is taking up capacity and how ways of working can be improved. For example, the service found that staff were completing admin tasks that were no longer required due to the introduction of digital systems. At the time of our inspection, the service was looking at plans for how to adapt this monitoring for on-call staff.

We found a lack of targets for prevention and protection staff, and no key performance indicators for HR or IT. However, there are regular performance and scrutiny boards which monitor department performance and outcomes.

At the time of the inspection, the service told us it plans to introduce targets for departments such as prevention and protection once their restructure has settled.

The service collaborates effectively, which brings mutual benefits to those involved

We were pleased to see the service meets its statutory duty to collaborate. It routinely considers opportunities to collaborate with other emergency responders. It has eight shared services with Staffordshire Police:

- HR
- estates
- fleet
- communications
- commercial services
- equality, diversity and inclusion
- occupational health
- finance.

These shared services save staffing costs, even though they employ some specific fire and rescue staff who have a good working knowledge of the service.

We found that the service benefited from having access to larger teams to support projects and day-to-day work, including a communications team that is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. And we heard positive comments from staff about being able to quickly access the physical and mental health support they require from the occupational health team.

The service shares five of its fire stations with police, which provides income for the service and savings for the police force. This is being extended to a further six fire stations.

The service comprehensively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and results of its collaborations. It regularly reviews the service level agreements it has with shared services to make sure it is receiving enough support for what it pays.

For example, it noticed the joint emergency transport service wasn't performing as it should, which prompted a review. An interim management structure was introduced within the joint emergency transport team to provide better oversight of key performance indicators.

The service has effective continuity arrangements in place

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

Our inspectors found suitable plans in place for stations, departments and risks. These plans have been tested, and would make sure the service would continue to run effectively in the event of industrial action, power outage, pandemic, severe weather or staffing loss.

The service shows sound financial management

There are regular reviews to consider all the service's expenditure, including its non-pay costs. This scrutiny makes sure the service gets value for money. For example, the commercial team works closely with departments and budget holders. The procurement lead reports to the service delivery board four times a year, providing an overview of contracts, expenditure, savings and work being carried out.

While we found some slippage in the capital programme, the service was able to explain why this had happened, including delays in receiving new fire engines from the manufacturer. This is back on track, and the service told us it has a new tracking process which gives it better oversight of capital expenditure and projects.

The service has made savings and efficiencies, which haven't impacted its operational performance and the service it gives the public. For example, reducing minimum crewing for on-call and wholetime fire engines has decreased overtime expenditure.

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 national procurement frameworks to get the best possible purchasing power. Recent purchases through procurement frameworks include breathing apparatus sets and cutting equipment.

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

Good

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

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

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

Main findings

The service is aware of its future financial challenges and achieves good value for money for the public

The service has a sound understanding of future financial challenges. It plans to mitigate its main and significant financial risks. For example, its planning assumptions for the 2024/25 revenue budget are likely to provide contingency for unforeseen cost pressures.

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 pay, inflation, pensions and future government funding.

The service's transformation board oversees work to improve the productivity and effectiveness of the service. The next phase of work includes carrying out a fire cover review to identify what impact future changes in demand and risk may have on resourcing and budget requirements. The service has also developed some costed options for making savings if it faces financial pressures in the future, including an assessment of their anticipated risks and effects.

In the financial year 2022/23, the service's firefighter cost per head of population was £20.32, which was lower than the average rate for fire and rescue services in England of £26.96 per head of population.

The service has a plan for how to use its reserves

The service has a sensible and sustainable plan for using its reserves. As at 1 April 2023, the authority held £1.9m in general reserves and £7.5m in earmarked reserves.

This plan includes continued investments in IT and systems to provide further efficiencies.

The service has clear fleet and estates strategies

The service's fleet and estates strategies have clear links to its Safety Plan, and support its improvement plans.

The service has a shared estates and fleet function with Staffordshire Police. It has 21 community fire stations that are funded through private finance initiatives. These are modern and energy-efficient, and provide an appropriate working environment for staff. A programme of station refurbishments is in place. As part of the fleet strategy, the service has introduced some electric vehicles and charging points. Both strategies exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

The service regularly reviews these strategies so that it can properly assess the effect that any changes in estates and fleet provision, or future innovation, would have on risk.

The service is improving its technology to be more effective and efficient

The service actively considers how changes in technology and future innovation may affect risk. It also plans to exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness presented by changes in technology.

The service has improved the resilience and reliability of its IT systems. It has improved its network by increasing the number of firewalls and introducing a new backup system. It has invested in moving its systems to cloud-based servers, to make them more resilient and accessible. Its data is also now more accessible. This was an area for improvement in the service's last inspection.

The service is aware that it needs to improve the systems and equipment staff directly access. It has plans in place for this, which include updating protection systems, investing in equipment for fire engines, and a joint mobilising system.

At the time of our inspection, the service recognised that it needs additional capacity and capability to support future project work. The service told us it is putting plans in place for this.

The service routinely identifies opportunities to work with others to improve efficiency and provide better services in the future. This can be seen in the work it carries out with WMAS on the falls response and home from hospital teams.

The service generates some income

The service receives income from Staffordshire Police for the space it uses in the service's fire stations. At the time of our inspection, this applied to five stations, and was being rolled out to a further six.

The service considers options for generating extra income, but its ambition and track record in securing extra income are limited.

Promoting the right values and culture

Good

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service is good 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.

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 culture but recognises it still has more work to do

The service has well-defined values, which staff understand. It has fully adopted the Core Code of Ethics, which we found was promoted, demonstrated and understood across the service. We found a clear and consistent message from senior leaders around expectations of staff, which is reinforced during recruitment and promotion processes. This was identified as an area for improvement in our previous inspection.

Of the staff who responded to our survey, 96 percent (170 out of 178) said they are aware of the service's statement of values.

We found staff at all levels of the service behaving in a way that reflected the service's values. We were encouraged by the improvements the service has made to its culture. Expectations around standards of behaviour are clear and set out for staff during initial training. The service has actively promoted a culture where the workforce feels supported and empowered to challenge inappropriate behaviour.

For example, it has introduced active bystander training, to make sure staff feel empowered to challenge inappropriate behaviours. It also encourages open and difficult conversations around negative media stories, although most staff said that this isn't something they recognise as an issue for the service.

Senior leaders act as role models and are visible across the service. For example, the principal officers carry out a programme of visits across the service and regularly make briefing videos to update staff on service information or specific news. This was identified as an area for improvement in our previous inspection.

Of the respondents to our staff survey, 71 percent (120 out of 170) felt that senior leaders consistently model and maintain the service's values. Staff told us that each area of the Core Code of Ethics is the responsibility of a specific senior leader, who is the contact for questions or concerns around that area.

Our staff survey shows that 88 percent (150 out of 170) of respondents felt that their managers consistently model and maintain the service's values.

There is a positive working culture throughout the service. While we found some small pockets of negative behaviour, our inspectors found examples at all levels of staff being confident and willing to challenge inappropriate behaviour.

The service has good provisions to support the physical and mental health of staff

The service continues to have well-understood and effective well-being policies in place, which are available to staff. A significant range of well-being support is available to support both physical and mental health – for example:

- occupational health
- mental health first-aiders
- fitness advisers
- Fire Fighters Charity
- trauma risk management
- Thrive – an app that staff can access physical and mental health support on.

Of the respondents to our staff survey, 86 percent (153 out of 178) agreed that they are satisfied their personal safety and welfare are treated seriously at work.

The occupational health department is a shared service with Staffordshire Police. At the start of this collaboration, provisions were limited, but this has improved. Fire and rescue service staff now receive the same provision as their police colleagues to support mental and physical health.

There are good provisions in place to promote staff well-being. This includes debriefing processes following potentially traumatic incidents. Staff are made aware of this provision via the intranet and newsletters. Of the respondents to our staff survey, 91 percent (162 out of 178) reported that they can access services to support their mental well-being. Most staff told us that they understand and have confidence in the well-being support available.

Health and safety is seen as a high priority for the service

The service continues to have effective and well-understood health and safety policies and procedures in place. Staff are trained during induction, with managers receiving nationally recognised health and safety qualifications.

These policies and procedures are readily available, and the service promotes them effectively to all staff. Our inspectors saw evidence of eye-catching health and safety posters to promote good manual handling and warn about slip and trip hazards. Both staff and representative bodies have confidence in the health and safety approach the service takes.

There are measures in place for reporting to the senior leaders who monitor the performance of each department. This allows the service to tackle issues or concerns early by identifying trends.

The service has improved how it monitors staff who have secondary employment or dual contracts (either multiple contracts with the service or contracts with multiple FRSs). Annual updates are carried out for those with secondary employment to see if this is still in place. While the service has better oversight of working hours for those with dual contracts using bespoke systems, it is still partly the personal responsibility of staff to monitor their own well-being. This is discussed during appraisals.

The service has effective measures in place to manage absence

We found there are clear processes in place to manage absences for all staff. There is clear guidance for managers, and we found most were confident in using the process. The service manages absences well and in accordance with policy. Return to work meetings are carried out following periods of absence. Managers also have some discretion on how to handle cases of regular absence where there is reasonable justification not to follow the service's policy.

In 2022/23, the average number of days/shifts not worked per firefighter due to long-term sickness absence was 9.0 days/shifts, and for short-term sickness absence, it was 6.7 days/shifts. This is a decrease of 22 percent for long-term sickness absence and 21 percent for short-term sickness absence compared to 2021/22.

Getting the right people with the right skills

<div style="background-color:olive;color:white;">Good</div>

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

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

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

Main findings

The service has improved its workforce planning

The service's workforce planning is starting to take full account of the skills and capabilities it needs to carry out its Safety Plan effectively. For example, it uses data to plan when to carry out recruitment, use casual contracts to cover gaps, or carry out a transfer process. All major stakeholders attend the workforce planning board meetings, so there is a clear overview of all areas. We identified this as an area for improvement during our previous inspection, and we confirm the service has now improved, so it has been closed.

We found that the introduction of the workforce planning board meetings has been a positive step for the service. At the time of our inspection, these meetings were focused on operations, but the service is fully aware that there needs to be better insight for support roles and is planning to include these as part of the workforce planning board in the future.

Workforce and succession planning is subject to consistent scrutiny in the form of regular meetings to discuss requirements. The head of HR gives a report to a service delivery board and provides details for the quarterly performance reports. The assistant chief fire officer also attends the workforce planning meetings.

The service has improved its oversight of the skills and capabilities of its workforce

Most staff told us that they had access to the training they need to be effective in their role, including management skills. The service's training plans make sure they can maintain their competence and capability effectively. For example, there is a suite of mandatory e-learning which all staff complete, and specific management courses that must be completed when staff are successfully promoted. Staff are also able to obtain external safety and management qualifications to support them in their roles.

However, we did find examples where the implementation of training wasn't carried out in a consistent manner across the workforce to create a common understanding or knowledge of the subject or equipment. For example, we found that while mandatory safeguarding training was in place, this wasn't understood across the workforce. And training for new IT equipment was only provided to one individual in each station, who was required to train others.

The service monitors staff competence at response, prevention and protection performance boards. The learning and development team provides key training performance indicators for these. There are some quality assurance processes in place for departments such as prevention and protection, while operational assurance is carried out at some incidents.

The service regularly updates its understanding of its staff's skills and risk-critical safety capabilities during workforce planning boards. This approach helps the service to identify gaps in workforce capabilities and resilience, and take appropriate action, such as using casual contracts for on-call staff to fill wholetime gaps or transfer processes. It also means it can make sound and financially sustainable decisions about current and future needs.

The service promotes a culture of continuous improvement

The service promotes a culture of continuous improvement throughout the organisation, and it encourages staff to learn and develop. For example, the service actively monitors and reports on work on the areas for improvement from our previous inspection and the recommendations from our 'Values and culture in fire and rescue services' report. It also has an operational assurance monitoring process, which is carried out by incident commanders.

Most staff told us they can access a range of learning and development resources. These include face-to-face learning, e-learning and guidance documents. This allows them to do their job effectively.

In our staff survey, 70 percent of respondents (124 out of 178) told us they are able to access the right learning and development opportunities.

The service has also improved its reliance on overtime, which was identified as an area for improvement in our previous inspection. Between 2020/21 and 2022/23, by reducing the minimum staffing required for wholetime fire engines to four, and by recruiting, the service has seen a 46.9 percent decrease in its overtime spend per person in the workforce.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity

Adequate

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at ensuring fairness and promoting diversity.

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

Areas for improvement

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

The service should make sure it has robust processes in place to carry out equality impact assessments and review any actions agreed as a result.

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 processes in place to gather feedback and challenge from the workforce

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

Staff have access to Say So, an independent organisation that collates feedback from the workforce. Reports are then generated to allow the service to use the anonymised data to determine if any action is required – for example, transferring staff to a different watch, or communications about the Core Code of Ethics. Say So carries out a programme of visits across the service to explain what it is and how to use it.

Senior leaders have also carried out service-wide briefings via Teams, which give staff the opportunity to feed back or raise concerns.

During the inspection, we found that some staff still lacked the confidence to use the feedback processes, due to past negative experiences – either their own, those of colleagues, or rumours they had heard.

The service has taken action to address matters staff have raised. For example, it has introduced a transfer process where staff can request to work at a different station and are moved if a vacancy becomes available. This was implemented following feedback from exit interviews.

Representative bodies and staff associations reported that the service works with them well.

The service is improving how it tackles 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 our staff survey, 17 percent (30 out of 178) of respondents told us they had felt bullied or harassed, and 12 percent (21 out of 178) had felt discriminated against at work over the past 12 months.

Most staff are confident in the service's approach to tackling bullying, harassment, discrimination, grievances and disciplinary matters. It uses discipline and grievance data in conjunction with absence figures and Say So reports to better understand trends and patterns and the workforce's trust and confidence in the processes.

The service has introduced active bystander training, which staff spoke positively about. It also told us that it will be introducing training in employment law for senior leaders to make sure that cases of misconduct are dealt with consistently. The service has used media stories about inappropriate behaviour in the service as an opportunity to promote reporting processes and expected behaviours.

The service has used independent organisations to carry out some of its more complex discipline and grievance cases, to make sure the processes are fair and transparent. It has yet to complete a full analysis of the processes to determine the costs and benefits.

The service is improving how it addresses disproportionality in recruitment and retention

There is an open, fair and honest recruitment process for staff and those wishing to work for Staffordshire FRS. The service has an effective system to understand and remove the risk of disproportionality in recruitment processes. For example, its recruitment policy is supported by a people impact assessment. This lays out the service's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. This includes carrying out positive action within its recruitment campaigns, and supporting reasonable adjustments. The service has appointed a community engagement officer who is responsible for connecting with hard-to-reach communities, not just at times of recruitment. It has also appointed a positive action officer. However, the service is fully aware that this effort needs to be consistent and become part of its everyday work.

The service has recently moved its equality, diversity and inclusion function to a shared team with Staffordshire Police. It is hoping to tap into a larger pool of knowledge and understanding to improve its work in this area. We look forward to seeing the progress of this work in future.

The service has put considerable effort into developing its recruitment processes so that they are fair, and potential applicants can understand them. The recruitment policies are comprehensive and cover opportunities in all roles. The service advertises recruitment opportunities both internally and externally. This has encouraged some applicants from diverse backgrounds, including into middle and senior management roles.

However, the service needs to do more to increase staff diversity. There has been little improvement in ethnic and gender diversity. In 2022/23, 5 percent of new joiners identified as being from an ethnic minority background. The overall proportion of firefighters who identified as being from an ethnic minority background decreased from 6.1 percent (39 people) in 2021/22 to 5.5 percent (34 people) in 2022/23. The proportion of firefighters who identified as a woman increased from 7.7 percent (49 people) to 8.5 percent (53 people) over the same period.

For the whole workforce, in 2022/23, 5.1 percent identified as being from an ethnic minority background compared to 12.1 percent in their local population and 8.4 percent throughout all FRSs. And 18.6 percent of the whole workforce identified as a woman, compared to an average of 19.4 percent throughout all FRSs.

The service has taken part in the direct entry national programme, which aims to identify people with specific leadership skills from a variety of sectors for middle manager roles. It has also opened senior leadership roles to both operational and non-operational staff, to encourage a more diverse range of applicants and create fairness of opportunity. The service is aware that the work it is doing around positive action and working with its communities hasn't yet had the desired effect of increasing workforce representation, but it knows it will take time to see results from this work.

The service needs to improve its approach to equality, diversity and inclusion

The service needs to improve its approach to equality, diversity and inclusion. It has a good strategic direction for this work, and it is a clear priority for the service. However, we found a lack of awareness among staff about the benefits that equality, diversity, inclusion and positive action bring to an organisation. The service has previously given training in this area, but staff were unable to demonstrate what it included or the objectives it aimed to achieve. More needs to be done to make sure staff understand the benefits of this.

The service has some staff networks, such as neurodiversity, women and menopause, Black and ethnic minority, and LGBTQ+ networks, to support those with protected characteristics. However, these are still in their infancy and not established across the service or fully integrated into processes such as consultations for people impact assessments.

There have been some positive outcomes from some of the networks, such as the neurodiversity network. For example, some staff have obtained qualifications so that the service can now complete dyslexia screening in house, which has improved the time taken to implement reasonable adjustments.

Although the service has a process in place to assess equality impact, it doesn't properly assess or act on the impact on each protected characteristic. Actions and outcomes from people impact assessments aren't monitored, and actions sit with the authors who are responsible for completing the assessment and aren't monitored or followed up. Our inspectors also found that the service doesn't consult with staff networks or use those with specific knowledge and understanding of an area to review assessments.

The service is aware that this is an area where it needs to improve, and it has taken the decision to move to a shared equality, diversity and inclusion service with Staffordshire Police. This will provide it with more diverse knowledge and understanding, and allow it to use a bigger team to help it improve in this area. We look forward to seeing how this work progresses.

Managing performance and developing leaders

Adequate

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service is adequate 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 put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders.

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

Main findings

The service is improving the way it manages individuals' performance

The service has some performance management systems which allow it to effectively develop and assess the individual performance of some staff. However, our inspectors found that some individuals had no performance targets, even though there is effective reporting on performance outcomes at a departmental level. The service is planning to introduce performance targets for all staff.

Some staff told us that they have discussions with their manager every 12 months, or if they start a new role. They told us that these discussions are meaningful, and focus on health and well-being, performance, development and goals. Staff who are in development have development reviews every three months.

The service is planning to improve the process to make sure it focuses on the Core Code of Ethics, welfare and identifying those suitable for promotion. It also intends to use 360-degree feedback, in which feedback is gathered from a staff member's direct reports and peers as well as their manager.

Promotion processes are fair and transparent, but their implementation could be improved to make sure they are fair and effective in practice

The service has made a considerable effort to develop its promotion and progression processes. These have been built to comply with the National Fire Chiefs Council framework and Core Code of Ethics to make sure they are fair and all staff can understand them. These policies and processes are comprehensive and cover opportunities in all roles.

Staff told us that they felt the processes were fair and transparent. However, their implementation could be improved. We heard examples of individuals being informed about interviews with limited notice and without flexibility to take account of work and personal-life commitments.

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

It manages some of its selection processes consistently. It keeps applications anonymous during the written stages to make sure that filtering is carried out fairly. We did find some evidence of records of assessment scores during the application process not being kept. The service makes appropriate use of temporary promotions to fill short-term resourcing gaps.

The service is working to improve the diversity of its leadership

Since our last inspection, the service has taken some steps to increase workforce diversity, especially in middle and senior management roles. It has advertised senior roles to non-operational staff and taken part in the direct entry national trial to recruit from a more diverse pool of individuals.

However, the service knows it needs to do more in this area. It hopes that the work with the shared equality, diversity and inclusion service and its new community engagement officer and positive action officer will help improve this in the future.

The service should improve how it identifies and supports high-potential staff to develop into leadership roles

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.

The service has some informal talent-spotting in place to identify potential leaders and high-potential staff, but it doesn't manage this openly or fairly. Identifying those with relevant skills and encouraging them to apply for promotion is left to individual line managers.

The service should consider putting in place formal arrangements to identify and support members of staff to become senior leaders.

The service needs to do more to make sure it implements the December 2022 Leading the Service and Leading and Developing People fire standards effectively.