

# Fire & Rescue Service 2021/22

## Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service



# Contents

About this inspection	1
Overview	2
Service in numbers	5
<b>Effectiveness</b>	<b>7</b>
How effective is the service at keeping people safe and secure?	8
Summary	8
Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies	9
Preventing fires and other risks	11
Protecting the public through fire regulation	14
Responding to fires and other emergencies	18
Responding to major and multi-agency incidents	20
<b>Efficiency</b>	<b>23</b>
How efficient is the service at keeping people safe and secure?	24
Summary	24
Making best use of resources	25
Making the fire and rescue service affordable now and in the future	28
<b>People</b>	<b>30</b>
How well does the service look after its people?	31
Summary	31
Promoting the right values and culture	32
Getting the right people with the right skills	34
Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity	36
Managing performance and developing leaders	39

# About this inspection

---

This is our third inspection of fire and rescue services across England. We first inspected Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service in July 2018, publishing a report with our findings in December 2018 on the service's effectiveness and efficiency and how it looks after its people. Our second inspection, in autumn 2020, considered how the service was responding to the pandemic. This inspection considers for a second time the service's effectiveness, efficiency and people.

---

In this round of our inspections of all 44 fire and rescue services in England, we answer three main questions:

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

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

## What inspection judgments mean

Our categories of graded judgment are:

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








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





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







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

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

# Overview

Question	This inspection	2018/19
 <b>Effectiveness</b>	 <b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>Good</b>
Understanding fires and other risks	 Requires improvement	Good
Preventing fires and other risks	 Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Protecting the public through fire regulation	 Good	Good
Responding to fires and other emergencies	 Requires improvement	Good
Responding to major and multi-agency incidents	 Good	Good

Question	This inspection	2018/19
 <b>Efficiency</b>	 <b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Making best use of resources	 Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Future affordability	 Requires improvement	Good

Question	This inspection	2018/19
 <b>People</b>	 <b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Promoting the right values and culture	 Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Getting the right people with the right skills	 Requires improvement	Good
Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity	 Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Managing performance and developing leaders	 Requires improvement	Requires improvement

## HMI summary

It was a pleasure to inspect Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service again. I want to thank the service for working with us by accommodating the virtual approach of this inspection. Inspections usually take a hybrid approach but inspecting during the pandemic meant we had to adapt. I also want to recognise the disruption caused by the pandemic. This has been considered in our findings.

I am satisfied with some aspects of the performance of Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service. And I am encouraged by the improvements the service has made in certain areas since our last inspection. However, there remain areas where it needs to improve.

The service is good at protecting the public through fire regulation, and at responding to major incidents. But it needs to have a better understanding of fires and other risks. It also needs to be better at both preventing fires and responding to fires and other emergencies.

The service displays some sound financial management. And its medium-term financial plan (MTFP) takes a prudent approach to government funding, given that the full impact of the pandemic is unknown. But the service still needs to improve its use of resources. It is financially secure but could do more to plan for future financial challenges. The service is developing a plan for the use of its [reserves](#). It should regularly review its fleet and estate strategies.

We are encouraged by the improvements the service has made since our last inspection. It now actively considers the relationship between technology, future innovation and risk. Its [fire control](#) mobilising system has moved to West Mercia Police headquarters, and the service is seeking to use changes in technology to improve efficiency and effectiveness. But it has limited capacity and capability to bring about sustainable future change.

The service needs to improve how it treats its people. This includes promoting the right values and culture, and getting the right people with the right skills, as well as looking at performance management and talent development. I note that the service needs to do more to make the service a fair place to work and to promote diversity, and with better communication between senior leaders and staff. The newly established senior leadership team should look to provide opportunities to improve the culture of the organisation.

Overall, I require improvements in Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service's effectiveness and efficiency, and in how it treats its people. I look forward to assessing progress at our next inspection.



**Wendy Williams**

HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

# Service in numbers



## Response

Hereford and  
Worcester

England

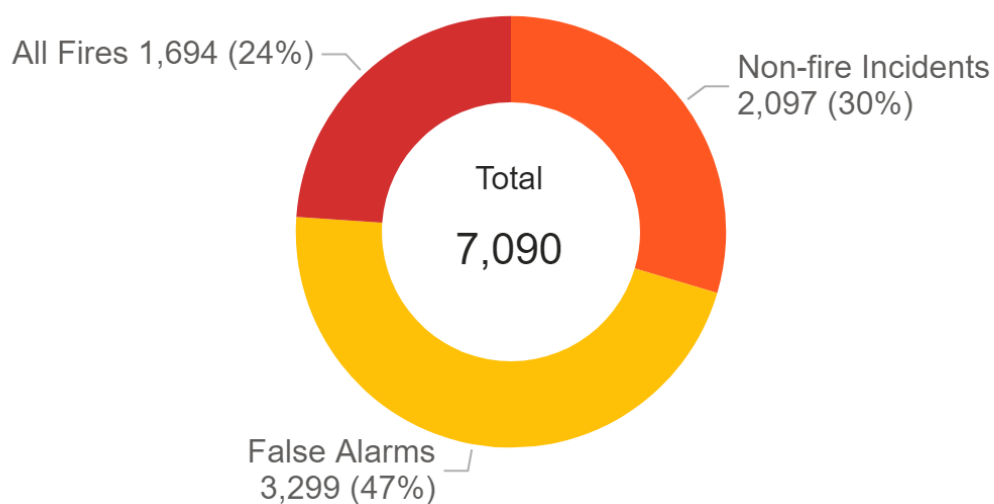
Incidents attended per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	8.96	9.16
Home fire safety checks carried out by fire and rescue service per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	2.95	4.47
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises Year ending 31 March 2020	3.41	2.55
Average availability of pumps Year ending 31 March 2020	78.70%	83.07%



## Cost

Firefighter cost per person per year Year ending 31 March 2020	£22.74	£23.82
---	--------	--------

### Incidents attended in the year to 31 March 2021

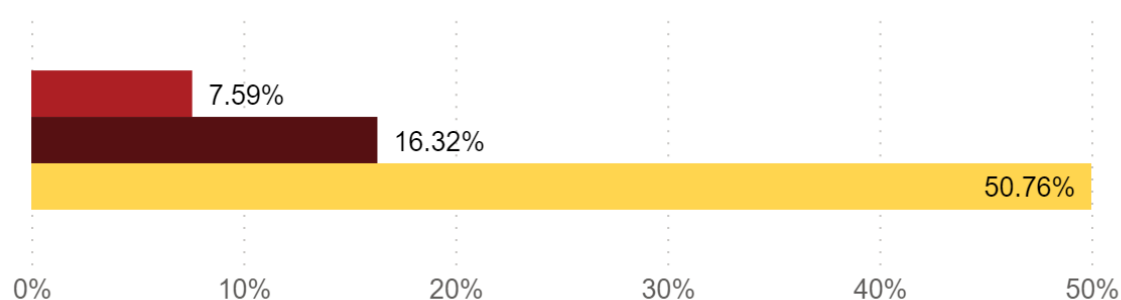




Five-year change in total workforce 2015 to 2020	-8.07%	-5.30%
Number of firefighters per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2020	0.75	0.63
Percentage of firefighters who are wholetime Year ending 31 March 2020	37.97%	65.10%

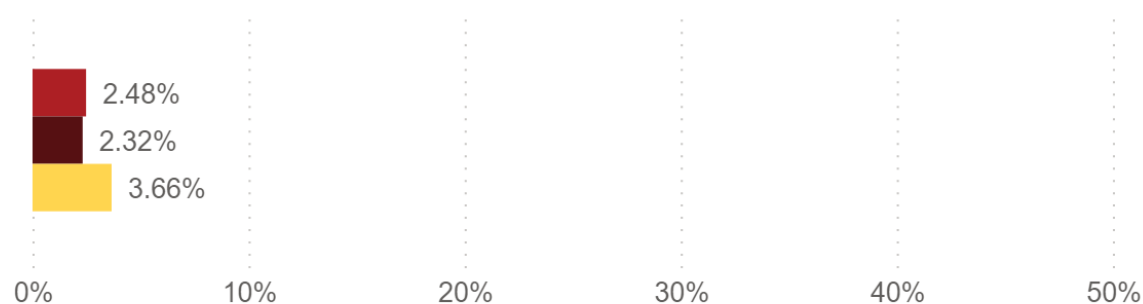
### Percentage population, firefighters and workforce who are female as at 31 March 2020

Female ● Firefighters ● Workforce ● Local population



### Percentage of population, firefighters, and workforce who are Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) as at 31 March 2020

BAME ● Firefighters ● Workforce ● Local population



For more information on data and analysis throughout this report, please view the [‘About the data’ section of our website](#).

# Effectiveness



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



## Requires improvement

### Summary

---

An effective fire and rescue service will identify and assess the full range of foreseeable fire and rescue risks its community faces. It should target its fire prevention and protection activities to those who are at greatest risk from fire, and make sure fire safety legislation is being enforced. And when the public calls for help, respond promptly with the right skills and equipment to deal with the incident effectively. Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service's overall effectiveness requires improvement.

---

The service is good at protecting the public through fire regulation. It is also good at responding to major and multi-agency incidents. That said, the service requires improvement in its understanding and prevention of fires and other risks. It also requires improvement in how it responds to fires and other emergencies.

Specifically, the service needs to make sure its prevention, protection and response activity are better defined in its community risk management plan (CRMP). It also needs to make sure that firefighters have good access to temporary risk information.

The service needs to adequately identify those who are most at risk from fire, and effectively target its prevention activity. It should also evaluate its prevention work so that it understands what works. This is a cause of concern.

The service works well with other agencies to regulate fire safety. It is good at responding to building regulation consultations. And its staff work well with business owners. Now the service needs to make sure that it has an effective quality assurance process and makes appropriate use of its enforcement powers.

The service's response strategy needs to give the most appropriate response for the public, in line with the community risk management plan. We note that the service has yet to introduce an effective system for staff learning and debriefs. Finally, the service needs a deeper understanding of, and a plan for, adopting [national operational guidance](#), as well as improved understanding of marauding terrorist attacks (MTAs).

## Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies



### Requires improvement (2018: Good)

Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at understanding risk.

Each fire and rescue service should identify and assess all foreseeable fire and rescue-related risks that could affect its communities. Arrangements should be put in place through the service's prevention, protection and response capabilities to prevent or mitigate these risks for the public.

#### Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure that the aims and objectives of prevention, protection and response activity are clearly defined in its community risk management plan (CRMP).
- The service should ensure its firefighters have good access to relevant and up-to-date temporary risk information.

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

### **The service is good at identifying risk in the community, but doesn't use this information well**

The service has assessed an appropriate range of risks and threats through its community risk management planning process. When assessing risk, it has considered relevant information collected from a broad range of internal and external sources and data sets. For example, it considered information from the Office for National Statistics, Worcestershire and Herefordshire councils, and socio-economic population data.

Since we last inspected, the service has made progress in how it works with the local community to build its risk profile. When appropriate, the service has consulted and undertaken a constructive dialogue with staff, communities and others including businesses, local authorities and West Mercia Police. The service made good use of a variety of ways to communicate (such as focus groups, social media, letters and videos) to reach all parts of the community. It did this to both understand the risk and explain how it intends to mitigate it.

However, we found that the service doesn't effectively use this risk profiling in its prevention, protection and response activities.

### **The service doesn't clearly set out how it will deliver its CRMP**

After assessing relevant risks, the service has recorded its findings in the community risk management plan (CRMP). But the plan doesn't fully identify how the risks will be mitigated. It doesn't give timescales or identify the resources (such as staff or finances) needed to carry out the actions to mitigate the risks. The plan does not detail how the service intends to use its prevention, protection and response resources to mitigate or reduce the risk and threats to the community. The service doesn't have strategies that are clearly linked to the CRMP. Also, the CRMP doesn't yet specify the end results the service will use to measure the plan's success.

The service has some systems in place to identify changes to risk levels in the future. For example, it looks at themes from operational incidents and societal data. But the use of this information to inform service plans isn't yet clearly established.

### **The service could improve the way it manages temporary risk information**

The service routinely collects and updates the information it has about the people, places and threats it has identified as being at greatest risk. Since our last inspection, the service has made progress on the area for improvement identified relating to the site-specific risk information process. The service now updates information daily on fire engine [mobile data terminals](#). Also, the service has a co-ordinated programme of re-inspections taking place. These daily updates of the terminals and regular re-inspections enable staff to identify, reduce and mitigate risk effectively.

The service has arrangements in place to gather information, such as evacuation strategies during familiarisation visits to high-rise residential flats. It is also recording risk information relating to [vulnerable](#) members of the community (including hoarders), to support its response in the event of an incident.

However, the service uses a manual system to collect and update temporary risk information (such as information about sporting events or festivals, or oxygen storage). This system needs better control and scrutiny. We found that some risk information was missing, outdated or was very limited for fire crews who may have to respond to an incident at the location.

### **The service doesn't consistently use emerging information from operational activity to inform its understanding of risk**

We found limited evidence that the service learns from and acts on feedback from either local or national operational activity. We reviewed several significant incidents and identified that the service wasn't collecting or sharing debrief information throughout the organisation.

Likewise, we found limited evidence that this information was being used to regularly update risk assessments or inform the assumptions made in the CRMP. The service has station risk plans to support the CRMP, but staff aren't aware of the information contained within the station plans. Also, the plans aren't aligned to the latest CRMP.

As a result, the service is missing the opportunity to review risk assessments or inform the assumptions made in the CRMP.

## **The service has used learning from the Grenfell Tower inquiry to reduce risk**

During this round of inspection, we sampled how each fire and rescue service has responded to the recommendations and learning from phase one of the Grenfell Tower fire inquiry.

Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service has responded to learning from this tragedy. The service has:

- assessed the risk of each high-rise building in its service area;
- carried out fire safety audits; and
- collected and passed relevant risk information to its prevention, protection and response teams about buildings identified as high risk and all high-rise buildings using cladding that is similar to the cladding installed on Grenfell Tower.

The service has developed an action plan. This is derived from a gap analysis of the inquiry recommendations, to update emergency response plans and work more closely with building owners.

## **Preventing fires and other risks**



### **Requires improvement (2018: Requires improvement)**

Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement 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 sector, as well as with the police and ambulance services. They should provide intelligence and risk information with these other organisations when they identify vulnerability or exploitation.

### **Cause of concern**

Prevention activity is not a sufficiently high priority for the service and it is not adequately identifying those most at risk from fire.

### **Recommendations**

By 31 August 2021, the service 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. This is to make sure they are managed effectively and the backlog of [safe and well visits](#) is reduced and resourced in accordance with risk.

### **Area for improvement**

The service should evaluate its prevention work so that it understands what works.

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

### **The service has made no progress since our previous inspection in 2018 on how it targets its prevention activity**

Since we last inspected the service in 2018, it still doesn't have a clear, risk-based approach that enables it to direct prevention activity towards the people most at risk from fire and other emergencies.

The service isn't effectively using data sources and risk profiling to target its prevention activity. There is limited monitoring of risk or partnership working to make sure it is effectively identifying risk and driving activities. The prevention department is working in isolation, rather than with operational firefighters, and therefore has limited knowledge of fire station risk profiles or what activities firefighters are doing (or could do) to target risk.

### **The service doesn't have a prevention strategy that clearly links to the CRMP**

The service doesn't have a prevention strategy or departmental plan that sets out how it will target those most at risk from fire in its communities. Therefore, it isn't clear how prevention activity links to the risks and priorities in the community risk management plan (CRMP).

Prevention work generally happens in isolation, and we found little evidence of relevant information being shared between the service's prevention, protection and response functions. The service has a specialist prevention team, but this has

limited capacity. We found very little evidence that operational firefighters carry out prevention activity in a co-ordinated way. At the time of our inspection, operational crews had stopped doing [home fire safety checks \(HFSCs\)](#) (other than after a fire). This was due to the pandemic. The service doesn't sufficiently measure or evaluate prevention activity. Outputs for both HFSCs and safe and well visits are low compared to other similar fire and rescue services.

As a result, vulnerable people and others may not be getting the support they need.

### **The service has made limited progress since the COVID-19 inspection**

We considered how the service had adapted its prevention work during our COVID-19 specific inspection in October 2020. At that time, we found it had adapted its public prevention work appropriately. However, the service has made limited progress to reduce the 591 outstanding HFSCs it had at the time of the inspection (in May 2021).

The service has put some mitigation measures in place. These include temporarily employing extra people to reduce the backlog, and contacting those who are awaiting HFSCs to see if their circumstances had changed. However, it will take several months for the service to complete this outstanding work. Firefighters stopped doing HFSCs in February 2020. The service will need to reinstate the training that firefighters had completed in preparation for starting safe and well visits that year if they are to do this work.

### **Prevention staff are confident in carrying out safe and well visits and HFSCs, but firefighters don't currently do this work**

Prevention staff told us they have the right skills and confidence to undertake HFSCs and safe and well visits. These checks cover an appropriate range of hazards that can put vulnerable people at greater risk from fire and other emergencies.

### **The service has improved staff understanding of vulnerability**

Our 2018 inspection included an area for improvement for the service to ensure staff understand how to identify vulnerability and [safeguard](#) vulnerable people. Since that inspection, the service has made improvements in its safeguarding training and procedures. When we interviewed staff for this inspection, they told us that they feel confident and have been trained to act appropriately and promptly in response to safeguarding concerns. They knew how to identify safeguarding issues and were aware of the processes to follow.

### **The service works well with others to reduce the number of fires and other risks**

The service works with a wide range of other organisations including Baywater Healthcare, Wye Valley NHS Trust and Wychavon District Council to prevent fires and other emergencies. It routinely refers people at greatest risk to other organisations which may be better able to meet their needs. These organisations include domiciliary care services, social services, and occupational therapists.

Arrangements are in place to receive referrals from others such as telecare providers, housing services and carers associations. The service acts appropriately on the referrals it receives.

The West Mercia police and crime commissioner has commissioned the service to jointly deliver a road safety project with other organisations. The project is called #MORSE (Making Our Roads Safer for Everyone). Early evaluation of this scheme is showing positive results. We are keen to understand if this activity is successful in reducing the number of people who are killed or seriously injured on the roads in Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

### **The service is good at tackling fire-setting behaviour**

The service has a range of suitable and effective interventions to target and educate people of different ages who show signs of fire-setting behaviour. This includes the service's juvenile fire-setter programme. Last year the service received 30 referrals for this scheme. It did interventions online at schools and youth clubs, as it couldn't make home visits during the pandemic.

The prevention team has an arrangement in place for arson prevention. This includes identifying derelict properties and areas of fly tipping, and monitoring incidents to identify issues, trends and hot-spot areas.

### **The service doesn't routinely evaluate its prevention activity**

Since we last inspected the service in 2018, we are disappointed to find limited evidence that the service has improved how it evaluates the effectiveness of its activity. Similarly, there is limited evidence that the service makes sure its targeting of prevention activity meets the needs of its communities.

We did find that the service commissioned the University of Worcester to evaluate safe and well visits before the intended service-wide activity for crews. Despite limited responses from the public, some recommendations were made from the evaluation. However, the service has made few improvements in light of the recommendations.

The service doesn't have clear reporting on the performance and evaluation of prevention activity. And it should develop stronger links with the communications department to promote safety campaigns and evaluate their effectiveness. This means that the service doesn't know if the work it is doing is benefiting the public, and so it can't make continuous improvements.

## **Protecting the public through fire regulation**



### **Good (2018: Good)**

Hereford & 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.

### **Areas for improvement**

- The service should ensure that it has an effective quality assurance process in place, so that staff carry out audits to an appropriate standard.
- The service should assure itself that its use of enforcement powers prioritises the highest risks and includes proportionate activity to reduce the risk.
- The service should ensure it effectively addresses the burden of false alarms.

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

### **The service aligns protection activity to risk, but doesn't clearly link to the CRMP**

The service's risk-based inspection programme is focused on the service's highest-risk buildings. The audits we reviewed were completed in the timescales the service has set itself.

The amount of unsatisfactory fire safety audits completed by the service, which is higher than the England average, suggests that it is targeting effectively. Unsatisfactory audits are those requiring some form of intervention to improve fire safety compliance in premises. The completion of these audits and required remedial action should make buildings safer for the people who use them. However, the service doesn't have a protection plan that clearly sets out how it assesses risks, or how it targets its enforcement and inspection activity. The service has defined 'high risk', has set annual targets for audits, and is targeting premises through its risk-based inspection programme. But it doesn't have a protection plan clearly linked to the risks identified in its CRMP.

### **COVID-19 impact on protection**

We considered how the service had adapted its protection activity during our COVID-19 specific inspection in October 2020. At that time, we found it was slow to suitably adapt its protection work for the public. The service suspended its risk-based inspection programme, but didn't replace it with a suitable alternative risk-based approach (such as introducing desktop reviews).

During this inspection, we are encouraged to see that the service has developed a remote desktop audit process, based on national guidance. It has also completed the audits that were deferred during the pandemic. It completed them using desktop and face-to-face audits.

### **The service has increased its levels of protection resources**

Our 2018 inspection included an area for improvement for the service to ensure it allocates enough resources to a prioritised, risk-based inspection programme.

The service has made good progress with increased staff numbers and competency levels. Further improvements are underway: 32 [watch](#) commanders are studying for level 3 fire safety qualifications; and a further 11 members of staff are studying for a

[level 4 diploma](#). We will be interested to see how effectively the service uses this additional capacity in the future.

The service is meeting its annual revisit for the 340 premises in Herefordshire and Worcestershire that it has determined to be high risk. The service has set a target of 750 audits per year from 2020 onwards.

### **The service has taken appropriate action to inspect aluminium composite material (ACM) cladding and other high-rise buildings**

The service has carried out inspections at all ten high-rise buildings within its service area. It identified one building as having ACM cladding, similar to the cladding installed on Grenfell Tower. The service gathered information during these inspections, and has made the information available to response teams and control operators. This will enable them to respond more effectively in an emergency. The service has also developed a computer-based training simulation of the building with ACM cladding, so that incident commanders can carry out training.

### **The service works closely with other agencies to regulate fire safety**

The service works closely with other enforcement agencies to regulate fire safety and routinely exchanges risk information with them. For instance, the service:

- works as a main partner in the MATES (Multi-Agency Targeted Enforcement Scheme) partnership. This partnership aims to improve community safety and brings together a wide range of different enforcement agencies such as Herefordshire Council Trading Standards and the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority;
- carries out joint fire safety inspection and enforcement activity with local authority property enforcement officers; and
- is an active and valued member of the Herefordshire and Worcestershire safety advisory groups, working together to make sure members of the public are safe at sporting and community events.

### **The service's response to building consultations is timely and supports its statutory responsibility**

The service responds to almost all building consultations on time, so consistently meets its statutory responsibility to comment on fire safety arrangements at new and altered buildings. In 2019/20 the service responded to 99.3 percent of building consultations within the required timeframe, which is to be commended.

### **The service works with businesses to promote compliance with fire safety legislation**

The service proactively engages with local businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation. For example, it operates four [primary authority schemes](#) with businesses, to support them with their responsibilities in relation to fire safety. It also gives good advice and guidance to businesses on its website, including giving support during the pandemic.

## **Limited quality assurance takes place**

We reviewed a range of fire safety audits carried out at different premises across the service. This included audits as part of the service's risk-based inspection programme, after fires at premises where fire safety legislation applied, where enforcement action had been taken, and at high-rise, high-risk buildings. We found that the service could improve the consistency of the audits.

Only limited quality assurance of its protection activity takes place. Managers don't routinely quality assure audits, and may only review work when enforcement action is proposed. There is little quality assurance to ensure inspecting officers are carrying out consistent inspections. We also found inconsistencies in how the service rates similar high-rise premises in terms of risk.

The service doesn't have good evaluation tools in place to measure its effectiveness or to make sure all sections of its communities get equal access to protection services that meet their needs.

## **The service isn't using the full range of its enforcement powers**

As identified as an area for improvement in the 2018 Round 1 inspection, the service doesn't consistently use its full range of enforcement powers. We found it has a limited appetite to prosecute those who fail to comply with fire safety regulations. Since 2016/17, the service has carried out a significant amount of enforcement activity compared to other fire and rescue services. This has taken the form of alterations notices, enforcement notices and prohibition notices. However, it is noticeable that despite the significant amount of enforcement activity, the service hasn't carried out any prosecutions during this time.

In the year to 31 March 2020, the service issued 43 alteration notices, 69 enforcement notices, 75 prohibition notices and undertook no prosecutions. It has completed no prosecutions since 2013.

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

Only limited action is being taken to reduce the number of unwanted fire signals (false alarms due to fire alarm systems) that are received. The number of calls to the service that are unwanted fire signals has remained consistently high for more than five years. In 2019/20, there were 2,462 such calls. This is 31 percent of all calls that the service received. (All false alarms equated to 42 percent of all calls). This means that fire engines may be attending false alarms when a genuine call is received, as well as creating a risk to the public with more fire engines travelling on roads responding to these incidents.

## Responding to fires and other emergencies



### Requires improvement (2018: Good)

Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement 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 within their areas.

#### Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure its response strategy provides the most appropriate response for the public in line with its CRMP.
- The service should ensure it has an effective system for staff to use learning and debriefs to improve operational response and incident command.
- The service should ensure 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 set out our detailed findings below. These are the basis for our judgment of the service's performance in this area.

#### The service's response strategy isn't clear

The service hasn't yet published a response strategy that is clearly linked to the risks identified in its CRMP. The CRMP makes a commitment to continuously review fire and emergency cover to make sure there is appropriate provision of resources (such as fire engines and equipment) and crewing arrangements. However, there was no information available to explain the rationale for the location of all its fire engines, response staff and working patterns.

#### The service isn't meeting its response standards

There are no national response standards against which the service can [benchmark](#) its performance for the public. But the service has set out its own response standards in its CRMP.

The service standard for building fires is for the first fire engine to be in attendance within ten minutes of receiving the call on 75 percent of occasions. The service doesn't always achieve these standards and in 2019/20 only met this on 52 percent of occasions. In the year to 31 March 2020, the service's average response time to [primary fires](#) was 11 minutes and 5 seconds. This is the slowest time compared to other fire and rescue services in the significantly rural group.

However, we were encouraged to see that the availability of fire engines increased by 7 percent between 2019/20 and 2020/21. If the service sustains this improvement, it could meet its response standards to fires and other incidents.

### **Staff have a good understanding of how to command incidents safely**

The service has trained incident commanders who are assessed regularly and properly. This includes an assessment every two years; an annual health check; and active incident monitoring at least once a year, where the service reviews a person's command competence at an operational incident. This enables the service to safely, assertively, and effectively manage the whole range of incidents that 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. The incident commanders we interviewed are familiar with risk assessing, decision making and recording information at incidents in line with national best practice, as well as [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles \(JESIP\)](#).

However, we did find that [operational discretion](#) (this allows them to use their professional judgment to make decisions in an unforeseen situation at an incident) wasn't clearly understood within the service.

### **Control staff regularly get involved in operational learning and debriefing**

We are pleased to see the service's control staff integrated into some of the service's command, training, exercise and debrief activity. Control staff have participated in several multi-agency exercises. They can contribute fully in debriefs. And they take part in command training (such as the high-rise exercises in the West Midlands).

### **The service can give fire survival guidance to multiple callers**

The control room staff we interviewed are confident they could provide fire survival guidance to many callers simultaneously. This was identified as learning for fire services after the Grenfell Tower fire. We also learnt that [fire control](#) has arrangements in place both to communicate with other control rooms and for calls to be diverted if the need arises.

Fire control has good systems in place to exchange real-time risk information with incident commanders, other responding partners, and other supporting fire and rescue services. This includes communicating in a timely way with crews and making sure all staff in the control room are kept up to date with the latest information. Maintaining good situational awareness enables the service to communicate effectively with the public, providing them with accurate and tailored advice.

### **Staff have good access to risk information within the service**

We sampled a range of risk information. This included what information is in place for firefighters responding to incidents at high-risk, high-rise buildings, and what information is held by fire control.

We found that the service sends regular bulletins to give updates on risk information. The service also updates the mobile data terminals on fire engines promptly, which

wasn't the case when we inspected the service in 2018. The information we reviewed was up to date and detailed. Staff could access it easily and understand it.

### **The service should improve the way it evaluates operational performance and national operational guidance**

As part of our inspection, we reviewed a range of emergency incidents and training events.

We are disappointed to find that the service doesn't consistently follow its policies to assure itself that staff command incidents in line with operational guidance. As a result, the service doesn't always update internal risk information after an incident.

The service doesn'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. We found that the service's debrief process was ineffective and hadn't been improved following our inspection in 2018. We reviewed several significant incidents and found that the service hadn't identified learning and hadn't debriefed the incidents in line with its policy. Moreover, the service isn't following its policy in using structured debriefs for larger incidents or exercises.

The service is carrying out cross-border exercises with some neighbouring fire and rescue services. However, the quality of the exercises varies. It would be advantageous for the service to carry out a review to improve effectiveness.

The service has adopted some [National Operational Guidance](#) products. But it has carried out limited and insufficient training for staff on these new procedures. The service will implement further National Operational Guidance in the future and should improve its information, instruction and training for staff.

### **The service has good measures to keep the public informed during incidents**

The service has good systems in place to inform the public about ongoing incidents and help keep them safe during and after incidents. This includes social and local media; the service's website; and effective measures for joint communication with other organisations, including the [local resilience forum \(LRF\)](#). The service continues to chair the fortnightly LRF COVID-19 Communications Cell. And it takes part in regular exercises as part of the LRF Warn and Inform Group.

## **Responding to major and multi-agency incidents**



### **Good (2018: Good)**

Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is good 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).

### **Area for improvement**

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

### **The service is well-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. Examples include flooding, flu pandemics and fires at large industrial premises.

It is also familiar with the significant risks that could be faced by neighbouring fire and rescue services that it might reasonably be asked to respond to in an emergency. These include the canal tunnel at Wast Hills, a water bottling plant in Mid and West Wales, and a historic boarding school in Shropshire. However, firefighters don't always have access to risk information from neighbouring services. The service shares its risk information on a secure national website called [Resilience Direct](#), but neighbouring services don't always reciprocate. The service should consider how it can review the information it exchanges with neighbouring services more frequently.

### **The service has the ability to respond to major and multi-agency incidents, but needs to improve understanding on (MTAs)**

We reviewed the arrangements the service has in place to respond to different major incidents, such as high-risk building fires, wide-area flooding and a marauding terrorist attack (MTA).

The service has good arrangements in place, which are well understood by staff, for high-rise building fires and flooding. The service has trained staff at a specialised high-rise training facility in the West Midlands, and it dealt well with a major incident in February 2020 involving significant floods. The service has resources that it can offer to support a major incident; these include an [urban search and rescue](#) team, an environmental protection unit and a high-volume pump. Staff are clear on when and how to deploy these resources. However, we found that many firefighters and incident commanders had limited knowledge or training in relation to MTA procedures.

### **The service works effectively with other fire services**

The service supports other fire and rescue services responding to emergency incidents. It carries out training with neighbouring services to share learning. Local teams train on specific risks with other organisations. Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service has also supported other services to respond to emergency incidents (for example, to help prevent a dam collapse in Derbyshire). It is interoperable with these services and can form part of a multi-agency response. It has

successfully deployed to other services and has used national assets (such as a high-volume pump).

### **Incident commanders understand JESIP**

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

The service gave us strong evidence that it consistently follows these principles. Staff showed a good understanding of them. Incident commanders we spoke to could effectively describe the joint decision-making principles. They could also describe the procedures for reporting information on major incidents to relevant government departments.

### **The service is proactively working with other partners and is an active member of the West Mercia LRF**

The service has good arrangements in place to respond to emergencies with other partners that make up the West Mercia LRF. These arrangements include comprehensive plans for [control of major accident hazards \(COMAH\) sites](#). It also has a generic major incident plan, as well as site-specific risk information for sites that pose additional risks.

The service is an active member of the LRF. It vice-chairs for the business management group. And it gives representation at the forum's management board, strategic and tactical co-ordinating groups, and subgroups. It also takes part in regular training events and uses the learning to develop planning assumptions about responding to major and multi-agency incidents.

Recently, the service has started activity with West Mercia Police related to the use of drones and missing persons, and with West Midlands Ambulance Service about gaining entry to premises where medical assistance may be needed.

### **The service uses national learning to inform planning**

The service keeps itself up to date with joint operational learning updates from other fire services and national operational learning from other blue light partners, such as the police and ambulance trusts. This learning is used to inform planning assumptions that have been made with other partners.

We are encouraged to see the service is contributing towards, and acting on, learning from other fire and rescue services or operational learning obtained from other emergency service partners. This includes the Manchester Arena attack (the [Kerslake Arena Review](#)) and five incidents (as of June 2021) that the service has submitted for national learning, such as hazards found in scrap cars.

# Efficiency



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



## Requires improvement

### Summary

---

An efficient fire and rescue service will manage its budget and use its resources properly and appropriately. It will align its resources to the risks and priorities identified in its [integrated risk management plan](#). It should try to achieve value for money and keep costs down without compromising public safety. It should make the best possible use of its resources to achieve better outcomes for the public. Plans should be based on robust and realistic assumptions about income and costs. Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service's overall efficiency requires improvement.

---

The service displays some sound financial management. But it requires improvement at making best use of resources. It needs to show a clear rationale for allocating resources between its activities, and this should be in line with the risk and priorities as described in the CRMP. The service needs a testing programme for its business continuity plans. And it needs to better monitor, review and evaluate the benefits and outcomes of future collaborations.

The service requires improvement in making itself affordable now and in the future. It is financially secure but could do more to plan for future financial challenges. The service is developing a plan for the use of its [reserves](#). It should regularly review its fleet and estate strategies.

We are encouraged to see the improvements the service has made since our last inspection. For instance, the service now actively considers the relationship between technology, future innovation and risk. We note that it has moved its [fire control](#) mobilising system to West Mercia Police headquarters, and is seeking to use changes in technology to improve efficiency and effectiveness. But at the time of writing, the service has limited capacity and capability to bring about sustainable future change.

## Making best use of resources



### **Requires improvement (2018: Requires improvement)**

Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at making best use of its resources.

Fire and rescue services should manage their resources properly and appropriately, aligning those resources to meet the services' risks and statutory responsibilities. They should make best possible use of their resources to achieve better outcomes for the public.

The service's budget for 2021/22 is just under £32.4m. This is around a 3.2 percent increase change (£31.4m in 2019/20) from the previous financial year.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- The service needs to show a clear rationale for the resources allocated between prevention, protection, and response activities. This should reflect, and be consistent with, the risk and priorities set out in its CRMP.
- The service should ensure there is a testing programme for its business continuity plans, particularly in high-risk areas of service.
- The service should ensure it effectively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and outcomes of any future collaboration.

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

### **The service's plans don't effectively support its objectives**

The service sometimes uses its resources well to manage risk, but there remain weaknesses that need addressing. Since our last inspection in 2018, the service has put additional staff into fire control. And it is using additional government funding to improve capacity and capability in protection. However, the service has only recently applied these investments and it is too early to identify the results.

The service doesn't have a workforce plan that is designed to make sure it has the staff to meet the risks identified in the CRMP. Also, there is no linkage between the budget and medium-term financial plan (MTFP) to provide the CRMP.

The way the service allocates resources to prevention, protection and response functions is mainly based on previous funding allocations. This is affecting the service's ability to deliver its responsibilities in these areas, as reflected in the section on effectiveness (page 7) in this report.

There is limited performance management oversight of important functions. So the service isn't evaluating activity to make sure it is sufficiently staffed to deal with the priorities in the CRMP.

The service has a suitable financial position and has made reasonable and potentially prudent assumptions in its financial planning. We found some limited financial controls in place through the monitoring and scrutiny arrangements. This reduces the risk of misusing public money.

### **The service isn't using its workforce in the most productive way**

We are encouraged to see the improvements the service has made since our last inspection. The service has addressed areas identified for improvement in terms of clarifying the role of watch managers and managing the replacement of faulty smoke alarms. Watch managers now have clear roles on fire stations and in departments. And a new supplier has remedied the defective alarms.

The pandemic necessitated changes to working practices which are being implemented as business as usual. These include protection staff carrying out remote fire safety audits for businesses using desktop audits.

However, the service should do more to make sure its workforce is as productive as possible. For example, we found that staff on some stations were on differing contracts and shift patterns. This was affecting productivity, and there were instances of fire engines becoming unavailable due to insufficient staffing.

It was also unclear how the service measures the productivity of firefighters in terms of home safety and business safety activity. It is understandable that the pandemic has significantly affected these areas. But we don't know how the service intends to best use the capacity of operational firefighters due to the absence of strategies.

### **The service is collaborating with a range of partners, but isn't effectively monitoring and evaluating the benefits**

We are pleased to see the service meets its statutory duty to collaborate, and routinely considers opportunities to collaborate with other emergency responders. The service now shares a headquarters with West Mercia Police, and a joint police and fire station at the Wyre Forest Hub. However, the service couldn't fully quantify the financial benefits of this collaboration work.

The service is exploring the potential for a joint-training facility with the police in North Herefordshire. It is actively working with other emergency services on operational activity, and is considering further opportunities to improve working together. And the service is working collaboratively on:

- supporting the police in the search for missing persons;
- MATES inspections with a wide range of organisations to improve community safety;
- the joint use of aerial drones with the police (Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service has bought the drones and trained staff); and
- gaining entry to premises. This is to help the ambulance service to quickly access people who may need medical assistance.

The service has also committed to a strategic alliance with Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service. They are working together on the four main aims: procurement, fire control, information and communications technology (ICT) and joint development of the services' separate CRMPs.

The alliance has made some progress in the joint procurement of vehicles and equipment. But, again, there has been limited evaluation of the financial benefits of this collaboration. Both services worked closely together in the formulation of their new CRMPs, which were published on 1 April 2021. There has been limited improvement regarding ICT and fire control.

During our 2018 inspection, we found that the service didn't comprehensively monitor, review and evaluate the benefits and outcomes of its collaborations. Disappointingly, this is still the case.

It was also evident that although the service has done continuing work with West Mercia Police on the joint use of drones, the agreement for this work (including the terms for cost recovery of expenditure) is still awaiting formal sign off.

### **The service hasn't fully tested its continuity arrangements**

The service has business continuity plans in place for industrial action and fire control. However, there was an absence of testing to make sure that the plans are effective. The service hasn't fully reviewed and tested the business continuity plans for fire control, with an evacuation to the secondary control in Droitwich, since autumn 2018. This means that the service isn't appropriately testing back-up arrangements in the event of a significant failure. Also, staff aren't fully aware of the arrangements and their associated responsibilities.

### **The service displays some 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, the service reports finance and performance through processes that an independent external audit has reviewed. The audit found the service's finance and performance arrangements to be satisfactory. Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority also provides review and scrutiny on a quarterly basis.

The service has made savings and efficiencies, which haven't affected its operational performance and the service it provides to the public. The service is taking steps to make sure that important areas, including estates and procurement, are well placed to achieve efficiency gains through sound financial management and best working practices. For fleet procurement, the preferred method is using frameworks to make sure that the service gets best value for money. It is investing in future innovation in the form of smaller fire engines to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

The service's MTFP takes a prudent approach to government funding, as the full impact of the pandemic isn't yet known.

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



### **Requires improvement (2018: Good)**

Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at making itself 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 should invest in better services for the public.

#### **Area for improvement**

The service should ensure that its fleet and estate strategies are regularly reviewed and evaluated to maximise potential efficiencies.

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

### **The service understands the future financial challenges but could do more planning to address this risk**

The service has a secure financial position and has developed an understanding of future financial challenges. The underpinning assumptions are relatively robust, realistic and prudent, and take account of the wider external environment.

It has some plans to mitigate its main or significant financial risks. For example, the service has acted on the pension court ruling for the [Firefighters' Pension Scheme](#), and made provision for increased employer contributions. It is also actively monitoring the implications for future judgments.

However, the service could take more action to develop and consult on the range of potential savings and investment opportunities to deal with financial uncertainties. The service makes limited use of scenario planning for future spending reductions.

### **The service is developing a plan for the use of its reserves**

The service has maintained a robust level of reserves. It is now planning to make considerable investments in frontline services while keeping the general reserve at approximately 4 percent of its budget.

At the time of the inspection (May 2021), the service was considering bid proposals for funding allocation from the reserves. It was not clear if the proposals to utilise the reserves have been carefully considered as part of a co-ordinated investment programme linked to the CRMP or the MTFP. We look forward to seeing how the future investment has improved the service's effectiveness and efficiency.

### **The service isn't maximising efficiency through its fleet and estates**

The service doesn't fully exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness presented by changes in fleet and estate provision. The service's investment in estates, fleet and equipment doesn't clearly align with the requirements of its latest CRMP.

The service doesn't properly assess the effect any changes in estate and fleet provision, or future innovation may have on risk. For example, since our last inspection the service has bought new smaller compact fire engines. It did this to explore any potential long-term savings (capital and revenue), but primarily to improve operational response in remote rural areas, and in narrow and congested roads. During our inspection, staff gave a variety of views about the effectiveness of these new fire engines. The service should evaluate the overall impact of these changes.

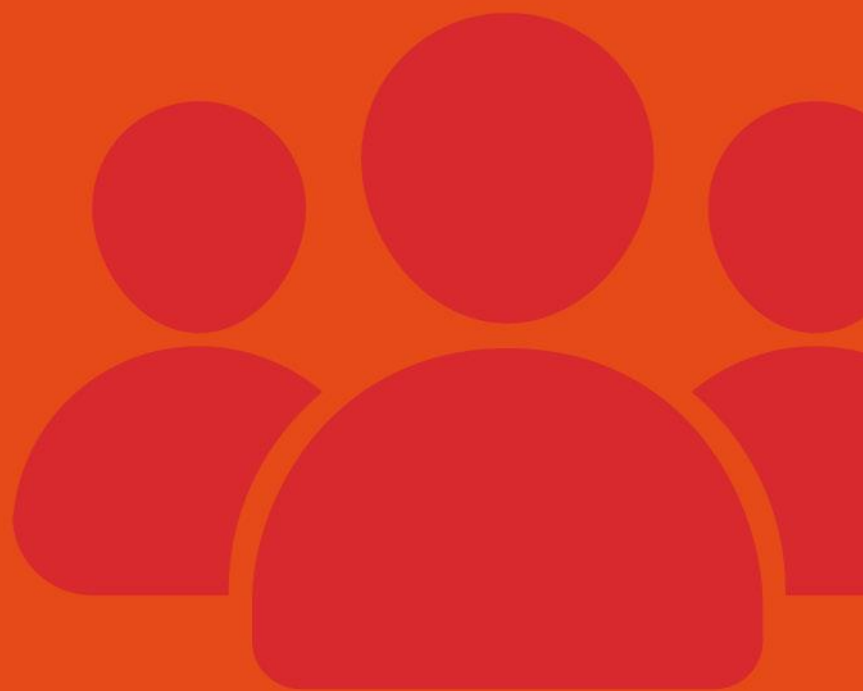
Following the end of the service's participation in the Place Partnership Project, it is to procure the services of the West Mercia police and crime commissioner for the provision of property management. The agreement was due to start on 1 April 2021. However, when we reviewed the agreement, it didn't contain key performance indicators or standards of service. The service should assure itself that it is getting best value for money and service levels from this service agreement.

### **The service has invested in some technologies, but needs to improve its capacity and capability**

We are encouraged to see the improvements the service has made since the last inspection. The service actively considers how changes in technology and future innovation may affect risk. The service has moved its fire control mobilising system to West Mercia Police headquarters. It also seeks to exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness presented by changes in technology. Since the pandemic, the service has accelerated its use of virtual technology to communicate effectively with staff. The service has installed large screens in stations so that whole teams can participate in calls or training sessions.

However, the service has limited capacity and capability to bring about lasting future change. The service has developed some in-house IT solutions (such as the debrief system). However, it doesn't have capacity to maintain and improve these systems and has procured external IT consultants to provide support. The service also wants to improve environmentally and has written a specification for electric vehicles. But it isn't yet in a position for procurement, until a charging infrastructure has been put in place in the service.

# People



# How well does the service look after its people?



## Requires improvement

### Summary

---

A well-led fire and rescue service develops and maintains a workforce that is supported, professional, resilient, skilled, flexible and diverse. The service's leaders should be positive role models, and this should be reflected in the behaviour of staff at all levels. All staff should feel supported and be given opportunities to develop. Equality, diversity and inclusion is embedded in everything the service does and its staff understand their role in promoting it. Overall, Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at looking after its people.

---

Staff have a good understanding of the service's values, which are well defined. The service should make sure that senior managers are visible and model service values.

The service has a good workforce-wellbeing provision. Staff were especially positive about the support they receive from the [critical incident](#) support team following traumatic incidents. However, the service needs to talk to staff to better understand their individual needs.

The service has clear processes in place for managing staff absences. However, there has been a significant increase in long-term absence in the year to 31 March 2020 for non-operational staff.

The service does some workforce planning. But it needs a workforce plan that takes full account of the skills and capabilities it needs to effectively meet the needs of its community risk management plan (CRMP).

Some of the service's records could be more accurate and up to date. We are concerned at a lack of effective arrangements for the monitoring and recording of training completed by staff.

In terms of ensuring fairness and promoting diversity, the service should make sure that it has appropriate ways of gathering feedback from all staff. We note that the service has increased the overall percentage of [wholetime](#) female firefighters to well

above the England average. It could make more progress to improve black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) diversity throughout the organisation to make it more representative of its local community.

The service needs to have a consistent process in place for performance and development. Currently, it lacks a process for talent management and development.

## Promoting the right values and culture



### Requires improvement (2018: Requires improvement)

Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement 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. Health and safety should be effectively promoted, and staff should have access to a range of wellbeing support that can be tailored to their individual needs.

#### Areas for improvement

- The service should assure itself that senior managers are visible and demonstrate service values through their behaviours.
- The service should monitor secondary contracts to make sure working hours are not exceeded.
- The service should make sure it has a robust system in place to update and review its operational incident (analytical) risk assessments.

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

### Staff understand the service's values, but senior leaders need to improve visibility and communication

The service has well-defined values that it updated in consultation with staff in autumn 2019. The results of our staff survey indicate that the values are well understood and accepted throughout the organisation, with 97 percent of respondents stating that they are aware of the service's statement of values. Those we spoke to understand the service's values and generally felt that behaviours reflective of the service's values are shown at all levels of the service.

However, during our inspection many members of staff told us of a continued lack of visibility of senior managers. This was particularly evident during the service's management of change processes. We found that there had been limited progress on the area for improvement from our last inspection in 2018, in relation to effective two-way communication between senior leaders and staff.

Senior managers in the service recognise that there is a lot more to do in terms of improving organisational culture. However, we did find staff were optimistic that the newly appointed chief fire officer (in post from 1 April 2021) will improve the culture of the service.

### **Workforce-wellbeing provision is good, but the service needs to engage more with its staff to understand their individual needs**

The service has some wellbeing provisions to support the mental and physical health of staff. This includes occupational health, the service chaplain, and the wellbeing team who can support staff to access the help available (such as counselling or physiotherapy). Staff were really positive about the support that the critical incident support team gives following traumatic incidents.

However, staff told us that some of the mental health projects that the service has recently introduced have had limited impact to date. These include having staff wellbeing champions and signing the Time to Change Employer Pledge, a project supported by [Mind](#), the mental health charity. The service is aiming to offer mental health first aid training to some staff in the future. The service could do more to engage with its workforce and understand what else they need to support their individual needs. In our staff survey, 61 of the 225 respondents (27 percent) said they were not having wellbeing conversations with their manager at least once a year.

The service has produced its People Strategy 2020-22, which commits to “maximising the health, wellbeing and fitness of staff”. There is also a draft Wellbeing Plan 2021-23 with associated Plan Delivery Framework Year 1 2020-21.

The plans outline what the aims and objectives are, and how success will be measured in the future. However, the actions to achieve the wellbeing plan are currently at the planning and scoping stage. Also, some of these plans are behind the schedule that the service has put in place. We look forward to reviewing the progress the service has made on workforce wellbeing in the future.

### **Staff have confidence in health and safety policies, but some aspects of health and safety aren’t being monitored effectively by the service**

The service has some effective and well-understood health and safety policies and procedures in place. These include the health and safety management policy, and accident reporting procedures.

The survey completed by staff in the service showed that 210 of 225 respondents (93 percent) feel their personal safety and welfare is treated seriously at work. Additionally, most representative bodies agree that the service manages the health and safety of its staff well. Both staff and representative bodies have confidence in the service’s approach to health and safety.

However, we found that the service doesn’t monitor staff who have secondary employment to make sure they are complying with the secondary employment policy and not working excessive hours. The service puts the onus on staff to manage their working time. And there is no oversight to check whether staff with secondary employment are fit for duty.

We also found ineffective 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.) We reviewed several analytical risk assessments that were inadequately completed. It was evident that there was no quality assurance during the incident, or later when debriefing or reviewing the incident.

### **The service has clear absence management processes that staff understand**

As part of our inspection, we reviewed some case files to consider how the service manages and supports staff through absence including sickness, parental and special leave.

We found there are clear processes in place to manage absences for all staff. There are toolkits and guidance for managers, who are confident in the process. Absences are managed well and in accordance with policy. There was evidence of managers making regular contact with staff who weren't at work due to sickness. We viewed some staff referrals by managers to occupational health, who could then support the individual staff member through actions such as counselling.

However, we found that the absence management process doesn't sufficiently monitor trends. Also, the service isn't effectively reviewing and learning from long-term sickness absence cases to see how successfully they have been managed. Overall, the service has seen a decrease in long-term staff absences for wholetime firefighters (9 percent reduction) and control staff (73 percent reduction) over the 12 months between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020. But for non-operational staff there was a 40 percent increase in long-term absence in the same period.

### **Getting the right people with the right skills**



#### **Requires improvement (2018: Good)**

Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at getting the right people with the right skills.

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

#### **Areas for improvement**

- The service should ensure itself that records for risk critical competencies, such as breathing apparatus, driving fire engines and incident command are accurate and up to date.
- The service should ensure its workforce plan takes full account of the necessary skills and capabilities to carry out the CRMP.

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

### **The service needs to improve its workforce planning so it can fully understand the skills and capabilities of its workforce**

The service does some workforce planning, but it doesn't take full account of the skills and capabilities it needs to be able to effectively meet the needs of its CRMP. We found limited evidence that the service's planning allows it to fully consider workforce skills and overcome any gaps in capability. The service has a quarterly workforce planning group meeting. However, this group has predominantly focused on retirements and wholetime-firefighter recruitment. Recently, the terms of reference for the group have been expanded to analyse wider workforce planning matters. These include trends, recruitment of [on-call](#) and support staff, and senior-officer-cover arrangements.

More is needed by the service to improve how it considers future needs and undertakes succession planning. During our inspection, we found that there were many newly-promoted officers within the service, particularly at watch commander level. This places a demand on the service in terms of developing many staff who are new in their role. The service needs to assure itself that the support for those new managers is in place.

We are concerned to find that the service doesn't have effective arrangements for the monitoring and recording of training completed by staff. The service uses an electronic computerised training recording system. Many records we reviewed for control staff weren't completed. We also found that some risk-critical training assessments for firefighters were overdue. The service didn't have suitable monitoring by managers or reporting processes in place to identify staff training requirements. A small number of firefighters were still responding to operational incidents when they were out of date for some competencies.

### **The service offers a range of learning and development resources**

A culture of continuous improvement is promoted across the service and staff are encouraged to learn and develop. For example, the service offers a range of training and health and safety qualifications for staff throughout the organisation. These include the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health qualification for level 1 incident commanders and the National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health General Certificate for level 2 and 3 commanders.

During the pandemic, the service has adapted how it offers learning and development opportunities. It now includes the use of virtual platforms. However, some staff felt that the level of learning and development available to them decreased during this time. They also felt that development opportunities aren't consistent across all staff groups.

We are pleased to see that the service has a range of resources in place. These include support to achieve academic qualifications, and a fire engineering degree sponsorship programme. The service also has mandatory e-learning in place for all staff. Overall, 165 of 225 respondents to our staff survey (73 percent) said that they could access a range of learning and development resources. This allows them

to carry out their role effectively. The survey also showed that 79 percent of respondents found that learning and development conversations with their managers were useful.

## Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity



### Requires improvement (2018: Requires improvement)

Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at ensuring fairness and promoting diversity.

Creating a more representative workforce will provide huge benefits for fire and rescue services. This includes greater access to talent and different ways of thinking, and improved understanding of and engagement with their local communities. Each service should make sure that equality, diversity and inclusion are firmly embedded and understood across the organisation. This includes successfully taking steps to remove inequality and making progress to improve fairness, diversity and inclusion at all levels within the service. It should proactively seek and respond to feedback from staff and make sure any action taken is meaningful.

#### Area for improvement

The service should make sure it has appropriate ways to engage with and seek feedback from all staff, including those from under-represented groups.

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

### The service needs to improve the ways it seeks and acts on staff feedback and challenge

In our previous inspection, we identified that the service should assure itself that staff are confident using its feedback systems. The service now operates an organisational development and challenge group to work with staff and gather their feedback. The group helped to develop the service values and contributed to the approvals process in autumn 2019. But staff told us that its overall effectiveness has been limited to date, and many staff didn't know about the group's purpose. At the time of the inspection, the service was in the process of refreshing the group's terms of reference.

The service doesn't carry out an overarching staff survey. This limits its ability to identify staff concerns. It also limits the opportunity for people throughout the service to share their views confidentially about what the service is doing well and what it could improve.

Although the service does have some means of gathering staff feedback, these are inconsistent and not wide ranging. During our inspection, we found that the service had carried out some stand-alone surveys on individual topics such as [safeguarding](#), staff retention and counselling options. These surveys may well help the service with

short-term planning. But if the service were to repeat comprehensive staff surveys at regular intervals, these could help it to chart improvements.

Staff have limited confidence in the service's feedback mechanisms and don't think they are effective. As part of the inspection process, we saw surveys that representative bodies had done. The surveys supported these views. Also, some representative bodies and staff associations reported that they would like to see improved engagement from the service. The service has a Joint Consultative Committee to discuss matters and has appointed a new engagement and wellbeing officer to improve communication with staff.

### **EDI needs to be understood by everyone within the organisation**

The service has introduced a range of new measures to improve its approach to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). These include:

- a new EDI Plan 2020-25;
- a new EDI policy;
- a new positive action plan;
- recruitment of an EDI officer; and
- the introduction of Fire Authority member champions and a buddy scheme for new female recruits.

However, staff we spoke to throughout the service told us that plans for EDI improvement were new and that change wasn't yet accepted and understood throughout the organisation. We were told that "many staff don't yet understand the importance of EDI". The service has appointed EDI allies, but it has given them limited training to date and their roles were unclear.

The service doesn't yet have robust processes in place for equality impact assessments of its policies and procedures. These are needed to make sure that the service doesn't discriminate or disadvantage people. At the time of our inspection, the service was developing its arrangements for quality assurance, monitoring of actions and reporting using the [National Fire Chiefs Council's](#) (NFCC) Equality Impact Assessment Toolkit.

The service has talked to and worked with staff to improve their understanding of positive action. Encouragingly, the service has been increasing the overall percentage of female staff in the service from 15 percent in 2017/18 to 16 percent in 2019 /20. Since 2017/18 there has been a 3.3 percent increase in the female wholetime firefighter workforce. This has increased the overall percentage of wholetime staff female firefighters to 10 percent. This is well above the England average of 7 percent.

However, the service has made limited progress to improve BAME and gender diversity across all staff in the service. Since 2017/18, the percentage of staff who have self-declared as being from a BAME group has reduced from 2.8 percent to 2.3 percent. Five percent of the workforce don't declare their ethnicity.

## **The service has made some improvements in showing fairness in recruitment, promotion and progression processes, but needs to do more**

There is an open, fair and honest recruitment process for staff or those wishing to work for the fire and rescue service. The service's recruitment policy gives some guidance to hiring managers about how to recruit to posts and consider the equality duty at each stage of the process. The policy includes guidance on:

- how to recruit to new or vacant roles;
- employment legislation; and
- giving feedback to unsuccessful candidates.

For the most recent whole-time-firefighter recruitment in 2020, the service carried out a wide-ranging positive action campaign to encourage women to apply. However, there was limited focus in the arrangements for BAME candidates and limited evaluation of the campaign's success.

The service has developed a new promotion policy to make sure that progression processes are fair and that staff understand them. The policy is linked to the NFCC leadership framework. It covers acting up, and temporary and permanent operational staff vacancies, but doesn't include non-operational roles. To ensure consistency and transparency of promotions, the policy contains provision for an independent scrutiny panel to oversee all stages of the procedures. The panel is made up of a cross-section of people from the workforce, to check and challenge the process.

However, we did find that the service doesn't always use the scrutiny panel effectively. We also found that some staff still don't feel confident that the procedures are fair, or that the procedures are promoting the right leaders or people with appropriate experience.

Nearly 40 percent of those who responded to our staff survey said that they didn't think the promotion process was fair. One third said that they weren't given the same opportunities to develop as other staff.

## **Most staff are confident in the service's approach to tackling bullying, harassment and discrimination**

Staff have a good understanding of what bullying, harassment and discrimination are, and the negative effect they have on both colleagues and the organisation.

Our staff survey revealed that, over the last 12 months:

- 9 percent of respondents had been subject to bullying and harassment (20 from 225); and
- 15 percent had been subject to discrimination (34 from 225).

Of the 20 people who reported that they had been subject to bullying and harassment, 10 didn't report it. The reasons cited for this were mainly a belief that nothing would be done if the matters were reported, or fear of being labelled a troublemaker.

However, during our inspection many staff told us that they are confident in the service's approach to tackling bullying, harassment, discrimination, grievances and disciplinary matters. Staff we spoke to had received training on these matters and understood their importance. They also knew how to report concerns and felt comfortable to challenge inappropriate behaviour. Most felt confident that their line manager would deal appropriately with any concerns that they raised.

Our surveys showed that most representative bodies feel that the service has put appropriate processes in place, and that it takes appropriate action to eliminate bullying, harassment and discrimination.

The service had nine grievance cases in 2019/20. Managers are encouraged to resolve grievances informally, but we did see that the service doesn't record informal outcomes of grievances. The service may be limited in identifying and responding to any potential trends.

## Managing performance and developing leaders



### **Requires improvement (2018: Requires improvement)**

Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement 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 high-potential staff and improving diversity in leadership roles.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- The service should improve all staff understanding and application of the appraisal review process.
- 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.

### **The service is inconsistent at managing individuals' performance**

The service has an individual appraisal process. But we heard that its effectiveness depended on the skills of the line managers who do the reviews. We also heard that the process is more effective for those staff who are in development or seeking promotion.

It is evident that many members of staff haven't had an annual performance review. The service supplied data for 2019/20 which showed it had carried out the following percentages of appraisals:

- 58 percent of wholetime firefighters;
- 37 percent of on-call firefighters;
- 35 percent of support staff; and
- 0 percent of [fire control](#) staff.

Therefore, a large number of the workforce aren't receiving an annual review of their performance. This means that staff are missing out on a performance conversation with their manager, as well as potential opportunities to further their development and improve individual performance. This could be detrimental to the service more broadly, as it isn't supporting staff development or improving organisational effectiveness.

### **The service isn't effective at developing leadership and high-potential staff at all levels**

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

In our previous inspection in 2018, we identified that the service should improve its talent process, and put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders. We found that the service had updated its promotions process. But it still didn't have a talent management scheme to develop leaders and high-potential staff.

The service should consider putting in place more formal arrangements to identify and support members of staff to become senior leaders. There is a significant gap in its succession planning at present. The service hasn't set out how it will identify and develop high-performing staff. Currently, the promotion process is its only process.

The service's new promotions policy doesn't apply to all staff. And non-operational staff told us that they have limited or no promotion opportunities. The service's promotion policy focuses on operational staff. This has resulted in inconsistency and it undermines staff perception of fairness. It has also contributed to some non-operational staff feeling less valued than their operational colleagues.

The policy covers acting up, and temporary and permanent operational staff vacancies. However, we found that temporary promotions aren't well managed, and we found evidence of them being in place for longer than appropriate when compared to other fire and rescue services. According to data that the service submitted, the average length of temporary promotions as of 31 March 2020 was 483 days. The longest was 1,551 days. The service uses temporary promotions to fill gaps created by such matters as long-term sickness, secondments and temporary deployments into other areas. The service also needs them for succession planning, development of staff and in between promotion board processes.

