



# Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service

## HMICFRS Improvement Plan 2018/19



In March 2018, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service (HMICFRS) announced their intention to inspect all 45 fire and rescue services in England over the next 18 months. The Service was selected as one of the first 14 services to be inspected.

Over summer 2018, inspectors from HMICFRS carried out their in-depth review of our Service, focusing on how effective and efficient we are and how well we look after our people. Their report was published in December 2018, and this is a [the link to the report](#).

### Report findings

The inspection considered three main questions:

- How **effective** is the fire and rescue service at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?
- How **efficient** is the fire and rescue service at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?
- How well does the fire and rescue service look after its **people**?

The Service was found to be 'good' within the effectiveness area but 'requiring improvement' when considering efficiency and people.

The inspection report highlighted a number of areas for improvement and recommended that action be taken to address them. Therefore, the Service has prepared an Improvement Plan which not only focuses on the areas for improvement highlighted in the inspection report, but also adds a number of other areas, where further improvements can be made. The Improvement Plan will be owned by senior managers and will be regularly updated and published as progress is made throughout the year ahead.

A HMICFRS [update](#) was provided to the Fire Authority on 11/2/19 where the Improvement Plan was shared. This Plan can be found in the following pages:

## HMICFRS Inspection – Improvement Plan 2018-19

Effectiveness				
Source (HMICFRS Inspection 2018)	Summary finding	Detailed finding	Areas for Improvement	Department – Activity Lead and Action Owner
Page 8, 9, 11-12	The service is good at understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies. Its plan to manage risk is based on a range of information. However, mobile computer systems are not updated fast enough with this risk information. The service recognises this and has plans in place to address this.	Staff informed us that delays often occur in uploading new or updated risk records to the mobile data terminals. This is due to limited capacity to produce the plans and to the need to update each fire engine mobile data terminal manually. This means that it can take several months to upload the full risk information. This is an area for improvement.	<b>The service should ensure its firefighters have good access to relevant and up-to-date risk information.</b>	Area Commander (Head of Operational Support)
Page 8, 9	Community engagement could also be better, to help understand local risk.	Apart from statutory consultations, like the one for the Wyre Forest hub, local station engagement with the community is limited. The service could not show how it engages with the community concerning the services it provides. The exception to this is the service's 'after fire' surveys, which it is aiming to improve.		Area Commander (Head of Community Risk)  Head of Corporate Services
Page 8, 11, 12	The service needs to improve how it prevents fires and other risk. Its prevention plan does not explain how or when things will be done.	The community risk strategy also supports the CRMP. But while the priorities within this strategy are clear, it is less clear how they will be achieved, or how they link to the CRMP. The (community risk strategy) gives members of the public a good overview, but lacks any detail. It does not explain how and when priorities will be implemented, or who is responsible for ensuring they are completed.		Area Commander (Head of Community Risk)

Page 8, 12, 13	The service has extended its home fire safety checks to include questions about vulnerable people. Further training is needed to give staff more confidence in this process.	We found that staff had varying levels of understanding about safeguarding and vulnerable people. Staff informed us that most of the training has been done via e-learning, and that some people are not confident about what questions to ask, to complete the new home fire safety checks. The service acknowledges this and says it is planning further training as part of the rollout of safe and well checks.	<b>The service should ensure staff understand how to identify vulnerability and safeguard vulnerable people.</b>	Area Commander (Head of Community Risk)
Page 8, 13	The service should also ensure it evaluates all its prevention work.	The service recognises it has not evaluated all of its preventative work, other than the assessment of safe and well checks conducted by Worcester University and the Dying2Drive road safety scheme.	<b>The service should evaluate its prevention work, so it understands the benefits better.</b>	Area Commander (Head of Community Risk)

Page 8, 14, 15	<p>The service is good in how it protects the public through fire regulation. It needs to get the right balance between inspections based on risk and those based on intelligence.</p>	<p>Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service has a risk-based inspection programme, which is managed via the community fire risk management information system (CFRMIS). This is consistent with the fire and rescue national framework for England. We reviewed the fire safety policy and found that it did not contain much detail about how the service classifies risk and manages its risk-based inspection programme.</p> <p>The service has made a considerable effort to move to more intelligence-led safety inspections. ... The dilemma for the service is that this intelligence-led approach has reduced its capacity for risk-based inspection work. Staff told us that inspectors are unlikely to be able to complete all their risk-based inspections due to the additional intelligence-led work. The service needs to consider what balance it wants to take. Its fire safety enforcement strategy should be clear about how much of its inspection work will be pre-planned and risk-based, how much will be intelligence-led, and why.</p>	<p><b>The service should ensure it allocates enough resources to a prioritised and risk-based inspection programme.</b></p> <p><b>The service should assure itself that its enforcement plan prioritises the highest risks and includes proportionate activity to reduce risk.</b></p>	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery)
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Page 8,16	However, the work of the multi-agency targeted enforcement team has the potential to be notable practice.	<p>The work of the MATE team is innovative. It involves partners from a range of organisations that all work together from one location.</p> <p>The service informed us that inspectors took fire safety enforcement action at approximately 75 percent of the premises targeted by the MATE team, We reviewed a case which started with the service issuing an enforcement notice but led to much wider public safety and organised crime issues. The work of the MATE team has the potential for being notable practice. The service should consider formalising this in a partnership agreement and evaluate the outcomes.</p>		
Page 8, 16	The service supports local businesses in understanding fire regulations. It should also work more closely with them to reduce the number of false alarms.	<p>The service is updating its policy for unwanted fire signals (false alarms from fire alarms and detection systems). It last partially updated this in 2014. We found evidence that the service is working with premises where repeat activations occur. This depends on individual operational managers, however, and protection officers are only used when they request it. As the number of false alarms makes up a large proportion of the incidents attended by the service, the service should continue its work to engage with business and reduce false alarms.</p>		<p>Area Commander (Head of Community Risk)</p> <p>Area Commander (Head of Operational Support)</p>

Page 18		The service recognises that the availability of on-call firefighters is a current and future challenge. At several locations, staff (both wholtime and on-call) expressed their concerns about the availability of the on-call fire engine, as this often led to delays in additional crews attending an incident. The service is working on addressing this concern and is implementing an on-call charter. We look forward to reviewing this charter.		
Page 8, 19	The service is good at responding to fires and other emergencies. It has good equipment and training. It is flexible in how it responds to incidents and follows national guidance. However, it should use hot debriefs more often.	The senior management board receives quarterly reports on all operational assurance activities and acts on any deficiencies. Operational learning comes from debrief findings. We found that the use of incident debriefs varies between stations. At some locations, hot debriefs (that is debriefs shortly after the incident has occurred) follow all incidents, whereas at other stations they rarely happen.	<b>The service should ensure it has an effective system for staff to use learning and debriefs to improve operational response and incident command.</b>	Area Commander (Head of Operational Support)  Area Commander (Head of Operations)

Page 8, 18, 19	Also, when it evaluates incident commanders, it should share the learning more widely.	<p>The use of operational discretion at an incident is broadly understood. Staff feel they would be supported if they had to use it. We were given an example of when it had been used and then debriefed, after which the learning was shared across the organisation. The service intends to do more to ensure all staff fully understand it, and any use of it properly recorded.</p> <p>The service uses active incident monitoring (AIM) to assess incident commanders. It believes this system is effective. It publishes the number of AIM assessments it carries out, as part of its performance snapshot to the public. However, with the number of incidents declining, AIM assessments are not always easy to achieve. Staff we spoke to were not clear about when these assessments should be carried out and who should complete them. The service acknowledges that this process is still evolving. We are keen to see how this work develops.</p>		Area Commander (Head of Operational Support)
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Efficiency				
Source (HMICFRS Inspection 2018)	Summary finding	Detailed finding	Areas for Improvement	Department – Activity Lead and Action Owner
Page 22, 23	An efficient fire and rescue service will manage its budget and spend money properly and appropriately. It will align its resources to its risk. It should try to keep costs down without compromising public safety. Future budgets should be based on robust and realistic assumptions. Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service's overall efficiency requires improvement.	<p>Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is not currently operating as efficiently as planned. The service is spending more than it needs to in responding to emergencies. The 2014 CRMP was ambitious in its plans for the service. It intended to reduce costs by operating with greater flexibility and greater efficiency.</p> <p>The medium-term financial plan is good. It identifies the problems the service faces with prudent assumptions about future income and expenditure. While the budgets are broadly balanced during the four years of the plan through to 2023, this is only achieved by using a significant proportion of the financial reserves to support the overspending each year. Longer term action is needed to reduce spending to acceptable levels in line with projected funding available. If the changes planned in the 2014 CRMP had been implemented, they would have mitigated some of these problems. The service plans to implement the new crewing arrangements, together with other cost saving measures.</p>		Chief Fire Officer

Page 22, 23, 25-26	<p>The service made ambitious plans in 2014 that it has not achieved. These were based on saving money by improving efficiency and making changes to the workforce. The financial plan is good, and is based on sensible assumptions. But delays in bringing in the planned changes are costing the service money. This presents a risk.</p>	<p>One of the main elements of the (2014 CRMP) plan was to reorganise the way the service responds to emergencies, by aligning resources more closely to risk. Within this new model, fire engine crews for most incidents would reduce in number from five firefighters to four. However, the combined fire authority later decided to continue operating with crews of five at as many incidents as possible for another two years. It funded extra staffing for this by using £800,000 of the service's reserves until February 2017.</p> <p>While the budgets are broadly balanced during the four years of the (MTFP) plan through to 2023, this is mainly achieved by using financial reserves. Longer-term action is needed to reduce spending to acceptable levels in line with projected funding available. Had the service implemented its changes as planned in the 2014 CRMP, it would have mitigated some of these problems. The service is considering alternative crewing arrangements together with other cost-saving measures. These include reducing the number of fire stations in the Wyre Forest area and relocating the fire headquarters and control room to the West Mercia Police headquarters.</p> <p>The service plans to achieve a balanced budget by making long-term cost savings, which will improve value for money. However, over the medium term, it continues to spend more than it receives in funding. It uses reserves to fill the gaps. The service intends to have put in place sufficient measures to reduce its spending to within</p>	Chief Fire Officer
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		<p>affordable limits. The assumptions made on income and expenditure are prudent and cautious. This means that the use of the reserve can be phased to meet the budget shortfalls later in this financial period.</p> <p>Once again, the delay in implementing the decisions taken in the 2014 CRMP mean that the pace of improving value for money has been slow. There is a risk that the service will continue to operate inefficiently and that the operating model may become unaffordable. This is made more likely by delays in implementing the workforce and crewing changes, and by any delays in some of the more ambitious change projects, such as the Wyre Forest hub and the relocation to the West Mercia Police headquarters site.</p>		
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Page 22, 24	<p>We found that staff do not fully understand the proposed changes to the role of watch managers. The service needs to address this situation.</p>	<p>Compared with 2010, the service has reduced the numbers of fire engines and staff to save money. More recently it introduced a range of flexible working patterns to align its response arrangements to risk and demand for services. The new staffing structure removes watch managers from riding on fire engines as part of the crew. This means the service can reduce the number of watch managers at each station from four to two. The two watch managers are employed on a flexible seven-day rota (except at day-crewing-plus stations). In the new structure, crew managers do more of the day-to-day supervision of firefighters; watch managers manage the performance of a wider group of firefighters and have an enhanced role in local partnership engagement activities. However, because the service has not yet fully implemented the reduction to four riders, or the wider changes to the operating model, we found some staff were unclear about the proposals. While the service has communicated the benefits and reasons for change to staff and representative bodies, more needs to be done.</p>	<p><b>The service should assure itself that its workforce is productive. It needs to clarify the role of watch manager ...</b></p>	<p>Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery)</p>
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Page 22, 24	Progress made in the service's prevention work is likely to increase workloads in other areas. We found that specialist prevention officers already have a lot of work to do. This is a risk. The service should review the situation and consider how to deal with this problem.	The service allocates resources to prevention and protection activities. These activities are designed to reduce the number of fires and other emergencies, as well as manage the risks throughout the area. We found that the specialist prevention officers have a backlog of work. The service needs to review this situation and make any changes necessary to reduce the backlog.	<b>The service should assure itself that its workforce is productive.</b>	Area Commander (Head of Community Risk)
Page 22, 24	In particular, it may be able to introduce a better system for replacing faulty smoke alarms.	It is not clear whether the service is making best use of response firefighters for prevention activities. For example, we found occasions when the service sent a full fire crew to replace faulty smoke alarms (in homes where the service previously fitted them). We recognise it is essential that fire crews can be deployed quickly to an emergency, and defective alarms do need to be replaced, but there may be more cost-effective ways of achieving this. This could free up crews to undertake other work, such as new home fire safety checks, where their skills could be better employed.	<b>The service should assure itself that its workforce is productive. It needs to ... consider alternative ways to manage the replacement of faulty smoke alarms.</b>	Area Commander (Head of Community Risk)
Page 24		The service's fire protection programme of work is risk-based and is increasingly targeted at sites where the risk to community and firefighter safety is greatest. However, this better targeting of protection activity means that inspections are leading to more enforcement and follow-up activity. This affects the workloads of other staff and could soon lead to current resourcing levels becoming stretched.	<b>The service should assure itself that its workforce is productive.</b>	Area Commander (Head of Community Risk)

Page 22, 24, 26	<p>The service is good at working with partner organisations. Good arrangements are in place for joint work with Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service, West Mercia Police, and several local authorities. Some of these arrangements are innovative and the service is willing to try new things. The service should evaluate the benefits of these arrangements and make sure they are achieved. The benefits should include providing value for money.</p>	<p>We found that the service is keen to collaborate both with other fire services and with the wider public sector. However, it is not clear whether the benefits of collaboration, for the fire and rescue service and its users, have been fully evaluated.</p> <p>Much of the collaboration work to date, although constructive and valued by partners, has not resulted in measurable improvements in terms of value for money. In discussions with the service and partner organisations, it is clear that the main initial motivation for these initiatives was not to save money, but because it felt like the right thing to do. The chief fire officer has ambitious intentions to involve fire service staff in much greater joint service provision with other public services. However, these plans are at an early stage of development. The service is not yet able to show how it can increase its range of activities without affecting its main statutory functions. The service acknowledges it needs to identify the expected benefits at the start and then monitor and evaluate the outcomes, to ensure these benefits are realised.</p>	<p><b>The service should ensure it effectively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and outcomes of any future collaboration.</b></p>	Head of Corporate Services
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Page 22, 25	There are good arrangements in place to make sure the service can continue to function in all circumstances.	Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service has a comprehensive system for assessing and recording business continuity. We reviewed plans across many areas including plans for the move of fire control. These include detailed plans for before, during and after the move, to ensure business as usual. However, in two of the plans supplied, there was no version control and review dates had not been recorded. The service could not, therefore, reassure us that these plans had been fully agreed.	Area Commander (Head of Operational Support)  Area Commander (Head of Operations)
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<b>People</b>				
<b>Source (HMICFRS Inspection 2018)</b>	<b>Summary finding</b>	<b>Detailed finding</b>	<b>Areas for Improvement</b>	<b>Department – Activity Lead and Action Owner</b>
Page 29, 30, 36	A fire and rescue service that looks after its people should be able to provide an effective service to its community. It should offer a range of services to make its communities safer. This will include developing and maintaining a workforce that is professional, resilient, skilled, flexible and diverse. The service's leaders should be positive role models, and this should be reflected in the behaviour of the workforce. Overall, Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at looking after its people.	The people strategy action plan includes a number of proposed changes. This is still to be agreed. It is important that the service uses this opportunity to include staff in the process, so that they are aware of what is being proposed.	<b>The service should put in place a regular and effective system to measure and monitor staff engagement (across the whole service). It needs to improve its two-way communication channels with staff, and its face-to-face communication by and with senior leaders.</b>	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery)



Page 29, 31, 32	<p>The service needs to improve how it promotes the right values and culture. It particularly needs to improve how senior leaders communicate with the workforce. It is making changes to make the workforce more adaptable and take on different work. Staff do not fully understand the reasons for these changes. The service should address this, so that it can improve trust and move forward with its plans.</p>	<p>The service management team wants to move the service into new areas and develop an adaptable workforce that can cope with the new roles. We saw a lot of evidence of the more recent change initiatives. This included changes to crewing and the change in role for watch managers to become more flexible and responsible for wider change.</p> <p>Negotiation between the service and representative bodies has taken a considerable amount of time and effort, but has not yet achieved an agreed outcome. Staff told us that they had not understood the change process and felt it was being imposed on them. The senior manager with responsibility for frontline operational teams made regular visits to watches and stations to discuss the proposed changes with affected staff. Staff told us, however, that they felt senior management were not sufficiently visible and had only communicated through the union.</p> <p>Staff from a range of roles and levels across the organisation said they thought that challenge wasn't welcomed and the service does not listen to them. They believe there is no proper project management, "just people running with their own ideas". Several members of staff described Hereford as remote and forgotten about.</p>	<p><b>The service should put in place a regular and effective system to measure and monitor staff engagement (across the whole service). It needs to improve its two-way communication channels with staff, and its face-to-face communication by and with senior leaders.</b></p>	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery)
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		<p>The senior management board has recognised some of these problems. In early 2018, it hired independent consultants to carry out a cultural survey of the senior management board. Those who were consulted within the service were station and group managers or non-uniformed manager equivalents.</p> <p>After receiving the report, the chief fire officer proposed forming a managers' group to improve the culture, whose members would be selected from among their peers. This aimed to encourage the change proposals from managers who had been part of the survey. It was intended to represent a team approach, as the survey's results indicated that the leadership was viewed as high-handed.</p> <p>While senior and middle managers received a copy of the report and other staff groups were aware of the review, staff members reported they had not been told any details. In the absence of information, staff have drawn their own conclusions.</p>		
		<p>It is clear that improvements need to be made in communications and openness between senior leaders and the workforce. Senior leaders showed us plans that are in place to re-commence visits across the service. We would encourage this at the earliest opportunity, to tackle these communication problems.</p>		

Page 29, 30	The service is good at making sure staff wellbeing is a priority. Staff access a range of support services. The service could consider the benefits of letting staff from all roles work more flexibly.	The service provided us with examples of flexible working. It should continue to consider requests for flexible working across all its roles, to meet its people strategy. On-call staff told us they would welcome more flexibility in the contracts for on-call staff, which they said would aid recruitment and retention. The service believes there is sufficient flexibility, but recognise it needs to do more to promote opportunities more widely.		Area Commander (Head of Operations)
Page 32		We were told of several occasions when engines had relatively new crew managers in charge. While this is not unusual across fire and rescue services, the service will need to ensure that these new managers are supported during their operational development, especially at incidents.		Area Commander (Head of Operations)
Page 29, 32, 33	The service is good at getting the right people with the right skills and makes sure they are well trained. It is working on a charter for on-call firefighters to improve their experience and increase numbers. The service would also benefit from finding out about the wider skills and experience of on-call staff.	<p>We were told that the low numbers of on-call staff willing to take on crew manager roles is a principal reason why fire engines are unavailable. The reasons given for this reluctance are the extra responsibility and time required, balanced against the reward offered. The service is publishing an on-call charter and will be surveying on-call staff. We look forward to seeing the progress of the on-call charter.</p> <p>On-call staff told us that the service doesn't audit the skills staff have gained from working in other jobs, to understand how these may benefit the service. These staff work in roles outside the fire service, as business owners, project managers or IT workers, for example. The service should consider what wider skills could be gained from its on-call workforce.</p>		Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery)

Page 29, 34	<p>The service needs to improve how it ensures fairness and promotes diversity. We found that some staff do not understand the importance of diversity. The service should focus on developing this understanding, so that the workforce can build trust and confidence with its community.</p>	<p>We have already discussed some of the concerns about engagement from senior leaders under the 'Culture and values' section. Work is underway to address this and we look forward to reviewing the results of this at a later date.</p> <p>Senior leaders understand the need for a diverse workforce but staff at lower levels are not as clear and do not understand its relevance. The service provides diversity training for staff. However, staff referred to 'diversity issues' in the 1990s, which they said had made them wary of having a female firefighter on their station. Overall, staff told us there is too much emphasis on diversity and the service is already doing all it can in this field. This again indicates the importance of more effective communication between the service and its workforce.</p>	<p><b>The service should assure itself that staff are confident using its feedback mechanisms.</b></p> <p><b>The service should ensure any change processes it proposes are visible to all staff.</b></p>	Chief Fire Officer
Page 34		<p>In the 12 months to 31 March 2018, the service recorded a low number of grievances. We reviewed these and found that the majority did not meet the timescales laid down in the policy. In some cases, an explanation was given for the delay. However, support was not offered to the staff members, despite the potential of these delays to cause stress. This was the case even when a grievance was subsequently upheld.</p>		

Page 30, 34	The service should improve how it manages performance and develops leaders.	The service does not have a process throughout the organisation to identify future leaders. It has recently allowed group managers to apply for the national executive leadership programme. Two have since been successful.	<b>The service should put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders.</b>	Area Commander (Head of Community Risk)
Page 30, 35	Managers with specialist skills should continue to be included in leadership team meetings, to support decision making.	The senior management board includes specialist staff within its membership. The board invites managers with specialist skills to participate in some discussions and decisions. To support its understanding of issues and allow more informed decision making, the service should consider how this could be expanded. It could also consider using these skills more in wider senior management team meetings.		Area Commander (Head of Community Risk)

Page 30, 35	All staff need to understand and use the appraisal system, to assist workforce development.	<p>The service has an individual personal development review (IPDR) or appraisal process in place. We found that all operational staff use it to maintain their continual professional development, for which they receive a payment. However, some staff have not had an IPDR for several years. We were also told others have been emailed their review without having a face-to-face meeting with their manager. By not ensuring that staff understand the IPDR process, and by not using the information to assist workforce development, the service is missing out on wider benefits.</p> <p>Processes are in place for the use of exit interviews when staff leave the service, but their use does not appear to be consistent. The service would benefit from using these interviews in all cases where possible, as important information can be obtained that will assist with future improvements.</p>	Chief Fire Officer
Page 35		We were informed that the service manages any failure of on-call staff to respond to incidents. This will usually involve an investigation into the reasons for the failure, such as traffic conditions or a pager not working. The service's policy states that when six failures to respond occur within six months, management intervention is required. During our inspection, the lack of evidence meant that no conclusion could be drawn about whether this happens uniformly across the service.	<p>Area Commander (Head of Operational Support)</p> <p>Area Commander (Head of Operations)</p>

Page 30, 36	<p>The service should do more to make sure staff are confident in the promotion process. It is not as open as it could be.</p>	<p>Staff at many levels informed us that the promotion procedure is not open and clear. At roles up to watch manager, we noted a lack of defined selection criteria, and that the procedure has changed several times. The perception is common that staff will only be promoted to station manager and above if they have sponsorship from more senior managers. The service's process for promotions should be clear and open.</p> <p>The service has recognised this perception, which the cultural review mentioned previously also highlighted. An independent person took part in its recent middle-manager promotions, to encourage a more open process. We highlighted this change to the staff we spoke to. They told us they were aware of it, but felt it was only a start. More needs to be done to build confidence in the process.</p>	<p><b>The service should put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders.</b></p>	Chief Fire Officer
Page 36		<p>We were told that that some staff have been in temporary management positions for years, and not been substantively promoted, despite having applied for it. Staff members gave us various examples of this, each with different explanations as to why this might be the case. This situation may results in some individuals being in long-term temporary management positions with little or no management training, though they are experienced operational commanders. The service should ensure that it is confident in the skills of its managers and supports them in these roles.</p>		Chief Fire Officer