

Fire & Rescue Service

Effectiveness, efficiency and people 2018/19

An inspection of Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service



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About this inspection

This is the first time that HMICFRS has inspected fire and rescue services across England. Our focus is on the service they provide to the public, and the way they use the resources available. The inspection assesses how effectively and efficiently Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service prevents, protects the public against and responds to fires and other emergencies. We also assess how well it looks after the people who work for the service.

In carrying out our inspections of all 45 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. After taking all the evidence into account, we apply a graded judgment for each of the three questions.

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**.

Service in numbers



Public perceptions

Northamptonshire England

Perceived effectiveness of service Public perceptions survey (June/July 2018)	83%	86%
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Response

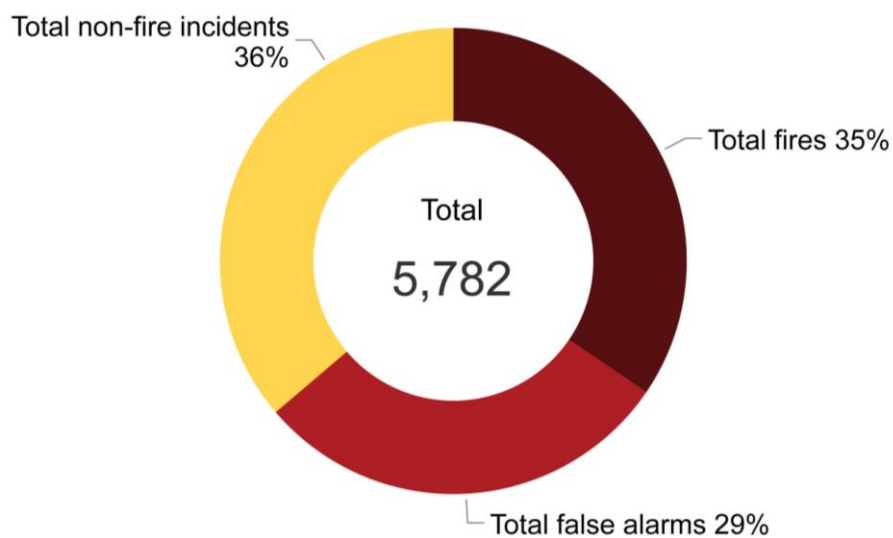
Northamptonshire England

Incidents attended per 1,000 population 12 months to 30 September 2018	7.8	10.5
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Home fire risk checks carried out by FRS per 1,000 population 12 months to 31 March 2018	3.3	10.4
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Fire safety audits per 100 known premises 12 months to 31 March 2018	2.4	3.0
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Incidents attended in the 12 months to 30 September 2018





Cost

Northamptonshire

England

Firefighter cost per person per year
12 months to 31 March 2018

£18.81

£22.38



Workforce

Northamptonshire

England

Number of firefighters per 1,000 population
As at 31 March 2018

0.5

0.6

Five-year change in workforce
As at 31 March 2013 compared with 31 March 2018

-21%

-14%

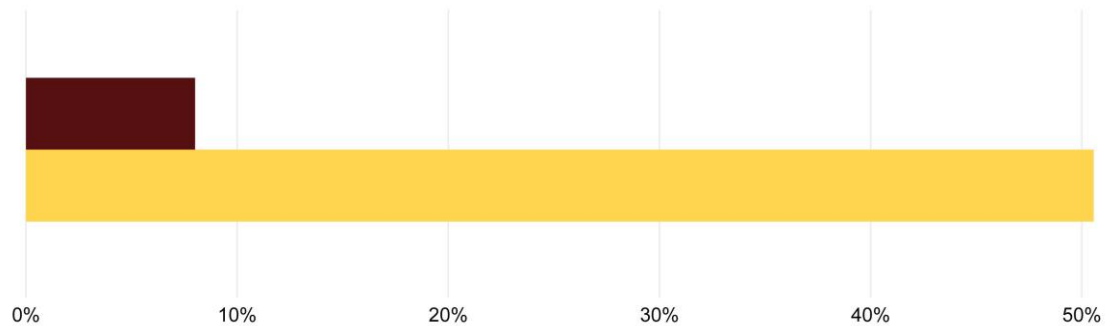
Percentage of wholetime firefighters
As at 31 March 2018

61%

70%

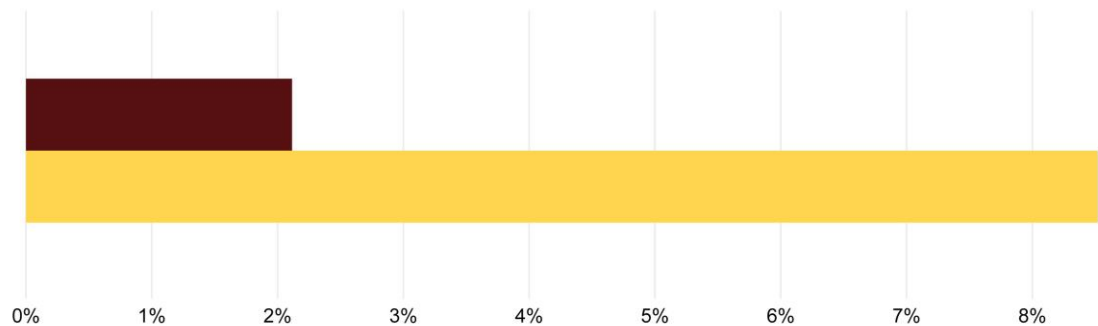
Percentage of female firefighters as at 31 March 2018

● Female firefighters ● Female residential population














Percentage of black, Asian and minority ethnic firefighters as at 31 March 2018

● BAME firefighters ● BAME residential population



Please refer to annex A for full details on data used.

Overview

 Effectiveness	 Requires improvement
Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies	 Good
Preventing fires and other risks	 Requires improvement
Protecting the public through fire regulation	 Requires improvement
Responding to fires and other emergencies	 Inadequate
Responding to national risks	 Requires improvement
 Efficiency	 Requires improvement
Making best use of resources	 Requires improvement
Making the fire and rescue service affordable now and in the future	 Requires improvement

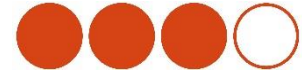


People



Requires improvement

Promoting the right values and culture



Good

Getting the right people with the right skills



Inadequate

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity



Requires improvement

Managing performance and developing leaders



Requires improvement

Overall summary of inspection findings

We are satisfied with some aspects of the performance of Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service. But there are several areas where the service needs to make improvements.

Northamptonshire FRS requires improvement to its effectiveness. Its response to emergencies is inadequate. It requires improvement to how it:

- prevents fires and other risks;
- protects the public through fire regulation; and
- responds to national risks.

We judged it to be good at understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies.

The service's efficiency requires improvement, particularly in making use of resources and in making the service affordable.

It requires improvement to the way it looks after its people. It is inadequate at getting the right people with the right skills. It requires improvement to how it ensures fairness and promotes diversity and how it manages performance and develops leaders. But it is good at promoting the right values and culture.

Overall, we would like to see improvements in the year ahead.

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 will target its fire prevention and protection activities to those who are at greatest risk from fire. It will make sure businesses comply with fire safety legislation. When the public calls for help, the fire and rescue service should respond promptly with the right skills and equipment to deal with the incident effectively. Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service's overall effectiveness requires improvement.

Too often Northamptonshire FRS has too few fire engines available which has an effect on response times. The service is aware of this and is looking to make improvements, including new flexible arrangements for staff to help cover demand. But it needs to keep better track of how many engines it has available at any given time and consider what more can be done.

The service's prevention and protection work also needs improvement. Its prevention team has been substantially reduced to make savings required by the county council and so it doesn't have enough resources to cover its prevention activity. Firefighters are supposed to support prevention but are often too busy. It works with partner agencies on a variety of annual activities to promote fire safety, but it needs to review how effective these are.

The service also has too few resources to meet the requirements in its risk-based inspection programme and isn't auditing the high-risk premises it says it needs to. It also doesn't do enough to engage informally with local businesses.

The service consults with the local community to build a picture of the risk of fire and other emergencies. Northamptonshire FRS works with the police to collect and share information about risk for particular premises. But not all of its scheduled checks are being done, although we are glad to see its backlog in processing this information has been cleared. It needs to ensure all systems for sharing information work as well as they should.

The service works with other agencies in planning the response to large-scale incidents. But these exercises should be based on realistic situations and involve more staff. It shares its control room service with Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service, which helps it to deal with demand. Staff are trained to take command at incident sites, but more senior commanders don't have their training updated or checked. The service gathers debriefs from operational staff after incidents, but could improve the way it communicates identified learning to them. Crews were not always aware that over-the-border risk information is available to them when attending incidents in neighbouring counties. A more consistent approach with neighbouring services to conduct joint training is needed.

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies



Good

All fire and rescue services should identify and assess all foreseeable fire and rescue-related risks. They should also prevent and mitigate these risks.

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

Understanding local and community risk

Northamptonshire FRS engages well with the local community to build up a comprehensive risk profile. Its [integrated risk management plan](#) for 2017–2020 is called the Community Protection Plan (CPP). The draft CPP is made available to the public for consultation for six weeks before it is submitted to the [fire authority](#) for agreement. The service promotes this through its social media sites. It also sends a letter with a summary to 2,500 residents selected at random. It uses its community outreach vehicle, a van containing outreach materials, to get feedback from the public. The CPP for 2017–20 had 2,771 unique views on the service's website during the consultation period.

The service uses a wide range of information from its own activity and from other sources to understand the local risk profile. It uses this information to set its objectives in the CPP. Examples include information gathered from protection and prevention visits, socio-economic data provided by the county council and demographic data provided by the Ordnance Survey. The service uses this information to develop local risk maps, called scorecards. These are put on the service's intranet. Supervisory managers at stations can access these and use them to focus their teams' activity on specific risks affecting their local area. This information is regularly updated and reviewed to make sure that the service is prioritising the most vulnerable.

The population of the county is growing faster than the national average, and the age of the population is higher than average. In response, the service targets its work on preventing fires and accidents in the home at people aged over 65, who are at greater risk of fire. In the year to 31 March 2018, over half of the [home fire risk checks](#) the service carried out as part of its prevention activity were directed to those aged 65 and over.

The service is aware of other [vulnerable people](#) in its community who are harder to reach through traditional methods. It uses a wide variety of data to understand its local communities. Its staff also interact with those communities through prevention activities. The service has a good understanding of what risks affect the most vulnerable. This information is used to set objectives within the CPP. For example, the service supports the police and county council in their work targeting anti-social behaviour and modern slavery, which often involves vulnerable people who are hard to reach.

The service shares information with a range of partner agencies to make sure they understand risks in the same way. These partners include the police, East Midlands Ambulance Service and the county council.

Having an effective risk management plan

Northamptonshire FRS has an effective risk management plan. Each year, the service reviews all the information that is used to develop the CPP. This is to make sure that it continues to understand which local people are most vulnerable. This is key to providing the best coverage of fire engines across the county. From this review, the service develops an annual action plan to make sure that it keeps working towards the strategic aims in the CPP.

A service-wide review was completed in 2015 which included an assessment of what fire cover was provided, the working patterns of staff, and all its property and vehicles. The findings from this review have been fed into a new draft CPP for 2019–22. The service should make sure that the new draft includes information about its response standards and what fire cover it provides. It should consult with the public to make sure their views are considered, and to help them understand what to expect from the service.

The service has developed an annual action plan which describes its progress on several key projects. These projects all support the three strategic objectives identified in the CPP, which the service calls:

1. keeping our communities safe and well;
2. keeping our staff safe and well; and
3. making the best use of resources.

The plan also explains the service's intentions over the coming year. It considers a range of objectives, such as preparing for the governance change in January 2019, when responsibility for the service changed from Northamptonshire County Council to the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (OPFCC). Having this plan helps keep the service focused on the goals outlined in the CPP.

The CPP meets the requirements of the [Fire and Rescue National Framework](#) for England. It provides a summary of both the political and financial situations. The CPP identifies what actions have been taken to support the three strategic objectives. It also identifies what needs to be done in the future. The CPP doesn't have specific sections about operational work, or prevention and protection work, although these are commented on throughout the document. The document provides a clear summary to the public of the current and future risks facing the service.

Maintaining risk information

The service's management of risk information is good. The joint operations team consists of specialist staff from both the service and the police. Among other responsibilities, this team manages the process for gathering and recording information that firefighters need to know when attending a particular premises. This is recorded in a standardised form known as site-specific risk information (SSRI). The risk intelligence officer who works within the joint operations team notifies local station managers of existing SSRIs to be reviewed or new premises to be considered. [Wholetime staff](#) then visit the designated premises and complete a form that captures all relevant risk information. This form is reviewed by a station manager before being sent to the risk intelligence technician, who uploads the document onto a central database. This then allows the document to be seen on all [mobile data terminals](#) (MDT) fitted to fire engines. Once the document has been uploaded, the risk information can be accessed by any operational staff.

The risk information contained in the SSRIs is also used to review the number of fire engines sent to premises that request the attendance of the fire service. We found that [on-call staff](#) review the existing SSRIs to make sure that the information is still relevant. New risks are inspected by wholetime staff or the joint operations team.

Operational staff were able to demonstrate a good understanding of how to access risk information on the MDT. However, they consistently described the SSRI process as being very slow. Until October 2017, the service had only one risk intelligence technician. This person is responsible for making sure the information is accurate and uploading it to the MDT. This individual was unable to keep up with the volume of SSRIs and a backlog built up. The service recognised this and employed a second risk intelligence technician. This risk was also identified during a [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) inspection which was completed in March 2018. During our inspection we found that the backlog has been cleared and the time required to upload an SSRI onto the MDT has improved.

The joint operations team works to gather and share information about risk for public events such as the Silverstone Grand Prix. Having a joint police and fire team do this ensures that both services have a standard process for planning their responses to an emergency. The service is an active partner of the county council's safety advisory group which provides advice and guidance to event organisers on public safety.

The service's policy is for the supervisory manager to update the team with any service communications at the start of each new shift, including relevant general and site-specific risk information.

This information is shared across the organisation via email and the intranet. A handover book is also used in stations to pass information from one [watch](#) to another.

We found that some watches weren't indicating in the book that they had read the information. Other stations didn't even have a handover book. At these stations, junior officers passed risk information orally. This system is very informal and doesn't leave a record that the service can audit. Some on-call managers said that they don't have enough time to update their teams with risk information.

Preventing fires and other risks



Requires improvement

Area for improvement

- The service should ensure it allocates enough resources to prevention work. The service should evaluate its prevention work, so it understands the benefits better.

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

Prevention strategy

The prevention strategy currently includes home fire safety checks. These are assessments undertaken by the service in the homes of people vulnerable to fire. Prevention visits in the service include identifying potential fire risks, taking action to reduce fire risks, ensuring working smoke alarms are fitted, advice on social welfare, and advice on slips, trips and falls.

Northamptonshire FRS has a dedicated prevention team, but it has been reduced from 16 staff in 2010 to 7 staff in 2018 to make the financial savings. This team co-ordinates all the service's prevention activity, including more complex situations.

The service uses a wide range of data sources to understand risk within its local communities. This information is uploaded to the intranet and local station managers are expected to use it to target their prevention activities. We found that many station managers don't use this information and rely on a particular source of social demographic data which specifies only residents over the age of 65. It contains no other risk information. Because of this, operational crews aren't able to find out who is the highest priority in their community. The service has identified this issue and provided clearer guidance to their station managers to ensure they use the full scorecards.

In the year to 31 March 2018, the service carried out 3.3 home fire safety checks per 1,000 population. This is below the rate for England over the same period. The service hasn't allocated enough resources to its prevention activity. All wholetime firefighters are supposed to participate in prevention activity, but we found that this was not always taking place.

The priority for wholetime firefighters is to be available to respond to fires. They may be moved around the county to best provide this cover. This can make it difficult for them to plan and complete prevention activity.

The service also expects its on-call firefighters to contribute to prevention activity. However, we found that some on-call firefighters didn't believe that they should be doing this. On-call firefighters had little understanding of the benefits of effective prevention and saw it as an activity done by others within the service. Because of this, the prevention team didn't feel that they were well supported by the operational crews – although they did say that a small number of stations were very proactive.

[Safe and well visits](#) consider wider social and health problems. Trials of this type of visit are currently being run at two stations, Rushden and Kettering. These are due for completion in March 2019.

The service records the number of home fire safety checks completed by each station. It does not record any further detail about these checks. The service doesn't evaluate its fire prevention activities to make sure it is having the biggest possible impact on reducing the risk of fire to the most vulnerable.

Promoting community safety

Despite low resources, the service undertakes a commendable amount of community safety activity. It has developed an annual campaign calendar to organise its seasonal and themed prevention campaigns. This helps it co-ordinate with partner agencies and wider national campaigns.

The service participates across the county in a programme called a Week of Action with partner agencies, such as the police community team and county council neighbourhood wardens. The Week of Action is designed to reach as many people as possible within a particular community over the course of a single week. Staff from the service attend community meetings, give fire prevention advice and identify suitable candidates for a home fire safety check. They also support their partner agencies in tackling anti-social behaviour and other social issues. The service should conduct a performance review or evaluation to see how effective this is.

We found that all staff have had suitable training to identify vulnerable people and make [safeguarding](#) referrals where required. They liaise well with other agencies and share intelligence to protect those identified as vulnerable. Staff are confident in implementing safeguarding procedures when needed.

The service works well to reduce deliberate fires through its Arson Task Force, a constructive partnership with Northamptonshire Police. In the year to 31 March 2017 the service attended 970 deliberate fires. This reduced to 859 in the year to 30 March 2018 – a 11 percent decrease. The service works with the police and the county council to highlight areas at risk of arson. They then work collaboratively to improve lighting, remove rubbish that has been fly-tipped, and reduce anti-social behaviour.

The service also supports a unique emergency service cadets scheme with the police and East Midlands Ambulance Service, for young people aged 13 to 18. The aim of the scheme is to assist young people to reach their full potential while at the same time providing opportunities for them to support their communities in a range of ways through volunteering activity. This includes taking part in a range of community safety and engagement activity for all three services. The service uses the scheme to give cadets a better understanding of fire safety and to deter them from activities that may result in fires. The service and the other agencies involved have agreed to allocate 25 percent of places to young people who are more likely to set fires. The service runs several community safety campaigns throughout the year. These are organised through the service's campaign calendar. They focus on a range of seasonal themes such as water safety and fire safety within the home.

Road safety

The service doesn't successfully promote road safety to reduce the number of people who are seriously injured or killed on the roads. In the year to 31 March 2017 the service recorded 12 fatalities in road traffic collisions. This increased to 25 fatalities in the year to 31 March 2018.

The Northamptonshire Safer Roads Alliance (NSRA) has recently been established. This is a partnership between the service, police, highways agency, East Midlands Ambulance Service and the county council. The NSRA seeks to use road traffic collision data to identify trends and risk areas. It then co-ordinates a wide range of activities to reduce this risk.

The service recognises that it often acts in isolation without informing the NSRA. This results in some duplication of activities. Partner agencies also told us that the service uses a hard-hitting approach to dissuade young people from acting recklessly on the county roads. The NSRA doesn't support this tactic as it doesn't believe that it is effective.

Protecting the public through fire regulation



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service should assure itself that its risk-based inspection programme includes proportionate activity to reduce risk. It should also include appropriate monitoring and evaluation.
- The service should ensure it provides enough informal fire safety information to the local business community.

All fire and rescue services should assess fire risks in 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.

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

Risk-based approach

The service is not at the forefront of developing, sharing and influencing regulatory work to keep people safe and secure from fire and other risks.

While the service has a risk-based inspection programme (RBIP), it lacks the resources to undertake what is needed. The programme prioritises sleeping accommodation such as hospitals, care homes and hotels as the highest risk and requires that fire protection officers audit the high-risk premises more frequently than those at lower risk. The RBIP complies with the requirements of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England.

Like the prevention team, the service's protection team has been reduced to save money, as required by the fire authority. As at 31 December 2018, the service had eight dedicated fire protection officers who are competent to undertake a fire safety inspection and serve a formal notice if required. This has reduced from 15 staff as at 31 March 2011.

In the year to 31 March 2018, the service carried out 2.4 fire safety audits per 100 known premises (which equates to 510 audits). This compares to the England rate of 3.0 over the same period. The clear majority of the audits the service carried out were on high-risk premises.

How often specific premises should be inspected is calculated by an electronic database. This uses information such as the risk associated with the premises and whether it complies with the law to decide which premises are a priority. Each week the database produces a list of premises to be audited. We found that the fire protection officers don't have time to audit all the premises on the list. They use their professional judgment to decide which premises are the highest risk and only audit those. As at 31 December 2018, the service had identified a total of 5,513 high-risk premises. In the year to 31 December 2018, the service completed fire safety audits of 612 high-risk premises. The premises that aren't audited are returned to the system incomplete. The service is unable to audit all high-risk premises as required by the RBIP. As the service is only undertaking limited protection work, it may not identify potentially unsafe buildings, which could place both the public and firefighters at risk.

The service completes its consultations on planning applications within the legally required timeframes. We found this process to be well managed. Between 1 April 2018 and 31 December 2018, the service received 510 building regulation consultations and responded to 496 (97.3 percent) in the required timeframes.

The service responds to fire safety concerns in a timely manner and in line with its policy. It has ensured that specialist knowledge about protection is available to operational staff at all times of the day and night. As part of their contract, all protection staff have agreed to work on a call-out rota, rather than only office hours.

Fire protection officers are well trained and qualified and have obtained a [level 4 diploma in fire safety](#). Protection managers routinely oversee fire safety inspectors when they undertake an audit to make sure they are done consistently. However, no records are made of this assessment to make sure that performance keeps improving.

Operational crews have not received training on fire protection work, enforcing safety law. Inspectors found that operational crews refer fire safety concerns to a fire protection officer rather than dealing with it themselves. They are unable to assist the fire protection officers by checking for hazards or conducting low-risk audits. The service has recognised this and plans to develop a new training package for all operational crews.

The service doesn't proactively analyse protection data to make sure that it is having the biggest possible impact on reducing risk.

Enforcement

The service recognises the need to help businesses comply with fire regulations during its audits, in line with the [Regulators' Code](#). The service also understands that formal enforcement powers can be used when the need arises, if there is a particularly high degree of risk at a premises, or they have a history of not complying with the law. The county council provides the service with legal guidance when considering formal enforcement actions and prosecutions. Fire protection officers have received the necessary training to be able to carry out a prosecution.

Fire protection officers can issue a prohibition notice without needing a line manager to approve it. To make sure these notices are being issued correctly, the fire protection officer will request a peer review from a colleague before they issue it. The colleague looks carefully at the evidence to make sure that a prohibition notice is the best course of action to reduce risk. These reviews are recorded as a typed note on the protection database.

In the year to 31 March 2018, the service issued 137 informal notifications, 19 enforcement notices and 6 prohibition notices. It did not issue any alteration notices or instigate any prosecutions. However, fire protection officers felt that the service supported them well when they were considering a prosecution case. Where appropriate the service works on these prosecutions with other regulatory bodies such as the local housing authority and trading standards.

Working with others

The service doesn't engage effectively with local businesses on an informal level. This limits its ability to support people who want to comply with the law. The service recognises that it doesn't use social media to raise awareness of fire safety within the local business community. It plans to develop self-help tools on its website to help people to find fire safety information without needing to speak to a fire safety inspector.

The fire protection manager is responsible for the supervision of several police staff within their team. This enables the two organisations to share specialist skills and knowledge. It is particularly helpful in providing consistent advice on public safety to organisers of events such as the Silverstone Grand Prix.

Northamptonshire FRS has successfully reduced the number of false alarms and is committed to reducing this further. Control room staff have a 'call challenging' procedure to decide whether a fire engine is needed. This procedure follows the guidance provided by the National Fire Chiefs Council. Where the same premises keeps having false alarms, a fire protection officer will attend to offer advice and guidance. When the responsible person fails to take appropriate action to prevent further false alarms, the service supports the use of formal enforcement action. In the year ending 30 September 2009 there were 3,673 false alarm incidents attended. In the year ending 30 September 2018 there were 1,692, and the rate of false alarms attended in Northamptonshire was lower than the rate for England. This suggests that the service is effectively reducing and challenging false alarms.

Responding to fires and other emergencies



Inadequate

Area for improvement

- The service should ensure it has an effective system for staff to use learning and debriefs to improve operational response and incident command.

Cause of concern

We have serious concerns about Northamptonshire FRS's ability to respond to incidents. The service consistently doesn't have available its minimum number of fire engines. Senior managers are not routinely told when this happens.

Recommendation

- The service should improve its process for monitoring the number of fire engines available, so that senior managers can make effective decisions.

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

Managing assets and resources

At the time of inspection, the service was operating in accordance with its response strategy (2017–20). This strategy doesn't clearly identify what the risks are within the county. Nor does it state what the expected attendance times are and what resources are required.

The service has identified that it needs at least 14 fire engines to be available across the county. It seeks to achieve this by having seven wholtime crewed fire engines available, as well as two 'variable crewed', with wholtime staffing during office hours and on-call staff in the evening. The remaining five fire engines are provided by on-call firefighters. Ensuring that 14 fire engines are available is a daily challenge for the service. The service recognises that it is struggling to have enough on-call fire engines available. In the short time period we sampled, on-call fire engines were below the minimum required during weekday mornings and throughout the day on weekends. Between April 2018 and December 2018, the overall average monthly engine availability ranged from 72 percent to 77 percent. Between April 2018 and December 2018, the average number of available engines each month was consistently lower than the minimum needed of 14 engines available.

If the number of available fire engines drops below 14 at any time, the officer in charge of the control room is required to notify the senior officer on duty. This is stated in the service's operational response mobilising policy. The senior fire officer should then review the situation and move fire engines or crews around the county to maintain cover in line with the service's policy. However, we found that this isn't happening. The situation arises so often that staff don't feel that there is any point reporting it. We are seriously concerned that it has become business-as-usual to manage the service with fewer than the minimum number of fire engines required.

The service has developed flexible crewing arrangements to address some of the shortfall caused by the lack of on-call availability. For example, for specific incident types a fire engine can attend with a reduced crew of three, as opposed to the usual four. A crew of three can only be used where strict conditions are met.

The service has also created a resource management centre to improve strategic cover. It does this by moving fire engines around the county, and by bringing in more staff to work overtime.

Despite these actions the service still isn't able to ensure that it consistently has the minimum of 14 fire engines available that it needs to keep the public safe.

Response

The service researched what its response standards should be, using data from within and beyond the fire sector. It concluded that the level it should aspire to is that on 75 percent of occasions it should:

- respond to incidents where someone's life is at risk within 8 minutes (from time of call);
- respond to fires where no-one's life is at risk within 12 minutes; and
- respond to road traffic collisions where no-one's life is at risk within 15 minutes.

The service does not meet these standards. In the year to 31 March 2018, the service's average response time to [primary fires](#) was 10 minutes 36 seconds. From 1 April 2018 to 31 December 2018, the service responded to 37.4 percent of life at risk incidents within 8 minutes.

The service views these standards as a goal it aspires to, rather than a realistic target with its current resources. It intended to work with the county council and other agencies to explore how these targets could be achieved. The service informs us this work was not completed due to reduced funding. The service has undertaken a review of its response standards and the fire cover model. It has developed new response standards which are part of the proposed CPP (2019–22).

The service has reviewed [national operational guidance](#) to identify where its current procedures are not aligned. It is collaborating with other East Midlands fire and rescue services to make sure that national operational guidance is implemented accurately and consistently. Appropriate personnel within the service have been given the responsibility for addressing the gaps identified. At the time of inspection, it was found that the service is on track to fully implement national operational guidance in line with its action plan.

The service has developed a partnership with Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service. In 2018 the service introduced a new [mobilising](#) system which enables the control rooms in Northamptonshire and Warwickshire to share responsibility for handling calls and managing incidents. This has provided the service with greater resilience in its control room.

We found that operational staff were able to find a range of risk information using their MDTs. They were also confident in their ability to locate information to help them manage a range of incidents, such as road traffic collisions or chemical spillages.

Command

The service has a plan in place to adopt the national operational guidance on incident command. Most supervisory managers were able to demonstrate a good understanding of the guidance.

Incident commanders demonstrated good knowledge of the support materials available to them. These include memory aids, command support packs, analytical risk assessments and decision logs.

Staff have training to take on a command role at incidents. The service uses a software package to train and assess incident commanders. There are four levels of incident command – level one is the lowest. New level one incident commanders are assisted by an incident monitoring officer who acts as a ‘critical friend’ at an operational incident. Level one commanders have their command skills refreshed and assessed regularly, as required by the service’s policy.

The service doesn’t provide any refresher training or assessment for level two commanders and above. The service cannot therefore be sure that its level two and above incident commanders are working to the latest guidance and best practice.

Keeping the public informed

The public are initially informed of any incident via the service’s social media channels and website. The service also has a partnership with the police communications team which provides 24-hour support for incident communications and media. The county council media team will also provide communications support where these affect the authority. For major emergencies, 24-hour communications are provided through the [local resilience forum](#), which brings together the local authority, fire service, police, ambulance and emergency planning.

We found that operational crews have had training to help them recognise vulnerable people and take action to safeguard them when required. Staff demonstrated a good understanding of the process and were confident in describing when they would make a safeguarding referral.

Control room staff have clear guidance to support them in providing guidance to people who are in immediate danger from fire. We found that staff were able to demonstrate how to find documents and relevant information on their systems. This ensures that guidance is provided quickly and confidently.

Evaluating operational performance

The service regularly undertakes [hot debriefs](#) after incidents. These are used to evaluate the performance of service staff and to identify any lessons they need to learn from the incident. A hot debrief is often carried out by the incident commander and is completed on site before the crews return to the station.

The service has a robust electronic system to record larger debriefs. These are divided into minor and major. A minor debrief can be instigated by any member of staff. Major debriefs are only instigated after the service has attended an incident which required six fire engines or more. On these occasions, all staff involved receive an email asking them to complete a debrief form. East Midlands Ambulance Service and police colleagues are also asked to contribute when they have attended an incident. These electronic forms are collated by the joint operations team, which then identifies any lessons for the organisation.

Although the service gathers information from operational staff after an incident, staff were not clear about how this information is used to identify lessons for the organisation. Staff responses are collected into a single report and then returned to them. This report can often be very long as it contains all the entries that have been submitted. Staff stated that it doesn't include any conclusions or actions. Some staff told us that they have lost confidence in the process because it doesn't result in any meaningful changes.

Responding to national risks



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure operational staff have good access to cross-border risk information.
- The service should arrange a programme of over-the-border exercises, sharing the learning from these exercises.
- The service should ensure it is well-prepared to form part of a multi-agency response to a community risk identified by the local resilience forum, including a marauding terrorist attack, and that its procedures for responding to terrorist-related incidents are understood by all staff and are well tested.

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).

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

Preparedness

The service has made arrangements to supplement its resources in the event of extraordinary need. It has a water rescue unit which recently supported Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service during a period of flooding. It also has high-volume pumping and a mass decontamination unit, which are listed as national assets, making them available to services across the country.

The service has established a system for completing site-specific response plans for high-risk premises. The service uses an electronic risk assessment matrix to identify the highest risks. A tactical information plan is then developed for these premises. This is available to the operational crews on their MDTs.

The service has a system to record newly identified risks that may cause harm to firefighters. A temporary SSRI can be completed and recorded on the MDT within 48 hours. Operational crews then visit the site to conduct a full SSRI and specify the minimum attendance at that premises in an emergency situation if it differs from what would normally be required for that kind of site, for example if it is being used to store flammable materials.

Working with other services

The service shares a county border with seven other fire and rescue services. Northamptonshire crews and crews from neighbouring counties regularly attend each other's incidents. The service states that it stores information for any high-risk premises in a neighbouring county that are within 10 km of the county border. This information should be available to operational crews on the MDT. However, we consistently found that operational staff were either unaware of the information or unable to access it. This means they could attend an operational incident without prior knowledge of the risks they could face.

Operational staff said that they don't undertake any training or exercises with neighbouring services to help them work with each other effectively. Staff described working in isolation at operational incidents involving other fire and rescue services. Staff did not seem aware of recognised systems of work with other services. This can be addressed by a more consistent cross-border exercise programme.

Working with other agencies

Twice a year the service participates in 'table-top' training exercises for large multi-agency incidents, in which senior officers come up with a scenario and work it through using maps and documents. The exercises involve other agencies such as the police, East Midlands Ambulance Service and the emergency planning department of the county council. These are co-ordinated through the local resilience forum and include middle and senior incident commanders. The exercises are described by middle managers as being limited by being table-top simulations. At the time of inspection, no evidence was provided of the service using computer simulations or practical exercises. They don't allow other fire service staff, including firefighters, to gain valuable experience. This system alone is insufficient to ensure that the service can work effectively as part of a multi-agency response.

The service has developed guidance for its control room staff when dealing with a multi-agency incident. Control room staff have received appropriate training and have access to on-screen guidance to help them gather information and make decisions.

Incident commanders have a good range of equipment to help them manage an incident. However, we found that not all of them have a good understanding of the [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles](#). These principles ensure that all the blue light services work together effectively. Some incident commanders weren't confident in their ability to respond to a multi-agency event.

The service has a group of [national inter-agency liaison officers](#) providing 24-hour cover in support of partner agencies. These staff act as advisers for incidents like a marauding terrorist attack. They provide the service with a secure means of communication, which allows classified information to be shared between police, fire and ambulance services.

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 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. Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service's overall efficiency requires improvement.

The service needs to balance how it distributes its staff between its prevention, protection and response teams. Prevention and protection teams are under-resourced and cannot meet their goals. This has followed substantial cuts in funding by the council.

The service has no financial [reserves](#). It does have a capital plan but this is largely unfunded. It does a few things that bring in income, including charging for special services and training.

Because of the staff shortage, fire engines are often moved around the county to provide cover. Engines aren't meeting their target times for responding to emergencies. Staff are unhappy that they can't do their work as well as they would like.

Northamptonshire FRS doesn't use new technology to improve how it works. Its systems are sometimes complicated and inefficient.

The service is working with the police as part of an interoperability programme to help the efficiency of both organisations. It shares three stations, a headquarters building, storage facilities and fleet maintenance. It also works in various joint teams with the police. This saves hundreds of thousands of pounds a year and helps improve the work of both services.

The service has made changes to how it organises its staff to help deal with the shortages. It has recruited new control room staff and started working with

Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service to share control rooms. This has resulted in some improvements. However, overtime isn't being organised centrally, and some staff are worried that their colleagues are working for too long without enough rest. Nevertheless, staff are proud to work for the service.

Making best use of resources



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service needs to show a clear rationale for the resources allocated between prevention, protection and response activities. This should be linked to risks and priorities set out in an up-to-date integrated risk management plan.
- The service should ensure it has clear and robust processes to manage staff overtime.
- The service should ensure it has good business continuity arrangements in place that take account of all foreseeable threats and risks. It needs to review and test plans thoroughly.

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

How plans support objectives

At the time Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service was inspected (November 2018) it was governed by Northamptonshire County Council. Our findings are based on this governance arrangement. As of January 2019, the service has moved from the county council to the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (OPFCC).

The service's financial plans were under review at the time of the inspection in preparation for the change in governance. Under the old structure, the service was financed as a department of the county council. The service's priority was to maintain its service to the public during the transitional period.

At the time of the inspection the service wasn't part of the county council's medium-term financial plan (MTFP) as it was taken out when the change in governance was agreed in 2018. The service was drafting its own MTFP in preparation for operating within the OPFCC budget. This draft MTFP was due to be adopted in January 2019. It considers costs such as an expected national pay increase for its operational staff and a charge by the OPFCC for support services.

The service recognises that how staff are distributed across the organisation needs to be rebalanced. The prevention and protection teams are under-resourced and cannot currently meet the objectives in the CPP. To help meet the targets for cost saving that were set by the county council, the service has substantially reduced its number of staff. As at 31 March 2016 there were 591 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff.

As at 31 March 2018 there were 453 FTE staff. The county council was subject to a Section 114 notice in July 2018, which limited new spending by the council. This placed considerable financial restrictions on the service.

Staff shortages have resulted in a lack of available fire engines. This has resulted in fire engines being moved around the county to provide cover. Information provided by the service shows an increase in the response times of supporting fire engines (those sent after the first fire engine responds), from 13 minutes and 10 seconds in the year ending 31 March 2013 to 14 minutes and 26 seconds in the year ending 31 March 2018. Operational staff said that they felt hindered by a lack of resources and were unable to provide the level of service they wanted to.

The reduction of staff has had an impact on the volume of work they can do and on the morale of the team. The service planned to lessen the impact of cuts to the prevention team by having operational crews take on more prevention work. However, it was consistently found that on-call stations don't complete home fire safety checks. Prevention staff said that they didn't believe the organisation was committed to prevention and was not achieving all that it could in this area.

The protection team expressed similar concerns. Protection staff said that they were unable to inspect all the highest risks identified within their risk-based inspection programme. There are insufficient resources within the department to manage all the re-inspections identified by the database. Because of this, managers are using their professional judgment to decide what work should take priority. The uncompleted work is returned to the database with no viable plan for completing it. Also, the service no longer has a member of staff who can generate reports from the database. Local managers are taking data from the database and manually typing it into spreadsheets to analyse it. This is time consuming and has the potential for information to be entered incorrectly.

Productivity and ways of working

As at 31 March 2018, the service had 453 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff. At the same time, 61 percent of FTE firefighters were wholetime. The reduction in the number of staff across the service has affected the amount of work it can do. This is most apparent within the on-call section. The service aims for all on-call fire engines to be available at least 85 percent of the time but has not been able to achieve this.

The service has developed a bank system to address staffing shortfalls at some on-call stations. This system utilises a pool of staff who have offered to work additional overtime shifts. This has seen an improvement in the availability of some on-call stations. The service has also developed an on-call working group to better understand where low availability is most pronounced and how it can resolve this.

Until recently, overtime was also being used to provide cover in the control room. We found that on several occasions in the recent past control room staffing, due to unforeseen circumstances such as sickness, had been reduced to a single control operator. On these occasions the service has provided additional support to [fire control](#) by using a senior operational officer. The service requires that a minimum of three staff should be on duty. It has recruited new control staff to address this. However, the new recruits will need time to train and develop. The risk of low staffing levels has also been addressed by the control partnership with Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service. Warwickshire can take all emergency calls for Northamptonshire and mobilise local fire engines.

The service has previously relied on control room staff working overtime to deal with staff shortages. The on-call section is still reliant on staff working overtime to maintain availability. The service does have appropriate policies to prevent staff from working consecutive shifts without a suitable rest period. But we found that overtime was managed at a local level and that the service wasn't overseeing it appropriately. Several staff raised concerns about colleagues working too many shifts without sufficient rest periods.

Despite the challenging financial circumstances, staff said that they were proud to work for the service and serve their local communities. Operational staff have praised the service for extending the day shift by an hour, saying that this has given them much-needed time to complete their administrative duties.

Collaboration

The service is committed to the Northamptonshire Interoperability Programme. This has been designed to increase effectiveness and identify efficiency savings that could be achieved by working more closely with the police.

The service currently has three shared stations with the police at Mereway, Rushden and Thrapston (as at 31 March 2018 there were 22 stations, of which 14 were on call, 5 were mixed and 3 were wholetime). The service also shares a headquarters building with the police at Wootton Hall. The service has reported making savings of around £160,000 a year from reorganising how it uses its buildings and land in collaboration with the police.

The service shares the maintenance of its fleet and its storage facilities with the police. The service has merged its two fleet management departments into a single team, which saves £70,000 a year.

The service has recently designed and purchased a new joint command unit. This vehicle contains advanced information and communications technology. This has enabled the service and the police to provide enhanced incident command at major incidents.

Police and fire staff are integrated within combined teams, such as the joint operations team. This has allowed skilled staff to share technical information with each other, which helps to create a consistent understanding of risk between the two organisations and a single method for managing that risk.

The service's collaborations are supported by an interoperability board. The board considers the feasibility and benefits of proposed schemes before making recommendations to the senior team. It also looks at schemes once it has begun to make sure they are achieving their aims.

Continuity arrangements

The service requires that each head of department is responsible for planning how to maintain their service if something happens that directly affects the staff or stations, like power cuts or extreme weather that makes it hard to travel. Plans are created using a standard template which is then approved by the assurance manager. The service's policy is that all such plans should be reviewed annually, or when there is a significant change in circumstances. All the plans we checked had been reviewed within the last year.

We found that department heads didn't always do 'real world' tests of their plans to make sure they were appropriate. Where practical testing of plans had been done – for example within the control room – there was no evidence the team had thought about how the plan could be improved.

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



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure it has sufficiently robust plans in place which fully consider the future management of its fleet and properties.
- The service should do more to identify areas where innovation, including the use of technology, can help it improve productivity and develop capacity.

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

Improving value for money

In the year to 31 March 2018, the firefighter cost per head of population was £18.81. This compares to the England rate of £22.38 over the same time period. However, many factors influence this cost, for example the ratio of wholetime to on-call staff which is in part influenced by the rurality of the service.

At the time of our inspection, the service was given its budget by the county council. The county council has had to make significant cuts to its spending, and as a department of the county council, the fire service had to contribute to these savings. The service has made the required savings of £4.5m. Its current operating budget

is £19.8m. Savings have been achieved by making substantial staff reductions across officer and on-call firefighter posts as well as support staff. As at 31 March 2016 there were 591 FTE staff and as at 31 March 2018 there were 453 FTE staff. The service also made reductions in the support services it paid for through the county council.

In 2015 the service carried out a full review to make sure it was operating as efficiently as possible. The final report identified five key recommendations for improvement. It also said when and how the changes should be implemented. These recommendations have been included in the new CPP 2019–22, which is currently out for public consultation. The recommendations are:

1. a full fire cover review;
2. a review of current standards of response;
3. a review of current working patterns and arrangements;
4. a review of asset utilisation including property and vehicle requirements; and
5. the expansion of home fire safety checks to include a safe-and-well concept.

The control partnership with Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service has saved £150,000. The service is now planning to combine other departments with the police to increase their capacity and work more efficiently.

Innovation

The service shows few signs of innovation. Plans are largely based on what has been done before, with some minor changes. The service doesn't actively try to find ways to improve its working practices. It has purchased systems which don't always work well with its existing systems. The systems it uses don't record simple information in the same format. For example, we found that the service uses three different reference numbers to identify the same premises across its systems.

The service hasn't used technology to simplify the way it gathers data. For example, we found that operational crews recorded risk information on paper forms which were sent to a station manager to be checked. The forms are then sent to the risk intelligence officer to be put onto an electronic system and uploaded onto the MDTs. There is an inherent delay in the process as paperwork is physically passed on to the next person. There is also a risk that this information could be misplaced.

We found that the protection department also uses inefficient practices. Fire protection officers record an audit of a premises on paper. Once the officer has returned to the fire station, this information is input into a database. This means the data is recorded twice, which is time-consuming. It also increases the risk of information being recorded incorrectly.

That said, the service has recently purchased an unmanned aerial vehicle (drone) to enable it to conduct safer and more informed assessments of risk at a large incident. The drone is shared with the police and has also been made available as a national asset.

Future investment and working with others

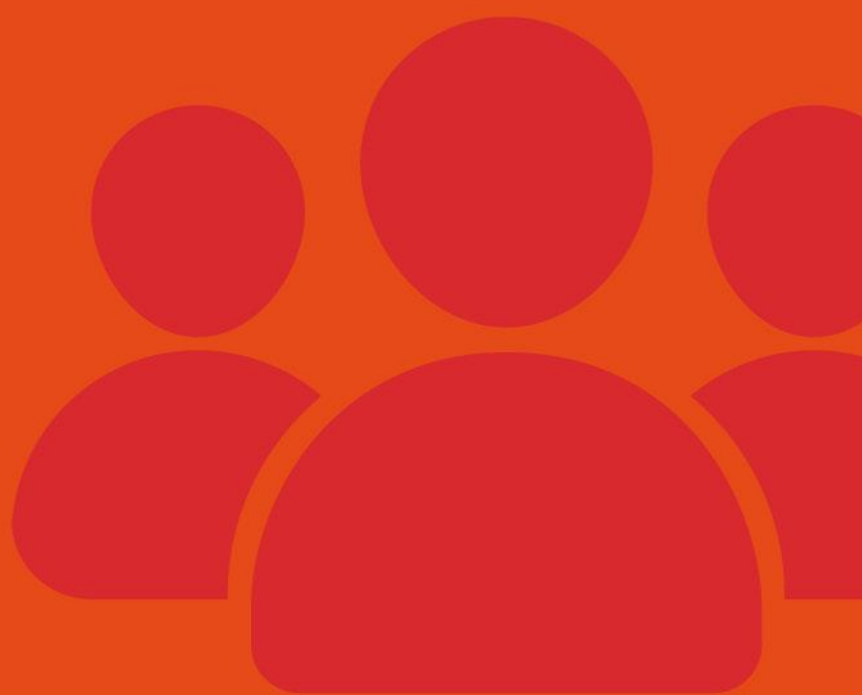
At the time of inspection neither the service nor the county council had financial reserves. The service didn't have a valid capital plan or any capital funding. The service is prioritising the development of a small reserve and is writing an initial capital plan with support and scrutiny from the OPFCC. This was expected to be in place for January 2019. The service owns its fleet of vehicles and is responsible for their replacement. Without a capital plan it is unclear how it can do this. At the time of inspection, it hadn't been confirmed who would be responsible for maintaining and refurbishing properties used by the service. The service needs to develop and finance a capital plan to make sure firefighters have the best possible equipment.

In March 2018, the service issued a paper with ideas for how it could generate income. The paper is a high-level three-year strategy (2017–2020) identifying the direction that the service is intending to take in generating income.

A small number of activities are undertaken which generate income, although on a 'cost recovery' basis. These activities include operational 'special services', such as getting into a building or releasing people from lifts, and operational training, including specialist tactical firefighting training using the cold-cutting lance.

The service has secured income from telecommunications companies for putting masts on their drill towers. This brought in around £177,000 in the year ending 31 March 2017. The service spends this income on maintaining fixtures and fittings at fire stations.

People



How well does the service look after its people?



Requires improvement

Summary

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, Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at looking after its people.

The service provides support for the mental and physical health of its staff. It checks the welfare of all staff involved in an incident, and is testing a new peer support system. People who have used these services like them, but not all staff understand what is available or how to access it. Some managers don't feel confident discussing mental health with their team.

The service takes health and safety seriously. All staff have appropriate training, and all accidents are investigated. However, not all staff feel that their personal safety is taken seriously. The service provides skills training for its staff, but doesn't properly keep track of it. Many staff don't feel that they have had enough training to do their job.

The service has a positive culture, and most staff we spoke to feel proud to work for it. Its values are widely known and understood by its staff. Staff are positive about senior management, though less so about middle managers.

The reduction in staff numbers means some feel pressured to take on too much work, and don't have enough time to do their job as well as they would like. The service needs a workforce plan to make sure it identifies and deals with staff shortages and skills gaps. It has recruited new staff to deal with its vacancies, but this has put pressure on the training team.

Line managers don't have enough training in dealing with informal grievances, and staff don't have confidence in this process. Formal grievances have been investigated appropriately.

The service is committed to increasing diversity, but needs to do more to find out why it doesn't have more successful female and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) applicants.

The service uses the council's process for annual staff reviews. This isn't being followed consistently, and some staff feel that it is pointless.

The service needs to develop better ways of identifying staff to promote. At the moment not all staff believe this is done in a fair and open way.

Promoting the right values and culture



Good

Areas for improvement

- The service should assure itself that staff understand and have confidence in the purpose and integrity of health, safety and wellbeing policies, especially how to access wellbeing support.

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

Workforce wellbeing

The service has suitable processes to provide support to its staff after a traumatic incident. A hot debrief is undertaken after every incident which includes a welfare check of all individuals involved. The service has recently tried out [trauma risk management](#) (TRiM), a peer support system designed to help people who have experienced a traumatic event. This was positively received by those involved in the trial and the service is developing this further.

The service has robust procedures in place to support the physical health of staff. These processes are well understood by all staff. Those who had suffered a physical injury were complimentary about the support they had received from the service, especially the physiotherapy.

The service has a wide range of facilities to support the wellbeing of its staff. This includes access to a counsellor to discuss work and home-based concerns. The service also gives its staff access to Kind Minds, a specialist organisation that provides mental health support. Staff can also access other support through occupational health and the MIND blue light charity. Staff can access this support

without needing approval from their line manager. The service has also established a wellbeing team which provides emotional wellbeing checks and counselling.

Despite all this, staff didn't feel supported. This is due to staff not understanding the provision available to them or how to access it. Because of this, individuals seek informal support from their team rather than engaging with the specialist wellbeing support provided by the service.

Also, supervisory managers haven't been trained in how to engage with team members who could be suffering from mental health problems. Supervisory managers said that they weren't confident in their ability to broach the subject of mental health with their team. For this reason, they would be unlikely to offer the support which is available. Control room staff felt better able to identify and support people who might be suffering from mental health difficulties. The control room had a wellbeing advocate within the team, and it was felt that this specialist knowledge gave managers more confidence to engage.

As part of our inspection, we carried out a survey of FRS staff to get their views of their service; 87 staff members responded, equating to 17 percent of the workforce. Of these 87 respondents, 26 percent of respondents reported feeling bullied or harassed at work in the last 12 months and 31 percent of respondents reported feeling discriminated against at work in the last 12 months. There are limitations to the staff survey which should be considered alongside the findings. We explain these in Annex A.

Health and safety

The service promotes a positive culture of health and safety. All staff have suitable training relevant to their role. Operational staff have further practical training which is focused on manual handling. This is refreshed every three years. Of the 87 respondents to our staff survey, 97 percent of respondents said that they knew how to report accidents and [near misses](#) and 92 percent of respondents agreed that they are encouraged to do so. This is in line with the England average.

Accidents are thoroughly investigated, and the results are shared with relevant people to make sure the organisation learns from them. Investigations are appropriately divided into three different levels, depending on the seriousness of the accident. Level one investigations are undertaken by the relevant line manager. Levels two and three are undertaken by a suitably qualified officer assisted by the health and safety lead. The health and safety committee reviews a quarterly report of all accidents to make sure that appropriate monitoring and review is in place.

Culture and values

Northamptonshire FRS has a positive and friendly culture. Most staff feel very motivated and proud to work for the organisation. The service has developed a set of values which are separate to those of the county council and more relevant to the fire and rescue service. The senior team asked the workforce to identify what they wanted their values to be, as they believed that this would result in greater ownership of those values. The service's values underpin, and are included within, all

service documentation. During the inspection we found that the service's values were widely known and understood.

Staff are supportive of the chief fire officer (CFO) and describe him as visible and approachable. The CFO was appointed in June 2016 and staff told us he has made a significant positive impact on the culture of the service.

However, staff are less positive or trusting of middle managers. Some watches are frustrated by how little they see their station manager, and view them as not visible or approachable. There is a perception within the service that communications are hindered at the middle manager level and that this has caused a break in communications between the frontline firefighters and the senior team. Our staff survey found that 70 percent of respondents did not feel confident that their ideas or suggestions will be listened to, and 56 percent of respondents did not feel able to challenge ideas without any detriment as to how they will be treated afterwards.

The reduction in staff numbers across the service has been felt by all staff. While staff are well motivated, they are aware of a lack of support services and feel pressured to take on more than they would have previously. Staff feel pride in the service they give to the public despite the difficulties they face on a day-to-day basis. However, some staff explained that the demands placed on them were too much and that they were having to work excessive hours to get the job done. Others said that they had too many responsibilities and felt unable to manage them all well.

Getting the right people with the right skills



Inadequate

Area for improvement

- The service should ensure its workforce plan takes full account of the necessary skills and capabilities to carry out the integrated risk management plan.

Cause of concern

Northamptonshire FRS needs to ensure that it has systems in place to effectively provide, record and monitor risk-critical training.

Recommendation

- By September 2019 the service must ensure that it provides, assesses and accurately records suitable operational training and that all operational staff have the proper risk-critical skills.

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

Workforce planning

Northamptonshire FRS does not have a workforce plan. Without this it may not be able to recognise and respond to staffing shortages or skills gaps. It is currently reviewing its succession planning arrangements and a new plan is being drafted.

The service has successfully addressed staffing shortages within the control room. New staff have been recruited and are being trained to ensure that all four watches have a minimum of four staff available.

The service believes that its high number of unfilled firefighter vacancies is due to the recent financial instability at the county council. Around one in three on-call firefighter posts are currently vacant. The number of on-call firefighters has been reduced further as the service draws on them to fill wholetime vacancies. The service has recruited six cohorts of on-call firefighters in 2018–19. This means that many operational staff are still developing and in need of training. This puts pressure on the training team.

Learning and improvement

We found a number of fundamental flaws with the service's training provision, including an absence of any oversight meaning that it cannot assure itself of the current skills its workforce has.

The service runs training programmes for its operational staff that are specific to their roles. These programmes are designed to enable staff to acquire new skills, and develop and maintain the ones they already have. Initial training is provided at a training centre. Operational staff are then required to demonstrate their competence by completing a development programme which is in line with national occupational standards. The completed development programmes are then verified by trained assessors and internal quality assurers. The standard of the development process is checked by an organisation outside the service.

The service uses a training database to record how the operational staff are maintaining their skills. Workplace assessments are undertaken to ensure that staff are maintaining the required skills and knowledge to safely undertake their role.

Watch managers are responsible for keeping the training database up to date when their teams have station-based training. But it was found that they weren't doing this. Centralised training is recorded on the database by the training department. We found that this team doesn't have enough resources to meet the demand for training courses. Because of this, courses are often cancelled, and records aren't always updated on the training database.

Of the 87 respondents to our staff survey, only 52 percent of respondents felt that they had received sufficient training to do what is asked of them. This is well below the England rate of 72 percent.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure leaders can demonstrate that they act on and have made changes as a direct result of feedback from staff. The service should also improve communications between senior managers and staff.
- The service should ensure that all staff understand the benefits of a diverse workforce.

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

Seeking and acting on staff feedback

The senior officers are collectively known as the fire executive group (FEG). The FEG visits each station and control room four times a year to get feedback from staff, and to give them updates. This is a relatively new initiative which began approximately 18 months ago. The FEG visits are largely well received by staff as they feel that they are able to speak freely and are listened to. However, staff told us that when they raised issues at a FEG visit, they weren't always told about any outcome later. This undermined their confidence that the visits had any meaningful impact.

The service participated in the 2017 county council staff survey. Once the results of the survey had been shared by the county council, the service developed an action plan to improve those areas which didn't score well. The areas the service views as a priority include communication and managing change. However, we found that many of these actions haven't yet been completed and staff haven't been regularly updated on their progress. Some staff interpret this to mean that the FEG don't take the survey seriously.

The service engages well with organisations that represent staff. These organisations felt that they are kept well informed by the service and are consulted on significant changes, such as the recent adjustment to shift patterns.

The service has appropriate procedures and policies for managing grievances. Where possible the service seeks to deal with these informally. Informal grievances are investigated and resolved by a line manager. However, line managers receive very little training about how to manage an informal grievance and need high levels of support from the county council's HR officer. This has undermined confidence from staff that the process is being followed correctly and that the results are fair and consistent.

Formal grievances are investigated and resolved by the designated Brigade investigating officer. We found that the service's process had been followed in all the files we reviewed. All parties involved in the grievance had been offered suitable representation and welfare support, as well as the right to appeal. The grievances had been resolved in a timely manner, in line with service policy. Where a resolution had taken longer than the accepted timescales, the service had contacted the complainant to explain why.

Diversity

The service's Equality and Diversity Strategy 2017–20 is aligned to the National Fire Chiefs Council People Strategy and links directly to the CPP. This document explains the service's commitment to diversity. The service has reintroduced a dedicated role to focus on equality, diversity and inclusion. As part of the work in this area, the service has established a diversity action group, a female firefighters forum and eight dyslexia champions. These groups feel well supported by the FEG.

As at 31 March 2018, 2.1 percent of firefighters were from a BAME background. This compares with a BAME residential population of 8.5 percent. Also, 8.0 percent of firefighters were female. The service has recently commissioned recruitment videos featuring a diverse mix of on-call firefighters to attract a wider range of applicants. The video was supported by a wider recruitment campaign. Because of this positive action, the service saw a greater number of female and BAME applicants. This resulted in the successful appointment of five female firefighters (40 percent of the total intake). There were no successful BAME candidates and the service hasn't yet evaluated its processes to find out why.

Disappointingly, some staff didn't understand the benefits of positive action or a diverse workforce. Some staff wrongly believed that standards had been lowered to enable more female applicants to be successful.

Managing performance and developing leaders



Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service should put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders.
- The service should improve awareness and understanding of the selection and promotion process among all staff.

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

Managing performance

The service currently uses a county council system called the Personal Appraisal and Development Programme (PADP). The service's policy is that all staff should have a PADP meeting with their line manager once a year. These meetings are intended to be used to set clear objectives and to identify how the team member can be supported to achieve their full potential.

It was found that not all operational staff have had a PADP, as the policy says they should. Some staff said that they hadn't received a regular annual appraisal. Others stated that they had received a PADP but didn't have clear objectives set. As at 31 March 2018, 93 percent of fire control had a completed PADP, as did 87 percent of wholetime firefighters, 77 percent of support staff and 66 percent of on-call firefighters.

Some non-operational staff didn't value this process. They told us that there was no funding for additional training and therefore setting personal development objectives was pointless. Also, the county council had stopped pay progression so there was little incentive. The service has recognised that the PADP process may not be well understood and lacks quality assurance. The process is currently being reviewed. Of those who completed our staff survey, 50.6 percent were not satisfied with their current level of learning and development.

Developing leaders

The service doesn't currently have a process to identify and develop staff with high potential to become the senior leaders of the future outside of its traditional development pathways. However, the service is working with Northamptonshire Police to develop a 'coaching culture'. It is also considering the development of a new talent management process. The intention is that staff members interested in progressing their careers can attend an organised coaching session with qualified coaches. This will help them prepare for the promotion process.

We found that there is no set process for promotion. The service is currently running trials of several different methods, and intends to review the policy in due course. The current policy is dated April 2009 and was due for review April 2011. However, this review still hasn't been done. This has resulted in an inconsistent promotion process. Continual changes to the process have undermined the staff's confidence that it is fair and open. The service needs to establish a set procedure and ensure that it is followed.

Annex A – About the data

Data in this report is from a range of sources, including:

- Home Office;
- Office for National Statistics (ONS);
- Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA);
- public perception survey;
- our inspection fieldwork; and
- data we collected directly from all 45 fire and rescue services in England.

Where we collected data directly from fire and rescue services (FRS), we took reasonable steps to agree the design of the data collection with services and with other interested parties such as the Home Office. This was primarily through the FRS Technical Advisory Group, which brings together representatives from FRSs and the Home Office to support the inspection's design and development, including data collection. We gave services several opportunities to validate the data they gave us and to ensure the accuracy of the evidence presented. For instance:

- We asked all services to check the data they submitted to us via an online application.
- We asked all services to check the final data used in the report and correct any errors identified.

We set out the source of Service in numbers data below.

Methodology

Population

For all uses of population as a denominator in our calculations, unless otherwise noted, we use [ONS mid-2017 population estimates](#). This is the most recent data available at the time of inspection.

BMG survey of public perception of the fire and rescue service

We commissioned BMG to survey attitudes towards fire and rescue services in June and July 2018. This consisted of 17,976 surveys across 44 local fire and rescue service areas. This survey didn't include the Isles of Scilly, due to its small population. Most interviews were conducted online, with online research panels.

However, a minority of the interviews (757) were conducted via face-to-face interviews with trained interviewers in respondents' homes. A small number of respondents were also interviewed online via postal invitations to the survey.

These face-to-face interviews were specifically targeted at groups traditionally under-represented on online panels, and so ensure that survey respondents are as representative as possible of the total adult population of England. The sampling method used isn't a statistical random sample. The sample size was small, varying between 400 and 446 individuals in each service area. So any results provided are only an indication of satisfaction rather than an absolute.

[Survey findings are available on BMG's website.](#)

Staff survey

We conducted a staff survey open to all members of FRS workforces across England. We received 2,905 responses between 1 October 2018 and 15 February 2019 from across 16 FRSs during this period in Tranche 2.

The staff survey is an important tool in understanding the views of staff who we may not have spoken to, for a variety of reasons, during fieldwork.

However, you should consider several points when interpreting the findings from the staff survey.

The results are not representative of the opinions and attitudes of a service's whole workforce. The survey was self-selecting, and the response rate ranged from 8 percent to 31 percent of a service's workforce. So any findings should be considered alongside the service's overall response rate, which is cited in the report.

To protect respondents' anonymity and allow completion on shared devices, it was not possible to limit responses to one per person. So it is possible that a single person could have completed the survey multiple times. It is also possible that the survey could have been shared and completed by people other than its intended respondents.

We have provided percentages when presenting the staff survey findings throughout the report. When a service has a low number of responses (less than 100), these figures should be treated with additional caution.

Due to the limitations set out above, the results from the staff survey should only be used to provide an indicative measure of service performance.

Service in numbers

A dash in this graphic indicates that a service couldn't give data to us or the Home Office.

Perceived effectiveness of service

We took this data from the following question of the public perceptions survey:

How confident are you, if at all, that the fire and rescue service in your local area provides an effective service overall?

The figure provided is a sum of respondents who stated they were either 'very confident' or 'fairly confident'. Respondents could have also stated 'not very confident', 'not at all confident' or 'don't know'. The percentage of 'don't know' responses varied between services (ranging from 5 percent to 14 percent).

Due to its small residential population, we didn't include the Isles of Scilly in the survey.

Incidents attended per 1,000 population

We took this data from the Home Office fire statistics, ['Incidents attended by fire and rescue services in England, by incident type and fire and rescue authority'](#) for the period from 1 October 2017 to 31 September 2018.

Please consider the following points when interpreting outcomes from this data.

- There are seven worksheets in this file. The 'FIRE0102' worksheet shows the number of incidents attended by type of incident and fire and rescue authority (FRA) for each financial year. The 'FIRE0102 Quarterly' worksheet shows the number of incidents attended by type of incident and FRA for each quarter. The worksheet 'Data' provides the raw data for the two main data tables (from 2009/10). The 'Incidents chart - front page', 'Chart 1' and 'Chart 2' worksheets provide the data for the corresponding charts in the statistical commentary. The 'FRS geographical categories' worksheet shows how FRAs are categorised.
- Fire data, covering all incidents that FRSs attend, is collected by the Incident Recording System (IRS). For several reasons some records take longer than others for FRSs to upload to the IRS. Totals are constantly being amended (by relatively small numbers).
- We took data for Service in numbers from the February 2019 incident publication. So figures may not directly match more recent publications due to data updates.
- Before 2017/18, Hampshire FRS did not record medical co-responding incidents in the IRS. It is currently undertaking a project to upload this data for 2017/18 and 2018/19. This was not completed in time for publication on 14 February 2019.

Home fire safety checks per 1,000 population

We took this data from the Home Office fire statistics, '[Home Fire Safety Checks carried out by fire and rescue services and partners, by fire and rescue authority](#)' for the period from 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018.

Each FRS's figure is based on the number of checks it carried out and doesn't include checks carried out by partners.

Please consider the following points when interpreting outcomes from this data.

- Dorset FRS and Wiltshire FRS merged to form Dorset & Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.
- Figures for 'Fire Risk Checks carried out by Elderly (65+)', 'Fire Risk Checks carried out by Disabled' and 'Number of Fire Risk Checks carried out by Partners' don't include imputed figures because a lot of FRAs can't supply these figures.
- The checks included in a home fire safety check can vary between services. You should consider this when making direct comparisons between services.

Home fire safety checks may also be referred to as home fire risk checks or safe and well visits by FRSs.

Fire safety audits per 100 known premises

Fire protection refers to FRSs' statutory role in ensuring public safety in the wider built environment. It involves auditing and, where necessary, enforcing regulatory compliance, primarily but not exclusively in respect of the provisions of the [Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005 \(FSO\)](#). The number of safety audits in Service in numbers refers to the number of audits FRSs carried out in known premises. According to the Home Office definition, "premises known to FRAs are the FRA's knowledge, as far as possible, of all relevant premises; for the enforcing authority to establish a risk profile for premises in its area. These refer to all premises except single private dwellings".

We took this from the Home Office fire statistics, '[Fire safety audits carried out by fire and rescue services, by fire and rescue authority](#)' for the period from 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018.

Please consider the following points when interpreting outcomes from this data.

- Berkshire FRS didn't provide figures for premises known between 2014/15 and 2017/18.
- Dorset FRS and Wiltshire FRS merged to form Dorset & Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.
- Several FRAs report 'Premises known to FRAs' as estimates based on historical data.

Firefighter cost per person per year

We took the data used to calculate firefighter cost per person per year from the annual financial data returns that individual FRSs complete and submit to CIPFA, and [ONS mid-2017 population estimates](#).

You should consider this data alongside the proportion of firefighters who are wholetime and on-call / retained.

Number of firefighters per 1,000 population, five-year change in workforce and percentage of wholetime firefighters

We took this data from the Home Office fire statistics, '[Total staff numbers \(full-time equivalent\) by role and by fire and rescue authority](#)' as at 31 March 2018.

Table 1102a: Total staff numbers (FTE) by role and fire authority – Wholetime Firefighters and table 1102b: Total staff numbers (FTE) by role and fire authority – Retained Duty System are used to produce the total number of firefighters.

Please consider the following points when interpreting outcomes from this data.

- We calculate these figures using full-time equivalent (FTE) numbers. FTE is a metric that describes a workload unit. One FTE is equivalent to one full-time worker. But one FTE may also be made up of two or more part-time workers whose calculated hours equal that of a full-time worker. This differs from headcount, which is the actual number of the working population regardless if employees work full or part-time.
- Some totals may not aggregate due to rounding.
- Dorset FRS and Wiltshire FRS merged to form Dorset & Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.

Percentage of female firefighters and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) firefighters

We took this data from the Home Office fire statistics, '[Staff headcount by gender, fire and rescue authority and role](#)' and '[Staff headcount by ethnicity, fire and rescue authority and role](#)' as at 31 March 2018.

Please consider the following points when interpreting outcomes from this data.

- We calculate BAME residential population data from ONS 2011 census data.
- We calculate female residential population data from ONS mid-2017 population estimates.
- The percentage of BAME firefighters does not include those who opted not to disclose their ethnic origin. There are large variations between services in the number of firefighters who did not state their ethnic origin.
- Dorset FRS and Wiltshire FRS merged to form Dorset & Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.

Annex B – Fire and rescue authority governance

These are the different models of fire and rescue authority (FRA) governance in England. Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service is a police, fire and crime commissioner FRA.

Metropolitan FRA

The FRA covers a metropolitan (large urban) area. Each is governed by locally elected councillors appointed from the constituent councils in that area.

Combined FRA

The FRA covers more than one local authority area. Each is governed by locally elected councillors appointed from the constituent councils in that area.

County FRA

Some county councils are defined as FRAs, with responsibility for fire and rescue service provision in their area.

Unitary authorities

These combine the usually separate council powers and functions for non-metropolitan counties and non-metropolitan districts. In such counties, a separate fire authority runs the fire services. This is made up of councillors from the county council and unitary councils.

London

Day-to-day control of London's fire and rescue service is the responsibility of the London fire commissioner, accountable to the Mayor. A Greater London Authority committee and the Deputy Mayor for Fire scrutinise the commissioner's work. The Mayor may arrange for the Deputy Mayor to exercise his fire and rescue functions.

Mayoral Combined Authority

Only in Greater Manchester. The Combined Authority is responsible for fire and rescue functions but with those functions exercised by the elected Mayor. A fire and rescue committee supports the Mayor in exercising non-strategic fire and rescue functions. This committee is made up of members from the constituent councils.

Police, fire and crime commissioner FRA

The police, fire and rescue commissioner is solely responsible for the service provision of fire & rescue and police functions.

Isles of Scilly

The Council of the Isles of Scilly is the FRA for the Isles of Scilly.

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