

Fire & Rescue Service 2021/22

Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service



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About this inspection

This is our third inspection of fire and rescue services in England. We first inspected Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service in July 2019, publishing a report with our findings in December 2019 on the service's effectiveness and efficiency and how it looks after its people. Our second inspection, in autumn 2020, considered how the service was responding to the pandemic. This inspection considers for a second time the service's effectiveness, efficiency and people.

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

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

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

What inspection judgments mean

Our categories of graded judgment are:

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












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







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

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

If there are serious, critical or systemic failings of policy, practice or performance of the fire and rescue service, then consideration will be given to a graded judgment of inadequate.

Overview

Question	This inspection	2018/19
 Effectiveness	 Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Understanding fires and other risks	 Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Preventing fires and other risks	 Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Protecting the public through fire regulation	 Requires improvement	Inadequate
Responding to fires and other emergencies	 Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Responding to major and multi-agency incidents	 Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Question	This inspection	2018/19
 Efficiency	 Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Making best use of resources	 Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Future affordability	 Requires improvement	Requires improvement

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

HM Inspector's summary

It was a pleasure to revisit Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service, and I am grateful for the positive and constructive way that the service engaged with our inspection.

I have concerns about the performance of Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service in keeping people safe and secure from fires and other risks. In particular, I have serious concerns about the way it promotes its values and culture, and how it is improving the understanding of the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and removing barriers to EDI. In view of these findings, I have been in regular contact with the chief fire officer, as I do not underestimate how much improvement is needed.

We were disappointed to see that the service hasn't made the progress we expected since our 2019 inspection. For example:

- targeting safety visits to the most [vulnerable](#) isn't done efficiently;
- plans to introduce national operational guidance have been delayed;
- the service's objectives are still not clearly linked to its budget plans;
- there is a lack of development support for newly promoted managers; and
- the service still doesn't have a process to support the development of high-potential staff.

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

The service hasn't done enough to have its values and associated behaviours accepted and understood by everyone, or to promote a positive workplace culture. There is a lack of senior leadership visibility. Staff haven't been involved in developing a clear vision of the service's future culture, or in the plans to introduce this. Previous efforts to instil the values and associated behaviours haven't been successful. Staff described unacceptable behaviours, inconsistent with the service's values. There were limited examples of staff being confident to challenge and manage inappropriate behaviour.

Progress to improve the understanding of the importance of EDI and removing barriers to EDI has been too slow. There is no clear plan for improvement. Actions taken so far lack planning and effective co-ordination. Slow progress is causing staff frustration and some staff don't understand the need for improvement. Staff who carry out the equality impact assessments are not properly trained, and there is a lack of effective governance and oversight for the assessments.

The service has invested time and effort to address problems identified during our previous inspection. But this work hasn't been focused or co-ordinated, and staff haven't been effectively involved. Some improvements have been made, but overall the service has deteriorated since 2019.

I have asked the service to produce a plan setting out how it will address the causes of concern we identified. We will revisit the service in the autumn to review progress against this plan.



Wendy Williams

HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Service in numbers



Response

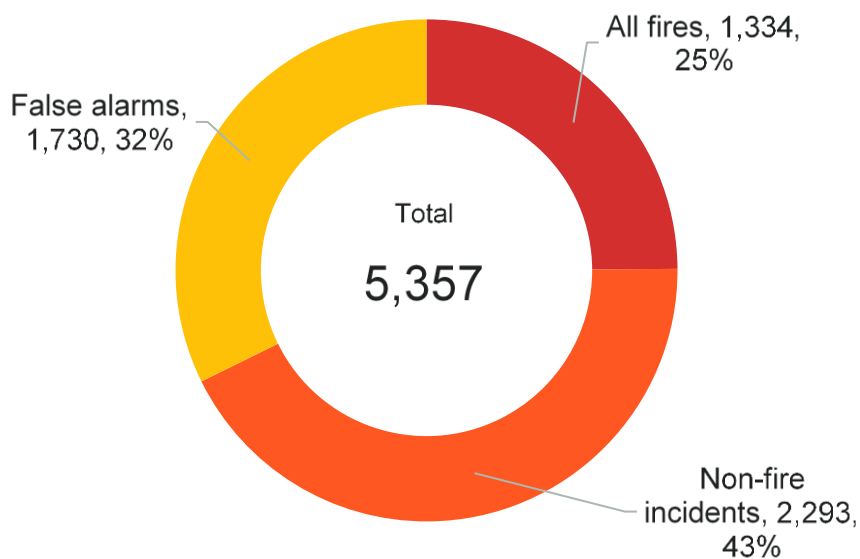
	Gloucestershire	England
Incidents attended per 1,000 population Year ending 30 June 2021	8.36	9.36
Home fire safety checks carried out by fire and rescue service per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	6.69	4.47
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises Year ending 31 March 2021	1.44	1.70
Average availability of pumps Year ending 31 March 2021	91.8%	86.4%



Cost

Firefighter cost per person Year ending 31 March 2021	N/A	£23.73
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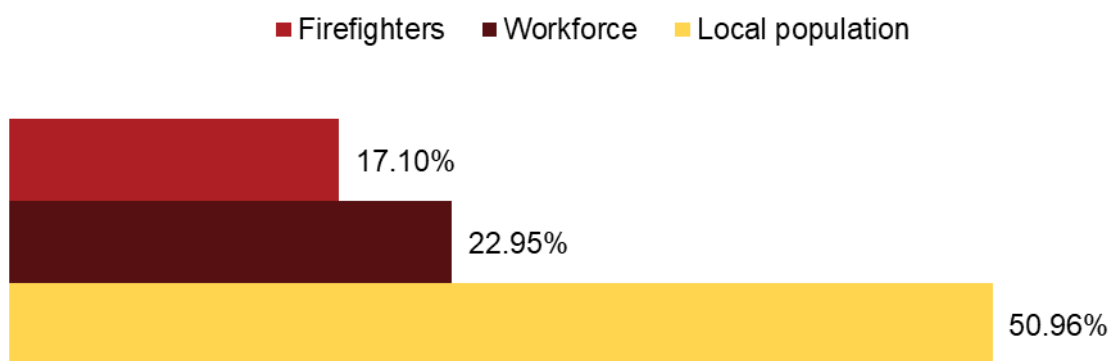
Incidents attended in the year to 30 June 2021



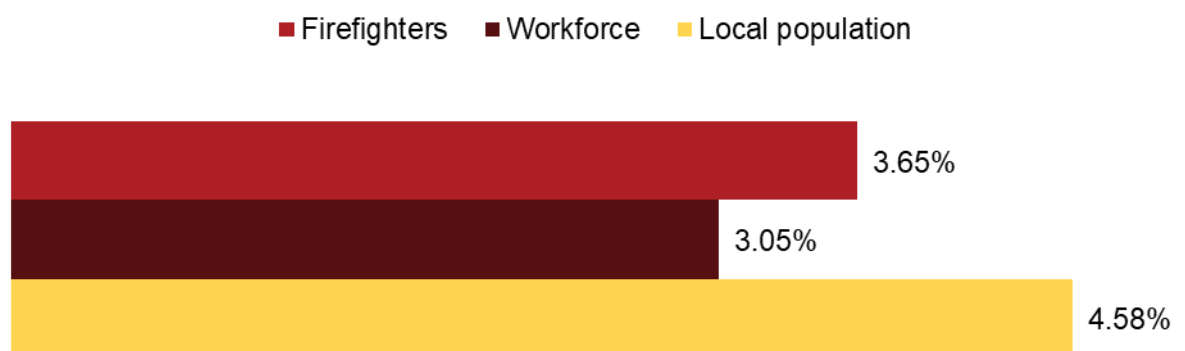


Five-year change in total workforce 2016 to 2021	3.30%	-1.60%
Number of firefighters per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	0.67	0.62
Percentage of firefighters who are wholetime Year ending 31 March 2021	40.3%	64.4%

Percentage of population, firefighters and workforce who are female as at 31 March 2021



Percentage of population, firefighters and workforce who are from ethnic minority backgrounds as at 31 March 2021



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

Effectiveness



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



Requires improvement

Summary

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

We saw improvements in some areas since our 2019 inspection, but other areas have deteriorated. Overall, the service hasn't made enough progress.

The service should make clearer links between, and explain better, how its risk assessment informs its risk management plans and objectives.

It still hasn't developed a process to make sure its [home fire safety checks](#) can be easily prioritised to those at the highest risk. It is also still not evaluating all of its prevention activity, so it can't assess how well its actions work, and which of them are most effective.

Fire safety audits are completed to a consistent standard. But the feedback the service gives to building owners needs improvement. It also needs to do more to assure the quality of its protection work.

Work to address the Grenfell Inquiry findings has made some progress, but more is needed. The service particularly needs to improve how it shares casualty information from fire survival guidance calls.

There has been some progress in learning lessons from emergency incidents and exercises, but more work is needed. Sharing the results of these lessons and making improvements based on them needs better oversight and management.

Positively, we found the service had maintained improved staffing levels in the protection team, and there is a clear plan to inspect the highest-risk buildings. There is evidence of the service collaborating with other organisations to identify and reduce risk. Fire engine availability is good and has improved since the last inspection. Information about the risks that firefighters face is up to date and easy to access. There was good knowledge of command procedures for incidents involving multiple emergency services and authorities.

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at understanding risk.

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

Areas for improvement

- The service needs to improve how it engages with its local community to build a comprehensive profile of risk in its service area.
- The service should make sure its [integrated risk management plan \(IRMP\)](#) includes clear outcomes which show the public how it is mitigating risk.
- The service should ensure the data it collects to inform its IRMP is understood and used to manage its risk within the county.

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

Risks are assessed, but the data is not used to inform local risk management

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service has assessed an appropriate range of risks and threats to develop its community risk profiles (CRP) 2020–2021. When assessing risk, it has considered relevant information collected from a broad range of internal and external sources and data sets. These include national and community risk registers, the service's incident data, [indices of multiple deprivation](#) and information about fire protection activity.

We were surprised to find the CRP isn't being used to inform and manage risk in the county. Strategic managers told us about station risk profiles, which are intended to allow the risk information from the CRP to be used to target station-level risk mitigation work. But these were still being developed, and there were no examples for us to examine.

The service has undertaken only limited consultation with [vulnerable](#) communities, such as those with disabilities or living in remote rural areas, to understand risk and explain how it intends to mitigate it.

It is unclear how the IRMP targets and mitigates risk

Gloucestershire FRS extended its [IRMP](#) to March 2022 by adding an action plan. In April 2022, IRMPs were replaced with community risk management plans (CRMPs). At the time of our inspection the service was consulting on its draft CRMP for 2022–25.

It isn't clear how the 2021–22 IRMP action plan is being used to target and mitigate all risk in the service's area. Nor are there specific, measurable objectives to show the public how effective the plan is at reducing risk. There was little evidence to show how the action plan's commitments to reviewing the prevention and response policies were progressing, or how these policies would identify and reduce community risk. By contrast, the business fire safety policy had been updated and a programme of inspections of high-risk buildings was in progress.

Risk information is reviewed and updated promptly

We were reassured to find the service has improved the way it collects, reviews and updates information about the buildings and places it has identified as being at the most risk. One central team does this work, so the service can make sure risk information is reviewed and updated consistently. This means firefighters have access to accurate and up-to-date information to keep themselves and the public safe. We reviewed a selection of records and found they had been completed to a good standard.

There is a two-year programme for operational staff to visit sites so they are familiar with the risks and hazards, and with the actions they would need to take if they were called to emergencies at those places. The programme was new. [Wholetime crews](#) had been making visits, but [on-call staff](#) hadn't yet started. The service should make sure all on-call stations book and complete visits to their risk sites.

More work is needed on short-term risks and sharing risk information

The service is involved in planning for major events such as the Fairford Air Show and Cheltenham Festival. However, it has recognised that it doesn't have a robust process for collecting risk information about other temporary events such as sporting fixtures and music concerts. It has developed a new process for these, which was being tested during the inspection. We look forward to seeing this evolve and become established.

The service has a structured process for sharing changes in procedures and safety information with staff. Staff use an online system to record their training, and the service sends bulletins to this system. Staff can't start recording their training until they have read and acknowledged these bulletins. Managers on station also receive emails about new bulletins, so they can check staff are aware they need to read them.

However, arrangements for sharing risk information arising from fire prevention, response and, in particular, protection activity are less structured and based on local arrangements rather than a service process. The service should consider putting a consistent process in place.

Some improvements, but more work needed to share learning from incidents

The service has provided additional resources and a new system to help improve how it acts on feedback from local and national operational activity. However, more work is needed to establish this.

We found some examples of changes the service had made following incident debriefs. But not all staff we spoke to knew about these, nor were they confident about how to find information the service had shared following debriefs.

Most new information is available from the service's intranet 'staff hub' or through the online learning record system. The service should make sure that all learning from operational incidents is made available promptly and that operational staff are aware of how they can access this information.

The service has made positive progress on the Grenfell Inquiry findings but needs to do more

During this round of inspection, we sampled how each fire and rescue service has responded to the recommendations and learning from Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower fire inquiry.

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service has taken some steps to respond to this tragedy. It has identified some buildings with cladding similar to the type installed on Grenfell Tower. It has completed safety inspections at the majority of these buildings and, at the time of this inspection, the service was on track to complete this work as planned. At the same time as it inspected the buildings, it reviewed and updated its records and plans for dealing with incidents at each site.

But the service still has more to do. We heard that there were some training exercises shortly after the tragedy in 2017, but there have been few since. The service has set up a project team to oversee completion of actions following the fire and Phase 1 of the public inquiry. This work has been slow to progress. We were surprised to find that, given the national prominence of the issues raised by the Grenfell Tower fire, the service had not given this higher priority.

Preventing fires and other risks



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at preventing fires and other risks.

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

Areas for improvement

- The service should develop a clear prevention strategy targeting people most at risk and make sure activity undertaken is proportionate to reduce that risk.
- The service should make sure it allocates enough resources to meet its prevention strategy.
- The service should evaluate its prevention activity so it understands what works.
- The service should ensure it targets the most vulnerable referrals as a priority, and that staff understand the service's high-risk factor categories.

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

The service's prevention plan has not been fully updated

The service has a prevention plan which has been partly revised to align with its IRMP action plan. However, it hasn't been fully updated. For example, many of the projects and activities that it details are exactly the same as those in the 2017–20 prevention plan.

The revised plan contains four high-level objectives, but only one refers to reducing risk, and there is limited detail to link these objectives to the activities described in the plan. The service doesn't describe which people or communities it considers to be high risk. The plan doesn't include any meaningful and easily understood measures that can be used to show the public how the service is mitigating risk, or how successful its plans are. As a result, it isn't clear how the plan aligns to the risks the service has identified, or how it will use its resources to mitigate this risk.

Prevention work is returning to normal after the pandemic

We considered how the service had adapted its prevention work during our COVID-19 specific inspection between 9 and 20 November 2020. At that time, we found it had adapted its public prevention work appropriately. Since then, we are encouraged to find that the service has largely returned to face-to-face home fire safety checks, and that it continues to work with other organisations to receive referrals.

The process for targeting home fire safety checks still needs improvement

Gloucestershire FRS doesn't have the capacity to produce its own list of home fire safety checks. Instead, it is reliant on referrals from other organisations. The service has identified seven fatal fire risk factors, and it continues to use these to prioritise visits into high or low-risk categories.

At 6.7 checks per 1,000 population, the service's rate of home fire safety checks is higher than the national average of 4.5 checks per 1,000 population. However, it doesn't prioritise its home fire safety checks as well as it could. The systems it uses don't allow for the easy identification of those homes at greatest need within the high-risk category. As a result, there is a need for specialist prevention staff to regularly monitor the system to make sure those at greatest risk receive the fastest response. We identified this as an area for improvement during our 2019 inspection.

We heard the service has plans to develop a systematic process to determine which people it should prioritise out of those it has already identified as being at greatest risk from fire, otherwise known as a 'risk stratification system'. This would make sure those at greatest risk would receive the quickest response, without the need for manual intervention by specialist staff. This work was still in its early stages. The service should make sure it progresses this as soon as possible.

The training for [safe and well visits](#) lacks structure and staff do not have enough time to complete it

We found that the training for staff carrying out prevention work lacked structure. As the training must be completed alongside other work, there was also limited time for staff to do it.

Specialist prevention staff don't have a formal induction and training programme. E-learning modules are available, but need to be booked and completed alongside staff's other workloads. The specialist staff also have to train on-call staff who volunteer to complete safe and well visits. This limits the time they have to carry out important prevention visits even more.

The service has recently increased the length of time on-call staff have for training. Staff saw this as an opportunity to improve how they complete home fire safety checks.

The service has clear safeguarding procedures, but some referrals need to be improved

The service has improved its [safeguarding](#) arrangements since our last inspection. Safeguarding training is given to operational and specialist staff, a new safeguarding referral form has been introduced, and the safeguarding lead is active and visible in the service.

Most staff we spoke to understand the importance of recognising vulnerability and making a safeguarding referral, but sometimes staff will refer to their manager or send an email to the central team. The service should assure itself that all staff are confident they can make safeguarding referrals by the most appropriate route.

The service collaborates with others to identify and reduce community risk

The service works with a range of organisations to understand and reduce risk in the community. These include Gloucestershire Police, the Safer Gloucestershire Board, Cotswold District Council, and the county's safeguarding boards. They focus on those who are at greatest risk due to fire, domestic abuse and other vulnerabilities.

Gloucestershire FRS works directly with organisations on joint risk reduction projects at, for example, its SkillZONE community safety centre. It also receives referrals for home fire safety checks and makes referrals to organisations that are better able to meet the needs of people the service has identified as being at risk.

The service takes a lead role with the local authority and other organisations in preventing fire. For example, it chairs a multi-agency sub-group of the safeguarding adults board. The sub-group reviews fatal fire incidents and [near misses](#). It develops projects and action plans which aim to prevent fires, fire fatalities and injuries. The group has arrangements to share risk information. Where needed, the service will complete a safe and well visit within 48 hours.

At the time of the inspection, the service had started to develop a pilot project to provide 'domestic abuse champions' from on-call fire stations in the Cotswold District Council area. This was at the request of the council. It was in its early stages and we look forward to seeing it develop.

The service does limited work to tackle fire-setting behaviour

The service has only limited involvement in targeting and educating people who show signs of fire-setting behaviour. Some staff have recently worked with Gloucestershire Police in response to an increase in deliberate fires in an area of Cheltenham, but this wasn't part of a structured programme to tackle deliberate fire setting. The service is training staff to tackle deliberate fire setting, as recent retirements have affected its capacity to do this work.

There is not enough evaluation or quality assurance of prevention work

We found limited evidence that the service evaluates the effectiveness of its prevention activity. There was some evaluation of social media campaigns, but we found no evidence of quality assurance or review of the safe and well programme or other prevention work.

Without evaluation, the service can't be sure it is identifying and targeting those who are most at risk. It can't tell if its prevention work is effective at reducing risk and changing behaviours so that people are safer. It also can't tell whether it is making the best use of its limited resources.

Protecting the public through fire regulation



Requires improvement (2019: Inadequate)

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at protecting the public through fire regulation.

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

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure it has sufficient capacity and resilience to manage its RBIP and take proportionate enforcement action, including prosecution.
- The service should make sure it has an effective quality assurance process, so staff carry out audits to an appropriate standard.
- The service should assure itself that its use of enforcement powers prioritises the highest risks and includes proportionate activity to reduce risk.
- The service should make sure it works with local businesses and large organisations to share information and expectations on compliance with fire safety regulations.

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

The service has introduced a new protection plan

In line with the commitment in its IRMP action plan, the service has introduced a protection plan that sets out how it will make sure the buildings in its area are safe from fire.

The plan is a high-level document that explains how the service will review safety in buildings and, when needed, take enforcement action to make sure they are safe. However, the plan doesn't contain enough information for business owners and building users to understand if their buildings are high risk. It also doesn't outline how the service will work with them to make sure they make their buildings safer.

The service has revised its risk-based inspection programme (RBIP) to focus on the buildings most at risk

The service revised its RBIP following our last inspection. It used fire and casualty data and the results of inspection activity to develop a clear definition of high-risk buildings. This includes high-rise buildings of six or more floors, hospitals and care homes. This definition was understood by most staff we spoke to and is the focus of the service's audit programme.

At the time of the inspection, the service was on track to have audited all 1,732 buildings that meet its high-risk criteria by April 2022, which is positive.

We found the service isn't clear about the resources it will need to meet the future demands of its RBIP, and the associated enforcement and engagement work. It hasn't yet reviewed its RBIP and other anticipated work to determine if its current resources are enough. This is an important next step. The service should make sure this review is completed and that the results inform its future resource planning.

Resourcing has improved, but more resilience is needed

Despite improved resources, the service isn't doing enough to make sure its protection department is resilient now and in the future.

The increase in protection staff that we noted when we revisited the service earlier in 2021 has been maintained. Inspectors receive specialist training and accreditation to the appropriate national level. The majority of new staff have completed their training, and the service has also trained some of its operational staff to complete business safe and well visits. While this could increase capacity, the service was at a very early stage of testing the arrangements during the inspection.

There has been improvement in the availability of staff to give 24/7 specialist advice to make sure people are safe, but this is still not fully resilient.

We were concerned to see the service is still largely reliant on one member of staff to manage its fire safety records and work allocation system. It has been too slow to change this known single point of failure.

Protection work is returning to normal

We considered how the service had adapted its protection activity during our COVID-19 specific inspection in November 2020. At that time, we found it had adapted its protection work well. We were encouraged to hear the service had returned to on-site audits as lockdown restrictions were lifted.

The service has made good progress in reviewing safety in high-rise buildings

Gloucestershire FRS has reviewed the buildings in its area to identify those which use cladding similar to that installed on Grenfell Tower. It has visited most of these buildings to check fire safety arrangements and to gather information to help firefighters who might attend an emergency at the buildings. At the time of this inspection, the service was on track to complete this work as planned.

Audits are consistent, but feedback needs to be improved

Protection work is generally completed to a good standard, but the service could do more to make sure it gives a consistent response to businesses. We reviewed a range of audits of different premises. This included audits that were made:

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

Most audits had been completed in a consistent and systematic manner, with important information and findings accurately recorded, but there were some inconsistencies in the way feedback was given to building managers, and the action taken by other organisations could be recorded in a more consistent manner.

Quality assurance needs to be improved

The service isn't doing enough to quality assure its protection work. New staff have their work routinely reviewed by a manager to support their development. Managers also review any inspection reports which result in enforcement.

Service policy is for safety inspectors to have their work reviewed by a manager every six months. Staff we spoke to told us this rarely happens. Without regular quality assurance of all inspectors' work, the service is missing opportunities to promote consistency and drive improvement.

There is limited use of enforcement powers

A shortage of skills and capacity means Gloucestershire FRS doesn't consistently use its full range of enforcement powers. There has been a low level of enforcement activity in recent years. In the year to 31 March 2021, the service issued:

- no alteration notices;
- 37 informal notifications;
- 1 enforcement notice;
- 1 prohibition notice; and
- undertook no prosecutions.

It completed 2 prosecutions in the past 5 years, from 2016 to 2021.

Some staff lacked the confidence and experience to complete formal enforcement work. The department also doesn't have the capacity to carry out formal investigations for prosecutions alongside completing its RBIP. The service should consider how it supports its staff to take effective enforcement action, and make sure it has the resources to do this in the future.

The service is working with other organisations to improve building safety

The service gave examples of where it is working with other organisations to improve building fire safety. It works with the housing and building control departments of its local authorities. It also works with the Care Quality Commission to review safety in care homes.

Following the Grenfell Tower fire, the service has worked with residential building owners to review and improve the safety of the buildings in its area. This includes Cheltenham Borough Council and Gloucester City Homes. It has also engaged with the owners of commercial buildings that have cladding similar to Grenfell Tower to improve safety in those buildings.

The service has a good response to building and licensing consultations

The service responds well to building control and licensing consultations from its local authorities and approved inspectors. We spoke to Cotswold District Council, who were complimentary about how the service has worked with them. They said building control consultations get a timely response from suitably qualified staff. The council is also able to discuss any issues or concerns with the service.

In the year to March 2021, Gloucestershire FRS responded to 99.5 percent of its building control consultations within the expected 14 working days. Licensing consultations received a similarly good response, with 99.4 percent of consultations receiving a response within 28 working days.

The service needs to do more work with businesses to promote safety

The service could do more to work with local businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation.

The service gives some safety information on its website, and it uses social media to promote safety messages, often aligned to national business safety campaigns. But it rarely works directly with businesses to explain the importance and benefits of complying with fire safety legislation, and it has not set up any primary authority partnerships. The service is missing opportunities to improve fire safety by helping businesses understand the value of good compliance.

The service could do more to reduce unwanted fire alarms

The service challenges calls from automatic fire alarm systems as its primary mechanism to make sure false alarms don't affect responses to real emergencies. As a result, in the year to March 2021 the service didn't send a response to 54 percent of the automatic fire alarm calls it received. This increased the availability of fire engines and firefighters to respond to genuine emergencies. But the service could do more to highlight to businesses the importance of managing their fire alarm systems to prevent unwanted calls.

Areas that gave us concern have improved

During our 2019 inspection, we saw notable shortfalls in the service's protection arrangements. As these shortfalls were significant, we gave the service a [cause of concern](#), with recommendations for improvement. We were pleased to find the service has made enough progress for the original cause of concern to be lifted. We will continue to work with the service to review its progress and make sure these improvements are sustained.

Responding to fires and other emergencies



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at responding to fires and other emergencies.

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

Areas for improvement

- The service should make sure it has resilient arrangements to give relevant information to the public about ongoing incidents to help keep the public safe during and after they happen.
- The service should make sure it has an adequately resourced plan to adopt [national operational guidance](#), including joint and national learning.
- The service should ensure it has an effective system for staff to use learning and debriefs to improve operational response and incident command.

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

Response plans need updating

The service doesn't have a response plan which is clearly linked to risk, nor is it communicated in its IRMP. It hasn't reviewed its response model and the location of fire stations since 2015.

At the time of our inspection, the service did have plans to review its emergency response arrangements, but this work wasn't due to start until 2022. As a result, the service can't clearly link the rationale for the location and number of its emergency response vehicles and stations to its understanding of risk or to plans to mitigate that risk. For example, fire engines are being replaced on a like-for-like basis rather than with vehicles and equipment that have been chosen because they best meet the needs of the local community.

The service does not meet its new response standards.

There are no national standards for fire and rescue emergency response. The service has set out its own response standards. Disappointingly, it didn't do this as part of its IRMP, so the standards aren't linked to the management of risk. Neither did it consult the public on the proposed change.

The service's current response standards are:

- dwelling fires: an average response of nine minutes or less;
- other building/'commercial' fires: an average response time of ten minutes or less; and
- primary fires: an average response time of ten minutes or less.

In the year to March 2021, the service didn't meet its response times for dwelling, primary or other building/'commercial' fires. These had average response times of 9 minutes and 20 seconds, 10 minutes 6 seconds and 10 minutes and 2 seconds respectively.

We were pleased to see the service has amended its response policy since our last inspection. It now sends the nearest, appropriate fire engine to all calls, which improves the service the public receives.

Fire engine availability is good

To support its response model, the service aims to have its wholetime fire engines available on 100 percent of occasions, with on-call fire engines available on 90 percent of occasions. The service has improved its fire engine availability since our last inspection and has consistently met this standard. In the year to March 2021, wholetime fire engine availability was 100 percent and on-call engine availability was 91 percent.

Incident command skills support needs improvement

The service has arrangements to make sure the skills of its incident commanders are regularly assessed and validated in line with national standards. We reviewed the records of a sample of incident commanders and found them to be up to date and in line with service policy.

We found incident commanders were familiar with the procedures for assessing risk, making decisions and recording information at incidents in line with national operational guidance, as well as with the [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles \(JESIP\)](#).

However, some incident commanders told us there were few opportunities to maintain their command experience and skills in the periods between when they are trained and reassessed for their roles. This was particularly relevant for newly appointed commanders and those working in areas with relatively low call levels and few opportunities to command incidents. The service told us it had put support arrangements in place, so incident commanders could shadow more experienced staff and benefit from their support. These arrangements lacked structure and not all incident commanders were aware of them. The service should consider how it can improve the structure of these arrangements and increase staff confidence in them.

The service records analytical risk assessments at emergencies using a risk assessment form. It duplicates the latest assessment on a whiteboard, so firefighters can see the latest risk information when they are at an incident.

We were surprised to find some incident commanders did not understand this and were unclear about how permanent records of risk assessments were kept. The service should assure itself all response staff understand the process and the methods of permanently recording risk assessments.

Control staff are involved in exercises and incident debriefs

We are pleased to see the service integrates its control staff into its training and incident debrief activity. Staff told us this had improved since the last inspection.

There were examples of control staff being involved in exercises at a specialist local training venue and a high-rise building in Gloucester. Control staff were also involved in incident debriefs after an incident on the M5 and a fire in a high-rise building that raised important safety issues.

The service tries to arrange debriefs so control staff can attend in person. On some occasions they use online meeting facilities so that staff can attend while still on duty in the control room.

There is limited progress to introduce national operational guidance

The service needs to do more to introduce national operational guidance. This was an area for improvement we identified in our last inspection.

Its plan showed limited progress, with many tasks overdue. It has recently revised the plan and agreed additional staff levels at stations to support the work needed to introduce national operational guidance. It should make sure this work progresses promptly and with effective managerial oversight.

Arrangements for handling multiple fire survival guidance calls need to be more robust

Despite a positive start, more work is needed to make sure the service's arrangements for handling multiple fire survival guidance calls are robust and can be deployed effectively.

Following the Grenfell Tower fire, the service has reviewed its procedures for handling calls and providing survival advice to people trapped by fire. Control staff could confidently give survival advice and had access to clear guidance for this. There are also arrangements for passing additional calls to 'buddy' services, and facilities to bring in staff to deal with increased call numbers. But the system for recording and passing multiple casualty details to firefighters attending an incident was not well understood beyond control staff and had not been tested.

But we found 40 percent of control staff hadn't recently completed training in handling these calls, and the arrangements had not been tested in any exercises. The service should assure itself that its arrangements are robust, properly understood by all operational staff, and can be deployed effectively.

Risk information is up to date and easy to access

We sampled a range of risk information, including what is in place for firefighters responding to incidents at high-risk, high-rise buildings. The records we examined were up to date and had been reviewed with the service's protection and response teams. Operational staff we spoke to told us they can submit updated information following a visit to the site.

Staff are able to access risk information using computers in the cabs of their fire engines. The system appeared to be robust and reliable. Two areas where staff felt the system could be improved were by having access to specialist information about chemicals and information about vehicle safety systems. These would help firefighters attending emergency incidents keep the public and themselves safer. The service recognises this is an area where it can improve. It has committed to providing vehicle safety information on its fire engines. We look forward to seeing this progress.

The service needs to do more to improve incident debriefing

The service needs to do more to improve its arrangements for identifying, recording and sharing learning from incidents and exercises. It has done work in this area, but with limited progress.

The way the service manages learning and actions arising from debrief isn't effective. Service departments are not taking responsibility for improvement actions assigned to them. This means the actions aren't prioritised and completed. The service told us it plans to introduce new arrangements to oversee this and to make sure actions are completed. We look forward to seeing this develop, and to a more robust approach to debriefs and learning being established.

We found only limited evidence that the service contributes to and acts on learning from other fire and rescue services or operational learning gathered from other emergency service partners.

Arrangements to keep the public informed about ongoing incidents are ineffective

The service doesn't have a clear and co-ordinated approach to informing the public about ongoing incidents. This needs to be improved to help keep the public safe during and after incidents.

Some operational officers have the training to give media briefings. For more significant incidents, the service works with the council media team, with operational officers providing briefs when needed. The service also uses its social media channel to update the public about some incidents. Support for these arrangements isn't resilient and there is limited out-of-hours availability. The service recognises this is an area where it needs to improve.

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at responding to major and multi-agency incidents.

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

Areas for improvement

- The service should make sure it is well-prepared to form part of a multi-agency response to a terrorist incident, and its procedures for responding are understood by non-specialist response staff and are well tested.
- The service should ensure its firefighters have good access to relevant and up-to-date risk information. This should include cross-border risk information.
- The service should make sure it runs a programme of service, cross-border and partner exercises, sharing the learning from these exercises.

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

The service needs to improve its major and multi-agency incident preparations

The service has considered the reasonably foreseeable risks and threats it may face. These include site-specific risks such as Purton Water Treatment Works and Safran Landing Systems; community risks such as wide-area flooding and wildfires; and event risks like the Air Tattoo at Fairford and the Cheltenham Festival.

The service has made some progress since our last inspection in 2019. It has provided risk information on fire engines about sites in neighbouring service areas. However, we found all the firefighters we asked about this did not know the information was there or how to access it. When firefighters were called to an incident in a neighbouring service's area, they would rely on the neighbouring service for any risk information.

Response to major and multi-agency incidents needs improvement

We reviewed the arrangements the service has in place to respond to different major incidents, including high-rise building fires, risks planned for by the [local resilience forum \(LRF\)](#) and terrorist incidents.

Control staff know how to [mobilise](#) for major incidents and how to request national resources when needed. The service works with other organisations through the LRF. Staff from the service attend exercises and training organised by the LRF. The service is taking the strategic lead for the LRF's flood planning, and there is multi-agency liaison through regular work group meetings. Most staff we spoke to understand the service's major incident procedures and are confident about attending such incidents.

However, more work is needed. Training for multi-agency incidents needs to be given more frequently to all firefighters. Our staff survey showed that 55 percent of respondents (72 of 132) hadn't exercised with other organisations in the past 12 months. Firefighters hadn't received training in the latest high-rise firefighting and evacuation techniques. There was also no programme to give new national training to non-specialist responders who may be called to a terrorist incident.

Arrangements for working with other fire services are good

The service has arrangements in place so that it can respond to or request support from its six neighbouring services. The service told us it regularly attends incidents in neighbouring areas. Staff we spoke to were aware of the operating protocols to work effectively with neighbouring services.

Better co-ordination is needed for cross-border exercising arrangements

The service has a plan for cross-border exercising with some of its neighbouring services, although progress on this has been delayed by the pandemic. There was limited central oversight of exercises and training with neighbouring services. Much of the training was arranged at local station level.

A programme of major incident cross-border training had started just before the inspection. It needs more time to become established.

We saw limited examples of learning from cross-border exercises being shared between services and within Gloucestershire.

There is good understanding and application of JESIP

The service trains all incident commanders in the JESIP, which are used to make sure emergency services and partners work together effectively during emergencies. Strategic incident commanders also do multi-agency gold incident command training. Most incident commanders we spoke to were familiar with JESIP and could apply the principles correctly. The service gave us examples of JESIP being used in practice, including when working with LRF partners throughout the pandemic and during the recent fuel crisis.

The service has good arrangements for working with other organisations

The service has good arrangements to respond to emergencies with other organisations that make up the Gloucestershire LRF. It leads the operations group, oversees the LRF flood plans, and hosts the LRF secretariat.

The service supported the LRF to introduce a resilient command structure for the strategic co-ordinating groups during the response to the pandemic. It also worked on the excess deaths, community resilience and testing teams. It supported the South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust during the pandemic by providing trained staff to drive ambulances.

The service works with the Severn Area Response Association, which carries out waterborne search and rescue. The service hosts the Severn Area Response Association at its fire station in Tewkesbury.

Arrangements for using national learning need strengthening

The service told us it had arrangements for keeping up to date with [joint organisation learning](#) updates from other blue light partners and [national operational learning](#) from other fire services, such as the police service and ambulance trusts. However, it could give only very limited examples of learning which it had brought into the service. It couldn't give any examples showing how it used operational experience gained in service to contribute to national learning.

Efficiency



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



Requires improvement

Summary

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

There has been limited progress since the last inspection.

The service's budget, financial and staffing plans aren't clearly aligned to its IRMP, nor do they support its objectives. Its performance management arrangements need improvement. They should also show a clear link between the use of resources and achieving the service's objectives.

The service still needs more capacity to plan for and manage future change.

Some new controls and scrutiny have been introduced. But we found the service needs to take a more systematic approach to achieving value for money.

There isn't a current IT plan to link future provision to the service's plans and objectives. [Mobilising](#) systems need more robust and resilient support. We also saw that a lack of personnel system integration is hampering workforce efficiency.

The service needs a better understanding of its future financial challenges. This will allow it to make sure it has enough long-term funding and that its future plans are affordable.

Making best use of resources



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at making best use of its resources.

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

The service's budget for 2021/22 is £17.7m. This is a 2.06 percent increase from the previous financial year.

Areas for improvement

- The service should make sure it has resilient 24/7 support for its mobilising and associated IT systems.
- The service should make sure there is a testing programme for its business continuity plans, particularly in high-risk areas of service.
- The service should make sure that it is taking action to reduce non-pay costs and can demonstrate how it is achieving value for money.
- 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 its IRMP.
- The service should ensure it effectively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and outcomes of any collaboration.

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

The service's financial plans don't clearly support its objectives

The service sometimes uses its resources well to manage risk, but there are several weaknesses that need to be addressed. For example, there is no clear rationale for the allocation of resources to prevention, protection and response. The plans for these activities aren't clearly linked to the service's IRMP action plan and the risks they are intended to manage.

While there has been some progress profiling future requirements for staff skills and numbers, there isn't yet a consolidated workforce plan to bring these together.

We are concerned the service doesn't have enough information to determine the level of resources it needs for its future risk mitigation plans. As a result, the service isn't able to make clear, risk-based funding submissions to its parent authority. It was given additional in-year funding to support service improvements that hadn't been included in the formal budget build cycle. To address this lack of information and planning, it

has started to prepare business cases to support future funding increases. We look forward to seeing how this approach develops and how the service will link funding to its IRMP and risk mitigation plans.

We were pleased to see the service had taken action to improve its financial controls. There are clear internal budget monitoring and reporting processes. Additional oversight and challenge is carried out by the member-led Gloucester County Council fire scrutiny committee. As this oversight was a recent development at the time of our inspection, it was too early to see tangible benefits.

Better performance management arrangements are needed

The service needs to improve its performance management arrangements so it can clearly link its use of resources to its IRMP and strategic priorities. We saw examples of reports and information that are used to monitor and report service activity, but these didn't support a clear, senior-leader focus on performance management and effective prioritisation of the service's risk mitigation work.

We saw examples of how service managers had the flexibility to plan the work of their teams to improve productivity. These included:

- operational staff being redeployed to make sure fire engines stayed available;
- a range of contract times available for [on-call staff](#), to match resources to fire engine requirements; and
- training being planned at a local level to make sure on-call staff training time was used to maintain operational competence.

But more needs to be done. For example, there were limited examples of the service reviewing its working patterns to see if they meet the needs of the CRP. The service told us it plans to review operational cover during the first year of the new IRMP (2022–23). We look forward to seeing this work progress, and to seeing how the service shows the best use of its resources after the review.

IT support for emergency systems needs to be stronger

There has been a recent change in how the service's IT systems are supported. The reason for the change was to improve robustness by integrating with Gloucester County Council's IT department. But at the time of the inspection, the service was unable to assure itself there were resilient arrangements to support its emergency mobilising and associated systems at all times.

Some of the service's IT systems are either cumbersome to operate or don't meet its needs. For example, because the centralised staff management system is slow to be changed, some managers who take on temporary new responsibilities have to continue carrying out some of their old responsibilities that should be passed on to someone else. The service should assure itself that the IT systems it uses meet its needs and are efficient.

Collaboration work has stalled

The service has continued some collaborative activity which we saw during our last inspection in 2019. These include sharing a control room and headquarters building with Gloucestershire Police, and a joint private finance initiative training centre with Avon Fire and Rescue Service and Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service. However, we found that plans for further collaboration have been slow to progress.

Following changes in leadership in both organisations, the service is in discussion with Gloucestershire's police and crime commissioner to explore future collaborative opportunities with police. These include:

- sharing premises;
- a community safety partnership, which will allow a closer working relationship on road safety; and
- training and development.

There was still no evidence of the service reviewing or evaluating its existing collaborative work. As a result, it isn't able to clearly quantify the benefits of its current or planned collaborative work. The service recognises this is an area it needs to develop for the future.

This was an area of improvement we highlighted in 2019, and the service has not made enough progress since.

Continuity arrangements are in place, but they need to be tested

The service has good continuity arrangements in place in the event of industrial action. The plans were comprehensive and robust. However, there was no record of them being tested. This means staff aren't fully aware of the continuity plans or their associated responsibilities.

The service needs to take a co-ordinated approach to making sure it gets value for money

The service doesn't take a co-ordinated and consistent approach to demonstrating value for money in its purchasing decisions or when improving efficiency.

There were some examples of collaborative and framework procurement. However, it uses different approaches for its fleet, estates and other purchasing arrangements, with no single process to ensure consistency throughout the organisation. There also isn't a consistent process to monitor, review and evaluate the effectiveness of the service's purchasing decisions and other resource commitments. Without this, the service can't make sure that the planned benefits have been achieved, that they represent value for money, and that they don't have an adverse effect on other areas of its work.

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



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at making the service affordable now and in the future.

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

Areas for improvement

- The service should make sure it has sufficiently robust plans in place which address the medium-term financial challenges beyond 2021–22 and secure an affordable way of managing the risk of fire and other risks.
- The service should make sure that its fleet and estates management programmes are linked to the IRMP, and it understands the impact future changes to those programmes may have on its service to the public.
- The service should ensure it has sufficient capability and capacity to manage future change.

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

Better understanding of future financial challenges is needed

The service has a limited understanding of future financial challenges, which weakens its ability to mitigate its main or significant financial risks. It doesn't have coherent plans linked to a clear IRMP and objectives for mitigating community risk. Without these, and without an integrated workforce plan, the service has limited information about its probable future demand, workforce and resource needs. This hinders its ability to make long-term, informed budget submissions to Gloucestershire County Council.

There are clear arrangements to access and use reserves

Gloucestershire County Council holds the service's reserves. There is a robust process for the service to access reserves if it needs them. In 2021–22, the service received additional in-year funding of approximately £480,000 to support its improvement plans. In 2020–21, the service also received funding to offset the additional expenditure it had incurred in responding to the pandemic.

Fleet and estate plans should be clearly aligned to the IRMP

The service didn't have an up-to-date fleet plan at the time of the inspection. The previous plan was dated 2016–21. It didn't clearly align to the IRMP and hadn't been completed, in part due to delays in approving funding to purchase new fire engines. The plan doesn't link provision of fire engines to mitigating risk. The specification (design and equipment) of the fire engines that were being purchased at the time of the inspection weren't being matched to the community needs identified in the IRMP.

The service's estate needs are included in the parent council's corporate asset management plan. The service plans to review its emergency response model in 2022–23. This may lead to different estate requirements.

It isn't clear how the service's future requirements, based on its IRMP, would be provided for through the corporate asset management plan. We look forward to seeing how the service engages with the council to address its future needs.

The service needs more capacity for future changes

The service doesn't always consider how changes in technology and future innovation can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its workforce. For example, staff sickness and attendance are recorded in different systems, which aren't integrated. Local managers need to manually check reports from one system against the other to make sure the information is recorded correctly in both. Additionally, on-call managers don't have access to both systems, so must rely on their managers to check the reports for them. The service should work closely with its IT providers to make sure its systems and support are effective and fully meet its needs.

The service doesn't have an up-to-date IT plan, the last IT strategy ended in December 2020. As a result, it was unable to show us that it had considered where modern technology might improve its efficiency and effectiveness and support the delivery of its IRMP. The service should consider how it will plan for and demonstrate that its IT provision supports its IRMP, meets its needs and improves its efficiency and effectiveness.

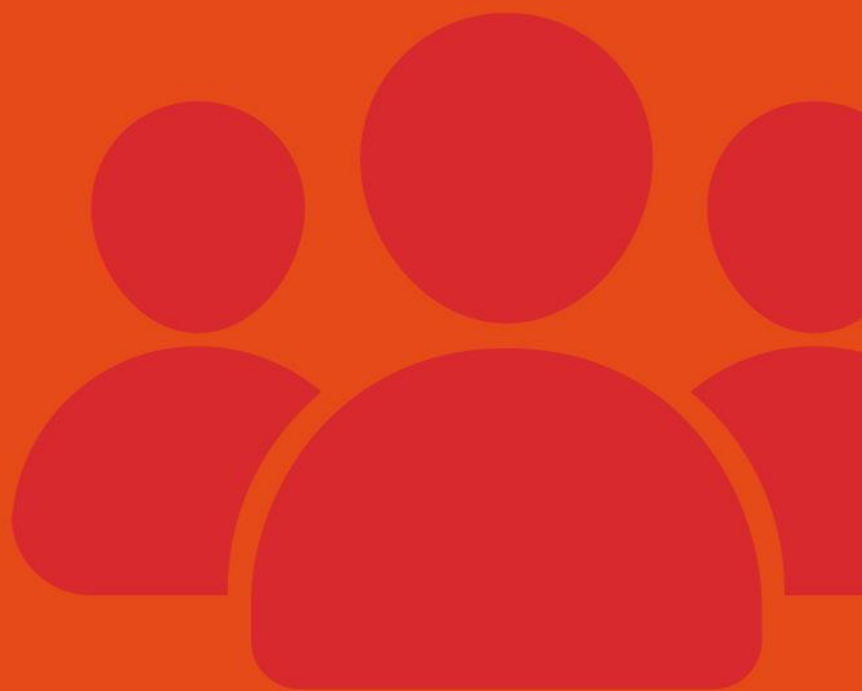
Disappointingly, the service still has limited capacity and capability to bring about lasting change. We identified this as an area for improvement during the 2019 inspection. Many departments lack enough resources to both carry out their routine work and make changes now and in the future. Workloads are high in many departments and some managers have multiple roles.

The service's progress in addressing the findings of our 2019 inspection has been slow, in part because of this limited capacity. The service has received additional funding from its parent authority to support its plans for change by increasing its available staff and resources. We look forward to seeing these plans develop and the speed of change increase.

There are no future plans for income generation

The service does generate some income through its control centre by taking out-of-hours calls for another council department, but it doesn't routinely consider external funding opportunities or options for generating income. It told us it had previously considered introducing a trading company as a way of generating income but concluded the financial benefits wouldn't justify the resources and commitment needed.

People



How well does the service look after its people?



Inadequate

Summary

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

Overall, it is disappointing to see that since the last inspection the service has deteriorated in the way it looks after its people. Much more work is needed, quickly, and with clear vision and leadership.

There has been limited progress on improving the service's culture.

We found worrying pockets of unacceptable behaviour among staff and management. These are having a negative effect on the wider culture of the service.

A significant number of staff feel some senior leaders don't model and maintain the service's values. There is a lack of senior-leader visibility. Staff told us communication with them is seen as one-way and ineffective.

Progress to address bullying, harassment and discrimination has been slow. We found staff have little belief in grievance and bullying, harassment and discrimination procedures. Staff and management have limited confidence to challenge inappropriate behaviour.

Efforts to improve EDI lack a clear vision and are not effectively co-ordinated. Equality impact assessments and actions don't have effective governance or oversight.

Some promotion procedures have been updated, following consultation with staff. But the service needs to do more to make sure the new procedures are seen as fair

and inclusive by all staff. It should also assure itself that they support increasing workplace diversity.

High workloads are affecting staff wellbeing. We found there was no plan to address this.

There has been some progress on workforce planning. But the service needs to do more to develop a comprehensive plan which is linked to the [integrated risk management plan \(IRMP\)](#).

Positively, the service has made some improvements to its approach to staff appraisals. It has appointed an EDI manager, which is an encouraging step towards improving EDI in the service. The number of temporarily promoted staff has also decreased.

Promoting the right values and culture



Inadequate (2019: Inadequate)

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service is inadequate at promoting the right values and culture.

Fire and rescue services should have positive and inclusive cultures, modelled by the behaviours of their senior leaders. Health and safety should be promoted effectively, and staff should have access to a range of wellbeing support that can be tailored to their individual needs.

We wrote to the service in January 2022, highlighting our concerns in this area. This was so it could take immediate action and develop a plan to confirm how it planned to make improvements.

Cause of concern

The service hasn't done enough since the last inspection to embed its values and associated behaviours and promote a positive workplace culture.

Recommendations

By 28 February 2022, the service should develop an action plan to:

- improve how it engages with its staff to gain their commitment to the service's values and associated behaviours;
- engage with its staff to develop a compelling vision of the service's future culture and set out a clear pathway to achieving this which staff can understand and relate to;
- make sure all staff understand the behaviours that are expected of them and how these relate to the service's culture;
- support managers to confidently challenge and manage inappropriate behaviour;
- establish effective measures to monitor and manage staff workloads; and
- make sure all staff have equitable access to appropriate welfare support.

Areas for improvement

- The service should assure itself that senior managers are visible and demonstrate service values through their behaviours.
- The service should assure itself that it has the facility to monitor and record working hours for those staff that have more than one contract.
- The service should ensure its programme for testing and maintaining equipment has suitable managerial oversight.

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

There has not been enough progress towards improving the culture

The service has more to do to establish a positive workplace culture that is consistent with its values and supported by appropriate staff behaviours.

The service adopted Gloucestershire County Council's values following our inspection in 2019. While it has taken some early steps, we were disappointed to find the service hasn't effectively involved its staff in the development of a clear vision of its future culture or created a plan which staff understand and can relate to. Without these it will be difficult to get staff commitment and support for the changes the service needs to make.

Senior managers are committed to making sure the new values and associated behaviours are accepted by everyone in the organisation, but efforts to achieve this

haven't been successful. Most staff we spoke to and 97.8 percent of staff who responded to our survey (186 of 190), were aware of the new values. However, not all staff understood the behaviours expected of them, the reasons the values had been changed, and how the values contribute to improvements in culture.

Some examples of unacceptable behaviour were described to us. This behaviour was inconsistent with the service's values and was also affecting the wider culture of the service. Examples included inappropriate language, lack of respect for colleagues, bullying, harassment and discrimination. There were limited examples of staff and managers feeling confident enough to challenge poor behaviour and, worryingly, some staff who did challenge it were shunned or excluded by colleagues for doing so. Responses to our survey showed that 48 percent of respondents (92 of 190) felt they weren't able to challenge ideas without detriment as to how they will be treated afterwards.

Many staff felt there was a lack of senior-leader visibility. 48 percent of staff who responded to our survey (92 of 186) felt senior leaders didn't model and maintain the service's values. Online communications, which were established during the pandemic, are seen as one-way, with limited opportunities for staff to challenge or give feedback to senior leaders. We were told staff felt that consultations with them on recent changes that affected the workforce were limited and ineffective. They felt they had not been given a chance to discuss the changes and their voices weren't being heard.

The service needs to take action to improve staff wellbeing

The service has some wellbeing provisions in place to support the mental and physical health of staff. This includes occupational health support, an employee assistance programme, and defusing support for staff who have attended traumatic or difficult incidents. Most staff on station and those who responded to our survey knew about the services available and where to find them, but we found staff didn't always find it easy to access them. In particular, some non-operational staff and those in specialist roles found that access to occupational health support and defusing wasn't always forthcoming or timely.

Despite increases in the number of staff since 2016, we found that high and poorly managed workloads were having a negative effect on staff physical and mental welfare. There has been a recent increase in stress-related absence and there was evidence of other serious illnesses brought on by the pressure of work. We were disappointed to find that, although there was an understanding of the effect of high workloads at senior leadership level, there was no clear plan to address this problem and improve staff wellbeing.

Of the staff who responded to our survey, 24 percent (45 of 190) reported they had never discussed their health and wellbeing with their manager. The service should consider how it can make sure all staff have this discussion with their manager. This will help it to better understand welfare needs and make appropriate improvements.

Absence management and reporting procedures need improvement

As part of our inspection, we reviewed some case files to consider how the service manages and supports staff through absence. The service has a clear, up-to-date, absence management policy. It gives guidance and training for managers and additional support to on-call stations. Managers we spoke to understood their responsibilities and were confident to manage staff absence.

However, we found that files weren't always complete. In particular, records of contact visits and discussions between staff who were sick, and their managers weren't always included in the files.

The service doesn't report its staff absence information nationally. We found this is because the service's method of recording 'light duties' as an alternative to sickness was inconsistent with most other services.

We were disappointed to find the service doesn't routinely consider redeployment to alternative roles as an alternative to ill-health dismissal. Managers told us redeployment may be used to allow a member of staff to recover prior to returning to their primary role, but that permanent redeployment was rarely considered.

Health and safety management needs to be improved

The service has an up-to-date health and safety policy, but some related policies were missing. For example, there is no lone-working policy. Nor is there a policy for the central oversight of hours worked by staff with dual contracts.

Staff did understand the health and safety policies and procedures that were in place. There was confidence in the service's approach to managing health and safety, with 85 percent of staff survey respondents (162 of 190) agreeing or tending to agree that the service took their safety and welfare seriously. Representative bodies also tended to agree the service manages health and safety well, although they felt they could be more involved in health and safety discussions.

Disappointingly, we found the service has been slow to take effective action to make sure there is central oversight of the testing of specialist equipment. This is a problem we highlighted during our last inspection. Records are currently held in a standalone computer system, which only one person has access to. Staff told us there were plans to transfer records to a central system run by the council, but this work hadn't been completed.

Getting the right people with the right skills



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at getting the right people with the right skills.

Fire and rescue services should have a workforce plan in place that is linked to their IRMPs, sets out their current and future skills requirements and addresses

capability gaps. They should supplement this with a culture of continuous improvement that includes appropriate learning and development throughout the service.

Areas for improvement

- The service should make sure its workforce plan takes full account of the necessary skills and capabilities to carry out the IRMP.
- The service should assure itself that all required training and assessment or re-validation for risk-critical competencies, such as breathing apparatus, driving fire engines and incident command, is provided and that records for these are accurate and up to date.
- The service should ensure it has development support for all newly promoted managers.

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

More progress is needed on workforce planning

The service needs to do more to improve its workforce planning so it can make sure it has the right skills and capabilities to effectively meet the needs of its IRMP. We found it has introduced a workforce planning board which has started to identify the service's future skill requirements, but further work is needed to make sure this approach is fully established. Departmental plans are developed in isolation. There also isn't yet an over-arching plan to draw together all the service's needs, align them to the IRMP, and link them to a service training plan.

More work is also needed to improve succession planning. While we were pleased to see the service has taken steps to reduce the number of staff in temporary positions, the average length of time in a temporary position is still over a year. The longest time in a temporary position is four years and ten months. Although this relates to a long-term specialist role away from the service.

The service has not made sure risk-critical skills are appropriately prioritised. We reviewed the service's training records and found some staff had not been trained and validated as required by service policy. Nor had all staff overdue training and validation been booked onto a course.

The training recording system could be improved with easy to access reports showing a service-wide view of training currency for all staff. An anomaly which means the service can't be assured that all staff have the correct skill requirements shown on their record should also be addressed.

We were disappointed to find there has been limited improvement in terms of the development support given to new managers. We identified this as an area for improvement during our previous inspection. Most managers don't receive mentoring or formal development support. There is a particular need for development support in people management skills, including grievance and discipline case management.

A wider range of training is needed for all staff

The service needs to improve the range of training it offers its staff. There is a range of practical, theoretical, and online training for operational and specialist staff, but only 64 percent of staff (122 of 190) responding to our survey said they received enough training to do their job effectively. For example, we found gaps in training for staff who were joining the prevention department, and in training non-specialist staff in terrorist incident procedures. The service needs to update its learning and development policy to show a clear link between [national operational guidance](#) and its training plans.

The service has recognised it needs to improve and has sourced additional training for staff. This includes a leadership programme which is being run with Gloucestershire Police, unconscious-bias training and business fire safety training for all operational staff.

We were pleased to see the service has given additional training time and supervision to [on-call staff](#), particularly those who have specialist response roles. This was an area for improvement we identified during our last inspection. It has also improved the initial training of its [wholetime firefighters](#) by introducing a national apprenticeship scheme.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity



Inadequate (2019: Requires improvement)

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service is inadequate at ensuring fairness and promoting diversity.

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

We wrote to the service in January 2022, highlighting our concerns in this area. This was so it could take immediate action and develop a plan to confirm how it planned to make improvements.

Cause of concern

The service hasn't done enough since the last inspection to improve understanding and awareness of the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and remove barriers to embedding EDI in the service.

Recommendation

By 28 February 2022 the service should develop an action plan to:

- engage with its staff to develop clear EDI objectives and a plan to increase awareness of EDI and its importance across the organisation. This should include understanding the impact positive action is having on staff;
- improve how it engages and seeks feedback and challenge from all areas of the service;
- understand the reasons for low declaration of staff diversity information and put in place a plan to address this;
- assure itself it has effective grievance procedures. It should identify and implement ways to improve staff confidence in the grievance process; and
- improve the understanding and use of equality impact assessments in all aspects of its work and consider if its policies and procedures are inclusive and support those with protected characteristics.

Area for improvement

The service should review how effective its policy on bullying, harassment and discrimination is in reducing unacceptable behaviour towards its staff.

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

The service needs to improve its approach for seeking and acting on staff feedback and challenge

More work is needed to build trust and confidence between senior leaders and the workforce by improving the way the service seeks challenge, gathers feedback from all staff and responds to staff concerns.

The service has ways to gather feedback and respond to staff concerns. These include a staff suggestions process, bi-weekly online meetings, grievance procedure and the annual staff performance review process. There has been an increase in the number of staff grievances the service has received. But we found staff have limited confidence in these and other feedback arrangements and don't think they are effective. In the survey we carried out:

- 46 percent (88 of 190) of staff who responded felt their ideas and suggestions wouldn't be listened to;

- 50 percent (95 of 190) didn't have confidence in the service's feedback systems; and
- 48 percent (92 of 190) felt they weren't able to challenge ideas without detriment as to how they will be treated afterwards.

The survey results were strongly reflected when we visited the service and spoke to staff. Many expressed a lack of confidence in feedback arrangements. They described giving feedback or asking questions but then not receiving responses or seeing any changes as a result. The service should make sure its feedback systems are effective, two-way and that staff are confident to use them.

Two of the three staff associations which responded to our survey felt their work with the service was usually meaningful. All three associations had less confidence that their views were listened to and valued by the service's leaders.

There is not enough effective action to address bullying, harassment and discrimination

Although we highlighted it as an area for improvement after our 2019 inspection, the service has made little progress towards improving staff understanding of bullying, harassment and discrimination, including their duty to eliminate them. In our staff survey, 14 percent of staff (26 of 190) told us they had been subject to harassment in the past year, and 22 percent (41 of 190) said they had experienced discrimination over the same period.

Although the service has policies, procedures and guidance in place, staff have limited confidence in its ability to deal effectively with cases of bullying, harassment and discrimination, or grievances and discipline. In some places, we heard that people considered it unsafe to report inappropriate behaviour, as they felt that their concerns wouldn't be listened to, and that they wouldn't be acted on appropriately or confidentially. Some feared that they would suffer adverse consequences for speaking up.

We found that the service hadn't created a safe environment for managers and staff to challenge unacceptable and poor workplace behaviours. Staff gave worrying examples of bullying, harassment and discrimination that hadn't been challenged or effectively addressed, and managers weren't always confident dealing with workplace behaviour problems. The service has started to address this by providing training for managers.

Improvements to wholetime firefighter recruitment

The service has started to improve its recruitment processes. It recently introduced a new selection method for wholetime firefighter recruitment. It supports this with positive action, to encourage applications from a wider range of people from different backgrounds to join the service. We were pleased to see encouraging signs of success from the new selection method. Forty-five percent of applicants who had been shortlisted to join the service were from ethnic minority backgrounds or women. We look forward to seeing whether this initial success can be sustained in future recruitment rounds.

This is a welcome improvement in recruitment approach, which builds on the service's overall workforce strategy. At the time of the inspection, the service had just completed a review of the new recruitment methodology. We look forward to seeing how the service adapts its approach following the review, and how it applies the principles of its current approach to all sections of its workforce.

At the end of March 2021, the proportion of the workforce from an ethnic minority background was 3.1 percent. Although the service has improved, rising from of 2.4 percent in March 2018, it doesn't compare well to the England figure of 5.3 percent. However, it is closer to the local population figure of 4.6 percent.

At 17.1 percent, the proportion of women firefighters in March 2021 was above the England proportion of 7.5 percent, but has only increased 1.7 percentage points since March 2018. Between April 2017 and March 2021, 2.8 percent (5 of 181) of new joiners who stated their ethnicity have self-declared as being from ethnic minority backgrounds and 25.1 percent (65 of 259) of new joiners were women. For firefighter recruitment in the year ending March 2021, 20.0 percent of all new recruits were women and 2.6 percent were from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Disappointingly, we found the service hasn't taken enough action to clearly explain positive action to all of its staff. In some areas there was lack of understanding about the value of positive action and the benefits it offers in helping to encourage workplace diversity.

The service needs to do more to improve its understanding of workplace diversity. This would help it recognise and eliminate any disproportionality in recruitment, retention and promotion. While the service has recently encouraged all staff to give their diversity data, the current level of declaration of this information throughout the service is consistently below the England level. For example, by 31 March 2021, 21.6 percent of service staff hadn't declared their ethnicity. This is significantly higher than the England figure of 9.0 percent.

There has not been enough progress on improving EDI

The service needs to do much more to improve its approach to EDI. Senior leaders recognise there is a need to improve the service's approach, but progress to date has been limited and too slow. There is no plan with clearly stated objectives about how the service intends to improve in this area.

The actions taken so far, while they have made some improvements, lack clear strategic vision and are disjointed. Some areas of work to improve EDI are being steered by passionate and interested groups or individuals, but without senior leaders giving clear direction or taking responsibility for the work.

We found the service's lack of progress has left staff frustrated at the slow pace of change. In some areas, efforts to improve understanding of the importance of equality and having a diverse, inclusive workplace weren't well received or successful. Instead, not all staff felt engaged with the need for improvement. It has also resulted in staff lacking the confidence to discuss EDI issues in the workplace for fear of 'getting it wrong' and being seen as part of the problem.

We found some pockets of the service where the lack of understanding and respect had led to wholly inappropriate and unacceptable language and behaviour being normalised and left unchallenged. We were particularly concerned when staff described to us examples of sexist behaviour, racist comments and bullying which they had experienced or witnessed in the workplace. We interviewed several members of staff who were clearly distressed by their experiences.

One important process for assessing the equality impact of the proposed changes in the service lacked effective oversight and governance. This meant there was no way for the service to assure itself that any of the actions proposed to mitigate equality impacts had been completed, or that they were having the desired result. We reviewed a selection of recently completed assessments and found that the staff undertaking the assessments had limited training and experience in applying the process. Training in the procedure wasn't due to be completed until March 2022.

We welcome the recent appointment of an EDI manager, but we are concerned that there continue to be limited resources available to resolve the complex issues the service faces in improving its EDI approach.

The service should set out clear, properly resourced plans and objectives which show how it will improve EDI. It should make better use of its staff networks to do this, and make sure the work is led, managed and supported effectively.

Managing performance and developing leaders



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at managing performance and developing leaders.

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

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 put in place a system to actively manage staff careers, with the aim of diversifying the pool of future and current leaders.

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

Individual performance management arrangements have improved

We were pleased to see the service has improved its approach to performance management since our last inspection. It has an effective system in place, which allows it to develop and assess the individual performances of its staff. The personal development review (PDR) process includes links to the service's and council's objectives, and identifies personal contributions to supporting the new organisational values and EDI.

Through our staff survey, most respondents reported that they have had regular discussions with their manager and that these discussions were useful. Each staff member has individual goals and objectives, and regular assessments of their performance. Most staff we spoke to felt confident in the performance and development arrangements that are in place.

But figures provided by the service showed that completion rates of PDRs for on-call and non-uniform staff were much lower than those for wholetime and control staff. The service should make sure that all staff receive a regular PDR.

More work is needed to build staff confidence in the fairness of promotion and progression processes

The service needs to do more to make sure its promotion and progression processes are seen as fair and inclusive by all staff. It introduced a new promotion process in May 2021. The policy was developed following feedback and consultation from staff and staff associations. During our inspection, it was being used to create a reserve list of staff for future vacancies.

However, more work is needed to build staff understanding and confidence in the fairness of the service's approach to promotion. Fifty-nine percent (112 of 190) of staff who responded to our survey did not feel that the promotion process in the service was fair.

The service doesn't have strong succession planning processes in place to allow it to effectively manage the career pathways of its staff, including roles requiring specialist skills. Senior leaders told us the service had started to introduce career pathways, but there was limited evidence of progress in this area. The service needs to take more action to address this. It needs to develop effective and inclusive career pathways for all staff.

We were pleased to see the service had taken action to reduce the number of temporary promotions. At the time of our inspection these had reduced to 31, from 53 on 31 March 2019. The promotion assessment processes that were being run during the inspection were expected to reduce this number further, but we found that some temporary promotions had been in place for longer than appropriate.

As of 31 March 2021, the average length of a temporary promotion was over a year (420 days). The longest temporary promotion was just over 4 years and 10 months (1,782 days). The service should make sure it takes further action to better manage and reduce the use of temporary promotions for extended periods.

There has been no improvement in developing leadership and high-potential staff

We were disappointed to find the service still hasn't introduced arrangements to actively manage the career pathways of staff, including those with specialist skills and leadership roles. This was an area for improvement we highlighted following our last inspection.

The service has no talent management schemes. While it recognises this is an area where it needs to do more, there was no plan in place or timeframe in which the work would be completed.

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