

Fire & Rescue Service 2021/22

Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of West Sussex 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 West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service in November 2018, publishing a report with our findings in June 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 West Sussex 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.




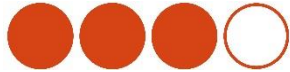


If the service exceeds what we expect for good, we will judge it as outstanding.

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	 Good	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	 Good	Requires improvement
Responding to major and multi-agency incidents	 Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Question	This inspection	2018/19
 Efficiency	 Good	Requires improvement
Making best use of resources	 Good	Requires improvement
Future affordability	 Good	Requires improvement

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

HM Inspector's summary

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

I am satisfied with some aspects of the performance of West Sussex FRS in keeping people safe and secure from fires and other risks, but there are areas where the service needs to improve. These include making sure firefighters carry out enough prevention activity, doing more to reduce unwanted fire signals, and continuing to make sure staff behaviour aligns with organisational values.

We were pleased to see that the service has made progress since our 2018 inspection. For example, it has used increased funding to expand its prevention and protection teams. We no longer have causes of concern about how these teams carry out aspects of their work.

These are the findings I consider most important from our assessments of the service over the last year:

- The service is improving how it responds to incidents. Fire engines arrive at incidents within expected timeframes. The service commands incidents well, and there are good processes for staff to learn from the incidents it deals with.
- The service is getting better at having the right people with the right skills. The service has good workforce planning processes in place. This means it anticipates the number of staff retiring and how many staff it needs to recruit and train. A new computer system allows the service to monitor the competence of staff more easily. The service has improved its online training programme to make sure staff are trained to a consistent standard.
- The service is becoming more efficient. It has made comprehensive plans for carrying out its work in different future financial situations. And it has improved the way it works with other organisations. This includes joint control arrangements with other services.

The service has made significant progress in many areas since our last inspection. It must now maintain and build on this improvement, making it a priority to continue to tackle bullying, harassment and discrimination. This should include making sure that all staff understand and act on the service's values.



Matt Parr

HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Service in numbers



Response

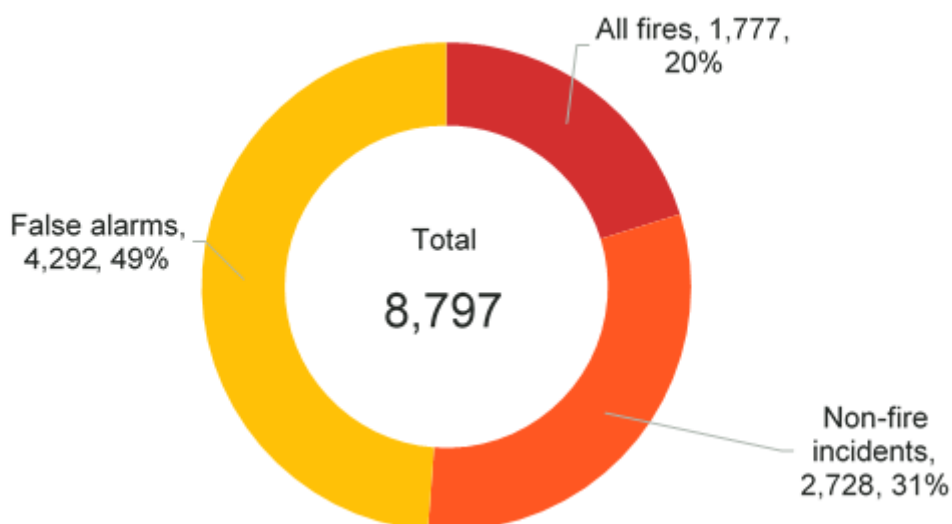
	West Sussex	England
Incidents attended per 1,000 population Year ending 30 June 2021	10.14	9.36
Home fire safety checks carried out by fire and rescue service per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	4.94	4.47
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises Year ending 31 March 2021	2.63	1.70
Average availability of pumps Year ending 31 March 2021	77.2%	86.4%



Cost

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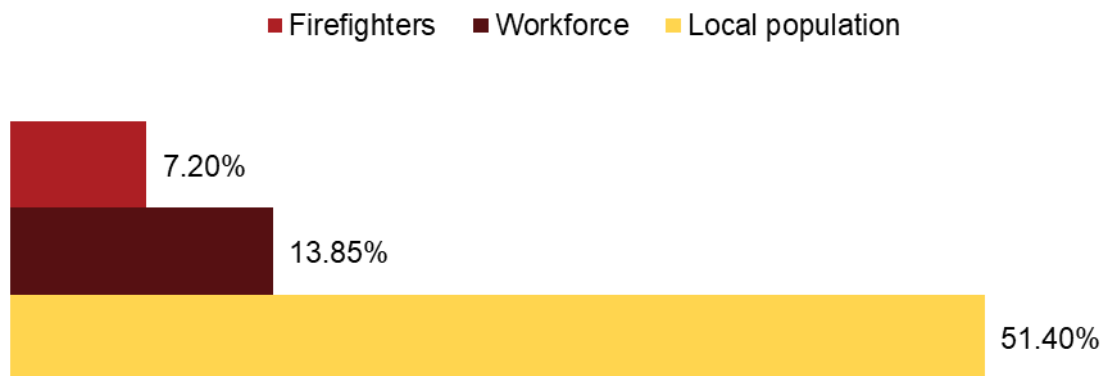
Incidents attended in the year to 30 June 2021



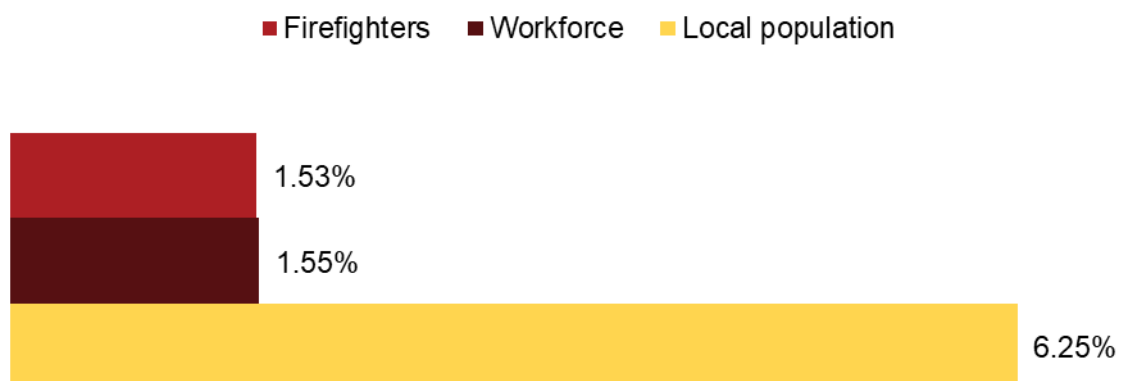


Five-year change in total workforce 2016 to 2021	7.75%	-1.60%
Number of firefighters per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2021	0.74	0.62
Percentage of firefighters who are wholetime Year ending 31 March 2021	51.8%	64.4%

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. West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service's overall effectiveness requires improvement.

Since our last inspection, the service has used increased funding from West Sussex County Council to add more staff to its prevention, protection and operational assurance teams. This has helped improve effectiveness. But there is still more to do.

For example, the service needs to make sure that all firefighters understand what their role would be in a possible terrorist incident. And firefighters could carry out more prevention work with the public.

The service also needs to do more to reduce unwanted fire signals. We are pleased that the current public consultation on the service's community risk management plan (CRMP) includes proposals for addressing this problem.

It is encouraging that the service has begun using new technology to improve the way it works. A database is allowing prevention, protection and response staff to share information on risks, which helps keep the public and firefighters safer.

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies



Good (2019: Requires improvement)

West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service is good at understanding risk.

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

Area 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.

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

The service is good at identifying risk

The service has assessed an appropriate range of risks and threats following a thorough planning process. This is communicated to the public in its integrated risk management. When assessing risk, it has considered relevant information collected from a broad range of internal and external sources and data sets. For example, the service shares information about [vulnerable people](#) with other parts of West Sussex County Council.

The service is consulting on a new [integrated risk management plan \(IRMP\)](#), which it plans to call the community risk management plan (CRMP) 2022–2026. The county council has reviewed and approved the approach the service has taken to involve its local communities in this process.

When appropriate, the service has consulted and undertaken constructive dialogue with communities and others such as parish councils, voluntary groups, faith organisations, and other emergency services. The service is also consulting with staff and representative bodies on its CRMP. This work helps the service understand risks and explain how it plans to mitigate them.

There is an effective IRMP

After assessing relevant risks, the service has recorded its findings in an easily understood IRMP. This plan describes how prevention, protection and response activity is to be effectively resourced to mitigate or reduce the risks and threats the community faces, both now and in the future.

The service's IRMP for 2018–22 sets out how it aims to:

- reduce the number of emergency incidents and their effects by continuously improving prevention, protection and response activity;
- as part of West Sussex County Council, work with local communities, districts and boroughs to keep West Sussex safe;
- work with emergency services and other local and national organisations to improve end results for the public;
- support staff to be professional, resilient, skilled, flexible and diverse; and
- focus on customer needs and offer value for money.

The service reports to West Sussex [Fire Authority](#) on its performance and progress, which are measured against the IRMP's priorities.

It has brought in local risk management plans (LRMPs) which cover the district areas within the county. The LRMPs include and support actions from the IRMP.

But firefighters don't yet have enough links with their communities. The service should build and strengthen these links so the LRMPs can more effectively support people who are most at risk.

The service communicates risk information well

The service routinely collects and updates the information it has about the people, places and threats it has identified as being at greatest risk. It has established robust processes and systems to gather, record and make site-specific risk information readily available to prevention, protection and response staff. This helps them to identify, reduce and mitigate risk effectively.

The service's processes and systems include:

- gathering information during familiarisation visits to high-risk premises;
- working with building owners to put measures in place to reduce fire risks;
- working with organisations and businesses to determine short-term risk, for example at sporting events and festivals; and
- recording risk information about vulnerable members of the community, including hoarders.

Staff are given information in a range of ways, including [mobile data terminals](#) on fire engines, email and an online learning system.

Where appropriate, risk information is also given to other organisations such as local authorities, other emergency services and health organisations.

Feedback from operational activity informs understanding of risk

The service records and communicates risk information effectively. It also routinely updates risk assessments and uses feedback from local and national operational activity to inform its planning assumptions.

Since our last inspection, the service has added more staff to its operational assurance team. This team has reviewed and improved the way it gathers and disseminates learning from operational activity.

The service monitors national learning platforms to help find ways to improve the way it works. It also distributes its own learning via one of these, the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) platform.

Learning from Grenfell is helping reduce risk

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

West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service has responded positively and proactively to learning from this tragedy. At the time of our inspection, the service was on track to having assessed the risk of every high-rise building in its service area by the end of 2021.

It has carried out a fire safety audit and collected and passed relevant risk information to its prevention, protection and response teams about buildings identified as high risk and all high-rise buildings with cladding that is similar to the cladding installed on Grenfell Tower.

The service and local authority building control teams share information with each other as part of Building Risk Review work. This has helped create a common understanding of risk.

Preventing fires and other risks



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

West Sussex 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.

We are encouraged to see improvement in the service's prevention work since our last inspection. We previously identified a cause of concern in how the service aligns prevention activity with risk, and how it conducts [safe and well visits](#) in a timely manner. This cause of concern has now been resolved. While there is still more to do, the central prevention team is working much more effectively.

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure operational staff are productively involved in prevention work.
- The service should make sure it quality assures its prevention activity, so staff carry out safe and well visits consistently.
- The service should evaluate its prevention activity so it understands what works.

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

The prevention strategy aligns with the IRMP

The service's prevention strategy is clearly linked to the risks identified in its IRMP. Since our last inspection in 2018, prevention activities are targeting risk more effectively. The service has a much better understanding of overall risk in its area, which means it can better target its support to people who are most at risk.

The service co-ordinates its teams and works well with other relevant organisations on prevention, passing on relevant information when needed. Information is used to adjust planning assumptions and direct activity between the service's prevention, protection and response functions. There is a process in place to make sure that information about high-risk premises is shared between different departments. This means the service can manage and respond to risks appropriately.

The pandemic has reduced prevention activity

We considered how the service had adapted its prevention work during our COVID-19 specific inspection in October 2020. At that time, we found it had adapted its public prevention work by giving more online safety information and giving more advice to people on the telephone. This meant the service supported people when it wasn't possible to do this work in person.

Since then, the service hasn't resumed its prevention activities in the same way as before the pandemic. Firefighters aren't achieving the targets the service has set for safe and well visits and many are doing very little prevention work. The service told us this is because some people are less willing to have fire service staff in their houses during a pandemic. In contrast, the central prevention team is on target to achieve its targets for safe and well visits.

In light of this situation, it is good that the service has redirected firefighters to carry out more school visits and other prevention activities. But the service needs to understand why the central team is going into enough homes while operational staff aren't.

Work to make sure the most vulnerable people are prioritised is improving – but there is more to do

Prevention activity is clearly prioritised using a risk-based approach towards people most at risk from fire and other emergencies. The service takes account of a broad range of information and data to target its prevention activity at vulnerable individuals and groups. This includes NHS data, demographic information, vulnerability data from the county council and historic incident data.

The prevention team uses a scoring system to help determine which people are most at risk from fire. The service then uses different activities to address the risks it has identified. This includes sending staff with specialist training to visit the people who are most at risk, while firefighters visit people at lower risk.

Based on its assessments, the service sets targets for how many safe and well visits should be carried out by firefighters. Firefighters also have targets for generating safe and well visits. But we found they are often reluctant to make these visits and that many tend not to see prevention as part of their role.

Staff need more support in carrying out safe and well visits

Some staff told us they don't have the right skills or confidence to make safe and well visits. These checks cover a range of hazards that can put vulnerable people at greater risk from fire and other emergencies.

Some staff told us that they felt comfortable giving the public fire safety advice on the visits but were less confident discussing wider health and safety matters. Some said they avoided asking questions on these topics. But even when this happens, a visit can still be counted as completed.

The service has recruited two prevention trainers to support and develop the skills of its operational crews in this area. But this work has been delayed by the pandemic, when it hasn't always been possible for the trainers to visit staff on fire stations. The service introduced an online training package to overcome this. However, many firefighters told us they need more support.

Staff feel confident in identifying and raising safeguarding concerns

Staff we interviewed told us about occasions when they had identified [safeguarding](#) problems. They told us they feel confident and trained to act appropriately and promptly. Staff were able to explain the process they would follow if they had any safeguarding causes for concern. All staff have access to online safeguarding training, which covers a range of topics including identifying neglect and modern-day slavery.

The service works well with other organisations

The service works with a wide range of other organisations to prevent fires and other emergencies. These organisations include Sussex Police, Sussex Safer Roads Partnership, and telecare providers, who monitor and support vulnerable people to live independently.

We found good evidence that the service routinely refers people at greatest risk to other organisations which may be better able to meet their needs. These organisations include Age UK, the local public health team, prevention assessment teams, and community safety partnerships. Arrangements are in place to receive referrals from other organisations such as the NHS and adult social care. The service has good systems in place to respond to the referrals it receives. At the time of our inspection there was no backlog of referrals from other organisations.

The service routinely exchanges information with other public sector organisations about people and groups at greatest risk. It uses the information to challenge planning assumptions and target prevention activity. For example, in the last year the service has started to carry out collaborative fatal fire reviews, working with other organisations who may be able to learn from them.

As we saw in the COVID-19 inspection, the service is now working more closely with organisations in the Sussex Resilience Forum. Staff from other organisations have told us that as a result, the service is seen as a more active and trusted partner.

There are effective procedures for tackling fire-setting behaviour

The service has a range of suitable and effective interventions to target and educate people of different ages who show signs that they might start fires. This includes having a trained group of staff who work with fire-setters to change their behaviours.

The service works with other organisations including the police and local authorities to share information and support a multi-agency approach.

Until now the service has only worked with younger fire-setters, but there are plans to work with adult fire-setters too.

The evaluation of prevention activity could be improved

The service could improve the way it evaluates the effectiveness of its activity, to make sure all its communities get access to prevention activity that meets their needs.

For example, operational staff told us that to achieve their targets for generating safe and well visits, they sometimes go to supermarkets and public places to get the required quantity of requests – which isn't targeting the people most at risk.

Because the prevention activities are not consistently evaluated the service can't be sure that its work is making a difference to the people it visits.

The service doesn't ask for feedback following all its prevention activities. This means it is missing opportunities to learn and improve the types of activities it provides to the public.

Protecting the public through fire regulation



Requires improvement (2019: Inadequate)

West Sussex 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.

We are encouraged to see improvement in the service's protection work since our last inspection.

We previously identified a cause of concern that the service didn't have a clear strategy for using its RBIP to identify the highest-risk premises. We found that the database the service used to manage premises' information was unreliable and not always accurate. And the service couldn't carry out the number of audits of high-risk premises that it committed to as part of its programme.

The cause of concern is now resolved. While there is still more to do, the protection team is working much more effectively.

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure it addresses effectively the burden of false alarms (termed 'unwanted fire signals').
- 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 protection strategy is aligned with the IRMP

The service's protection strategy is clearly linked to the risk it has identified in its IRMP.

Staff across the service are involved in this activity, with information effectively exchanged as needed. For example, protection staff give information about enforcement activity to operational crews about where there may be an increased level of risk.

Information is in turn used to adjust planning assumptions and direct activity between the service's protection, prevention and response functions. This means resources are properly aligned to risk. The service is training all its firefighters to carry out basic fire safety audits, to improve the way it works with businesses and help integrate protection and response work.

The pandemic has slowed down inspection work

We considered how the service had adapted its protection activity during our COVID-19 specific inspection in October 2020. At that time, we found it had adapted its protection work well. It introduced more online and telephone advice for businesses when it wasn't possible to do this in person. Since then we are encouraged to find that fire safety audits have continued, most of them remotely.

The service told us that its RBIP had gone ahead more slowly than expected because of the pandemic. At the time of the inspection we saw that it had robust plans to address this and intended to prioritise physical visits when safe to do so.

Protection activity is becoming more focused on the highest-risk buildings

In 2020/21 86 percent of the audits the service completed were satisfactory, which is higher than the national average. This was an improvement on the previous year, but the high number of satisfactory audits could indicate that the service isn't auditing the highest-risk premises.

The service's RBIP is becoming more focused on West Sussex's highest-risk buildings. The service is using a new IT system to support this approach, scoring each

premises against several criteria to determine the overall level of risk. As the IT system becomes more widely used within the protection team, protection activities are becoming better aligned with risk. The audits we reviewed were completed in the timescales the service has set itself.

Safety audits of high-rise buildings are on track

Audits have been carried out at all high-rise buildings the service has identified as using cladding that is similar to the cladding installed on Grenfell Tower. Information gathered during these audits is made available to response teams and control operators, enabling them to respond more effectively in an emergency.

At the time of our inspection the service was on track to visit all the high-rise, high-risk buildings it had identified in its service area.

Post-fire audits aren't routinely carried out

We reviewed a range of audits of different premises across the service. This included audits 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.

The audits we reviewed were completed in a consistent, systematic way, and in line with the service's policies. Relevant information from the audits is made available to operational teams and control room operators.

However, we noted that audits aren't routinely carried out after fires at premises where fire safety legislation applies. We also found that the service doesn't always communicate with the responsible person after an audit, in contrast to its stated policy.

Fire safety audits are quality assured

Quality assurance of protection activity takes place in a proportionate way. Before an audit file can be closed, it must be approved by a line manager, who reviews the contents. And managers regularly carry out quality assurance by accompanying inspecting officers on audits.

Protection activities aren't evaluated

The service doesn't have good evaluation tools in place to measure its effectiveness or to make sure all sections of its communities get access to protection services that meet their needs. The service is aware of this and is starting to work with community groups to improve the situation. For example, it is having discussions with owners of takeaways to help them understand how to comply with fire safety legislation.

Fire safety legislation is effectively enforced

The service consistently uses its full range of enforcement powers, and when appropriate, prosecutes those who don't comply with fire safety regulations. The service has 24/7 availability for enforcement and prohibition activity.

In the year to 31 March 2021, the service issued no alteration notices, 87 informal notifications, 12 enforcement notices, 7 prohibition notices and undertook 3 prosecutions. It completed 7 prosecutions in the last 5 years from 2016/17 to 2020/21.

Protection resources have been increased to match needs

The service has increased the number of competent protection staff to meet the requirements of the service's RBIP. At our last inspection in 2018/19, there were 5 competent staff in the protection team. At the end of 2020/21 there were 14. This will enable the service to provide the full range of audit and enforcement activity needed, both now and in the future.

The service aligns staff training with nationally recognised standards. It doesn't have a trained and competent fire engineer but has arrangements with neighbouring services to access engineer support when this is needed.

The service works closely with other organisations on fire safety

The service works closely with other enforcement agencies to regulate fire safety and routinely exchanges risk information with them. For example, since the start of the pandemic, the protection team has worked with the Care Quality Commission to share information and carry out joint visits to care homes. The service has also worked with the county council to support fire safety compliance at quarantine hotels such as those near Gatwick Airport.

Responses to building consultations are being submitted on time

The service has improved its response to building consultations and it completed 100 percent of building consultations within the required time frame in 2020/21. This met its statutory responsibility to comment on fire safety arrangements at new and altered buildings. But the number of consultations received was almost a third lower than in the previous year (499 in 2020/21 compared with 730 in 2019/20). In 2019/20 the number of consultations completed on time was 83 percent. The service needs to make sure it has enough resources to meet any future increase in demand.

The service needs to do more to work with businesses

The service could do more to engage with local businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation. During our COVID-19 inspection, we found that the service used its social media accounts and website to communicate messages to businesses about fire safety compliance in the pandemic. But in this inspection, we found that the service wasn't communicating with businesses regularly.

The service has been slow to reduce the number of false alarms it attends

During our last inspection, we identified an area for improvement in how the service deals with unwanted fire signals. Only limited action is being taken to reduce the number of unwanted fire signals.

The service has introduced procedures in the control room when dealing with automatic fire alarms. When calls coming from automatic fire alarms are received in

the control room, operators challenge callers more and fire engines aren't [mobilised](#) automatically. The service told us it has set a target to reduce automatic fire alarms (AFAs) in non-domestic premises by 10 percent per year, and achieved a 12 percent reduction in 2020/21 from the previous year.

Despite this, the service attends more AFAs than the national average. In the year to 31 March 2021, it didn't respond to 16 percent, compared to the England-wide rate of 37 percent. This means that fire engines may be unavailable to respond to genuine incidents because they are attending false alarms. It also creates a risk to the public if more fire engines travel at high speed on roads to respond to these incidents.

The service has included options for improving how it responds to unwanted fire signals in its current IRMP public consultation. These include assessing whether to attend based on the risk level of premises; using technology to change the ways businesses manage potential false alarms; education; and in extreme cases, charging businesses which don't do enough to reduce false alarms.

Responding to fires and other emergencies



Good (2019: Requires improvement)

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

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

Area for improvement

The service should ensure the availability of its on-call fire engines is aligned to the risks identified in its IRMP.

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

Response resources are linked to identified risks

The service's response strategy is linked to the risks identified in its IRMP. Its fire engines and response staff, as well as its working patterns, are designed and located to enable the service to respond flexibly to fires and other emergencies with the right resources. The service plans to review its crewing models as part of its CRMP.

The staff in the control room use computer software which helps make sure fire engines are where they are needed. The service call this the 'dynamic cover tool'. This means that when fire engines respond to an incident, the tool suggests which fire engines should be moved from their base locations to maintain cover across the area.

Target response times are consistently achieved

There are no national response standards of performance for the public. But the service has set out its own response standards in its IRMP. These vary by risk level but say that a [critical incident](#) in a high-risk area should be attended by a fire engine within 10 minutes and within 14 minutes in a low-risk area.

The service consistently meets its standards. Home Office data shows that in the year to 31 March 2021, the service's response time to [primary fires](#) was 9 minutes and 33 seconds. This is faster than the average for other services categorised as significantly rural.

The availability of on-call fire engines needs improvement

The service met its target availability for wholetime fire engines in 2020/21 (99.4 percent availability compared to its target of 100 percent). But the service is not meeting its target for the availability of on-call fire engines (69.1 percent compared to a target of 75 percent).

The service recognises that the current on-call arrangements don't support the IRMP. In its CRMP consultation, the service has made proposals to address this problem.

Incident commanders have appropriate training

Our last inspection identified an area for improvement for the service to make sure it has an effective system to maintain the competencies of all incident commanders. We are pleased to see that this has improved. The service has trained its incident commanders and assesses them against national standards. In 2020/21, 97 percent of incident commanders had been accredited within the preceding 2 years. In the same year, every incident was attended by an incident commander with the right level of accreditation. This helps the service to safely, confidently and effectively manage the whole range of incidents that it could face, from small and routine ones to complex multi-agency incidents.

As part of our inspection, we interviewed incident commanders from across the service. The incident commanders we interviewed are familiar with risk assessing, decision-making and recording information at incidents in line with national best practice, as well as the [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles \(JESIP\)](#).

Control staff are regularly involved in operational learning

We are pleased to see the control room staff are integrated into the service's command, training, exercise, debrief and assurance activity. We saw examples where control staff had been involved with debrief procedures and were able to give feedback on performance.

[Fire control](#) also has its own staff training programme, which is aligned to national competencies.

Fire control can provide fire survival guidance to multiple callers

The control room staff we interviewed were confident they could provide fire survival guidance to many callers simultaneously. This was identified as learning for fire services after the Grenfell Tower fire. We saw that the mobilising system had prompts and checklists for staff to follow when fielding multiple fire survival guidance calls.

Control has good systems in place to exchange real-time risk information with incident commanders, other responding partners, and other supporting fire and rescue services. The service has recently introduced new co-ordinating roles to liaise between control and incident commanders. At the time of our inspection, this approach was being implemented and tested. Maintaining good situational awareness helps the service to communicate effectively with the public, providing them with accurate and tailored advice.

Risk information is easily accessible to staff

We sampled a range of risk information for several premises involving long and short-term risks, including what is in place for firefighters responding to incidents at high-risk, high-rise buildings and what information is held by fire control.

The information we reviewed was up to date and detailed. It could be easily accessed and understood by staff. Encouragingly, it had been completed with input from the service's prevention, protection and response functions when appropriate.

We saw examples of temporary risk information being given to staff – for example, relating to a light aircraft crash near Goodwood Airfield in July 2021.

Operational performance is comprehensively evaluated

As part of the inspection, we reviewed a range of emergency incidents and training events. These included domestic and commercial fires and rescues.

We are pleased to see the service routinely follows its policies to assure itself that staff command incidents in line with operational guidance. Internal risk information is updated with the information received.

The service has established a culture of continual learning and improvement. We saw evidence of useful information being disseminated throughout the organisation through bulletins which are based on operational debriefs for incidents attended by the service's staff. Staff must confirm that they have read these bulletins through the training IT system.

We are encouraged to see the service is contributing towards, and acting on, learning from other fire and rescue services or operational learning gathered from other emergency service partners. Briefings from [national operational learning \(NOL\)](#) and [joint organisation learning \(JOL\)](#) are reported to the operational assurance team and then communicated to the rest of the service. A process is in place to make sure staff read and respond to these updates.

The public is kept well informed

The service has good systems in place to inform the public about ongoing incidents and help keep them safe during and after incidents. The communications team has enough resources to keep the public informed about continuous incidents on a 24/7 basis. The team also makes sure that the service's website and social media accounts are regularly updated with information on incidents and safety messages.

The communications team works well with the [local resilience forum](#) to convey consistent messages to the public.

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

West Sussex 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 all staff and are well tested.
- The service should make sure it is well-prepared to form part of a multi-agency response to an incident and all relevant staff know how to apply JESIP.

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

The service is prepared for major and multi-agency incidents

The service has effectively anticipated and considered the reasonably foreseeable risks and threats it may face. These risks are listed in both local and national risk registers as part of its integrated risk management planning. For example, the service has made plans for dealing with large-scale flooding, wildfires and industrial incidents.

It is also familiar with the significant risks that could be faced by neighbouring fire and rescue services that it might reasonably be asked to respond to in an emergency. These include possible incidents at high-rise buildings in Brighton and the motorway network. Firefighters have access to risk information from neighbouring services. And operational staff have access to risk information for areas up to 20 kilometres into neighbouring FRs.

Staff are generally well-prepared for major and multi-agency incidents

We reviewed the arrangements the service has in place to respond to different major incidents, including incidents relating to high-rise buildings, wide-area flooding and a marauding terrorist attack.

The service has good arrangements in place. These are well understood by staff, who can learn about them through e-learning training packages. We found that the service tests its arrangements and its staff's understanding of them through regular exercises. The service has maintained this exercise programme throughout the pandemic, although the number of exercises was understandably reduced from the previous, pre-pandemic year.

All staff must be prepared to respond to a terrorist incident

Many firefighters we spoke to didn't realise they might have a part to play in responding to a marauding terrorist attack, because they thought only the specialist team would be involved.

The service needs to be sure all its staff are prepared to respond safely and effectively to a terrorist incident. And it needs to make sure learning from exercises is used to improve its plans.

The service needs to learn from its work with other services

The service supports other fire and rescue services responding to emergency incidents. Since beginning joint control arrangements with Surrey Fire and Rescue Service in 2019, the 2 services have used borderless mobilising. This means control staff will send whichever fire engine can get to an incident the quickest. East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service joined these control arrangements in November 2021. The service is intraoperable with these other services and can form part of a multi-agency response.

The service has successfully deployed to other service areas and has used national assets in its own service area.

But we saw little evidence that the service evaluates its work with other services. We found few lessons were learned and shared between the neighbouring fire and rescue services.

The service would benefit from more structured cross-border plans

The service has a cross-border exercise plan with neighbouring fire and rescue services. This enables them to work more effectively together to keep the public safe. But the plan lacks detail and doesn't include the risks of major events at which the service could foreseeably provide support or request assistance from neighbouring services. Staff we spoke to had limited awareness of cross-border risks and had little experience of attending cross-border exercises. Only some learning from these exercises is used to inform risk information and service plans.

Most staff understand interoperability principles

The service could provide us with strong evidence that it consistently follows the JESIP. This includes online training packages on JESIP. All the incident commanders we spoke to at station manager level and above had a good understanding of JESIP. But some crew and [watch](#) managers were less familiar with the principles.

The service is an active member of the Sussex Resilience Forum

The service has good arrangements in place to respond to emergencies with other partners that make up the Sussex Resilience Forum. These arrangements include joint plans for generic major incidents, as well as site-specific risk information for places that have additional risks.

The service is a valued partner in the resilience forum. During the pandemic the service has been represented in the forum's strategic and tactical co-ordination groups, as well as other working groups when needed. The service takes part in regular training events with other members of the local resilience forum and uses the learning to develop planning assumptions about responding to major and multi-agency incidents. Members of the forum use a single policy and procedure, called Sussex Emergency Response and Recovery.

The service uses and contributes to national learning

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

We saw evidence that the service has contributed to NOL and JOL. There is a single point of contact for both of these, who makes sure the service maintains up to date information.

Efficiency



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



Good

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. West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service's overall efficiency is good.

We are pleased to see that the county council has invested significantly in the service since our last inspection. This funding has been used to help the service work more effectively and efficiently.

We have seen improvements in the way fire service managers work with the council's finance team. This has led to better mutual understanding and improved future planning. The new governance arrangements mean the service's decision-making can be challenged in a more robust and informed way. And there is now a better understanding of performance management, including financial management, in the service.

There are also now increased staff numbers in the prevention and protection teams. This is helping these teams improve the way the service meets its statutory duties in these areas.

The service is doing more work with other emergency services and aims to save money through this approach. But it needs to make sure it evaluates how effective and efficient this collaborative work is.

The service has invested in new IT systems since our last inspection. While the move to these has created some minor setbacks, they are already improving the way teams and individuals work.

Since our last inspection, the service has focused on increasing staff numbers in its most important areas of work to improve performance. It has introduced more efficient ways of working, but this has not been a priority. The service is now better resourced, but it must make sure its future financial plans account for a wide range of future funding arrangements.

Making best use of resources



Good (2019: Requires improvement)

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

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

From the service's figures, its budget for 2021/22 is £29.03m. This is an 8 percent increase on the previous financial year.

Area for improvement

The service should have effective measures in place to assure itself that its workforce is productive and that their time is used as efficiently and effectively as possible to meet the priorities in the IRMP.

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 support its objectives

We are encouraged to see the improvements the service has made since the last inspection. The service's financial and workforce plans, including allocating staff to prevention, protection and response, reflect and are consistent with the risks and priorities identified in the IRMP and the consultation on its CRMP.

Plans are built on sound scenarios. They help make sure the service is sustainable and are underpinned by financial controls that reduce the risk of misusing public money. We have seen an improvement in the way the service approaches its risk planning and use of resources. Both these aspects of work are now continuously reviewed. And the prevention, protection and response strategies are now linked to the IRMP and the consultation on the CRMP.

The service needs to make sure staff time is used effectively and efficiently

We are pleased to see that the service's arrangements for managing its workforce's performance are improving, but they don't yet clearly link how the service uses its resources to the IRMP. Operational staff have targets for the number of [safe and well visits](#) to carry out, but these targets are not being met.

The pandemic has led to many members of the public not wanting the service to carry out safe and well visits in their homes. Despite this, we have seen that the central prevention team are on track to meet their target for home visits. The service needs to understand why the central team is apparently finding it easier than operational staff to access people's homes.

The service has introduced a revised performance management framework to help make sure staff use their time productively. But it should do more to make sure its workforce is as productive as possible. This includes considering new ways of working. For example, the service has introduced an LRMP to make sure operational staff's activity is targeted at local risks. But this new approach isn't understood by all operational staff yet.

The service had to adapt its working practices because of the pandemic, and these are still part of its day-to-day activity. For example, along with the wider county council, the service has introduced flexible working: staff can work from the most convenient location, whether that is at home, at a local fire station or a county council building. But the service hasn't evaluated how this affects productivity.

The service is benefiting from more collaboration

In our last inspection in 2018 we identified an area for improvement in this area. This stated that the service should assure itself that it makes the most of collaboration opportunities and that these improve its capacity, capability and service to the public, and are good value for money.

We are encouraged to see the service is finding more ways to work with other organisations since the last inspection and is evaluating this work better than it was.

The service meets its statutory duty to collaborate, and routinely considers opportunities to collaborate with other emergency responders. In December 2019 West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service and Surrey Fire and Rescue Service set up a joint control room. This has led to cashable savings of about £1m for West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service. East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service also joined the joint control arrangements in November 2021. Savings from this new arrangement will be reinvested to make sure that the joint [fire control](#) function meets all Grenfell-related procedural and staffing changes.

The service's collaborative work is aligned to the priorities in its IRMP. For example, the service and East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service are exploring whether having a joint fleet manager could make it easier to procure and maintain vehicles in future.

We have seen that the service is actively seeking to work with other organisations. For example, it is going to build a new training centre and fire station at Horsham. The service invited other emergency services to consider working with it on this project, but this was not successful. Despite this, the service is discussing with public and private sector organisations how the building might be used jointly once it has been built, to share costs and improve efficiency.

The service needs to do more to monitor, review and evaluate the benefits and results of its collaborations. For example, we were told about financial savings from the joint fire control arrangements. But we were given little information about the possible benefits from East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service joining these arrangements, or how these would be evaluated.

Continuity plans are strong and regularly tested

The service has good continuity arrangements in place for areas where threats and risks are considered high. These threats and risks are regularly reviewed and tested so that staff are aware of the arrangements and their associated responsibilities.

Control staff were confident in the continuity arrangements for control. These are tested regularly, including the [fall back](#) arrangements with Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service.

The service is improving its financial management

The service carries out regular reviews of all its expenditure, including its non-pay costs. The process of continuously challenging its spending arrangements helps to make sure the service gets value for money. The service has improved the way it works with the county council finance team through regular review meetings. Finance and performance are reported and scrutinised regularly by cabinet members.

In our last inspection, we found the service didn't have enough staff to carry out effective prevention and protection activities. But this is no longer the case. The county council has supported the service's improvement plan with extra funding to make sure it has enough staff to meet its main duties.

The service is taking steps to make sure important areas, including estates and fleet, are well-placed to achieve efficiency gains through sound financial management and best working practices. For example, the service knows it needs to update many of its fire stations and plans to do this in a prioritised way, taking the needs of the wider service into account.

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



Good (2019: Requires improvement)

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

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

Areas for improvement

- The service should assure itself that its IT systems are resilient, reliable, accurate and accessible.
- The service should make sure that it takes full advantage of opportunities to secure external funding and generate income to improve services and increase efficiency.

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

The service plans for future financial challenges

We are encouraged to see the improvements the service has made since the last inspection. The service has developed a sound understanding of future financial challenges. It plans to mitigate its main or significant financial risks. For example, the service has made plans for responding to a range of events that may affect its budget. The underpinning assumptions are relatively robust, realistic and prudent, and take account of the wider external environment and some scenario planning for future spending reductions. These include regular planning meetings with the wider county council and [fire authority](#). The service plans for the possible future impact of changes in areas such as government funding, business rates and pay, which could lead to less money being available.

We are pleased to see that the service has identified savings and investment opportunities to improve the service to the public or generate further savings. For example, the service is saving approximately £1m every year from its joint control arrangements.

The service doesn't have its own reserves

The service doesn't have its own financial reserves as these are held by the county council. But we have seen that the service gets financial support from the county council when it needs it. For example, in our COVID-19 inspection we saw that the service was able to ask for funding to cover extra costs that were directly due to the pandemic.

The county council has provided extra money from its reserves to support the service's improvement plan. But since the council's reserves have been reduced during the pandemic, the service needs to make sure it plans for the possibility that the council may be less able to support it in future. We have seen evidence that the service is doing this.

The service is improving the links between its fleet and estates strategies and the IRMP

The service's estates and fleet strategies are becoming better aligned with the IRMP. The service has commissioned an independent survey of its fire stations. This has highlighted areas where improvements need to be made, after several years where maintenance hasn't been routinely carried out. The county council has promised £5m to fund the improvements. The service is prioritising this improvement work where it is needed most.

The service has secured funding for a new training centre and fire station at Horsham. The service told us this is due to be ready by the summer of 2023. It will have up-to-date training facilities to help operational staff maintain their most important skills.

At the moment the service is sharing its fleet manager with East Sussex FRS, to explore opportunities to work together more effectively. The service will evaluate the trial to see if this approach will lead to more efficiency.

Technology is improving efficiency, but staff need more IT support

We are encouraged to see the improvements the service has made since the last inspection, where we identified this as an area for improvement. The service actively considers how changes in technology and future innovation may affect risk. The [mobilising](#) system used for joint control arrangements means that the nearest fire engines from either the West Sussex or Surrey service are sent to incidents in both counties. This supports firefighter and public safety.

The service has invested in a new IT system to link prevention, protection and response information. But staff told us that there isn't enough training or support for them to use these systems effectively. The service understands that more work needs to be done to make sure its IT systems are as effective and efficient as possible.

The service also seeks to exploit any opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness that are presented by changes in technology. As part of the wider county council, fire service staff can now work in a more agile way than before the pandemic. Technology is being used to support people to work at the most appropriate location, whether that is at home, the fire service or county council premises.

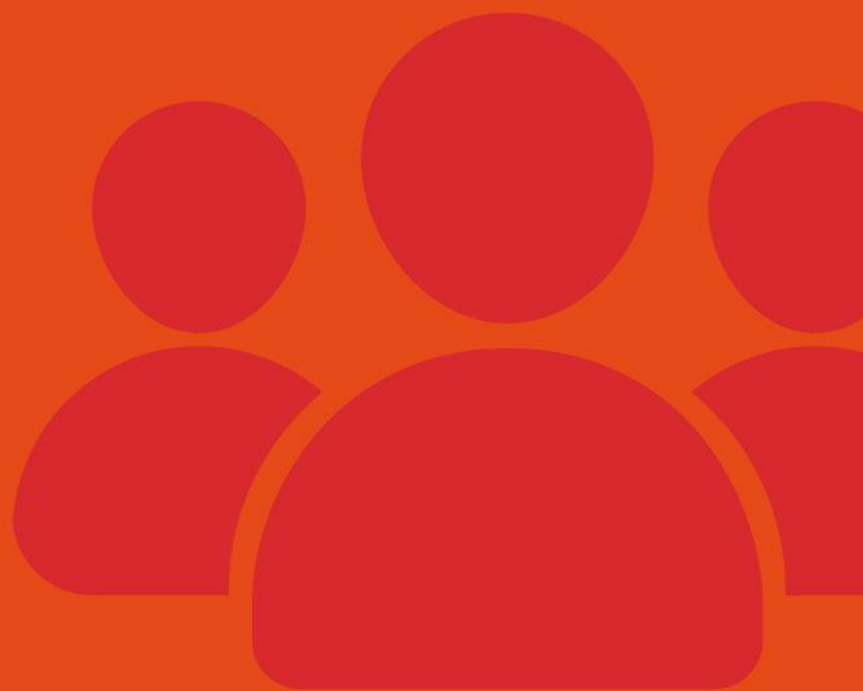
The service could do more to generate income

Since our last inspection the county council has significantly increased funding for the service. The service's focus has been on using this investment to employ more staff in its main areas of work.

So, the service has not been focused on generating income. But it has used savings created through more efficient ways of working to improve the organisation. For example, savings from the joint control arrangements with Surrey Fire and Rescue Service have been used to help fund more staff in the prevention, protection and operational assurance teams. With pressures on county council budgets expected from 2023/24, the service should consider how it can take full advantage of opportunities to secure external funding and generate income.

The service has secured external funding to invest in improvements to its work. This includes government funding linked to the response to the Grenfell Tower fire, and funding to recover costs that have arisen during the pandemic. For example, the service has used funding from the Building Risk Review (a national government-funded programme to understand and help reduce the fire risk in high-rise residential buildings) to buy smoke hoods to help make people safer in fires.

People



How well does the service look after its people?



Requires improvement

Summary

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

During our last inspection we highlighted two areas of concern relating to how the service looks after its people. The service has made improvements since then, but there is still much more to do. The service is engaging more with staff, and this is no longer a cause of concern. But the cause of concern we raised last time relating to values and behaviours remains, due to instances where values weren't being upheld.

The service knows that it needs to change its culture and is taking steps to do this. It has expanded the ways it supports staff health and wellbeing and supported better understanding of EDI. But we found examples of bullying, harassment and discrimination, which were being carried out on the basis of race, religion, sex and sexual orientation. While these behaviours weren't displayed throughout the service, we found too many instances where the service's values weren't being upheld.

The service needs to make sure that all staff understand its bullying, harassment and discrimination policy, so they can recognise and challenge these behaviours. We found that some staff weren't sure how to access support when facing these problems and many didn't understand the grievance procedure. This left some staff feeling they weren't being supported.

We also found that while the service has improved the way it interacts with staff, it needs to make sure that this leads to meaningful action. We saw examples of senior leaders using creative ways to communicate with staff. But despite this, many staff

told us they feel they aren't listened to, and we found few examples where staff feedback had led to changes to plans or procedures.

Promoting the right values and culture



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at promoting the right values and culture.

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

Cause of concern

The service hasn't done enough since the last inspection to improve how staff understand and display its expected values and behaviours.

Recommendation

By 31 August 2022 the service should provide an updated action plan to:

- improve how it works with its staff and provides feedback in relation to issues involving values and behaviours; and
- ensure that staff act in line with its values and are trained to identify and deal with non-compliance.

Area for improvement

The service should monitor secondary contracts to make sure working hours are not exceeded.

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

Staff don't always act in accordance with the service's behaviours and values

In our last inspection we identified a cause of concern that West Sussex FRS's staff were sometimes acting in ways that went against its core values. This was leading to bullying in the workplace. We made the following recommendations:

- The service should clearly and effectively communicate its core values to staff. This should include acceptable behaviour statements.
- The service should ensure that staff act in line with its values and are trained to identify and deal with non-compliance.

While the service has made improvements in this area, there is still a lot to do.

The service has a clearly defined set of values, but it should improve awareness of them at all levels. In our staff survey, 90 percent of respondents (195 out of 217) said they were aware of the service's values. But while 87 percent of respondents (170 out of 195) felt that their colleagues modelled and maintained these values, only 35 percent (68 out of 195) said that senior leaders did. Senior leaders always need to make sure they act as role models for a service's values.

The staff we spoke to were overwhelmingly proud of the service. But they told us that they didn't always feel involved in decisions that affect them. While staff said there is now more communication from senior managers, they feel they aren't always listened to. For example, firefighters told us that while they are given targets to achieve for prevention and response activities, they don't have an opportunity to discuss those targets with managers.

The culture of the organisation doesn't always align with its values. Some behaviours we saw or were told about didn't meet the standards expected. For example, we found that different types of staff told us that they felt they were treated differently, with [on-call staff](#) feeling ostracised in some locations and non-operational staff not always feeling valued.

We also found examples where behaviours not in keeping with service policy weren't challenged. We were told there is a "generational gap" between longer-serving members of staff (who tend to be older) and newer ones (who tend to be younger).

Staff told us that some longer-serving members of staff sometimes used language or displayed behaviours that didn't align with service expectations. Some newer members of staff told us that they are willing to challenge this, which is helping to change the organisational culture. Staff told us that while the service is trying to tackle the issue, they felt that the culture wouldn't really change until the older generation retired. We were told of homophobic and racial slurs being dismissed as "banter". We also heard examples of racist and sexist comments and behaviours which had gone unchallenged. We did see recent evidence that the service is challenging behaviours not in keeping with service policy more robustly.

Work has begun to implement the new national [Core Code of Ethics](#). This is being managed centrally through the service's programme board, with senior leaders given clear responsibilities.

Staff have access to services that support their mental and physical health

As we saw in the COVID-19 inspection, the service continues to have well understood and effective wellbeing policies in place that are available to staff. A significant range of wellbeing support is available to support both physical and mental health. For example, staff can access support through an occupational health provider, specialist counselling and support, peer support, and a designated health and wellbeing team.

There are good provisions in place to promote staff wellbeing. Since the last inspection, the service has appointed a wellbeing manager and wellbeing champions, who are available to discuss any concerns staff may have. The service

also has 12 trained mental health first aiders and a dedicated wellbeing area on its intranet. Most staff reported they understand and have confidence in the wellbeing support processes available. In our staff survey, 89 percent of respondents (194 out of 217) agreed or tended to agree that they could access services to support their mental health.

But the service could do more to understand and support individuals' needs. The staff survey found that 48 percent of respondents (105 out of 217) discussed their wellbeing with managers twice a year or less, and 16 percent of respondents (35 out of 217) said they never have discussions about their wellbeing with managers. The service developed individual staff impact assessments during COVID-19, which were well-received. This may assist in increasing understanding to better support individuals' needs.

Staff understand and have confidence in health and safety policies

The service has effective and well understood health and safety policies and procedures in place. Our survey found that 95 percent of respondents (206 out of 217) understand the policies and procedures in this area.

These policies and procedures are readily available and effectively promoted to all staff. Our survey showed that 95 percent of respondents (207 out of 217) felt that the service had clear procedures to report all accidents, [near misses](#) and dangerous occurrences. Health and safety training is mainly provided through online training packages.

Both staff and representative bodies have confidence in the health and safety approach taken by the service. In the staff survey, 88 percent of respondents (192 out of 217) said they were satisfied that their personal safety and welfare was taken seriously at work. And surveys by representative bodies found that staff feel they are involved in decision-making involving health and safety matters.

We saw that the service could do more to monitor staff working hours, including for staff who have secondary employment or dual contracts. Staff are told that they should comply with working time arrangements and not work excessive hours. But we didn't see robust arrangements for line managers to monitor the working hours of their staff.

The service could communicate more effectively about health and safety matters. For example, it has recently brought in handheld radios for operational use. Staff told us they had reported some problems with using these to the health and safety team. But they hadn't been told about how the service was planning to resolve the problems.

Managers don't always feel confident managing absence

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

We found there are clear processes in place to manage absences for all staff. There is clear guidance for managers, who are confident in the process. Absences are managed well and in accordance with policy. Most staff we spoke to understand the

process to follow and what their responsibilities are when they are absent from work. Most managers have been trained to deal with absence management and know how to ask for support from the human resources team. But we spoke to some managers who haven't had training in managing absence and who didn't feel confident in following the correct procedures.

Overall, the service saw a decrease in staff absences between 2019/20 and 2020/21. However, it is unclear the impact COVID-19 will have had on levels of sickness.

Getting the right people with the right skills



Good (2019: Requires improvement)

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

Fire and rescue services should have a workforce plan in place that is linked to their [integrated risk management plans \(IRMPs\)](#), 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 it has an effective, accurate and accessible system for recording and monitoring operational staff competence.
- The service should evaluate the effectiveness of online training to make sure it suits the needs of its staff.

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

Workforce planning is improving, but IT systems could be used more effectively

The FRS has good workforce planning in place. This makes sure skills and capabilities align with what is needed to effectively deliver the IRMP. Workforce planning is scrutinised by senior managers every month, which allows needs to be discussed and problems resolved. This approach means the service can identify gaps in workforce capabilities and resilience and can make sound and financially sustainable decisions about current and future needs. For example, the service has invested in recruiting more specialist staff in its prevention team. It has also improved its retirement forecasting and monitors the effects of staff moves and recruitment activities.

The service monitors operational staff competence through its electronic recording systems. It regularly updates its understanding of staff's skills and risk-critical safety capabilities through monitoring of competencies by line managers and the central training team. But many staff told us that the IT systems used to record training could

be more effective. We were told that the service uses two systems which do not link to each other, meaning managers must monitor both systems when they review staff competencies. Some managers also told us that they would like more IT training and support to make the processes more effective and efficient.

We noted that training for non-operational staff isn't monitored as closely. Some non-operational staff were not aware of training available to them or the training systems they should use.

Most staff told us that they could get the training they need to be effective in their role. In our staff survey, 65 percent of respondents (140 out of 217) said that they had received the training they needed to allow them to do their job effectively. The service's training plans make sure they can maintain competence and capability effectively. For example, all operational staff are booked into assessments to make sure they do these often enough to maintain their most important skills.

The service is improving its approach to learning and development

A culture of continuous improvement is promoted throughout the service and staff are encouraged to learn and develop. For example, the service doesn't currently have its own training centre and uses facilities in neighbouring fire and rescue services and at Gatwick Airport. There has been significant investment in building a new training centre within West Sussex, which means the service will provide training to its operational staff which is based on feedback and learning from incidents it attends.

As we saw in the COVID-19 inspection, learning and development has been adapted to the pandemic, with more being done virtually. Some members of staff felt the amount of learning and development activity available to them decreased at this time.

The service uses a mixture of online and face-to-face training. Overall, 62 percent of respondents (134 out of 217) to our staff survey said they were satisfied with the level of learning and development available to them.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity



Requires improvement (2019: Inadequate)

West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at ensuring fairness and promoting diversity.

Creating a more representative workforce will provide huge benefits for fire and rescue services. This includes greater access to talent and different ways of thinking, and improved understanding of and engagement with their local communities. Each service should make sure 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.

In our last inspection, we identified a cause of concern in this area. This stated that:

West Sussex FRS doesn't engage with or seek feedback from staff to understand their needs. We found this to especially be the case with some under-represented groups. When staff raise issues and concerns, the service doesn't respond quickly enough.

We made the following recommendations:

- The service should ensure that it effectively engages with its staff, including minority groups.
- The service should improve communications between staff and senior managers, so concerns are responded to in a timely and appropriate way.

While we have seen enough improvement to discharge the cause of concern, the service needs to continue to strengthen its engagement with all 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 is improving the way it communicates with staff, but needs to do more

The service is improving how it communicates with staff. Senior managers use weekly online videos (which began during the pandemic), monthly newsletters, and face-to-face visits to communicate with staff. The service is improving the ways it gathers staff feedback. For example, it has introduced a shadow board. This is formed of staff from throughout the service, who can read and discuss papers before they go to the service executive board.

Representative bodies and staff associations reported that the service interacts with staff regularly. But the service needs to do more to build staff confidence in the way it communicates with them. Our staff survey found that only 37 percent of respondents (80 out of 217) felt confident in the ways for providing feedback to all levels.

Some mid-level managers told us that they would like more feedback on projects they are involved with. They felt that sometimes projects are stopped or delayed without the reasons for this being explained.

More needs to be done to tackle bullying, harassment and discrimination

Since our last inspection the service has reviewed its grievance procedure and staff are being encouraged to use this when they feel it is appropriate. In 2020/21, 13 grievances were raised, compared with 4 the previous year. The service feels this increase is because staff are now more willing to challenge unfair decisions or behaviours which are not consistent with the service's expected behaviours and values. But while many staff we spoke with felt the service had improved in this area, some told us that their experiences of being exposed to certain behaviours made them less confident there had been positive change.

We found evidence of behaviours taking place which are not consistent with the service's stated behaviours and values. Bullying, harassment and discrimination

are not always well understood, and are tolerated in several parts of the service. For example, we found examples where comments about sexual orientation, race and religion were dismissed as “banter”. We also heard examples of sexist and racist comments which went unchallenged by managers and staff. The staff survey indicated that 52 percent of respondents (112 out of 217) felt unable to challenge this kind of behaviour without worrying about how they would be treated afterwards.

Although the service does have clear policies and procedures in place, some staff have limited confidence in the service’s ability to deal effectively with cases of bullying, harassment and discrimination, grievances and discipline.

The service could go further to improve staff understanding of bullying, harassment and discrimination, including their duty to eliminate them. In our staff survey, 20 percent of respondents (44 out of 217) told us they had been subject to bullying or harassment and 22 percent (47 out of 217) to discrimination over the past 12 months. Of the people who told us they had been bullied or harassed, 11 percent reported this.

Of the 11 percent of respondents who reported the bullying and harassment, only 3 percent thought that action had been taken in response to their concerns. And of the 21 percent of respondents who told us they had been discriminated against, 7 percent had reported this – and only 1 percent of respondents felt that action had been taken. In some cases, this was because respondents felt it was too early to tell (9 of 24 bullying reports and 3 of 15 discrimination reports).

In the survey, the top reason given by staff for not reporting bullying and harassment was that they believed nothing would happen. Some also said they had concerns about being victimised, concerns about confidentiality or being labelled a troublemaker. Despite this, we saw that the service has used its disciplinary processes against several staff who have been accused of bullying and harassment. This has resulted in some staff being dismissed.

The service has improved its approach to tackling bullying, harassment and discrimination but it knows there is more work to be done. In particular, the service needs to ensure that all staff, not just managers, are trained to identify and challenge behaviours which aren’t consistent with the service’s expected values and behaviours.

The service needs to improve diversity in recruitment

The service has developed its recruitment processes so that they are fairer and better understood by applicants. The recruitment policy covers the process for the county council (including the FRS). Recent senior leader jobs have been advertised externally, with leaders from the wider county council involved in the selection process.

Since our last inspection the service has begun taking targeted positive action, although this is not mentioned in the recruitment strategy. It has advertised in magazines to target under-represented groups, as well as on local community television channels. Specific action has been taken in Crawley, where there are more ethnically-diverse communities. Here, ‘have a go days’ have been introduced, where people from under-represented groups can visit fire stations and try out the recruitment tests. The service has also reviewed the recruitment policy and removed unnecessary and outdated criteria that could be causing disproportionality, such as

the ability to swim. But this positive action has not yet led to an increase in the diversity of the organisation.

More is needed to increase staff diversity. There has been limited progress to improve ethnic background and gender diversity for all staff in the service. In the 4 years since 2017/18, 2.5 percent of new joiners self-declared as being from ethnic minority backgrounds, and 19.1 percent were women. For firefighter recruitment, 2.5 percent of all new recruits were from ethnic minority backgrounds and 11.9 percent were women.

For the whole workforce, at 31 March 2021, 1.6 percent have self-declared as being from ethnic minority backgrounds and 13.8 percent are women. However, 22.9 percent of staff chose not to state their ethnicity, compared with a national rate of 9.0 percent. The service needs to understand why some staff are reluctant to declare their ethnicity.

The service needs to continue to encourage applicants from diverse backgrounds into middle and senior level positions when these arise. All senior positions are advertised nationally to attract the best possible talent from the most diverse pool available. However, it could do more to create opportunities to make its workforce more representative.

The service doesn't routinely conduct exit interviews, so is missing opportunities to gain valuable feedback.

The service is making slow progress on improving EDI

Since our last inspection the service has spent time developing an EDI framework. It has appointed a diversity and inclusion manager and named EDI champions throughout its workforce. But staff who work on EDI activities told us that they aren't always involved in strategic decision-making when their input could contribute to positive change. These staff also told us that often, a limited number of staff from under-represented groups are asked to participate in recruitment campaigns. EDI champions believe they could improve these areas of work if they are involved. The service has introduced an EDI steering group as well as people impact assessments to capture staff suggestions. But the perception of staff is that this isn't influencing change yet.

The service has involved staff when creating a dignity and respect framework. The service is due to train staff in how to use the framework, but this hadn't happened at the time of the inspection. The framework covers behaviours and expectations in areas including bullying and harassment. The service is also developing a diversity dashboard which will include up-to-date information on numbers and trends.

The service has introduced an 'open chair' policy, where any member of staff can ask to attend a service executive board meeting. The person will be able to express opinions and explain the effects of new policies and procedures on frontline staff.

The service has recently introduced its own equality impact assessment, which it calls a people impact assessment (PIA). This is being used, but the process and purpose are not yet understood throughout the service.

PIAs have been used by the protection team to make sure enforcement activity isn't carried out disproportionately for different communities. A PIA was also carried out when considering how the service will use smoke hoods.

Training on using PIAs has started for managers, and there is clear governance to support using PIAs.

Despite the measures the service has taken, we found there is a lack of understanding of EDI among many staff. For example, we found that some staff believe positive action is being used to lower standards to allow under-represented groups to join. We heard that the service doesn't do enough to make sure all staff are treated fairly, and that many staff don't understand the benefits of working in an inclusive organisation.

Managing performance and developing leaders



Requires improvement (2019: Requires improvement)

West Sussex 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 make sure it has an effective system in place to manage staff development, performance, promotion and productivity.
- 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.

The service is inconsistent at managing individuals' performance

The service introduced an updated performance management system in April 2021, during our inspection. This is intended to make sure all staff objectives are linked to the IRMP.

Not all staff have had their performance reviewed in the past year. In our staff survey 22 percent of respondents (48 out of 217) said that they had not had a personal development review in the last 12 months. Some staff reported that they have regular, meaningful discussions with their manager. Of the survey respondents, 46 percent (99

out of 217) said they had performance meetings with their line manager monthly or more frequently. Sixty-six percent (140 out of 217) found performance meetings like this useful when they did happen.

Some staff told us that they didn't always find the performance management system to be useful. Many told us it was only useful for staff who were actively seeking promotion.

The service is introducing a new promotion process to support staff development

In our staff survey, 59 percent of respondents (127 out of 217) disagreed with the view that the promotion process is fair.

The service is introducing a new promotion process. Some respondents to the survey may have based their views on the previous promotion process and not the new one. The new process has been trialled at several levels of the service, and staff who have been involved told us that they feel the process is more open and transparent than the old one. But some staff told us that guidance they were given about the promotion process could be clearer.

Staff we spoke to told us that there are often limited development opportunities offered before a person is promoted. We were told this means a person who has been promoted needs to look for learning and development opportunities themselves once they are in post.

The service isn't effective at developing high-potential staff

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

This was highlighted as an area for improvement in our last inspection, and limited progress has been made since then.

The service doesn't have a talent management scheme to develop leaders and high-potential staff. It is improving the openness and fairness of its promotion processes. But there are still areas where more scrutiny, such as by involving the human resources team, would help.

The service should consider putting in place more formal arrangements to identify and support members of staff to become senior leaders. There is a significant gap in its succession planning.

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