

Fire & Rescue Service 2023–25

Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Cleveland Fire Brigade

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Changes to this round of inspection

We [last inspected Cleveland Fire Brigade in May 2022](#). And in January 2023, we published our inspection report with our findings on the service's effectiveness and efficiency and how well it looks after its people.

This inspection contains our third assessment of the service's effectiveness and efficiency, and how well it looks after its people. We have measured the service against the same 11 areas and given a grade for each.

We haven't given separate grades for effectiveness, efficiency and people as we did previously. This is to encourage the service to consider our inspection findings as a whole and not focus on just one area.

We now assess services against the characteristics of good performance, and we more clearly link our judgments to [causes of concern](#) and [areas for improvement](#). We have also expanded our previous four-tier system of graded judgments to five. As a result, we can state more precisely where we consider improvement is needed and highlight good performance more effectively. However, these changes mean it isn't possible to make direct comparisons between grades awarded in this round of fire and rescue service inspections with those from previous years.

A reduction in grade, particularly from good to adequate, doesn't necessarily mean there has been a reduction in performance, unless we say so in the report.

This report sets out our inspection findings for Cleveland Fire Brigade.

More information on [how we assess fire and rescue services](#) and [our graded judgments](#) is available on our website.

Overall summary

Our judgments

Our inspection assessed how well Cleveland Fire Brigade has performed in 11 areas. We have made the following graded judgments:

Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate
	Understanding fire and risk	Responding to fires and emergencies	Preventing fire and risk	
	Responding to major incidents	Right people, right skills	Public safety through fire regulation	
	Best use of resources	Promoting fairness and diversity	Promoting values and culture	
	Future affordability	Managing performance and developing leaders		

In the rest of the report, we set out our detailed findings about the areas in which the service has performed well and where it should improve.

HMI summary

It was a pleasure to revisit Cleveland Fire Brigade, and I am grateful for the positive and constructive way in which the brigade worked with our inspection staff.

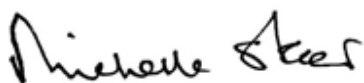
I am satisfied with some aspects of the performance of Cleveland Fire Brigade in keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks, but there are areas in which the brigade needs to improve. For example, the brigade should make sure that all staff are appropriately trained for their roles.

We were pleased to see that the brigade has made progress since our 2022 inspection. For example, the brigade has taken steps to better monitor, review and evaluate the benefits of collaborative activity.

My principal findings from our assessment of the brigade over the past year are as follows:

- Senior leaders encourage feedback and challenge from all parts of the workforce, and we found evidence that senior leaders regularly received and acted on feedback through staff forums, network groups and reporting processes.
- The brigade should make sure that risk information is accurate and up to date, as we sampled a range of risk information at stations and in [fire control](#), including the information for firefighters responding to incidents, and found information wasn't always up to date.
- We found that debriefing isn't always taking place in line with policy, and this is resulting in missed learning opportunities.
- The brigade should assure itself that senior managers demonstrate brigade values through their behaviours, as we found that the culture of the organisation doesn't always align with its values, and some behaviours we saw or were told about didn't meet the standards expected.

Overall, there is a clear commitment from staff, including senior leaders, to improve. We recognise the brigade is going through significant changes, which are affecting some areas of work. I encourage it to continue to improve in the areas we have highlighted.



Michelle Skeer

HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Service in numbers



Profile

	Cleveland	England
Area Square miles	231	50,370
Population (thousands) 30 June 2023	588	57,690
Population density Thousands per square mile	2.5	1.1



Cost

Funding Year ending 31 March 2023	£29.4m	£2.5bn
Expenditure per population Year ending 31 March 2023	£51.21	£46.66

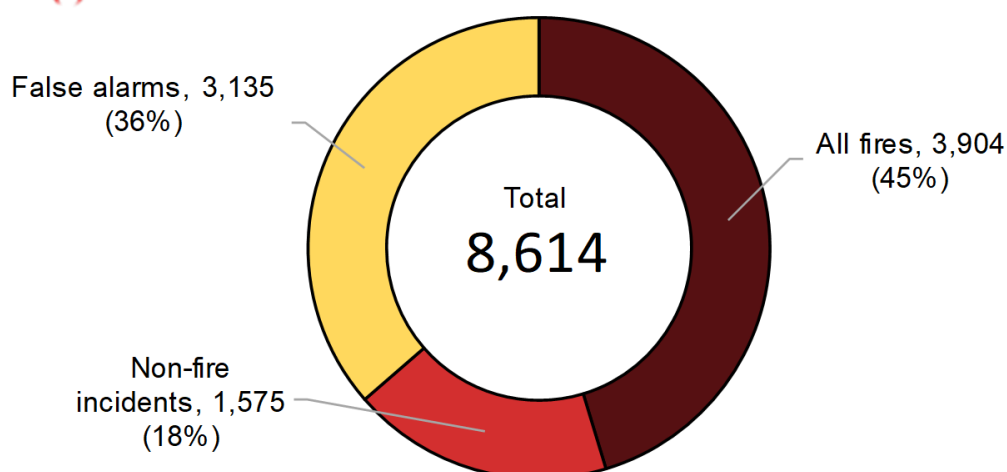


Response

Incidents attended per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2024	14.6	10.4
Home fire safety visits carried out by fire and rescue service per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2024	32.9	9.8
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises Year ending 31 March 2024	6.3	2.0
Availability of wholetime pumps Year ending 31 March 2024	93.2%	
Availability of on-call pumps Year ending 31 March 2024	47.0%	



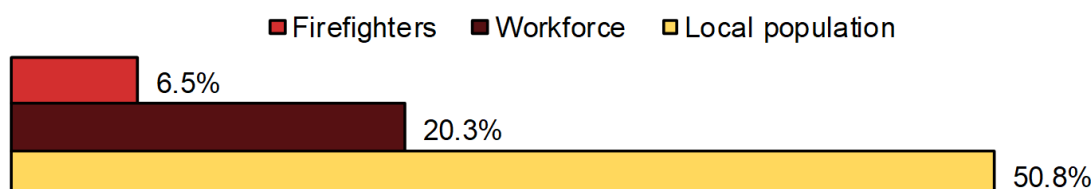
Incidents attended in year ending 31 March 2024



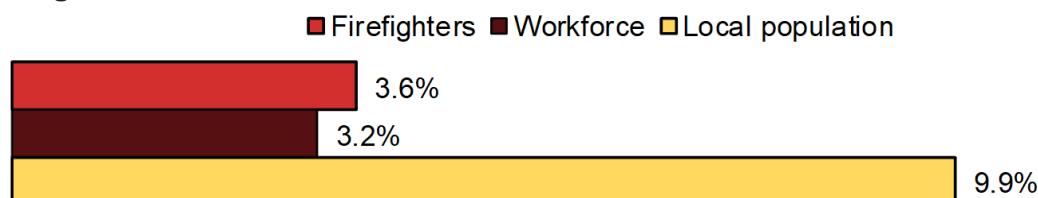
Workforce

	Cleveland	England
Five-year change in total workforce 2019 to 2024	-2.2%	1.9%
Number of firefighters per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2024	0.71	0.60
Percentage of firefighters who are wholetime Year ending 31 March 2024	78.8%	65.8%

Percentage of firefighters, workforce and population who identified as a woman as at 31 March 2024



Percentage of firefighters, workforce and population who were from ethnic minority backgrounds as at 31 March 2024



References to ethnic minorities in this report include people from White minority backgrounds but exclude people from Irish minority backgrounds. This is due to current data collection practices for national data. For more information on data and analysis in this report, please view the [‘About the data’ section of our website](#).

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies

Good

Cleveland Fire Brigade 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. It should use its protection and response capabilities to prevent or mitigate these risks for the public.

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

Main findings

The brigade is effective at identifying risk in the community

The brigade has assessed a suitable range of risks and threats using a thorough community risk management planning process. In its assessment of risk, it uses information it has collected from a broad range of internal and external sources and datasets. These include historical incident data, site-specific risk information, societal data, and national and local risk registers.

When appropriate, the brigade has consulted and held constructive dialogue with its communities and other relevant parties to understand risk and explain how it intends to mitigate it. For example, it has spoken to its employees, members of the public, trade union representatives, the [police and crime commissioner](#), other fire and rescue services, industrial and commercial business representatives, and the Tees Valley mayor.

The brigade has also used social media, surveys and its website to gather feedback from members of the public. However, it received only 420 responses throughout its 12-week consultation period. The brigade also told us that some senior managers had limited involvement in the development of the [community risk management plan \(CRMP\)](#) proposals.

The brigade carried out only limited evaluation of its previous CRMP. However, it has used the fire standard gap analysis tool to identify areas for improvement in CRMP development and consultation.

The brigade has an effective CRMP

Once it has assessed risks, the brigade records its findings in an easily understood CRMP. This plan describes how the brigade intends to use its prevention, protection and response activities to mitigate or reduce the risks and threats the community faces both now and in the future. For example, the brigade proposes to:

- target a programme of [safer home visits](#) at the most [vulnerable people](#) in the community;
- implement an arson reduction strategy with local authority partners;
- carry out academic research to understand why the Northeast has significantly more arson compared with other parts of the country;
- evaluate its risk prioritisation methodology to make sure it is inspecting the highest-risk buildings first;
- improve how it works with small businesses to improve fire safety; and
- regularly train and exercise with neighbouring partners, including other fire and rescue services, police forces and ambulance services.

The CRMP covers 2022 to 2026 and is reviewed annually.

The brigade effectively gathers and shares risk information but could do more to make sure it is kept up to date

The brigade routinely collects and updates the information it has about the highest-risk people, places and threats it has identified. This includes building risk information such as water supplies, hazards, evacuation plans, environmental considerations, and health information such as medical oxygen users.

We sampled a broad range of the risk information the brigade collects, including:

- site-specific risk information;
- safer home visit files;
- protection files; and
- short-term/temporary risk information.

But some of the information we viewed was out of date.

Risk information is readily available for the brigade's prevention, protection and response staff. This means these teams can identify, reduce and mitigate risk effectively. For example, the brigade uses a computer database to record risk information and share it among prevention, protection and response staff. The operational intelligence department shares it with all relevant staff through fire

alerts and emails. Where appropriate, the brigade shares risk information with other organisations, such as the police, local authority housing associations, Trading Standards and various charities.

Staff at the locations we visited, including firefighters and emergency control room staff, were able to show us that they could access, use and share risk information quickly to help them resolve incidents safely.

The brigade uses the outcomes of operational activity effectively to build an understanding of risk

The brigade records and communicates risk information effectively. It also routinely updates risk assessments and uses feedback from local and national operational activities to inform its planning assumptions. For example, it effectively shares and receives [national operational learning](#) and [joint organisational learning](#).

The brigade has analysed national reports on major incidents. It has identified learning, and improved policies and guidance in many areas, including changes to the operational procedure for fires in tall buildings.

Preventing fires and other risks

Requires improvement

Cleveland Fire Brigade 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 sectors, and with the police and ambulance services. They should share [intelligence](#) and risk information with these other organisations when they identify vulnerability or exploitation.

Areas for improvement

The brigade should make sure staff carry out safer home visits promptly.

The brigade should make sure it has an effective process to refer people at risk to partner organisations.

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

Main findings

The brigade's prevention strategy prioritises those most at risk from fire and other emergencies

The brigade's prevention strategy is clearly linked to the risks it has identified in its CRMP. This includes working with partner organisations to keep people safe on the roads and in the home, and to tackle arson and deliberate fire-setting.

The brigade's teams work well together and with other relevant organisations on prevention, and they share relevant information when needed. The brigade works closely with the police, local authorities and hospital discharge teams to target people considered vulnerable and at greater risk of fire. During 2023/24, it received 2,047 partnership referrals and made 2,809 referrals to partners.

The brigade uses information to adjust its planning assumptions and direct activity between its prevention, protection and response functions. For example, it has computerised forms that staff in prevention and protection can use to submit risk information. This information, such as defective fire safety equipment or vulnerability information, may have an impact on operational response.

The brigade doesn't effectively target safer home visits

The brigade uses a risk-based approach to clearly prioritise its prevention activity towards people most at risk from fire and other emergencies. For example, it prioritises safer home visits based on risk. It focuses on referrals from partners such as local authorities, the police and the NHS. Also, operational staff are provided with target address lists.

The brigade uses a broad range of information and data to target its prevention activity at vulnerable individuals and groups. This includes the use of risk-based targeting data to identify areas of high risk. And accidental house fire data is analysed monthly to identify trends and to inform community involvement and targeting of safer home visits.

However, Home Office data shows that, during 2023/24, only 57.4 percent of safer home visits (11,108 out of 19,340) effectively targeted vulnerable or at-risk groups, according to the Home Office definition of vulnerability.

The brigade carries out a range of interventions, which it adapts to the level of risk in its communities. These include carrying out safer home visits, school education visits, and water and road safety events. It also provides a range of safety advice on its website, including:

- barbecue safety;
- caravan and camping safety;
- firework safety;
- garden and countryside safety;
- flooding advice;
- water safety; and
- boat safety.

The website also has a link to an online home fire safety check. The check offers tips and advice on the steps that can be taken to reduce any identified risks. Once completed, a personalised fire safety action plan is produced to help keep the occupier(s) safe from fire.

Specialist prevention training could be improved

Most staff told us they have the right skills and confidence to carry out safer home visits. These visits cover an appropriate range of hazards that can put vulnerable people at greater risk from fire and other emergencies. The brigade has given training to staff on safer home visits and [safeguarding](#). But prevention staff told us that it hadn't provided specialist training in many areas, such as mental health awareness or disability awareness. This is despite staff requesting this through the annual appraisal process.

The brigade provides a range of home fire safety advice

The safer home visit questionnaire includes sections on home fire safety, alcohol and sensory loss (hearing impairment). If the occupier is over 65, the form includes questions on falls, memory loss, dementia, older drivers and loneliness. In addition, staff fit standard and sensory loss smoke alarms as needed.

In 2023/24, the brigade made 19,340 safer home visits. This is 32.9 visits per 1,000 population, which is substantially higher than the rate of 10.4 for England.

However, we found that some on-call staff don't carry out safer home visits.

We also found the brigade's post-incident prevention work was inconsistent. The files we sampled showed evidence of some post-fire visits not being carried out.

Staff understand how to identify vulnerable people and act to safeguard them

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. All staff receive level 1 safeguarding training, with station managers and above receiving level 2 training, and the safeguarding lead receiving level 3 training.

The brigade is an active partner of the Teeswide Safeguarding Adults Board and local [children's](#) safeguarding boards.

The brigade works with other organisations to reduce risk but should respond to referrals more consistently

The brigade works with a wide range of other organisations to prevent fires and other emergencies. These include road safety partnerships, local authorities, the police, the RNLI and local businesses.

We found evidence that it routinely refers people at greatest risk to organisations that may better meet their needs. These organisations include Age UK, NHS falls teams, befriending agencies and local authorities.

However, we found that referrals weren't being automatically sent to partners due to community safety computer system issues. This results in missed or delayed referrals. We also found that some of the onward referral routes, such as advice on dementia, hoarding and loneliness, weren't established in all districts. However, not all staff are aware of this, and some have unknowingly referred people to services that would never be provided. We found examples of vulnerable people waiting for further help that never came. The brigade is aware of this and plans to address the computer system issues. This is an area for improvement.

Arrangements are in place to receive referrals from others, including the police, local authorities, a [domestic abuse](#) partnership, Age UK and Andy's Man Club. And the brigade acts appropriately on the referrals it receives. During 2023/24, it received 2,047 referrals from partners. It prioritises safer home visit referrals.

However, we found many examples where referrals from partners weren't actioned within the seven-day target period that the brigade set. In some cases, files showed that vulnerable people were waiting over four months for a visit. This could result in vulnerable people being left with an unacceptable level of risk for some time. This is an area for improvement.

The brigade routinely exchanges information with other public sector organisations about people and groups at greatest risk. It uses this information to challenge planning assumptions and target prevention activity. For example, at the time of the inspection, the brigade was working with the police, local authorities and social housing providers to create a prevention and response plan in preparation for the bonfire period.

The brigade has arrangements to tackle fire-setting behaviour

The brigade has a range of suitable and effective interventions to target and educate people with different needs who show signs of fire-setting behaviour. This includes education packages in schools and a dedicated fire-setter education programme for young people referred to the brigade for fire-setting.

The brigade is the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) lead for arson and is a member of the Home Office Anti-Social Behaviour Strategic Board. It also works with the local community safety partnership and the police to reduce arson. It does this through working with young people, fire investigation and, where necessary, prosecution.

When appropriate, it routinely shares information with relevant organisations to support the prosecution of arsonists. These organisations include the police, local authorities and the Environment Agency. The brigade also has a joint arson reduction policy and fire investigator with the police.

The brigade's quality assurance process for safer home visits has improved

During our 2022 inspection, we highlighted that an area for improvement was that the brigade should continue to improve quality assurance of its prevention work. During this latest inspection, we found that there had been sufficient progress so we have closed this area for improvement.

The brigade has evaluation tools in place to measure how effective its activity is and to make sure all sections of its communities get appropriate access to the prevention services that meet their needs. For example, it evaluated its Wheel It In campaign. The campaign, in spring 2024, aimed to reduce deliberate rubbish fire incidents and [antisocial behaviour](#). It included activities such as school talks, arson patrols by crews, prompt removal of rubbish by councils, skip events and social media posts. Data provided by the brigade showed a 15 percent reduction in general rubbish fires and an 18 percent reduction in deliberate [secondary fires](#), but no reduction in deliberate wheelie bin fires.

Prevention activities take account of feedback from the public, other organisations and other parts of the brigade. For example, quality assurance processes are now in place for safer home visits and school education sessions. Quality assurance is carried out in five different ways for each activity. These include direct workplace observation of activities, feedback from the public to make sure their expectations are met, and dip sampling documentation.

The brigade uses feedback to inform its planning assumptions and change future activity, so it focuses on what the community needs and what works.

Protecting the public through fire regulation

Requires improvement

Cleveland Fire Brigade requires improvement at protecting the public through fire regulation.

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

Areas for improvement

The brigade should assure itself that its risk-based inspection programme prioritises the highest risks and includes proportionate activity to reduce risk.

The brigade should make sure it has an effective quality assurance process, so staff carry out audits to an appropriate standard.

The brigade should make sure it has effective arrangements to provide specialist protection advice out of hours.

The brigade should make sure it works with local businesses and other 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.

Main findings

The brigade's protection strategy is linked to its CRMP

The brigade's protection strategy is clearly linked to the risks it has identified in its CRMP.

Staff across the brigade are involved in this activity, effectively exchanging information as needed. For example, inspecting officers and firefighters inspect premises and work with local businesses to share information and advice on how they can comply with fire safety regulations. The brigade then uses information to adjust planning assumptions and direct activity between its protection, prevention and response functions. This means resources are properly aligned to risk. Information is also shared with prevention and response staff through a risk database.

The brigade isn't targeting high-risk buildings effectively

The brigade's risk-based inspection programme (RBIP) isn't always focused on the brigade's highest-risk buildings.

To determine the level of building risk, the brigade has developed a risk-based inspection tool. The tool applies weightings to every building in the brigade's RBIP based on the likelihood and result of a fire breaking out.

However, we found that building risk classification is inconsistent. Protection staff we spoke with explained that the weightings resulted in buildings being identified as high risk that they wouldn't expect to identify as such.

We found that the brigade isn't consistently auditing the buildings it has targeted in the timescales it has set. Inspection frequency is based on building risk:

- very high – 6 monthly
- high – 12 monthly
- medium – 4 yearly
- low and very low – reactively.

During our inspection, we sampled a range of protection files. Many of the files showed that audits hadn't been completed within the timescales. This includes high-risk buildings not being inspected within 12 months. We also found that the brigade didn't consistently carry out audits following enforcement action. This is an area for improvement.

The brigade completes audits to a good standard

We reviewed a range of audits that the brigade had carried out at different buildings across its area. These included audits carried out:

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

The audits we reviewed were completed to a high standard in a consistent, systematic way and in line with the brigade's policies. We sampled several high-risk fire safety audit files. All areas were filled out with enough information and were consistent with the details on the premises. The outcome of the audit was consistent with the information held on the audit file, and the enforcement management model was completed when appropriate.

In 2023/24, the brigade completed 1,067 fire safety audits. In 77 percent of these, the building was declared unsatisfactory. Thirty-seven of these audits were at high-risk buildings, out of a total of 86 such buildings.

The brigade makes relevant information from its audits available to operational teams and control room operators. Examples of such information include prohibition notices, domestic violence markers (police intelligence on properties that are associated with domestic violence) and details of residents who can't rescue themselves in the event of a fire.

The brigade doesn't have an effective quality assurance process

The brigade carries out limited quality assurance of its protection activity. It carries out quality assurance in various ways, including sampling files and direct observation. Although we found that the brigade had carried out quality assurance on inspecting officers who were in development, it hadn't carried out quality assurance of fully qualified inspecting officers since October 2023. We also found that there was no formal process for recording quality assurance. Records are kept on spreadsheets by individual managers. So the brigade can't be fully assured that audits are completed to the required standard. This is an area for improvement.

It has good evaluation tools in place to measure how effective activity is and to make sure all sections of its communities get appropriate access to the protection services that meet their needs. These include leaving QR codes with businesses to help them provide feedback after protection activity.

The brigade takes enforcement action when needed but could improve out-of-hours help

The brigade consistently uses its full range of enforcement powers, and when appropriate, it prosecutes those who don't comply with fire safety regulations. We saw good evidence of the brigade taking enforcement action against responsible persons who had failed to comply with fire safety regulations. It uses an enforcement management model to decide what action to take.

In the year ending 31 March 2024, the brigade issued 1 alteration notice, 806 informal notifications, 19 enforcement notices and 24 prohibition notices, and carried out 5 prosecutions. It completed seven prosecutions in the five years from April 2019 to March 2024.

However, we found that it can't guarantee 24-hour access to specialist protection advice for its staff and other organisations such as the police and the ambulance service. If specialist protection advice isn't immediately available, the brigade would have to rely on recalling an officer to duty, and this could delay enforcement action. This is an area for improvement.

The brigade should make sure it allocates enough resources to carry out its protection strategy

Although the brigade has enough staff in the protection department, it doesn't have enough qualified protection staff to support its audit and enforcement activity. As at March 2024, there were eight competent protection staff and five in development, which is more than in the previous year (when there were seven competent and five in development).

Staff get the right training and work to appropriate accreditation. Staff qualifications are aligned to the National Fire Chiefs Council competency framework and include level 3 certificate, and levels 4 and 5 diploma qualifications.

Staff told us that the protection department wasn't meeting performance standards, due to a lack of competent staff, and that the RBIP targets for medium-risk buildings weren't being met. We recognise that attracting, training and retaining specialist protection staff is a sector-wide issue.

The brigade has adapted well to new legislation

Since our last inspection, the Building Safety Act 2022 and the Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 have been introduced to bring about better regulation and management of tall buildings.

The brigade is supporting the introduction of the [Building Safety Regulator](#). It expects these arrangements to have a manageable impact on its other protection activity. However, it told us that the introduction of the regulator caused a delay in it receiving information.

The Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 introduced a range of duties for the managers of tall buildings. These include a requirement to give the fire and rescue service floor plans and inform them of any substantial faults to essential firefighting equipment, such as firefighting lifts. We found the brigade has good arrangements in place to receive this information.

The brigade works effectively with other enforcement agencies

The brigade works closely with other enforcement agencies to regulate fire safety and it routinely exchanges risk information with them. This work includes:

- joint inspections of waste and recycling sites with the Environment Agency;
- auditing houses converted to flats with local authority officers; and
- multi-agency operations with the police, Trading Standards, and immigration and customs officers where criminal activity is suspected.

The brigade doesn't consistently respond to building consultations on time

The brigade doesn't always respond to building consultations on time. This means it doesn't consistently meet its statutory responsibility to comment on fire safety arrangements at new and altered buildings. In 2023/24, the brigade responded to 93.9 percent of building consultations (275 out of 293) and 90.3 percent of licensing consultations (139 out of 154) within the required time frames. This is despite the number of consultations being the lowest since 2016/17. Staff told us that this was due to a lack of capacity in the department.

The brigade could do more to promote fire safety with local businesses

The brigade proactively works with some local businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation. Specialist protection officers have been embedded into some hospitals to work closely with the NHS trust's fire safety officers, providing advice and improving compliance.

However, we found limited evidence that the brigade routinely supported businesses to educate them and improve fire safety. It doesn't have a dedicated business support team, and the protection team has had little involvement with the communications team on campaign work. Staff told us that the brigade could be more proactive in its approach through business engagement workshops and seminars. This is an area for improvement.

The brigade could do more to reduce unwanted fire signals

The brigade is taking action to reduce the number of unwanted fire signals. It has a call-challenging process to limit unnecessary fire engine deployments. And it has an unwanted fire signal policy that details a reduced attendance to some buildings unless it receives a call that confirms there is a fire.

The brigade also uses powers in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 to charge businesses that persistently create false alarms. The aim is to encourage an improvement in the management of automatic fire alarm (AFA) systems.

In the year ending 31 March 2024, 22.2 percent of emergency calls received (2,723 out of 12,288) were from AFAs. This is an increase from 2,476 in the year ending 31 March 2023. The brigade is aware of this and told us that alarm call centres were providing inaccurate or incomplete information when passing the call to fire control. This can result in fire engines being deployed where they aren't needed. This in turn means fire engines may not be available 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 the roads to respond to these incidents. The brigade plans to work with alarm call centres to reduce the burden of unwanted fire signals.

Fire and rescue services don't need to attend all AFA calls, as they aren't always genuine emergencies. In the year ending 31 March 2024, the brigade didn't attend 35.2 percent of these calls. This figure is lower than the England rate of 39.5 percent.

Responding to fires and other emergencies

Adequate

Cleveland Fire Brigade is adequate 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 areas.

Areas for improvement

The brigade should make sure it has an effective system to learn from operational incidents.

The brigade should make sure its firefighters have access to relevant and up-to-date risk information.

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

Main findings

The brigade aligns its resources with the risks identified in its CRMP

The brigade's response strategy is linked to the risks it has identified in its CRMP. Its fire engines and response staff, as well as its working patterns, are designed and located to help the brigade respond flexibly to fires and other emergencies with the appropriate resources. For example, the brigade uses different duty systems to maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of its operational workforce. These include [wholetime](#) fire stations, with firefighters who are immediately available, and on-call fire stations staffed by firefighters who live and work locally and respond within five minutes of a call to areas of lower risk.

The brigade has used community risk data, historical incident data and evidence from a private consultancy to identify risk. This allows it to identify where its fire stations and fire engines are most effectively located.

The brigade has a clearly defined response standard

There are no national response standards of performance for the public. But the brigade has set out its own response standards in its CRMP. These standards are based on a fire survivability model, and include the following:

- first fire engine at all property fires in an average of seven minutes;
- second fire engine (where needed) at all property fires in an average of ten minutes; and
- first fire engine at all road traffic collisions with an identified risk to life in an average of eight minutes.

The brigade consistently meets its standards. Home Office data shows that in the year ending 31 March 2024, the brigade's response time to [primary fires](#) was 7 minutes and 56 seconds. This is broadly the same as the average for predominantly urban services.

The brigade's fire engine availability doesn't support its response standard

The brigade aims to have fire engines available to respond to incidents 100 percent of the time. However, we found that it rarely achieved this. Its overall availability for 2023/24 was 75.6 percent, with wholetime availability at 93.2 percent and on-call availability at 47 percent. In the same year, on-call availability for one of its fire engines was as low as 0.8 percent for a single month.

The brigade is aware of this and is planning to improve availability at all on-call stations. This includes increasing the time that on-call firefighters have to travel to stations to respond to emergencies. By doing this, the brigade aims to attract more people who may want to become an on-call firefighter. It also plans to increase availability by offering employment contracts with more flexible working hours.

Staff have a good understanding of how to command incidents safely

The brigade has trained incident commanders, who are assessed regularly and properly. In 2023/24, nearly all incident commanders (99.2 percent) were appropriately trained and qualified. They are assessed every year. In addition, some operational and non-operational staff complete multi-agency gold incident command courses delivered by the [College of Policing](#). This helps the brigade safely, assertively and effectively manage the whole range of incidents 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 brigade. They were 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 \(JESIP\)](#).

Fire control staff are regularly involved in training, exercises and debriefs

We were pleased to see the brigade's control staff integrated into its command, training, exercise, debrief and assurance activity. They complete regular training in JESIP, incident command and major incidents. They are involved in multi-agency exercises, for situations such as mass decontamination, terrorist events and fires in tall buildings. They are regularly invited to debriefs and are asked to provide feedback. And they are involved in fire fatality debriefs.

The brigade should make sure that risk information is accurate and up to date

We sampled a range of risk information available at fire stations and the control room, including the information in place for firefighters responding to incidents at high-risk, high-rise buildings and the information held by fire control.

The information we reviewed wasn't always up to date or detailed. For example, some site-specific risk information (SSRI) on [mobile data terminals](#) hasn't been updated for over ten years. We also found different SSRI for the same sites. And we found some temporary risk information was out of date and didn't match the information on the brigade's [mobilising](#) system. This is an area for improvement.

However, staff can easily access and understand information. It is made available through various methods, including mobile data terminals, tablets, phones and laptops. It includes SSRI, emergency response plans, chemical data and over-the-border risk information (information about risks in neighbouring counties). Some had input from the brigade's prevention, protection and response functions when appropriate. Such information helps, for example, fire control staff to access evacuation strategies at high-rise residential buildings.

The brigade has improved how it plans and carries out familiarisation visits

During our last inspection, we identified that the brigade should improve how it plans and carries out familiarisation visits by operational crews at high-risk premises. We are pleased to see that it has improved the planning and implementation of these visits. It has reviewed its inspection programme and developed a new three-stage approach. And we found that firefighters had received face-to-face training from the brigade's building risk manager in how to collect and interpret SSRI.

The three-stage approach to reviewing risk information includes the following stages:

- Stage 1 – carry out a review of risk information already held on file, before visiting a site.
- Stage 2 – visit the site and review all risk information, including emergency response plans.
- Stage 3 – carry out an exercise at the site.

Operational staff gather SSRI at all high-risk premises, which provides risk awareness to crews attending operational incidents at these sites. The brigade has also created a temporary role to co-ordinate and help with reviewing all risk intelligence, including SSRI.

Overall, during this inspection, we found that there had been sufficient progress so we have closed this area for improvement.

The brigade isn't consistently learning from operational incidents

As part of the inspection, we reviewed a range of emergency incidents and training events. These included major incidents, fires in domestic and commercial properties, road traffic collisions, water rescues and other complex incidents. We also reviewed training exercises, including multi-agency training events, such as responses to terrorist attacks and other incidents involving large numbers of casualties.

The brigade has responded to learning from incidents to improve its service for the public. For example, a debrief highlighted the need for better communication between fire control and other emergency services when dealing with fires in tall buildings. This has resulted in changes to high-rise building fire procedures. These changes include an action for fire control operators to inform both the police and the ambulance service of an ongoing incident, along with the building's evacuation procedure. The brigade also shares learning effectively through internal fire alerts and operational bulletins.

We were encouraged to see the brigade is contributing towards, and acting on, learning from other fire and rescue services or operational learning gathered from emergency service partners. This includes national operational learning and joint organisational learning, cross-border incidents and multi-agency exercises.

However, the brigade doesn't always act on learning it has, or should have, identified from incidents. This means it isn't routinely improving its service to the public. For example, brigade policy states that [hot debriefs](#) should be carried out as soon as possible after an incident or training activity, and that structured debriefs should be carried out when incidents meet set criteria, including:

- an emergency that requires the use of breathing apparatus;
- an emergency that puts a firefighter at heightened risk;
- a fire that causes death;
- a high-rise building fire; or
- a large or complex incident.

We found several examples of incidents and training exercises that met the brigade's criteria but hadn't been followed by any type of debrief or been reviewed by the brigade's operational assurance team. This is an area for improvement.

The brigade could improve communication with the public during incidents

The brigade could improve the processes in place to inform the public about ongoing incidents and help keep them safe during and after incidents. For example, the brigade uses social media to warn and inform the public about operational incidents. The communications team posts messages about incidents, but it is available only during office hours. Duty group managers and fire control post messages out of hours. The brigade told us that guidance notes and training are provided to support this role. However, some staff told us that they hadn't received training in dealing with the media. Staff gave examples of some incidents not being effectively communicated to the public or partners.

The brigade told us that the [local resilience forum](#) 'warn and inform' group hadn't met in the previous 12 months, and it didn't carry out exercises of plans.

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents

Good

Cleveland Fire Brigade is good at responding to major and multi-agency incidents.

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

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

Main findings

The brigade is prepared for major and multi-agency incidents

The brigade 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 community risk management planning. Examples of risks include wide-scale flooding, wildfires and terrorist threats.

It is also familiar with the significant risks neighbouring fire and rescue services may face, and which it might reasonably be asked to respond to in an emergency. Firefighters have access to risk information from neighbouring services. The brigade receives SSRI files from neighbouring services through the national emergency services portal [Resilience Direct](#). Premises within 10 km of a brigade border are entered on the risk management system, which operational staff can access through mobile data terminals.

The brigade is prepared to respond to tall building fires

In our last inspection, we focused on how the brigade had collected risk information and responded to the Government's building risk review programme for tall buildings.

In this inspection, we have focused on how well prepared the brigade is to respond to a major incident at a tall building, such as the tragedy at Grenfell Tower.

We found the brigade has well-developed policies and procedures in place for safely managing this type of incident. Staff at all levels understand them, and training and exercises have taken place to test them. During 2023/24, the brigade carried out 16 multi-agency training exercises, including several at high-rise buildings. Firefighters also complete e-learning on fires in tall buildings.

At this type of incident, a fire and rescue service would receive a high volume of simultaneous fire calls. We found that the systems in place in the brigade are robust enough to receive and manage this volume of calls. The brigade uses a computer system to relay important information, such as the people who are at greatest risk and need to be rescued. Risk information can be accessed and updated from both the emergency control room and the evacuation unit at the scene of an incident. This helps the brigade to prioritise rescues and effectively evacuate tall buildings on fire.

In response to the Grenfell Tower incident, the brigade has increased the pre-determined response to fires in high-risk tall buildings to ten fire engines.

The brigade works well with other fire and rescue services

The brigade supports other fire and rescue services responding to emergency incidents. It has two neighbouring fire and rescue services: County Durham and Darlington, and North Yorkshire. It is intraoperable with these services and can form part of a multi-agency response. It has [mutual aid](#) arrangements in place with both services.

The brigade has a detection, identification and monitoring unit with specialist officers. This is used to detect, identify and monitor a wide range of hazardous substances. National Resilience Fire Control can deploy the resource nationally on request from an affected service, under the National Coordination and Advisory Framework.

The brigade has successfully deployed to other services and has used national assets.

The brigade's cross-border exercise plan could be improved

The brigade has a cross-border exercise plan with neighbouring fire and rescue services, helping them work together effectively to keep the public safe. The plan includes the risks of major events at which the brigade could foreseeably give support or ask for help from neighbouring services. We were encouraged to see the brigade uses feedback from these exercises to inform risk information and brigade plans.

During 2023/24, the brigade took part in seven exercises with neighbouring fire and rescue services. However, although we spoke to firefighters who had been involved in these, many on-call firefighters told us that they had never been involved in any cross-border exercise.

Incident commanders have a good understanding of JESIP

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

The brigade could give us evidence that it consistently follows these principles. Incident commanders routinely use the joint decision model when liaising with other agencies. Staff at all levels are trained in JESIP through e-learning. And the principles are regularly used in training exercises and are embedded in incident command competency assessments at all levels.

However, during our inspection, we found evidence that the brigade is often not taking the opportunity to carry out robust debriefs after multi-agency incidents and/or exercises. This means it may not be identifying any problems it has with applying JESIP and may be missing learning opportunities. This could compromise the brigade's ability to respond effectively with other emergency services when major incidents do occur.

The brigade plays an active part in the local resilience forum

The brigade has good arrangements in place to respond to emergencies with partners that make up the Cleveland Local Resilience Forum. These arrangements involve working closely with Cleveland Police and the North East Ambulance Service to make sure there is co-ordinated planning for – and response to – any national, regional or local emergency.

The brigade is a valued partner and member of several Cleveland Local Resilience Forum working groups. It also chairs the blue light working group. The brigade takes part in training events with other members of the forum and uses the learning to develop planning assumptions about responding to major and multi-agency incidents. The forum co-ordinates multi-agency debriefs. Debrief reports are then produced and shared with partners through the blue light working group.

The brigade contributes to national learning

The brigade makes sure it knows about national operational updates from other fire and rescue services and joint organisational learning from other organisations, such as the police service and ambulance trusts. It uses this learning to inform planning assumptions that it makes with partner organisations.

The brigade's operational assurance action group has a dedicated single point of contact to monitor all submissions and to review and share learning throughout the organisation using the internal learning platform.

The brigade shares learning with other fire and rescue services if it may have implications for them. It does this through national operational learning and joint organisational learning.

Making best use of resources

Good

Cleveland Fire Brigade is good at making best use of its resources.

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

The service's revenue budget for 2024/25 is £33.1 million. This is a 12.3 percent increase from the previous financial year.

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

Main findings

The brigade's financial plans support its objectives, but it needs to improve resource allocation

The brigade's financial and workforce plans, including allocating resources to prevention, protection and response, continue to be consistent with the risks and priorities it has identified in its CRMP. All the brigade's strategic plans are aligned to the CRMP's needs and are affordable and sustainable over the medium to long term.

The brigade has staff shortages in fire control. At the time of our inspection, it was using three on-call control operators to fill staffing gaps. And an on-call control crew manager was providing one shift a week. The brigade is aware of this and is recruiting to fill the three vacancies with wholetime staff.

Although the protection department has the correct number of staff, several staff members are in development and not fully qualified. The brigade told us it had trouble retaining staff and gave an example of recently losing a member of staff to another service.

We found on-call availability as low as 0.8 percent for one month for one of its fire engines during 2023/24. This was due to reduced staffing levels. The brigade is aware of this and is planning to improve availability at all on-call stations. This includes increasing the time that on-call firefighters have to travel to stations to respond to emergencies. This has the aim of attracting more applicants for the on-call firefighter role.

The brigade has evaluated its mix of crewing and duty systems. It has analysed its response cover and can show it deploys its fire engines and response staff to manage risk efficiently. It uses both on-call and wholetime firefighter duty systems to make sure it always has a minimum of 14 fire engines available. It is piloting a new wholetime firefighter duty system. The new system aims to improve productivity and capacity, and reduce overtime costs. The brigade was due to evaluate the pilot in early 2025.

The brigade builds its plans on sound scenarios. They help make sure the brigade is sustainable and are underpinned by financial controls that reduce the risk of misusing public money. It sends quarterly management accounts to the [fire and rescue authority](#), which provide detailed updates on performance against budget and explanations of significant differences.

The brigade effectively manages workplace productivity

We were pleased to see that the brigade's arrangements for managing performance clearly link resource use to its CRMP and its strategic priorities. The establishment of productivity targets is aligned to the commitment to increase firefighter productivity by 3 percent by 2024/25.

The brigade understands how it uses its wholetime firefighters. It collects data on how they spend their time across day and night shifts. It makes the most of its capacity. For example, it has developed a productivity and capacity app and database. Managers use this to record workplace activity daily, allowing improved monitoring and reporting. The brigade told us that this had increased firefighter productivity by 6 percent. In addition, district management teams measure implementation of the CRMP monthly and report through quarterly performance meetings.

The brigade is taking steps to make sure the workforce's time is as productive as possible. This includes putting in place new ways of working. For example, it started a pilot wholetime firefighter duty system in January 2024. The system includes a change to start and finish times. This results in more time to complete prevention and protection activity when more people are at home, such as early evening. The brigade planned to evaluate the pilot in early 2025.

The brigade has improved its evaluation of collaborative activity

We were encouraged to see the improvements the brigade has made since our last inspection.

We were pleased to see the brigade meets its statutory duty to collaborate. It recognises in its CRMP that improving community safety is best achieved through collaboration with other agencies, and so it routinely considers opportunities to collaborate with other emergency responders. It has a long-established service level agreement with Hartlepool Borough Council for the provision of support services, and memoranda of understanding with several other emergency services. For example, it shares estate in Hartlepool with Cleveland Police, and the control room shares [fall-back](#) cover with three other fire and rescue services. It also plans to share further estate with Cleveland Police. Other collaboration includes:

- making safer home visits in partnership with health and local authorities;
- integrating its arson reduction strategy with that of Cleveland Police; and
- participating in the Cleveland Road Safety Partnership.

Collaborative work is aligned to the priorities in the brigade's CRMP. For example, the brigade has an arrangement with the North East Ambulance Service to provide a response to cardiac arrest incidents. It told us that this had resulted in 36 mobilisations in six months, with six lives being saved.

During our last inspection, we highlighted that an area for improvement was that the brigade should make sure it effectively monitors, reviews, and evaluates the benefits and outcomes of any collaboration. Since then, the brigade has employed a new partnership and evaluation manager and developed a new digital partnership framework called Better Together. It has also developed a live partnership register. And it has recently evaluated and extended its collaboration with Cleveland Police to maintain its vehicles. As a result, we have closed this area for improvement.

The brigade has effective continuity arrangements

The brigade has continuity arrangements in place for areas in which it considers threats and risks to be high. It regularly reviews and tests these threats and risks so that staff know the arrangements and their associated responsibilities. It has a business continuity plan to maintain an operational response based on a minimum of six fire engines during any period of industrial action. The plan uses a mix of staff from a resilience pool, non-operational staff and trained firefighters. The brigade also has three on-call control operators who provide availability 24 hours a week.

The brigade has a degradation list that is used for planning during periods of reduced fire engine availability. This lists all fire engines in priority order. It is supported by a computer system called Dynamic Cover Tool. This predicts the movement of fire engines and suggests how engines can be relocated to maximise cover.

We found that the brigade's operational continuity plan for industrial action had been reviewed and tested regularly. Learning is recorded and used to improve operational resilience.

The brigade shows effective financial management

There are regular reviews to consider all the brigade's expenditure, including its non-pay costs. And this scrutiny makes sure the brigade gets value for money. For example, the brigade has decided to pause its station rebuild programme due to the cost of inflation and financial uncertainty.

The brigade has made savings and efficiencies, which haven't affected its operational performance and the service it gives the public.

The brigade is taking steps to make sure it achieves efficiency gains through sound financial management and best working practices. It is doing this in important areas such as estates, fleet and procurement. It is buying a new mobilising system and breathing apparatus sets through procurement frameworks. It has also bought mobile data terminals with six other services. It told us that this had resulted in a 33 percent saving compared to the list price.

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

Good

Cleveland Fire Brigade 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.

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

Main findings

The brigade understands its future financial challenges

The brigade has a sound understanding of future financial challenges. It plans to mitigate its main financial risks. For example, its corporate risk register contains details of the key financial risks and the actions to address them. These include financial pressures and sustainability, and pension reforms. The brigade maintains a budget support fund reserve to manage funding uncertainties.

The underpinning assumptions are relatively robust and realistic. They take account of the wider external environment and some scenario planning for future spending reductions. In developing its medium-term financial strategy (MTFS), the brigade has produced a range of planning scenarios and has applied common annual planning factors, including:

- inflation and pay awards;
- council tax increase;
- government grant freeze or reduction; and
- investment income.

At the time of inspection, the brigade told us that it expected a budget shortfall of between £1.2 and £1.5 million by 2026/27. It is developing options for savings which it can make in 2025/26 and 2026/27.

The brigade has clear arrangements for the use of reserves

The brigade has a sensible and sustainable plan for using its reserves. The MTFS details the planned use of the brigade's earmarked reserves up to 2028/29. Earmarked reserves make up 88 percent of the brigade's reserves and are held to spread the cost of large-scale capital projects over several years, to support the revenue budget and to meet other one-off commitments. Over this period, earmarked reserves are forecast to reduce significantly as they are used to fund planned commitments as follows:

- capital programme reserve, allocated to support the brigade's asset management plan;
- budget support fund reserve, which supports the phased implementation of budget cuts;
- earmarked revenue reserves, allocated to fund deficits in the council's business rates collection fund (part of which goes to the brigade), installation of fire alarms and managing income risks for services funded by specific grant/external funding;
- funding for specific projects and programmes beyond the current planning period; and
- insurance fund, which covers claims that aren't covered by the brigade's insurance.

If circumstances change, and individual earmarked reserves aren't needed, or they are used less than forecast at the time of our inspection, the position will be reviewed when the MTFS is updated. This will make sure the reserves strategy continues to support the MTFS and the financial resilience of the brigade.

Fleet and estate strategies are aligned with the CRMP

The brigade's fleet and estate plans are contained in its resource plan and have clear links to the CRMP. The resource plan exploits opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness. The brigade has secured recurring cashable efficiencies. These include areas such as business rates, insurance, and energy and water rates. It has also installed electric charging points at many of its buildings, in line with its climate change plans. In addition, it continues to improve its training facilities in line with its risk profiles. These include new petrochemical, fire behaviour and wind turbine training rigs. And several fire stations have been refurbished. This will reduce future maintenance costs.

The brigade regularly reviews its resource plan so that it can properly assess the effect any changes in estate and fleet provision, or future innovation, have on risk.

The brigade invests in technology to support change and improve efficiency

The brigade actively considers how changes in technology and future innovation may affect risk. For example, it recognises the importance of cybersecurity and has employed a full-time cybersecurity manager. It has learned from other fire and rescue services and local authorities that have experienced cyberattacks. And a cybersecurity e-learning module has been produced to provide staff with a basic understanding in this area.

It also looks to exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness presented by changes in technology. It is exploring the use of artificial intelligence software to help in writing documents, creating presentations and dealing with freedom of information requests. It has also created a productivity and capacity app to effectively monitor operational staff activity.

The brigade has put in place the capacity and capability it needs to achieve sustainable transformation, and it routinely explores opportunities to work with others to improve efficiency and provide better services in the future. At the time of our inspection it was buying a new mobilising system with Shropshire, Hereford and Worcester, and Durham and Darlington fire and rescue services. This will remove the need for secondary control rooms, improve resilience and reduce costs.

The brigade effectively generates additional income

The brigade actively considers and exploits opportunities for generating extra income. It has established Cleveland Fire Brigade Risk Management Services, a community interest company (CIC). The CIC employs over 100 people. It has traded since 2011, and during this time it has used profits to support industrial, commercial and public safety. Sixty-five percent of the profit goes to the community – for example, the funding of cadet schemes. Total donations from the CIC amount to over £1 million since 2011. The brigade also has a service level agreement to make sure that any commissioned services provided by the brigade on behalf of partners are fully reimbursed by the CIC.

The CIC board consists of the former chief fire officer (chair), the brigade's solicitor and a former assistant chief fire officer. The board decides where the profits are allocated and reports to the fire and rescue authority annually. Conflicts of interest are covered in the schemes of delegation for the brigade and the CIC.

Where appropriate, the brigade has secured external funding and generated extra income to invest in improvements to the service it gives the public. For example, it has secured income through grants, donations, charging and contracts. In 2024/25, the forecast income was £610,000.

The brigade's self-funding commissioned services team aims to generate income to provide a range of community safety activities. These include 'stay safe and warm' advice, a befriending service and road safety programmes.

Promoting the right values and culture

Requires improvement

Cleveland Fire Brigade 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. Services should promote health and safety effectively, and staff should have access to a range of well-being support that can be tailored to their individual needs.

Areas for improvement

The brigade should assure itself that senior managers demonstrate brigade values through their behaviours.

The brigade should proactively monitor working hours (including overtime) to improve staff well-being.

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

Main findings

Some senior leaders don't routinely demonstrate the brigade's values

The brigade has a values and ethical behaviours framework, which includes a clearly defined set of core values that are aligned to the National Fire Chiefs Council's [Core Code of Ethics](#). The five values are protect, respect, innovate, do the right thing, and engage, summarised in the acronym PRIDE. The framework outlines each value and how it should be demonstrated at all levels of the organisation. Most staff who responded to our staff survey said that they were aware of the brigade's statement of values.

The brigade has recently introduced an integrity health check, which all staff must complete annually as part of the appraisal process. The health check requires staff

to confirm that they have read, understand and agree to a range of policies and procedures. These include the employee code of conduct, the values and ethical behaviours framework, and social media, dignity at work and grievance policies. They must also confirm they know how to raise a concern through the intranet or the independent whistleblowing line.

However, 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 collected evidence through interviews and our independent reporting line about the poor behaviour of some senior managers. This included examples of bullying, micromanaging and abuse of authority.

Staff felt that senior leaders don't always act as positive role models. Ninety percent of those who responded to our staff survey (167 out of 185) agreed they were treated with respect by the people they worked with. But only 74 percent of respondents (136 out of 185) agreed that senior leaders consistently modelled and maintained the brigade's values. This is an area for improvement.

However, encouragingly, we saw the start of a positive work culture throughout the brigade. Staff told us that the newly appointed chief fire officer and assistant chief fire officer were seen as positive role models. And senior leaders are open to feedback. We found evidence that they regularly received and acted on feedback through staff forums, network groups and reporting lines. Staff also told us that the visibility of middle and senior managers had improved.

Staff are starting to feel empowered and willing to challenge poor behaviours when they come across them. We look forward to seeing how the brigade makes progress in this area.

Staff have access to appropriate services to support mental and physical health

The brigade continues to have well-understood and effective well-being policies in place, which are available to staff. A significant range of well-being support is available to support both physical and mental health. For example, staff have access to physiotherapists; counsellors; a health, fitness and well-being co-ordinator and the Fire Fighters Charity.

There are good provisions in place to promote staff well-being. These include health and well-being staff bulletins, workplace posters and signposting on the intranet to other sources of support. Most staff reported they understand and have confidence in the well-being support processes available. Of those who responded to our staff survey, 88 percent (163 out of 185) agreed that they felt able to access services to support their mental well-being. And 30 percent (55 out of 185) told us they discussed their personal well-being or work-related stress with their manager weekly, 31 percent (57 out of 185) discussed it monthly, 11 percent (21 out of 185) discussed it quarterly, and 20 percent (37 out of 185) discussed it annually.

The brigade has listened to staff feedback and as a result it has recently changed its occupational health provider. However, although most staff told us that they often used the brigade's trauma risk management process, some staff told us that it could take a long time to get help.

The brigade has a positive health and safety culture

The brigade has effective and well-understood health and safety policies and procedures in place.

These policies and procedures are readily available, and the brigade promotes them effectively to all staff. It communicates with staff through regular health and safety bulletins. Of those who responded to our staff survey, 94 percent (174 out of 185) agreed that they were satisfied that their personal safety and welfare were treated seriously at work.

The brigade told us that:

- all staff must complete the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health's Working Safely course on appointment;
- all crew managers must complete the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health's Managing Safely course;
- station managers and above must complete the National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health's General Certificate; and
- group managers must complete a course on leading accident investigations.

During our last inspection, we found staff representative bodies had mixed levels of confidence in the health and safety approach the brigade takes. We found the same during this inspection. The union that represents staff in support roles agreed that the brigade managed health and safety well, but another union didn't.

The brigade doesn't monitor working hours effectively

The brigade doesn't monitor staff who have secondary employment or dual contracts to make sure they comply with the secondary employment policy and don't work excessive hours. A new secondary employment procedure introduced in June 2024 clearly outlines rest periods for staff with secondary employment.

However, staff with dual wholetime and on-call contracts don't need to take a rest between their wholetime and on-call duty, so long as they have assessed their level of fatigue at the start and end of each period of duty. The procedure explains that the brigade has processes to control and monitor the risk of dual contract staff working excessive hours. But staff told us that this wasn't the case and that there was no monitoring of the hours being worked and the impact on well-being and safety.

During our inspection the brigade told us that it was the responsibility of the employee to declare and ask for approval from the brigade for any secondary employment.

This rule was updated in 2017 but not communicated to the workforce. As a result, the brigade doesn't know which staff have secondary contracts or the effect this could have on their primary roles. This is an area for improvement.

The brigade's arrangements for cleaning on-call staff's fire kit aren't adequate

On-call firefighters told us that they felt the facilities for washing fire kit were inadequate. Although we found that the brigade had effective arrangements to decontaminate the fire kit of wholetime firefighters, this wasn't the case for on-call staff. Wholetime firefighters wash their fire kit using washing machines on station, but only one on-call station has a washing machine. As a result, on-call firefighters must travel to a neighbouring station to wash fire kit, so they aren't available to attend fire calls.

The brigade is effectively monitoring absences

We found there are clear processes in place to manage absences for all staff. There is clear guidance for managers. However, while some managers told us that they had completed absence management training, others told us that they didn't feel trained to deal with absence effectively.

In 2023/24, the average number of days/shifts lost by firefighters on long-term sickness was 9.8, compared with 7.3 in the previous year. This is a 34 percent increase. The total number of days lost in 2023/24 was 3,867.

The brigade is dealing with staffing shortages due to sickness. This includes a comprehensive staffing project called All's Well. The project aims to provide a detailed analysis of sickness causes, enabling better support and targeted interventions in the future.

Getting the right people with the right skills

Adequate

Cleveland Fire Brigade is adequate 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 CRMPs. It should set out their current and future skills requirements and address capability gaps. This should be supplemented by a culture of continuous improvement, including appropriate learning and development throughout the service.

Areas for improvement

The brigade should assure itself that all staff receive the right training for their role.

The brigade should make sure the system to record and monitor operational staff competence is aligned to its policy for maintaining skills and knowledge.

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

Main findings

The brigade regularly reviews its workforce and plans to fill gaps

The brigade has good workforce planning in place. This makes sure skills and capabilities align with what it needs to effectively carry out its CRMP. For example, the workforce plan is used to inform the annual training plan and forecast budget requirements. Training includes training to maintain staff competence, training to meet legal requirements, and training to meet the outcomes of annual appraisals.

Workforce and succession planning is subject to consistent scrutiny in the form of regular meetings to discuss requirements. The heads of human resources and training attend quarterly meetings to provide advice and further information for the executive leadership team. The meetings inform a medium-term workforce plan that is kept up to date. However, although staff told us that staffing gaps could be predicted, the decisions to fill the gaps through promotion and recruitment weren't made promptly.

As at 31 March 2024, 22 staff were on temporary promotion. This is a decrease from 34 the previous year.

The brigade doesn't effectively address all training needs

The brigade's training plans make sure it can maintain competence and capability effectively. Maintenance of competence is one of the brigade's key performance indicators and is formally reported to the executive leadership team quarterly.

Most staff told us that they could access the training they need to be effective in their role. Of those who responded to our staff survey, 82 percent (152 out of 185) agreed that overall they had received sufficient training to effectively do their job.

We also found, though, that sometimes staff didn't receive the full range of training to help them fulfil their role. Some specialist prevention staff didn't receive training in areas such as mental health and disability awareness, despite requesting this through the annual appraisal process. We also found some managers didn't receive training in areas such as discipline, absence management and appraisals.

During our inspection, we found training records for on-call firefighters that showed they were out of date for training in areas such as firefighting, working at height and extrications. Some on-call firefighters told us that they hadn't done any pump, ladder or extrication training in months. The brigade is aware of this. This is an area for improvement.

The brigade must do more to effectively record and monitor staff competence

The brigade monitors staff competence through a new personal development recording computer system. It regularly updates its understanding of staff skills and risk-critical safety capabilities by using a traffic light system of red, amber and green. However, we found the sampling of training records wasn't effective or aligned to the brigade's policy.

During our last two inspections, we highlighted that an area for improvement was that the brigade should make sure the system to record and monitor operational staff competence is aligned to its policy for maintaining skills and knowledge. Although the brigade has made progress in the computerised recording of training, we found that some staff were still using paper-based training records. While the brigade has made improvements, there is still more to do, and so the area for improvement remains.

The brigade supports staff with learning and development

The brigade promotes a culture of continuous improvements throughout the organisation, and it encourages staff to learn and develop. For example, the brigade's integrated talent management framework includes opportunities for staff to be developed beyond their current role. The development gateway – on the intranet – aims to provide all staff, regardless of role and level, with the opportunity to reach their full potential.

We were pleased to see that the brigade has a range of resources in place. These include a wide range of e-learning modules, and management and leadership training.

Most staff told us they can access a range of learning and development resources. Of those who responded to our staff survey, 81 percent (149 out of 185) agreed that they were able to access the right learning and development opportunities when needed.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity

Adequate

Cleveland Fire Brigade is adequate at ensuring fairness and promoting diversity.

Creating a more representative workforce gives fire and rescue services huge benefits. These include greater access to talent and different ways of thinking. It also helps them better understand and engage with local communities. Each service should make sure staff throughout the organisation firmly understand and show a commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. 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 it takes is meaningful.

Areas for improvement

The brigade should make sure it has robust processes in place to carry out [equality impact assessments](#) and review any actions agreed as a result.

The brigade should make sure it is transparent and fair when recruiting staff.

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

Main findings

The brigade is good at encouraging and acting on staff feedback and challenge

The brigade has developed several ways to work with staff on issues and decisions that affect them. These include methods to build all-staff awareness of fairness and diversity, as well as targeted initiatives to identify matters that affect different staff groups. The brigade has four staff network groups:

- disability
- cultural diversity

- LGBT+
- women.

The brigade receives staff feedback in several ways. These include staff surveys, focus groups, staff networks, the future leaders forum and weekly communication forums. Staff surveys are used to collect feedback in a range of areas, including values and ethical behaviours, health and safety, equality, diversity, inclusion, and health and well-being. But the outcomes of staff surveys aren't shared quickly enough.

The brigade has taken action to address matters staff have raised. For example, the brigade holds a weekly communication forum with senior leaders, which is cast virtually to the whole brigade. As a result of on-call firefighter feedback, these sessions are now recorded, so that firefighters can watch at their convenience. The brigade has also recently changed its occupational health provider following staff feedback. Staff have received these actions positively. Representative bodies and staff associations reported that the brigade communicates with them well.

Although the brigade is taking a positive approach to tackling bullying, harassment and discrimination, it could do more

Staff have a good understanding of what bullying, [harassment](#) and discrimination are, and their negative effects on colleagues and the organisation.

In this inspection, 16 percent of staff who responded to our staff survey (29 out of 185) told us they had been subject to bullying or harassment and 13 percent (24 out of 185) to discrimination over the past 12 months. Although we found examples of bullying at a senior manager level, most staff told us that they hadn't seen any inappropriate behaviour and felt confident they would be able to challenge it if they did.

Most staff are confident in the brigade's approach to tackling bullying, harassment and discrimination, grievances and disciplinary matters. The brigade is committed to protecting all employees against bullying, harassment and victimisation. It recognises that bullying and harassment are unlawful, and it takes a zero-tolerance approach to any behaviour of this kind. It also won't tolerate victimisation of a person for making allegations of bullying or harassment, or for supporting someone else to do so. Confidentiality is a priority: the brigade aims to deal with issues promptly, fairly, sensitively and confidentially.

The brigade has made sure all staff are trained and clear about what to do if they encounter inappropriate behaviour. Staff can report verbally but can also report through the 'Raising a Concern' section on the intranet or through the independent whistleblowing line.

The brigade is actively working to address disproportionality in recruitment

The brigade has an effective system to understand and remove the risk of [disproportionality](#) in recruitment processes. For example, the brigade uses community profile data to target recruitment campaigns. It recently employed a marketing and branding expert to assess campaign work and the brigade website. It has focused on mosques and Muslim community groups to better understand the barriers to starting a career in the brigade. It has run all-women promotional events run by serving women staff. It has also targeted a women's football team to break down myths about strength requirements for operational roles and to promote non-operational roles in the brigade.

The brigade has put considerable effort into developing its recruitment processes so that they are fair and potential applicants can understand them. The recruitment policies are comprehensive and cover opportunities in all roles. The brigade advertises recruitment opportunities internally and externally through:

- social media;
- the brigade website;
- attendance at Pride and other community events;
- the Asian Fire Service Association;
- Women in the Fire Service UK; and
- the National Fire Chiefs Council.

This has encouraged applicants from diverse backgrounds, including applicants for middle and senior management roles.

The brigade has taken steps to improve staff diversity. For example, it has produced a report titled 'Breaking Down Barriers in Recruitment'. The report summarises what the brigade has learned so far from a wide range of engagement opportunities, and the immediate improvements it has made in response to some of that learning. The report provides details of barriers to the recruitment of women and ethnic minorities, and actions that the brigade has taken to address them. The brigade told us that, while it had carried out a great deal of work on this, disappointingly this hadn't yet resulted in any significant changes to its workforce diversity profile. We were also told that the brigade didn't work with staff groups during the development of its recruitment process.

The brigade needs to do more to increase diversity. There has been little progress to improve ethnic and gender diversity. The proportion of firefighters who identified as being from an ethnic minority background has slightly increased from 2.7 percent (11 people) as at 31 March 2023 to 3.6 percent (15 people) as at 31 March 2024. The proportion of firefighters who identified as a woman has slightly increased from 6.1 percent (25 people) to 6.5 percent (27 people) over the same period.

For the whole workforce, as at 31 March 2024, 3.2 percent identified as being from an ethnic minority background compared to 9.9 percent in their local population and 8.6 percent throughout all fire and rescue services in England. In the brigade, 20.3 percent identified as a woman, compared to an average of 20.2 percent throughout all fire and rescue services in England. Most women in the brigade work in non-operational roles.

The brigade's recruitment processes lack transparency

Staff told us that the lack of involvement of human resources professionals in promotion and recruitment interview panels had resulted in a lack of transparency and fairness.

There are policies and procedures for firefighter recruitment campaigns, which help to make sure there is transparency in the recruitment process for applicants. The human resources team runs these campaigns. However, for non-operational staff and more senior appointments, there is a lack of transparency. The processes for these appointments are run by a single senior manager and, as a result, lack transparency. Some of the policies and documents for the recent chief fire officer appointment weren't available for us to review at the time of the inspection.

The brigade should make sure it is transparent and fair when recruiting staff. This is an area for improvement.

The brigade needs to further improve its approach to equality, diversity and inclusion

The brigade has improved its approach to equality, diversity and inclusion. It makes sure it can offer the right services to its communities and can support staff with [protected characteristics](#). For example, the brigade's digital interactive toolkit allows the comparison of workforce diversity and community diversity. It supports the targeting of community safety initiatives, involvement with less vocal groups, and [positive action](#) in recruitment.

The brigade has four staff network groups:

- LGBT+
- cultural diversity
- women
- disability.

Some staff network group representatives also sit on the brigade's equality, diversity and inclusion board.

The brigade also works with staff groups from local authorities, other fire and rescue services, Cleveland Police, Teesside University and local colleges.

Although the brigade has a process in place to assess equality impact, it doesn't properly assess or act on the impact on each protected characteristic. During our inspection, we found inconsistencies with equality impact assessments (EqIAs). We found some had missing detail, were past the review date, were completed incorrectly or couldn't be found at the time of our inspection. We also found several policies that were missing EqIAs. This is an area for improvement.

The brigade has recently recruited an equality, diversity and inclusion lead. The lead has completed an EqIA review to identify gaps and inconsistencies and provide quality assurance. The brigade told us that no future policies or procedures would be signed off without the completion of an EqIA. It has given some informal training in this to some staff and plans to offer more formal training in the future. We look forward to seeing improvements in this area.

Managing performance and developing leaders

Adequate

Cleveland Fire Brigade is adequate 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 brigade needs to do more to assure its workforce that promotion processes are fair.

The brigade should put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders.

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

Main findings

The brigade has improved how it manages individuals' performance

There is a good performance management system in place, which allows the brigade to effectively develop and assess the individual performance of all staff. For example, the appraisal process is completed annually and is used for recognising achievement, reviewing performance of activity and behaviour, setting and reviewing goals, and identifying development needs.

Before completing the review, staff must complete an integrity health check. They must confirm that they have read, understand and agree to a range of policies and procedures. These include the employee code of conduct, the values and ethical

behaviours framework, and social media, dignity at work, grievance and whistleblowing policies. But some staff told us that they felt this was a tick-box exercise and wasn't useful.

Through our staff survey, most staff reported that they have regular discussions with their manager and that these are meaningful. Each staff member has individual goals and objectives, and regular performance assessments. Staff feel confident in the performance and development arrangements in place. Of those who responded to our staff survey, 91 percent (168 out of 185) told us that they had had an appraisal in the last 12 months.

The brigade needs to do more to assure the workforce that promotion processes are fair

The brigade has effective succession-planning processes in place, which allow it to effectively manage the career pathways of its staff, including roles needing specialist skills.

It manages selection processes consistently. Promotion processes are carried out for a specific role, which may be at any station or in any department, rather than for a specific available position. For example, a member of staff is promoted to the [watch](#) manager role, as opposed to the watch manager at a certain station. Where there are more candidates achieving the benchmark than there are available jobs, candidates are held in a holding pool and will be offered a position should one become available in the following 12 months.

The brigade uses temporary promotions appropriately to fill short-term resourcing gaps. As at March 2024, it had 22 members of staff on temporary promotion. This is a decrease from 34 the previous year. At the same time, the average length of temporary promotion was 171 days. This is less than the England average of 328 days.

The brigade needs to do more to make sure its promotion and progression processes are viewed as fair. Staff told us that the human resources team wasn't involved in the process for any promotion above crew manager. They aren't involved in the interviews and don't have access to interview questions to make sure they are fair and consistent. Also, interviewers don't have formal training to carry out interviews. And although the brigade's promotion policy states that candidates will be given feedback, staff told us that this often didn't happen. We found candidates still waiting for feedback six months after the promotion process had ended. We also heard several allegations of inappropriate interference with promotion processes. Of those who responded to our staff survey, only 57 percent (105 out of 185) agreed that the promotion process was fair. The brigade should assure itself that it has an open and fair process to select staff for leadership roles and that the workforce perceives it to be fair. This is an area for improvement.

The brigade is taking steps to improve the diversity of its leadership

The brigade knows it needs to go further to increase workforce diversity, especially in middle and senior management. It has put in place plans to address this.

These include the blind sifting of job applications, with diversity criteria evaluated at each stage of the process to help understand if there are any barriers for those from minority backgrounds. The recruitment processes we examined included psychometric tests, interviews and physical tests.

The brigade advertises promotion and recruitment campaigns internally and externally through the National Fire Chiefs Council, the Asian Fire Service Association and Women in the Fire Service UK.

The brigade has recently advertised positions successfully for chief fire officer and assistant chief fire officer, and filled them with external candidates.

The brigade could still do more to identify and develop high potential at all levels

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

It recognises having staff on development programmes in readiness for the next role will be a key contributor to workforce and succession planning arrangements. It has an integrated talent management framework that supports effective succession planning, attracting talent and identifying potential future leaders.

The brigade introduced a new 'development beyond role' process in June 2024. This is a development programme which a staff member completes in their own time. Application for the programme is part of the appraisal process. A senior management panel assesses and approves applications. It isn't clear what the assessment criteria are.

However, the process isn't linked to promotion opportunities. It isn't yet clear what progress the brigade has made in successfully integrating this process, and identifying and supporting high potential staff. We look forward to seeing the improvements in the future.

The brigade should consider putting in place more formal arrangements to identify and support members of staff to become senior leaders. This is an area for improvement.

