

# Fire & Rescue Service 2023–25

## Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service

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# Changes to this round of inspection

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We last inspected Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service in June 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.

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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 Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service.

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 Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service has performed in 11 areas. We have made the following graded judgments:

Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate
	Understanding fire and risk	Right people, right skills	Best use of resources	
	Preventing fire and risk		Future affordability	
	Public safety through fire regulation		Promoting values and culture	
	Responding to fires and emergencies		Promoting fairness and diversity	
	Responding to major incidents			
	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 Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service, and I am grateful for the positive and constructive way in which the service worked with our inspection staff.

I am satisfied with some aspects of the performance of Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service in keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks, but there are areas in which the service needs to improve. For example, the service should make sure there are appropriate strategic oversight arrangements in place to manage financial risks.

I recognise that there have been some areas where improvements have been made. I am encouraged to see that the service works closely with other enforcement agencies to regulate fire safety. It exchanges risk information with them and takes appropriate enforcement action for those that don't comply with fire safety regulation. But I am disappointed to see that, since our 2022 inspection, the service hasn't made the overall progress we expected. For example, some areas remain unchanged, and others have deteriorated, particularly in relation to how the service looks after its people.

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

- The service has improved its overall approach in effectiveness by developing a dashboard that displays the key performance targets for prevention and protection, which helps staff understand their responsibilities and supports [community risk management plan \(CRMP\)](#) actions; reviewing its response standard and meeting its response times; and increasing its enforcement activity, with three prosecutions in progress.
- There are issues with the budget management arrangements as well as a lack of transparent reporting of financial information and risks to the [fire and rescue authority \(FRA\)](#).
- Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) aren't a high enough priority, and senior leaders aren't providing effective strategic oversight or commitment in this area.
- Staff told us that not all senior leaders acted as role models or showed that they were committed to the service's values through their behaviours.
- Staff lack confidence in the fairness of bullying, [harassment](#) and discrimination processes, and they told us that they didn't report concerns due to a fear of repercussions.
- The service needs to improve communication between staff and senior managers and create a safer environment for staff to be confident in providing feedback and challenge.

In view of these findings, I have been in regular contact with the chief fire officer, as I don't underestimate how much improvement is needed. I will keep in close contact with the service to monitor its progress in addressing the areas for improvement.



**Lee Freeman**

HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

# Service in numbers



## Profile

	Leicestershire	England
Area Square miles	985	50,370
Population (thousands) 30 June 2023	1,154	57,690
Population density Thousands per square mile	1.2	1.1



## Cost

Funding Year ending 31 March 2023	£39.9m	£2.5bn
Expenditure per population Year ending 31 March 2023	£41.53	£46.66

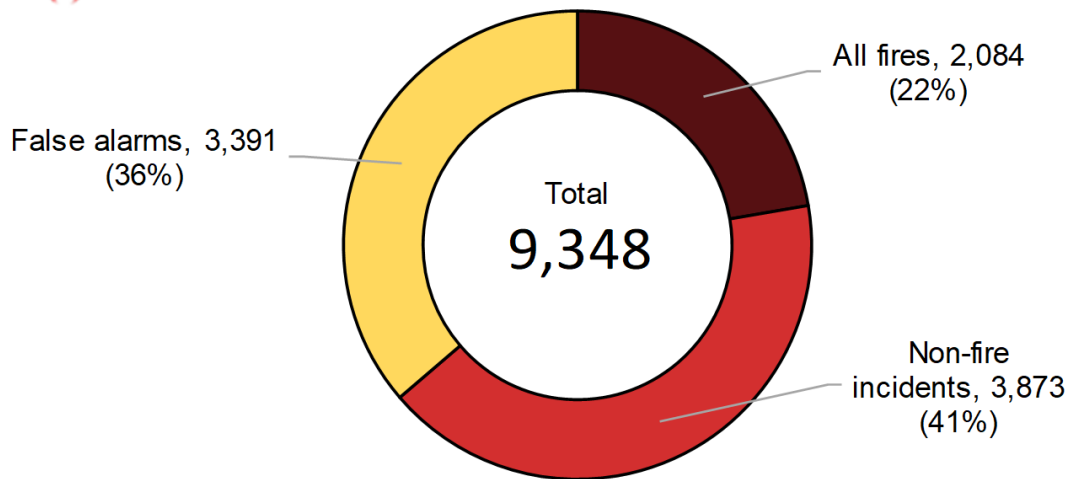


## Response

Incidents attended per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2024	8.1	10.4
Home fire safety visits carried out by fire and rescue service per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2024	12.4	9.8
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises Year ending 31 March 2024	4.5	2.0
Availability of wholetime pumps Year ending 31 March 2024	98.1%	
Availability of on-call pumps Year ending 31 March 2024	65.2%	



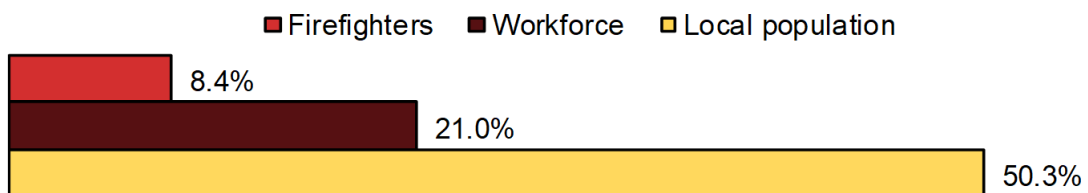
## Incidents attended in year ending 31 March 2024



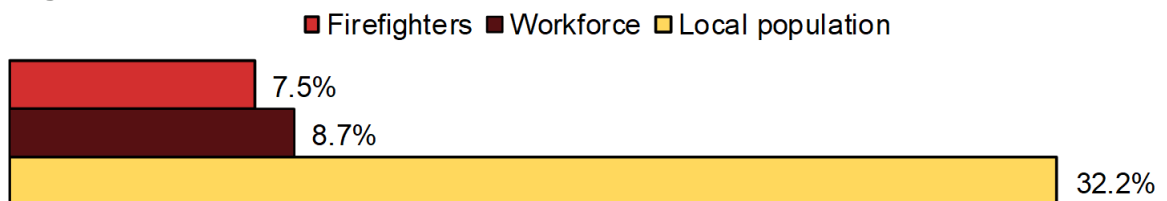
## Workforce

	Leicestershire	England
Five-year change in total workforce 2019 to 2024	10.3%	1.9%
Number of firefighters per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2024	0.52	0.60
Percentage of firefighters who are wholetime Year ending 31 March 2024	65.1%	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

Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service is good at understanding risk.

Each fire and rescue service should identify and assess all foreseeable fire and rescue-related risks that could affect its communities. 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 service is good at identifying and understanding risk in the community**

The service 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. The service recruited a business intelligence developer to carry out an extensive evaluation of risk using a broad range of internal and external sources and datasets. The service has documented this in its community risk model. The service uses community [risk modelling](#) to help build the risk profile for its CRMP, which it refers to as 'our plan 2024–2028'.

When appropriate, the service 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, as part of its CRMP development, it:

- received 143 responses to an online pre-consultation survey asking which areas the public felt the service should focus on for the duration of this CRMP;
- completed a 12-week consultation on its CRMP by attending community forums and engaging with local groups; and
- collected 188 online responses through a consultation survey on its website.

During the consultation period, the corporate communication team had monitored the number of interactions with members of the public. They estimated the service had over 144,000 public interactions. These included:

- 16,289 leaflets delivered by Royal Mail to postcodes in Leicester city with diverse communities;
- 3,000 leaflets shared during home safety visits;
- 119,377 impressions, likes and shares via social media;
- 4,245 emails sent to local stakeholders; and
- 2,305 views of the CRMP on the service's website.

### **The service has an effective CRMP**

We found that the service had a detailed planning and performance procedure. This sets out the CRMP planning process. The CRMP describes how the service 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.

This is set out in five key strategies:

- safer communities
- response
- finance and resources
- people
- governance.

The service uses the redesigned CRMP to monitor its aims and actions through 23 department and 20 district plans. Tactical managers, who are responsible for these plans, demonstrate progress via reports in a tactical management team meeting. This progress is then reported to the senior leadership team.

Staff told us that the tactical management teams weren't as effective as they could be at making decisions. We also found that managers sometimes had difficulty explaining current progress, and most decisions were escalated to the senior leadership team. Despite this, staff continue to make good progress against the CRMP commitments.

### **The service effectively gathers, maintains and shares risk information**

The service routinely collects and updates the information it has about the highest-risk people, places and threats it has identified. This includes site-specific risk information, permanent and temporary risk information, and information from prevention and protection activity.

We sampled a broad range of the risk information the service collects, such as for high-rise buildings and hospitals as well as learning from risk identified in debriefs.

The service has mandatory processes in place to make sure that staff read emerging risk information from national and local learning. This information is readily available for the service's prevention, protection and response staff. This means these teams can identify, reduce and mitigate risk effectively. For example, the service reports emerging risk to a health and safety risk committee and shares this knowledge across the organisation. It uses [safety flashes](#) to share time-critical risk issues. Staff told us that since the last inspection the service had improved how it shares risk across the organisation.

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.

Where appropriate, the service shares risk information with other organisations, but we found that some staff weren't aware of the procedures for sharing cross-border risk.

### **The service has good processes to help build an understanding of risk from operational activity**

The service 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, as part of its CRMP the service identified an increased risk of flooding and water-related incidents due to climate change. To mitigate the risk to the public during flooding events, it has invested £121,000 to increase its water rescue capability from two fire stations to five.

# Preventing fires and other risks

## Good

Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service is good 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.

## Area for improvement

The service should assure itself that its [home fire safety visits](#) target people most at risk and make sure the recording of prevention activity is transparent and accurate.

## Innovative practice

### **Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service uses road safety initiatives to help reduce reoffending**

The service works with Leicestershire Youth and Justice Service on a road safety intervention programme to divert young offenders away from the [criminal justice system](#).

The intervention programme is for young people aged 16–18 who aren't in education, employment or training.

Using education rather than punishment helps the service work with these young people to support them to understand the real-world consequences of their actions. The practical skills taught improve young people's understanding of road safety and prepare them to make informed decisions as both passengers and future drivers.

The interventions have been well attended by young people. The initiatives include The Fatal Four (an educational tool raising awareness about the four leading causes of road traffic collisions), 'ripple effect' practical sessions, CPR and catastrophic bleeding training, and Hazard Express awareness (a virtual reality experience which simulates real-life road traffic collisions).

The service regularly collects feedback from the educational sessions using a QR code. We found that many participants commented on how the immersive nature of virtual reality helped them better understand the dangers associated with reckless driving and poor decision-making on the road. This innovative approach has proven to be a particularly effective tool in engaging young people and leaving a lasting impression.

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 safer communities strategy sets out how the service will direct prevention activity**

The service's prevention strategy is clearly linked to the risks it has identified in its CRMP in the safer communities strategy.

The service's teams work well together and with other relevant organisations on prevention, and they share relevant information when needed. The service uses information to adjust its planning assumptions and direct activity between its prevention, protection and response functions. For example, departmental and district plans set out the targets required by prevention and operational staff to achieve the aims in the safer communities strategy.

### **The service has increased its activity, but more work is needed to target people most at risk**

The service uses a risk-based approach to clearly prioritise its prevention activity towards people most at risk from fire and other emergencies. It uses a broad range of information and data to target its prevention activity at [vulnerable people](#). We were encouraged to see that the prevention and protection departments were using a Microsoft Power BI dashboard to work closely together and carry out activity to reduce emerging risks. We found examples of teams overlaying social deprivation data onto incident data to identify high-risk areas.

The service carries out a range of interventions, which it adapts to the level of risk in its communities. It carries out home fire safety visits face-to-face and follows these up by phone. Each visit is counted independently and contributes to the overall target. As a result, one domestic property could have multiple contacts by the service over time. This approach has enabled the service to carry out a high number of home fire safety visits. Prevention community safety educators complete most very high and high-risk cases, and operational firefighters focus on low-risk visits. The service wanted to complete 13,400 visits in the year ending 31 March 2025. It used a Power BI dashboard to display this target and was on track to achieve it.

In the prevention data, records and reports we reviewed, there was no accurate breakdown of each visit type and how these contributed to the total number of home fire safety visits and protecting vulnerable people. This meant staff were unable to clearly interpret the information with confidence or accuracy. The service should consider how it presents home fire safety visits information to remove any confusion for staff or the public.

In 2023/24, the service completed 12.8 home fire safety visits per 1,000 population. This is higher than the national rate of 10.4 for England. In the same period, 57.3 percent of visits (8,486 out of 14,801) were carried out on households which contained at least one vulnerable person. This is lower than what we expect a service to be targeting. The England rate is 81.2 percent.

Although the service has an overall performance target for home fire safety visits, it doesn't have a performance target for the number of visits for vulnerable people. The service should make sure that the home fire safety visits reach the most at-risk people and that performance targets clearly show this.

### **The service has robust processes to improve how it manages partner referrals for safety checks**

In the last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should put a plan in place to address the backlog of home safety checks received from partner referrals.

The service has arrangements in place to receive home fire safety visit referrals from others. And it acts appropriately on the referrals it receives. As at 31 March 2024, the backlog was 1,281 referrals. The service examined this backlog and put an effective process in place to reduce it to an acceptable level. We found that the service made effective use of staff on modified duties to help address the backlog. At the time of inspection, the backlog had been reduced to 144 referrals. We have therefore closed this area for improvement.

In the last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should provide training to partners to make sure they are completing quality home safety check referrals.

Since then, the service has reviewed and streamlined the number of partnerships. It now focuses on the partner organisations which complete the highest number of referrals. We found good evidence that it routinely referred people at greatest risk to organisations that may better meet their needs. These organisations include adult social care.

The service has put a quality assurance process in place for partner referrals. This includes how it evaluates the level of risk and then acts using all available resources. The service has completed a programme of referral training to its top five partners, which will be an ongoing part of the partner onboarding process. This is monitored by the community safety team who complete a dip sample of four partner referrals per month for assurance. We have therefore closed this area for improvement.

### **Community prevention educators provide quality assurance to improve the standard of home fire safety visits**

Staff told us they have the right skills and confidence to make home fire safety visits. These visits cover an appropriate range of hazards that can put vulnerable people at greater risk from fire and other emergencies.

In the last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should make sure it quality assures its prevention activity, so staff carry out home safety checks to an appropriate standard.

During the current inspection, we sampled home fire safety visit records and files. Records are completed to a suitable standard and recorded at the right risk level, as service policy requires.

The service has a quality assurance process in place to monitor the quality of visits, which staff follow. We found that community safety educators spend a day on station carrying out quality assurance of low-risk visits completed by crews. Staff told us that this also gives community safety educators an opportunity to understand the work that stations are completing and the communities they work with.

Prevention teams could demonstrate how they give feedback to operational crews to improve home fire safety visit targeting. We found the service had progressed in this area.

However, when we reviewed the quality assurance process, we found the service could have been clearer in how it assured the number, frequency and quality of higher-risk referrals which community safety educators completed.



In this inspection, we found the service had made sufficient progress. We have therefore closed this area for improvement.

### **Staff understand how to identify vulnerability and take action to safeguard vulnerable people**

We found a clear process for managing [safeguarding](#) referrals. The service actively works with organisations such as safeguarding boards for both adults and children across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland to resolve them.

The service has adopted the [National Fire Chiefs Council \(NFCC\)](#) competency framework for safeguarding. 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 complete online level 1 safeguarding training. But we found that some staff at on-call stations had yet to do this. At the time of the inspection, service data showed that 85 percent of staff had completed some form of safeguarding training. Level 2 training is given to all station and group managers, prevention and protection staff, and HR staff. Level 3 training is provided to the eight designated safeguarding officers. Level 4 training is delivered to all senior leadership team members.

### **The service collaborates well with others to reduce the number of fires and other risks**

The service works with a wide range of other organisations to prevent fires and other emergencies. It is an active member of the Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Road Safety Partnership.

The service 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, the service has a data-led approach to target road traffic collisions. It has part-funded a Hazard Express vehicle via the Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Road Safety Partnership.

In the year ending 31 March 2024, the service carried out 3,681 prevention visits which were referrals from external agencies. Of these, 499 visits led to at least one onward referral to better support the household.

We found good evidence of the service working with organisations in the community to educate people and reduce risk. This includes the [RNLI Waterside Responder scheme](#), which provides specialist training to waterside community members to help prevent drowning around rivers and waterways. The scheme gives safety advice and raises awareness of the risks of the waterside. It also provides training in how to use a throw bag to help rescue somebody in the water.



## **The service works well with community groups to tackle fire-setting behaviour**

The service has a range of suitable and effective interventions to target and educate people with different needs who show signs of fire-setting behaviour.

The service's safeguarding department manages the FireCare fire-setting programme. This programme is for parents and carers of [children](#) and young people aged 13 to 17 years old who exhibit fire-setting behaviours.

The service works and supports Warning Zone, a charity providing safety messages to Year 6 pupils aged 10 and 11 years old. Warning Zone is an interactive skills centre which uses interactive lifelike scenarios to provide important safety advice on areas such as:

- fire risk in the home;
- building sites and electricity;
- alcohol and [antisocial behaviour](#);
- personal safety and knife crime;
- water safety;
- arson and criminal damage;
- road safety; and
- risk around railways.

## **The service evaluates the impact of its prevention activity and uses this to understand its performance**

In the last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should evaluate its prevention activity, so it understands what works.

Since then, the service has improved how it evaluates prevention work. We have therefore closed this area for improvement.

The service has good 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. We also saw good examples of how the services evaluated its prevention work as part of initiatives. For example, the evaluation for the #DoltForDave campaign, a [Biker Down](#) initiative, highlighted that the service is targeting the right areas of the community.

We also found that the service provides a performance overview on prevention progress in its annual service report.

Prevention activities take account of feedback from the public, other organisations and other parts of the service. For example, the prevention team uses surveys to gather feedback from the public on how successful prevention activity has been. Following a home safety visit, the service sends a QR code that links to a survey. The service then uses this feedback to inform its planning assumptions and change future activity, to make sure it focuses on what the community needs and what works.

### **The service's communication strategy helps prevention activity reach the area's diverse communities**

Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland have multicultural and diverse communities. The service's corporate communication team supports prevention activity that helps target these diverse communities. This includes taking part in NFCC and national fire safety campaigns.

We found the service is improving how it tailors safety messages for these communities. For example, it provides:

- picture messaging and clear literature to communicate safety messages to people whose first language isn't English;
- leaflets in different languages;
- on-site and remote interpreting services to give [fire control](#) and frontline firefighters access to over 250 languages in emergency situations; and
- Google Translate on its website to instantly translate text, documents and websites between English and 133 other languages.

The service has also made safety information more accessible and user-friendly for people with disabilities such as sight, hearing and mobility issues. For example, it uses British Sign Language (BSL) videos on its website to give safety advice. The service has also provided enhanced deaf awareness training to community safety teams. One team member has achieved BSL level 6, an advanced qualification, which means the service can provide safety checks in BSL.

# Protecting the public through fire regulation

Good

Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service is good at protecting the public through fire regulation.

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

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

## Main findings

### **The CRMP clearly directs the service's protection activity**

The service's protection strategy is clearly linked to the risks it has identified in its CRMP. The protection strategy can be found within the safer communities strategy.

Staff across the service are involved in this activity, effectively exchanging information as needed. The service 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. We found examples of prevention, response and protection staff sharing risk information on short-term risks and working together to mitigate these risks.

### **The service aligns its protection resources to risk**

The service told us that as part of the risk and resource methodology, it reviewed the level of risk and the capacity of fire protection officers to redesign the risk-based inspection programme. We found that the service's risk-based inspection programme was focused on the service's highest-risk buildings.

The audits we reviewed had been completed in the timescales the service has set itself. In 2024/25, the service had a key performance target of 1,040 fire safety audits. It monitors performance, and service data shows that between April and September 2024, the service had completed 695 audits. We noted that the service was on track to achieve its target in 2024/25.

### **The quality of fire safety audits is good**

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

- as part of the service's interim risk-based inspection programme;
- 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 service's policies. The service makes relevant information from its audits available to operational teams and control room operators. We found that the service has a fire safety officer available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to work with incident commanders and control, and give advice.

### **The service has a programme of assurance to quality assure fire protection work**

The service carries out proportionate quality assurance of its protection activity. We found a programme of assurance in place to quality assure the fire protection officers' work. For example, each team leader completes one quality assurance review per inspector per year. We found evidence of how this linked to the development framework, personal development discussions (PDD) and staff development courses.

Although the service carries out quality assurance of its protection activity, we found limited evidence of an overarching policy to bring this information together. The service is developing a peer assessment process, but this hasn't yet been integrated into its protection processes.

The service has good 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 protection services that meet their needs. For example, we found that Leicester City Council carried out two external audits as part of the risk-based inspection programme review.

### **The service's enforcement activities are proportionate to risk**

The service consistently uses its full range of enforcement powers, and when appropriate, it prosecutes those who don't comply with fire safety regulations.

In the year ending 31 March 2024, the service issued 17 alteration notices, 436 informal notifications, 76 enforcement notices, 89 prohibition notices and completed no prosecutions. It completed 221 satisfactory audits following enforcement, which shows it is effective at taking action. However, the service had only completed three prosecutions in the five years from 2019/20 to 2023/24. We were pleased to find at the time of the inspection the service was undertaking three prosecutions for non-compliance.

### **The service has competent and qualified protection staff**

The service has enough qualified protection staff to meet the requirements of its risk-based inspection programme. It has used the Home Office protection uplift funding to increase the size of the fire safety inspection team.

In 2023/24, the service's definition of competent protection staff was staff that had attended relevant course(s) and been awarded the level 4 diploma in fire safety. In 2023/24, the service had 19 competent protection staff. A further three staff were in development.

The number of competent staff has led to a high number of audits. In the year ending 31 March 2024, the service carried out 4.5 audits per 100 known premises, which is higher than the national rate of 2.0 audits per 100 known premises. Staff told us that they got the right training and appropriate accreditation to support their career development.

The service has also allocated some of the uplift grant funding to train all operational [watch](#) and crew managers in a level 3 fire safety qualification. It told us that this would help firefighters to spot hazards at premises while carrying out routine activities. It will also help the service provide the range of audit and enforcement activity needed, both now and in the future.

### **The service has responded positively 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 service is supporting the introduction of the [Building Safety Regulator](#). It has arranged for staff to have training and carry out other work to help them adjust to the changes in legislation. It expects these arrangements to have a manageable impact on its other protection activity.

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 service has good arrangements in place to receive this information. When it doesn't receive the right information, it takes action. And it accordingly updates the risk information it gives its operational staff.

### **The service works well with other organisations, but could work more with regulatory partners**

The service works closely with other enforcement agencies to regulate fire safety. It exchanges risk information with them and takes appropriate action.

For example, the service supports an initiative called Clear, Hold, Build, where it works with Leicester City Council and other enforcement agencies to target properties with known intelligence where there is a breach in compliance with fire safety regulations.

As part of the local authority safety and sports advisory group, fire safety officers attend large events such as Party At The Park and Download. Up to 60,000 campers attend these events.

The service is also part of the asylum contingency hotels group, making sure selected hotels have been audited and are compliant with regulations.

We found limited evidence the service carries out 'during performance' inspections at theatres or nightclubs to check use and occupancy during opening hours.

Staff also told us that they felt the service could share specific information more consistently with regulatory partners.

### **The service responds promptly to building consultations**

In the last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should make sure it allocates enough resources to respond effectively and in time to statutory building control consultations.

In this inspection, we found the service uses a dashboard to monitor building consultation progress. Staff were also aware of the service's expectations.

In 2023/24, the service responded to 100 percent of licensing consultations received (245 out of 245) within the required timeframe.

In 2023/24, the service responded to 98.5 percent of building regulation consultations received (644 out of 645) within the required timeframe.

Therefore, the service responds to all building consultations on time. This means it consistently meets its statutory responsibility to comment on fire safety arrangements at new and altered buildings. We are satisfied that the service has made progress and have closed the area for improvement.

## **The service works with businesses to promote fire safety legislation**

The service proactively works with local businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation. We found that the protection team has a dedicated person who has the responsibility to co-ordinate the Better Business for All programme. The protection team works closely with the corporate communication team to promote changes in regulations and national campaigns such as Business Safety Week. There are monthly workshops for responsible persons, and businesses can find example fire safety management plans on the service's website.

## **The service effectively manages the number of unwanted fire signals**

An effective risk-based approach is in place to manage the number of unwanted fire signals. In the year ending 31 March 2024:

- in total, 36.3 percent of incidents in Leicestershire were fire false alarms, compared to the national average of 42.3 percent;
- the service had 18.3 emergency calls per 1,000 population, compared to the England rate of 22.1; and
- of emergency calls, 63.4 percent were automatic fire alarms that weren't attended, compared to the England average of 39.5 percent.

We found that the service had robust procedures to reduce the number of mobilisations to unwanted fire signals. This means that the service responds to fewer automatic fire alarms.

Fewer unwanted calls mean fire engines are available to respond to a genuine incident rather than responding to a false one. It also reduces the risk to the public if fewer fire engines travel at high speed on the roads.

# Responding to fires and other emergencies

## Good

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

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

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 response strategy clearly identifies risks found in its CRMP

The service'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 service respond flexibly to fires and other emergencies with the appropriate resources. For example, it has a team which proactively monitors staffing levels and covers crewing shortages.

### The service is meeting its revised response standard

In the last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should review its response standard to ensure it is based upon an up-to-date assessment of risk.

There are no national response standards of performance for the public. But, since the last inspection, the service has reviewed and set out its own response standard in its CRMP. This standard has been informed by a wide range of information. It has also informed changes to the service's response times.

- The total average response time for all primary [dwelling fire](#), life-threatening incidents is ten minutes.
- The total average response time for all other types of life-threatening incidents is 12 minutes.



The service consistently meets its standards. It closely monitors response performance using a Power BI dashboard. The service told us that in the period April to September 2024, the total average response time for primary dwellings (life risk) was 8 minutes and 11 seconds.

Home Office data shows that in the year ending 31 March 2024, the service's response time to [primary fires](#) was 10 minutes and 10 seconds. This is faster than the average for significantly rural services, which is 10 minutes and 15 seconds.

We are satisfied with this evidence and therefore have closed the area of improvement.

### **Wholetime availability is robust, but on-call availability could be improved**

To support its response strategy, the service has 20 fire stations with 32 fire engines.

The service aims to have 100 percent of fire engines available on 100 percent of occasions. We found that the service consistently meets its wholetime standard but struggles to meet its on-call availability. In 2023/24, overall fire engine availability was 82.1 percent, with [wholetime](#) fire engine availability at 98.1 percent and on-call at 65.2 percent.

The service hasn't reviewed its key performance target for on-call availability, which is set at 100 percent. Staff told us that they were unsure why the target was set at such a high level when they hadn't been close to this target.

However, the service told us that it has mitigated this risk by:

- using a staffing team to cover any staffing shortfalls;
- having 98.1 percent of wholetime fire engines available; and
- offering alternative vehicle models so it can use more flexible types of crewing.

### **Staff have a good understanding of how to command incidents safely**

The service has trained incident commanders, who are assessed regularly and properly. In the year ending 31 March 2024, 98.1 percent of required incident commanders (204 out of 208) were accredited. This helps the service 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 service. 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 \(JESIP\)](#).

## **The service makes sure control staff are an integral part of operational activity**

We were pleased to see the service's control staff integrated into its command, training, exercise, debrief and assurance activity. We found that control had a robust process in place to exchange risk information at handover periods.

During the inspection, the service introduced a new [mobilising](#) system to mitigate the risks posed by the old system, which were highlighted in the service's organisational risk register.

It was encouraging to see that control staff were consulted and involved in the development of this project. They were instrumental to the project's success, helping it stay in scope and start within an 18-month timescale.

## **Staff are familiar with risk information, but site-specific plans could be more detailed**

We sampled a range of site-specific risk information. The information we reviewed was up to date, with basic information. Staff could easily access and understand it. Encouragingly, it had been completed with input from the service's prevention, protection and response functions when appropriate.

We also sampled risk information about firefighters responding to incidents at high-risk, high-rise buildings and the information held by fire control. Although the service had specific risk information available electronically, we found that this could have been more detailed. For example, operational and control roles have limited access to the right electronic building and floor plans when dealing with high-rise incidents. This means there is a risk that the service may have an inaccurate picture of how a high-rise incident is progressing.

## **The service has improved how it learns from operational incidents**

In the last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should make sure it has an effective system for learning from operational incidents.

As part of this inspection, we reviewed a range of emergency incidents and training events. These included primary dwelling fires, large fires at commercial buildings and training which is part of the service's exercise programme.

Since the last inspection, the service has introduced a new operational learning system. The service has a clear policy which includes the set triggers which would instigate a formal debrief. An operational assurance team reviews the learning and reports the debrief outcomes to an operational risk committee.

As a result, the service has reduced the timescales from when an incident occurs to when it completes a structured debrief.

The service has responded to learning from incidents to improve its service for the public. The service uses a BRAG (blue, amber, red and green) rating to determine how learning should be prioritised, categorised and shared. It shares learning through [organisational learning](#) notes, operational learning reviews and learning outcomes presentations.

The service tracks the readership of these documents to assure itself that staff have read the material. Staff told us that they felt the service had improved how it shared operational learning, and they were able to provide examples of learning from organisational learning notes.

We were encouraged to see the service is contributing towards, and acting on, learning from other fire and rescue services or operational learning gathered from emergency service partners.

The service is also providing some staff with formal debrief training via the [local resilience forum](#). We are pleased to report that the service has improved in this area, and therefore we have closed the area for improvement.

### **The service needs to assure itself that control procedures are aligned to national operational guidance**

The service routinely follows its policies to make sure that staff command incidents in line with operational guidance. It updates internal risk information with the information it receives.

It has an established [national operational guidance](#) structure that continuously reviews operational policies and how they align to [national operational learning](#). And it exchanges policy information with neighbouring services as part of regional and national operational groups.

However, it is disappointing to find that the service hasn't progressed fire control's alignment to national operational guidance and policy. The service told us that it planned to complete this once the new mobilising system was in place, which would release the required resources. We note that the service also has the established structure to integrate these into current plans.

### **The service monitors its success with keeping the public informed**

The service has good systems in place to inform the public about ongoing incidents and helps keep them safe during and after incidents. For example, the service provided safety advice for communities during the national disorder in 2024.

The service's corporate communication team provides cover during the day, and fire control staff have had training to provide public communications during the night. The head of communication is the chair of the local resilience forum 'warn and inform' group. There was clear evidence of how staff regularly exchange information with other category 1 and 2 responders, and how the corporate communication team contributes to learning and improvement. We found that the service works closely with the local resilience forum and community flood wardens to learn from flooding events and develop community response plans.

# Responding to major and multi-agency incidents

## Good

Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service 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 service is well prepared for major and multi-agency incidents

The service has effectively anticipated and considered the reasonably foreseeable risks and threats it may face. These risks are listed in both local and national risk registers as part of its community risk management planning. For example, the service and the local resilience forum work together to assess the eight top risks in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland as part of a risk assessment working group. These are:

- power loss
- disease outbreak
- severe weather
- loss of telecommunications
- flooding
- major transport incident
- cyber attack
- terrorism.

The service is also familiar with the significant risks neighbouring fire and rescue services face, and which it might reasonably be asked to respond to in an emergency. Neighbouring risks, within 10 km of the service's border, are identified and recorded on [Resilience Direct](#). The service has robust processes in place to share risk information with neighbouring fire and rescue services. However, we found staff weren't as familiar with how to access site-specific plans for over the border risks.

### **The service is well placed to respond to major and multi-agency incidents**

In our last inspection, we focused on how the service 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 service is to respond to a major incident at a tall building, such as the tragedy at Grenfell Tower.

We found the service has well-developed policies and procedures in place for safely managing this type of incident. Staff at all levels understand them, and robust training and exercises have taken place to test them.

At this type of incident, a fire and rescue service would receive a high volume of simultaneous fire calls. We found that the new mobilising system is robust enough to receive and manage this volume of calls. Staff in the emergency control room, at the incident and in assisting control rooms can share, view and update the actions and the result from the individual fire calls. We were satisfied that the service had robust arrangements to enhance its control staffing. And additional roles, such as single point of contact, can be used to support situational awareness in these types of incidents.

We sampled a range of site-specific risk information for high-rise buildings. We found that risk information was available but could have been more detailed in parts, including the access to accurate floor plans. The service relies on the responsible person updating premises information boxes. Due to the complex nature of this type of incident, the service should make sure that frontline staff and control have access to the same information to give better situational awareness.

### **The service works well with other fire and rescue services' control rooms**

The service supports other fire and rescue services responding to emergency incidents. It can also mobilise the other services' resources easily.

At the time of the inspection, the service had a tri-service mobilising agreement with the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire services. Due to the new mobilising system, the service will be changing this agreement to instead work with Bedfordshire and Essex in a similar arrangement.

The service has successfully deployed to other services and has used national assets such as [urban search and rescue](#). However, we found limited evidence of how the service incorporated other fire and rescue services into multi-agency plans. It could do more to improve its interoperability with other services and form part of a larger-scale multi-agency response.

### **The service has improved how it records cross-border exercises**

The service 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 service could foreseeably give support or ask for help from neighbouring services. We were encouraged to see the service uses feedback from these exercises to inform risk information and service plans.

In 2023/24, Leicestershire completed 61 multi-agency training exercises, 24 national resilience training exercises and 54 training exercises with neighbouring fire and rescue services.

In the same year, the service completed 278.5 training exercises per 1,000 full-time equivalent firefighters, compared to the England rate of 98.4 training exercises. This is also an improvement compared to 2022/23 when 17 exercises were recorded. Of these, eight were multi-agency exercises.

In our staff survey, 60 percent of respondents (74 out of 123) confirmed that they had taken part in training and exercises with neighbouring services in the last 12 months. And 80 percent of respondents (100 out of 125) had participated in training and exercises with other agencies in the last 12 months.

We also found that, as a result of the new operational learning system, the service was better at recording learning from exercises.

### **JESIP are part of a continuous training programme**

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

The service gave us strong evidence that it consistently followed these principles and JESIP training was part of an ongoing training cycle.

The service lead chairs a local resilience forum training and exercise group. As a result, this group has developed a multi-agency training prospectus for operational, tactical and strategic commanders. This prepares them for the multi-agency environment and provides the tools they need to align with JESIP.

We sampled a range of debriefs the service had carried out after multi-agency incidents or exercises. We were encouraged to find that where the service is identifying challenges with applying JESIP at multi-agency incidents, it is taking appropriate and prompt action with other emergency services. Learning is then reviewed by the operational assurance team, in line with the service's debrief policy.

### **The service works well with its partners as part of the local resilience forum**

The service has good arrangements in place to respond to emergencies with partners that make up the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland local resilience forum. These arrangements include producing emergency plans to either prevent or mitigate the impact of any incident on local communities.

The service is a valued partner and has strong representation in many local resilience forum working groups such as people and communities, the cyber advisory group, flood response planning group and recovery working group.

The service takes part in regular training events with other members of the local resilience forum and uses the learning to develop planning assumptions about responding to major and multi-agency incidents.

### **The service uses national learning to inform planning**

The service 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.



# Making best use of resources

## Requires improvement

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

Fire and rescue services should manage their resources properly and appropriately, aligning them with 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 £49.9 million. This is a 4.4 percent increase from the previous financial year.

### Areas for improvement

The service should make sure there are appropriate strategic oversight arrangements in place to manage financial risks.

The service should make sure it has robust processes for reporting accurate and suitably detailed finance and risk information to the [fire and rescue authority](#).

The service should assure itself it has effective budget management arrangements in place.

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 service should make sure there is appropriate strategic oversight to manage financial risks**

The service's medium-term financial plan (MTFP) is based on reasonable funding and cost assumptions, but scenario planning is limited. The service had set a balanced budget for 2024/25.

However, we found there were ineffective oversight arrangements to manage financial risks. Worryingly, between April 2023 and September 2024, the senior leadership team didn't receive timely and accurate financial information. The draft statement of accounts for 2023/24 wasn't published until 12 August 2024. This was required by 31 May 2024 to meet the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. The revenue and capital outturn figures for 2023/24 were also late and weren't reported to the FRA until October 2024.

The service has produced a 'lessons learnt' report and an action plan setting out how it intends to improve its financial management arrangements. But, at the time of our inspection, the corporate risk register didn't include significant financial risks and how the service would manage and monitor these. For example, the register doesn't include risks such as the lack of financial monitoring, the overdue draft statement of accounts publication, or issues with skills, capacity and knowledge in the finance team.

An internal audit report into procurement identified that the service isn't ready to meet the requirements of the Procurement Act 2023, which will reform existing procurement rules. It also identified that the service isn't managing procurement effectively.

The service should make sure there are appropriate strategic oversight arrangements in place to manage financial risks.

### **The service should assure itself it has effective budget management arrangements**

We found that financial controls needed improving. The service told us that the issues it has had with budget management were due to staff resourcing and turnover in the finance team. It has used agency staff to cover shortfalls. A lack of skills, capacity and knowledge has meant the service hasn't complied with statutory financial reporting requirements. There have also been problems with the finance computer system and the accuracy of financial information available to budget holders.

The service is aware of the issues and has an action plan setting out how it intends to improve its budget management arrangements.

We look forward to seeing the results during our next inspection.

## **The service should be more transparent in reporting finance and risk information**

We found that there had been a lack of transparency and timeliness with the financial information and risks reported to FRA members, who are responsible for overseeing financial decision-making. For example, at an FRA meeting held on 24 July 2024, the service communicated the delay with the draft statement of accounts for 2023/24 and the reasons for this. However, the service didn't transparently update the FRA or the corporate governance committee about the full extent of the skills and capability issues and the financial monitoring and legal compliance issues.

The estates strategy isn't included in the service's MTFP or the capital expenditure plans. This means the cost of the service's new learning and development training centre and the costs to improve the condition of the wider estate haven't been included. The service also asked for approval for the land purchase for the learning and development training centre without understanding and communicating the total revenue and capital costs of the full proposal to the FRA. This led to some project delays as well as increased costs.

The service has an efficiency and productivity plan. But it isn't published. And we found no evidence that it had been approved and was being monitored by the FRA.

The service also hasn't provided the FRA with a comprehensive medium-term reserves strategy covering the period of the MTFP. The service told us that this would be included in the next MTFP.

The service should make sure it has robust processes for reporting accurate and suitably detailed finance and risk information to the FRA.

## **The service has reviewed its duty systems to manage risk efficiently**

The service's workforce plans for allocating resources to prevention, protection and response are consistent with the risks and priorities it has identified in its CRMP. It has a risk and resource methodology, which provides detail and reasoning on how the service delivers prevention, protection and response activities.

Due to a legal ruling, the service carried out a project to remove its [day crewing plus duty system](#). The service set up a shift working group to evaluate its mix of crewing and duty systems. Through this work, it identified 16 alternative options to the day crewing plus duty system.

Following consultation, the service's preferred option was a wholetime self-rostering duty system at some fire stations. It trialled this system at one fire station for eight months. It then carried out an evaluation of the benefits and received positive feedback from staff. Although this duty system costs more than day crewing plus, it offers savings and efficiencies compared to other options. The service is in the process of introducing this duty system at other fire stations.

As part of managing this change, the service is using overtime to cover any shortfalls in staffing. This is co-ordinated by a central team. However, we found discrepancies in the overtime budget and how this was monitored.

### **The service uses Power BI dashboards to monitor and improve performance**

In the last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should assure itself that all processes in place to support performance management are effective. We had found the service had a lack of strategic oversight in some key business areas, such as the prevention backlog from partner referrals.

We were encouraged to see the improvements the service has made since our last inspection. The service reports on key performance indicators for all safer communities and response strategies. Performance reports are compared to a three-year average and reported to the senior leadership team.

The service uses dashboards to monitor the progress in prevention, protection and response. Staff we spoke to were able to clearly explain the targets and how these related to their CRMP district and department plans. As a result, the service has reduced its home fire safety visit backlog and now tracks fire protection building consultations. Staff told us they were more aware of what was expected of them and they felt that they contributed to reducing response times. Considering this evidence, we have closed the area for improvement.

We were pleased to see that the service's arrangements for managing performance clearly link resource use to its CRMP and its strategic priorities. However, there are still opportunities to improve. The service told us that it hadn't reviewed key performance indicators for some time. Some areas of the service would also benefit from a refresh of their indicators, and some don't have any targets in place.

We found limited evidence that the service had completed formal productivity reviews of how staff used their time. However, as a result of the day crewing plus project, the service has a better understanding of how it uses its wholetime firefighters. It was able to demonstrate a station's output by using Power BI data.

The service should continue to take steps to understand how its workforce's time is used and make sure this is as productive as possible.

### **The service meets its statutory duty to collaborate**

We are satisfied that the service meets its statutory duty to collaborate, and it considers opportunities to collaborate with other emergency responders.

Examples of collaboration projects include:

- sharing space with the East Midlands Ambulance Service at Coalville fire station and Birstall headquarters;
- sharing space with Leicestershire Police at Coalville fire station;

- sharing regional fire investigation resource with four neighbouring fire and rescue services;
- working with Leicester City Council for finance and Leicestershire County Council for monitoring officer services; and
- sharing a pensions adviser post with Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire fire and rescue services.

### **The service has robust business continuity arrangements**

In the last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should make sure it has appropriate business continuity arrangements in place which are regularly reviewed and tested and that take account of all foreseeable threats and risks.

We were encouraged to see the improvements the service has made since our last inspection. The service has good continuity arrangements in place for areas in which it considers threats and risks to be high. Therefore, we have closed this area for improvement.

The service's business continuity policies are maintained on a central SharePoint site. Plan owners are responsible for business continuity plans. These are reviewed at least every two years or when there is a significant change. The service is well prepared to respond to fires and other emergencies during industrial action. It has robust governance structures in place that set out how it will flex its resources in the event of industrial action – for example, by using contingency crews.

We found that the responsible owners regularly reviewed plans. There is also a clearly documented testing schedule of threats and risks so that staff know the arrangements and how to respond.

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

## Requires improvement

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

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

## Areas for improvement

The service should make sure it has robust financial ICT systems in place to support its financial management arrangements.

The service should make sure it has the right skills and capacity to successfully manage change across the organisation.

The service should have a clear and sustainable strategic plan for using its reserves.

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 service needs to do more work to understand and plan for future challenges**

A balanced revenue budget had been set for 2024/25. At the time of inspection, the service anticipated a small budget deficit of £242,000 in 2025/26 and £292,000 in 2026/27.

The MTFP is based on reasonable and prudent assumptions, but scenario planning is limited. As the service only models one base scenario, it isn't fully evaluating its financial uncertainties and risks. The service told us that it had plans to develop its scenario planning.

The opportunities the service has identified to make savings or generate further income are limited. But the service is developing an efficiency savings register. We look forward to seeing the results of this work.

### **The service should have a clear and sustainable strategic plan for using its reserves**

The amount held in the general reserve and earmarked reserves, as at March 2024, is included in the MTFP. However, at the time of inspection, the service didn't have a comprehensive reserves strategy which was published and included how reserves would be used in the future. The service told us that a reserves strategy would be included in the next MTFP.

The service gave us a spreadsheet which showed some information about how reserves would be used between 2024/25 and 2026/27 (the period covered by the MTFP). But we found that this didn't include the latest forecast costs for the estates strategy and learning and development centre.

The service also told us that the general reserve had been increased to 7 percent of its net revenue budget. This was done to mitigate the risk of higher than anticipated pay inflation.

### **The service has a clear plan for maintaining and replacing its fleet**

The service has good plans to maintain its fleet, with a fully funded and robust five-year replacement strategy. The service's fleet management plan has clear links to its CRMP. We found that the plan effectively supported the response strategy requirement to have the right number and type of vehicles.

### **The service's estate plans are progressing slowly**

In the last inspection, the service planned to invest in a new learning and development training centre as a transformation project that supported its CRMP. We found that the cost of the proposed learning and development training centre had increased significantly from the expected £6 million in the original business case. As a result, the service has had to scale back its plans, to make sure they are affordable.



The service has carried out a condition survey of its estate. It has developed a costed five-year plan to modernise the estate and improve welfare facilities for staff.

Staff shortages in the estates department have affected progress in making improvements. At the time of inspection, the service's draft estates strategy was under review. The service anticipated that it would be approved in early 2025. The service told us that it was moving into a project planning phase for its estate transformation.

### **The service is improving its technology to mitigate risk, but more work is needed to make sure that new software is reliable**

In the last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service needs to assure itself that it is maximising opportunities to improve workforce productivity and develop future capacity through use of innovation, including the use of technology.

We were pleased to find the service had addressed this area for improvement. We found that it actively considered how changes in technology and future innovation might affect risk. It also looks to exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness presented by changes in technology.

For example, we were encouraged to see the improvements the service had made to mitigate the risk associated with its mobilising system. Mobilising systems are complex to procure and deliver. During the inspection, we observed the introduction of the new mobilising system. We are pleased to report that this was successfully completed to time and approximate cost.

The service has made other changes to improve technology, such as:

- adopting Microsoft 365 to support better collaboration across functions; and
- using an AI-powered application for ICT to manage requests.

We found that the continued development work and projects led by ICT had surpassed current strategies. For example, when we reviewed the service's documentation, we found the ICT strategy was outdated and didn't reflect the current CRMP objectives. However, department project plans show how the implementation of new technology links to the CRMP.

### **The service should improve the reliability of its finance ICT system**

The service has had problems with its finance ICT system. This has affected the accuracy of financial information available to budget holders. It has also been a contributing factor to the wider issues the service has had with financial management.

The service recognises it needs to update its finance ICT system. It should make sure it has robust systems in place to support its financial management arrangements.



**The service should make sure it has the right skills and capacity to successfully manage change**

Since the last inspection, staff vacancies and absences have meant the service hasn't had the right skills and capacity it needs in areas such as finance and estates. This has negatively affected its financial management arrangements and the progress with its estates strategy.

The service should assure itself that it has the right resources in place to manage and complete the changes needed across the organisation.

**The service's income generation is limited**

The service considers options for generating extra income, but its ambition and track record in securing extra income are limited.

# Promoting the right values and culture

## Requires improvement

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

Fire and rescue services should have positive and inclusive cultures, modelled by the behaviours of their senior leaders. 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 service should assure itself that senior managers are engaging, visible and demonstrate service values through their behaviours.

The service should make sure it has effective absence and attendance procedures in place and that managers are appropriately trained to manage staff absence.

The service should proactively monitor working hours to make sure staff (including those on dual and secondary contracts) don't work excessive hours.

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 aren't demonstrating the service's values

The service has well-defined values, which staff understand. Most of the staff who responded to our staff survey reported being aware of the service's statement of values. The service has implemented the [Core Code of Ethics](#) and staff understand this.

We found staff helpful and welcoming, and there is a positive working culture throughout the service. Most staff demonstrate behaviours that reflect the service values. In our staff survey, 97 percent of respondents (215 out of 222) agreed that their colleagues consistently modelled and maintained the service values.

We found that there was a strong sense of respect between different functions such as firefighters, fire control and protection and prevention staff. However, staff spoke about a negative subculture between some senior leaders and most support staff that didn't align with the service's values.

Worryingly, we found that staff at all levels felt that senior leaders don't always act as positive role models. In our staff survey, 67 percent of respondents (149 out of 222) agreed that senior leaders consistently modelled and maintained the service's values.

We heard examples of senior leaders not acknowledging issues being raised by support staff. And we were told about several examples of poor behaviour demonstrated by leaders:

- Staff told us they felt that 'zone 4', where the senior leadership team offices are located, was an unfriendly and toxic environment, and some staff reported that they had been shouted at when receiving feedback from senior leaders.
- Support staff who attended tactical managers team meetings told us they experienced belittling, misogynistic and dismissive behaviours.
- Staff reported that senior leaders demonstrated dismissive and disrespectful behaviours towards women.

These types of behaviours can lead to lower levels of trust and staff engagement, as well as increased levels of physical and mental health problems.

During our inspection, we spoke to support staff, and reviewed sickness data and exit interviews. As detailed later in this section, sickness absence data for 2023/24 shows support staff were absent due to sickness for more days on average than wholetime firefighters. Worryingly, a high proportion of more recent support staff absences were due to stress. Some staff told us that they felt the high level of sickness among support staff was due to poor mental health, high workloads and conflict with senior leaders' leadership styles.

Home Office data shows that between 31 March 2023 and 31 March 2024, 20 support staff joined the service, but 18 left. This equates to 12.2 percent of all support staff leaving within the year and is more than double the rate of firefighters leaving the service.

We spoke to staff who were leaving the service, who told us that this was due to them not feeling supported in their role by senior leadership.

We found that there wasn't a strong culture of challenging unacceptable behaviour. Although we did find examples of staff challenging others' behaviours, these were limited to within an individual's own team. Staff told us that they didn't feel confident challenging senior leaders or those outside their team environment.

Some staff said they wouldn't report concerns due to a fear of being victimised by senior leaders. Staff who had reported concerns hadn't always been supported by managers when doing so. We found that the service had demonstrated little understanding or acknowledgment of these concerns and the cultural issues with support staff. We also found that the service didn't robustly monitor its people indicators, and it had a limited understanding of this data.

Overall, the service should assure itself that senior managers are engaging, visible and demonstrate service values through their behaviours.

### **The service continues to provide the workforce with good well-being support**

The service continues to have well-understood and effective well-being policies in place, which are available to staff. It has a significant range of well-being support for physical and mental health – for example, [trauma risk management](#), occupational health medical referrals, physiotherapy and a counselling network.

There are good provisions in place to promote staff well-being. Most staff reported they understand and have confidence in the well-being support processes available. In our staff survey, 97 percent of respondents (219 out of 225) agreed that they felt able to access services to support their mental well-being. While the service has good well-being arrangements, a better understanding of the trends in poor well-being and sickness absence would help it to target prevention and early intervention activities.

The service's debrief process identified that, prior to police arrival, firefighters play a significant role at incidents involving suicides. As a result, the service has adopted and is working with Leicestershire Police to provide a person in crisis training programme, alongside police negotiators. This has made sure that frontline staff have the necessary skills to support this type of incident. The service is extending the training to include community and control staff, and we look forward to seeing how this develops.

### **The service has a strong health and safety culture**

The service has effective and well-understood health and safety policies and procedures in place. These policies and procedures are readily available, and the service promotes them effectively to all staff.

Staff spoke positively about the Zinc health and safety reporting system and told us it has made it easier to report [near misses](#), accidents and events.

We found that managers receive robust health and safety training. This includes watch managers completing Institution of Occupational Safety and Health Managing Safely courses, and station managers completing the National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health General Certificate.

The service makes sure that staff are fully informed about risks and what action to take following health and safety events. Encouragingly, we found a clear link to learning identified in health and safety reporting which was then communicated to staff using safety flashes – for example, sharing information about moving bariatric patients using sliding sheets to reduce the risk of musculoskeletal injuries.

Both staff and representative bodies have confidence in the health and safety approach the service takes. We found that the service was proactive in its work with fire contaminants. For example, through its decontamination project, the service has introduced clean, dirty and hazard zones on fire stations to mitigate cross-contamination and limit the spread of contaminants.

### **The service needs to make sure that its process for monitoring working hours is effective**

In the last inspection, we identified an area for improvement about the service's need for a clear process for reporting and monitoring staff working hours.

Since then, the service has made some progress with monitoring working hours. It has introduced a secondary contract policy and a staffing team to monitor hours. The service has also developed a working time regulations and management procedure. And it has created a RAG rating process based on the number of contracts an employee has. A dip sample is then undertaken using payroll files, and working hours are checked.

However, the service told us that it hadn't received enough assurance about the effectiveness of the sampling process. The RAG rating system doesn't provide a consistent and robust understanding of employees who are at risk of working excessive hours. We found that, due to the service looking at an alternative way to sample records, the working time regulations and management procedure was in draft form. Staff we spoke to weren't aware of the monitoring process in place for secondary contracts.

Considering that the service doesn't yet have a robust process in place to monitor working hours, the area for improvement about this issue remains open. Although the service has made some effort to improve, it still needs to do more to assure itself that the procedures and systems for monitoring the working hours of those with secondary employment and dual contracts are robust.

## **The service needs to improve its approach to monitoring absence**

The service has an absence policy, but at the time of our inspection, this was under review. Staff told us they had contributed to the review and the policy had been updated in February 2024. But this policy is still awaiting approval and hasn't yet been published. Staff told us that they didn't understand the reasons for this delay.

We asked staff about their understanding of the current absence policy and found that managers and staff recognised the policy but didn't understand the process or their role within it.

In the training records we reviewed, we found limited training recorded for absence attendance procedures or welfare. Managers told us that they hadn't received training in this area. HR business partners are, however, available to managers for support and advice.

In the year ending 31 March 2024, data showed the average number of days not worked per person due to sickness absence were:

- 12.72 days for fire control staff;
- 10.26 days for support staff; and
- 7.08 days for wholetime firefighters.

Between April and June 2024, the most common reason for days not worked by support staff was stress. This accounted for 42 percent of all absences. In comparison, only 3 percent of wholetime firefighters were absent due to stress.

During the same period, the most common reason for days not worked by wholetime firefighters was musculoskeletal, back or lower-limb issues. These accounted for 34 percent of all absences.

People data such as absence and staff demographics is reported quarterly through a performance assurance report to the FRA via the corporate governance board and the senior leadership team. We found that the service didn't have any short-term sickness tiggers and therefore had a limited structure in place to improve in this area.

The service has some monitoring processes, but these aren't robust. It has also identified trends in sickness, but hasn't addressed these. For example, we found there was limited evidence that the service acted on or acknowledged the specific trends found with the disproportionate number of sickness absences among support staff.

The service should make sure it has effective absence and attendance procedures in place and that managers are appropriately trained to manage staff absence.

# Getting the right people with the right skills

## Adequate

Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service 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.

## Area for improvement

The service should review its succession planning to make sure that it has effective arrangements in place to manage staff turnover while continuing to provide its core service to 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 service could do more to improve workforce planning

The service has a workforce planning group in place, which meets monthly to discuss operational requirements. The service makes sure skills and capabilities align with what it needs to effectively carry out its response and safer communities strategies that support its CRMP. For example, we found that the group had forecast operational gaps in skillsets for on-call and wholetime firefighters.

Although the service does some workforce and succession planning, it doesn't take full account of the skills and capabilities it needs to effectively carry out its people and finance strategies, which underpin its CRMP.

We found the levels of long- and short-term sickness among support staff had a negative effect on the capacity and delivery of certain functions. We also found that the service had vacancies in some specialist roles such as professional standards, the estates department and finance.

We found limited evidence that the service's planning allows it to fully consider workforce skills and overcome any gaps in capability. For example, it has no achievable workforce plan to cover the gaps in support staff roles and departments.

The service also needs to do more to improve the way it considers its future needs and succession planning.

### **The service has an effective training plan for safety-critical skills**

Most staff told us that they could access the training they need to be effective in their role. This wasn't just focused on operational skills. The service's training plans make sure it can maintain competence and capability effectively.

The service recognises it has an inexperienced workforce. It uses its organisational risk register to monitor this issue, and it has robust training arrangements in place. In addition, the service:

- regularly updates its understanding of staff skills and risk-critical safety capabilities via the workforce staffing group;
- has increased the number of firefighters to give more resilience;
- runs a structured apprenticeship programme for new firefighters, which includes three monthly one-to-ones to offer support and monitor performance;
- monitors staff competence using the Oracle training system;
- has used an external training provider to supply hot fire training so firefighters are exposed to more realistic fire conditions;
- has a team which manages gaps in staffing and monitors the specialist skills required on fire engines and its stations; and
- provides new control staff with a clear development programme.

By understanding its workforce and training requirements, the service can identify short-term gaps in workforce capabilities and resilience in operational roles. We found that the service used good risk-based decision-making models to cover short-term gaps. However, once these gaps are identified, it relies on the use of overtime to fill them.

The service has an audit process to review workforce capabilities. We found there were vacancies in the team that managed the training system. This meant that records weren't monitored as robustly as required by the service's policy. During the inspection, we noted that the service had transferred staff from other departments to cover these gaps.



## **The service could place more emphasis on non-operational skills training**

Most staff told us that they could access the training they need to be effective in their role. The service's training plans make sure it can maintain competence and capability effectively. For example, in our staff survey, 82 percent of respondents (185 out of 225) agreed that they were able to access the right learning and development opportunities when they needed to.

We found that most operational training was mandatory. But while the service provides non-operational skills training, such as wider management skills required by leaders, it doesn't prioritise this. This training includes discipline and grievance training, and training for EDI and well-being. Some staff could give examples of having received these types of training but told us these were more ad hoc. We found limited examples of consistent training in place for these skills as part of the training plan.

## **The service promotes a culture of continuous improvement**

The service promotes a culture of continuous improvements throughout the organisation, and it encourages staff to learn and develop. For example, we found examples of the PDD process being used to request courses and the service supporting these requests.

We were pleased to see that the service has a range of resources in place. For example, prevention staff follow a core training curriculum to maintain competence. This involves safeguarding training, manual handling, lone working and mental health awareness.

Most staff told us they can access a range of learning and development resources. For example, the service has developed a training prospectus on behalf of the local resilience forum with the aim of preparing incident commanders at all levels to work in a multi-agency environment. This includes:

- how to write and validate an emergency plan;
- logistical support on how to operate multi-agency sharing platforms such as Resilience Direct;
- JESIP, strategic and tactical incident command training;
- planning and delivering an exercise;
- a structured debrief facilitator course;
- virtual reality immersive training where commanders can simulate a tactical co-ordination group; and
- humanitarian assistance lead officer training.

This range of training and simulations provides the skills and knowledge to allow staff to do their job effectively at multi-agency emergencies.

# Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity

## Requires improvement

Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement 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 EDI. 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 service should make sure it provides strategic commitment, visibility and leadership to promote equality, diversity and inclusion throughout the organisation.

The service should improve the way it collects people data and make sure it has robust processes in place to carry out [equality impact assessments](#) so it can better understand its workforce's needs and how its policies and procedures may affect people differently.

The service should improve communications between staff and senior managers, so questions and feedback receive prompt and appropriate responses and so that staff are confident using its feedback mechanisms.

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

## Main findings

### EDI is still not a high enough priority for the service

We found that the service needs to improve its approach to EDI. We were surprised that the EDI action plan isn't demonstrating sufficient progress against its target dates.

Disappointingly, there is limited strategic focus on and commitment to EDI.

For example, EDI isn't a standing item on the agendas of key meetings. And the medium-term financial plan doesn't have an EDI budget. Training is also ad hoc and isn't part of a rolling programme.

Representative bodies told us that they didn't feel that the service prioritised, managed or handled EDI concerns or issues appropriately. And staff told us that they didn't feel supported by senior leaders to co-ordinate and develop EDI.

There have been delays in the service making its estates more inclusive. Although the service has modernised two fire stations to a good standard, it couldn't give any assurance that every fire station had the appropriate facilities to support its staff.

Encouragingly, we did find some evidence of the service improving in some areas.

The service promotes national groups such as the [Asian Fire Service Association](#) and [Women in the Fire Service UK](#), and it has signed up to the [Disability Confident Scheme](#). It also has its own staff groups to represent women, staff from an ethnic minority background, and LGBTQ+ groups.

The service has recruited an EDI manager, although at the time of inspection this role was vacant. The previous manager had completed an EDI self-assessment of the service using the [Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion](#) talent, inclusion and diversity evaluation. The service was granted a silver award.

A senior leader chairs an established an EDI steering group. And the service has introduced EDI champions. However, these roles are only on fire stations, and many staff don't know about or use them.

We found some good examples of the service supporting staff with [protected characteristics](#). Almost all of the respondents to our staff survey who had shared information with the service about their long-standing illness, disability or health condition agreed they were satisfied that the service offered the required reasonable adjustments. But during the inspection we found the service could have been more consistent in making sure reasonable adjustments were offered where appropriate.

Although the service has taken some positive steps, there is still more that can be done. The service should make sure it provides strategic commitment, visibility and leadership to promote EDI throughout the organisation.

## **Equality impact assessment outcomes need to be more robust and quality assured**

As part of the inspection, we review the service's policies, procedures and projects to assess if they are up to date and have been through an equality impact assessment (EIA). These assessments are required to make sure that policies, services and practices don't create barriers to participation or discriminate against groups who share protected characteristics. They also make sure that organisations comply with the [public sector equality duty](#).

The service's EIA processes are in line with NFCC national best practice, but in practice, the process being followed isn't robust. Assessments don't properly review data, or assess and act on the impact on each protected characteristic. We found that projects had more robust assessments than policies. But most documentation is inconsistent and doesn't accurately show how the service uses data to support decisions.

Before a policy is published, the business services team makes sure there is an EIA. Then a senior leader approves the policy. We found records where the EDI manager had given feedback to the responsible manager completing the EIA, but these comments had been ignored. Most managers work on EIAs and store them on local drives rather than on the service's EDI collaborative space on its central SharePoint site. This means that there is little version control or audit trail for any decisions or actions taken.

Encouragingly, we found that some middle managers had completed EIA training. But staff told us they were disappointed that senior leaders didn't complete the full training despite having to complete and assure EIAs. Disappointingly, we also found limited effective internal strategic oversight to make sure EIAs were completed to the appropriate level.

### **The service needs to improve the way it stores people data**

We reviewed the service's workforce profile and how it used this data to understand trends. This included exit interviews, demographics, protected characteristics, professional development reviews, reporting lines and sickness absence.

We found the service collected a good range of workforce information. But this is stored in a disorganised and complicated way, and staff find it difficult to understand and retrieve the data.

Disappointingly, the service isn't using its workforce information effectively to identify trends and workforce issues. This is the case at all levels of the service. Managers have limited access to this data or understanding of how to use it as part of an EIA.

The service should improve the way it collects and manages its people data and how it uses this to inform EIAs. This will help it to better understand its workforce demographics and needs, and therefore make sure its policies and procedures don't have a disproportionate impact on particular groups.

We note that the service has discussed the development of a people dashboard. But, at the time of our inspection, this was in the early stages, and development hadn't yet started.

### **Staff aren't confident that the service acts on their feedback**

The service 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. We found that the previous EDI manager had spent time visiting staff to speak about EDI and [positive action](#).

Although the service has some means of gathering staff feedback, they aren't consistent or wide ranging.

In our staff survey, 74 percent of respondents (166 out of 225) agreed that they felt confident in the mechanisms for providing feedback to all levels. And 73 percent of respondents (165 out of 225) agreed that their ideas or suggestions would be listened to. But during the inspection, staff told us that they have limited confidence in the service's feedback mechanisms and don't think they are effective. Staff at all levels reported that they were afraid to speak up due to potential negative consequences from senior leaders.

Representative bodies and staff associations told us they would like better engagement from the service about EDI issues. Senior leaders have limited involvement with staff networks. There has been reduced staff participation with these networks. In some cases, such as the neurodiversity network Enable, the service has disbanded the networks. Staff told us that they didn't know what networks were available or how to join them. Although we found the service promoted external national groups, it could better support and develop internal staff networks.

The service has recently introduced 'engagement days' bringing staff together to speak with senior leaders. We look forward to seeing how these develop.

The service should improve communication between staff and senior managers, so questions and feedback receive prompt and appropriate responses and so staff are confident using feedback mechanisms.

## **Staff aren't confident to report bullying, harassment and discrimination**

In the last inspection, we found more needed to be done to remove bullying and harassment in the workplace. The main reasons for staff feeling harassed and not reporting this behaviour were concerns about being victimised and labelled as a troublemaker. We were also told by some staff that they would choose carefully which senior leader to raise matters with. And all of the respondents in the previous staff survey who told us they felt discriminated against said it was by someone more senior to them. We reported that the service needed to do more to build trust and confidence with staff reporting, so action can be taken.

Disappointingly, in this inspection, we found that staff still felt the same. Staff told us that they had little confidence when there was an allegation made against a senior leader that this was investigated fairly. And they are unwilling to report concerns due to fear of retribution.

In our staff survey, 14 percent of respondents (32 out of 225) told us they had been subject to bullying or harassment, and 10 percent of respondents (22 out of 225) had been subject to discrimination over the past 12 months. Of these people, most said the main source of the bullying or harassment was someone more senior than them.

We reviewed how well the service could effectively deal with cases of bullying, harassment and discrimination, as well as grievances and discipline.

Encouragingly, we found discipline and grievance processes were fair and comprehensive, with clear policies and procedures in place. Staff have a good understanding of what bullying, harassment and discrimination are and their negative effects on colleagues and the organisation.

We were pleased to see that the service had included awareness training, including challenging inappropriate behaviour, in its leadership programmes. But we found no formal training arrangements for managers for dealing with discipline and grievance processes.

The service has a formal process for whistleblowing. It has also introduced an independent reporting line called Say So, although some staff told us that they didn't have confidence in this. Worryingly, we found that there were no formal records or processes for actioning concerns from reporting lines. The service also had limited evidence to demonstrate how it identified trends and resolved staff concerns proactively.

## **The service's recruitment processes are fair, and encourage applicants from diverse backgrounds**

The service has introduced a diversity and community engagement officer who carries out work to attract and recruit a diverse workforce to address [disproportionality](#). The service has plans to make sure that it can offer the right services to its communities. For example, staff have shown a good understanding of positive action, and there has been good progress in this area.

We reviewed recruitment processes over the 12 months previous to our inspection and found these were open, fair and honest. The service has an effective system to understand and remove the risk of disproportionality in recruitment processes. In 2023, the service used the [NFCC direct entry scheme](#) to recruit more diverse individuals into middle management operational roles.

The service 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 service advertises recruitment opportunities internally and externally. This has encouraged applications from individuals from diverse backgrounds, including to middle and senior management roles. For example, we saw recruitment campaigns advertised via social media platforms, the NFCC, the Asian Fire Service Association and Women in the Fire Service UK.

The service monitors the success of its recruitment campaigns and interaction with its communities. Work included:

- the corporate communication team designing bespoke communication strategies to target under-represented groups in recruitment campaigns;
- a bespoke recruitment website page which received over 246,000 page views, with data showing that 98 percent of visitors were new to the site; and
- firefighters supporting the diversity and community engagement officer with positive action work, which meant 1,980 people were contacted at recruitment events.

We look forward to seeing how this work progresses.

## **The service still has more to do to make sure its workforce is reflective of its community**

The service has improved staff diversity at all levels of the organisation, but more could be done to make sure its workforce is reflective of the local community. However, staff diversity is in line with other fire and rescue services in England.



As at 31 March 2024, the service had 772 members of staff in all workforce groups. A total of 21 percent (162 people) identified as a woman, compared to an England average of 20.2 percent. This is an increase of 12 people compared to the previous year. The proportion of firefighters who identified as a woman has increased slightly from 8.1 percent (46 people) to 8.4 percent (50 people) over the same period. This was because the number of people identifying as a woman increased among wholetime firefighters but decreased among on-call firefighters.

As at 31 March 2024, 8.7 percent of staff (62 people) identified as being from an ethnic minority background, compared to 32.2 percent in the local population and an average of 8.6 percent across all fire and rescue services.

As at 31 March 2024, 7.5 percent of firefighters (41 people) identified as being from an ethnic minority background compared to 6.7 percent (36 people) as at 31 March 2023.

Encouragingly, the service has a plan to further increase the diversity of the workforce. It understands where it needs to target recruitment to achieve this. In its published equality scheme document, the service identifies the following groups are under-represented in its workforce:

- people who identify as a woman, specifically in operational firefighter roles;
- people from ethnic minority backgrounds;
- people with a disability; and
- members of the LGBTQ+ community.

We found that staff had a good understanding of positive action and were involved in work to support recruitment campaigns.



# Managing performance and developing leaders

Good

Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service is good 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.

## Area for improvement

The service should fully evaluate personal development discussions to make sure they are effective to manage staff development and performance.

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 service has improved its appraisal process, but this needs to be accessible to all management roles**

In the last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should fully evaluate personal development discussions to ensure they are effective to manage staff development and performance.

The service has since introduced a new PDD process to manage staff development and performance. This allows it to effectively develop and assess the individual performance of all staff.

Most staff reported that they have regular discussions with their manager and that these are meaningful and effective. Each staff member has individual goals and objectives, with regular performance assessments. Staff told us that they felt confident in the performance and development arrangements in place. In our staff survey, 71 percent of respondents (160 out of 225) told us that they had had a formal appraisal in the last 12 months.

However, the completion rate of PDDs varies for different staff groups and is particularly low for on-call firefighters. As at 31 March 2024, the proportion of completed PDDs by workforce type was:

- 82 percent for fire control;
- 48 percent for wholetime firefighters;
- 13 percent for support staff; and
- 7 percent for on-call firefighters.

Staff told us that the new digital system used to record and manage PDDs was simple to use and managers understood it. However, not all managers have access to complete staff appraisals. For example, crew managers are responsible for completing firefighters' PDDs, but they don't have access to the PDD system. Staff reported that they didn't think this was right or fair to crew or watch managers. Firefighters told us that they had regular, meaningful discussions with their crew managers which were then recorded by their watch manager.

Considering this evidence, the area for improvement remains open. The service should reevaluate the PDD process and make sure that it is effective to manage staff development and performance.

### **The service is constantly learning to make sure promotion and development processes continue to be fair**

The service has put considerable effort into developing its promotion and progression processes so that they are fair, and all staff can understand them. To do this, it works with an external company called Great Minds Don't. We found evidence of the service acting on feedback and improving its people development processes and policies.

The promotion and progression policies are comprehensive and cover opportunities in all roles. The service uses promotion processes to identify talent. Successful candidates move into a talent pool and can then apply for roles. It is encouraging that all candidates are given good, timely feedback. Unsuccessful candidates are offered independent coaching to help them develop further and prepare for future promotional processes.

We found evidence of PDDs leading to development and opportunities for promotion. This allows the service to effectively manage the career pathways of its staff, including roles needing specialist skills. The service has a good understanding of its workforce's aspirations, and this supports the development of its succession plan.

The service manages selection processes consistently. However, it doesn't have strong succession-planning processes in place to allow it to effectively fill roles needing specialist skills. We also found resourcing gaps in support functions. The service could do more to make sure it is consistent in this area.

The service uses temporary promotions appropriately to fill short-term resourcing gaps. As at 31 March 2024, the average length of a temporary promotion was 255 days. This is below the England average of 328 days. As at 31 March 2023, the average length was 511 days.

### **The service is working hard to remove barriers to diversity**

The service knows it needs to go further to increase workforce diversity, to reflect the community it serves, especially in middle and senior management. It has put a plan in place to address this. People is one of the five key strategies in its CRMP. The service has also:

- completed equality analysis of promotional and development pathways;
- given managers [unconscious bias](#) training;
- provided neurodiversity awareness training, including a bespoke e-learning package;
- included an independent member on its talent panels to mitigate unconscious bias; and
- used an external company to make sure its operational promotion processes and procedures are fair.

### **The service has established effective processes to identify and develop leadership at all levels**

In the last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders. We found that the service has made good progress against this and have closed this area for improvement.

The service has effective succession-planning processes in place, which allow it to manage high-potential staff into leadership roles. It has systems in place to develop its aspiring leaders. For example, it offers three leadership development programmes for supervisory, middle leadership and executive roles. These programmes are available to all relevant employees across all staff groups.

We are encouraged to see that the service has recruited two candidates into station manager roles using the NFCC's new direct entry programme. These candidates are new to the fire and rescue service sector, and the service has developed a robust three-year training programme to support their careers. We were pleased to see evidence that the service and its staff had made considerable efforts to make sure that the direct entry managers felt welcomed and supported.

There are talent management schemes to develop specific staff. The service uses training to support the development of aspiring and future leaders. We found a significant range of leadership courses such as:

- development pathway/portfolios up to middle manager level;
- aspiring and emerging leaders, and empowering leaders;
- an introduction to supervisory management, and practical management skills courses;
- supervisory leaders development programme; and
- the middle managers leadership programme introduced by the NFCC.

The service advertises all talent and leadership opportunities fairly through its recruitment team for all staff to consider. Support staff told us that they felt more senior roles were only available for operational officers. We found evidence that the service did consider those working in support roles for more senior roles. However, it should consider putting more transparent arrangements in place to make sure that support staff are aware of the development opportunities to become senior leaders.

The service has considered the December 2022 Leading the Service and Leading and Developing People fire standards, and these are integrated as part of a wider people action plan.

