ITEM 7

Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

MEETING	Extraordinary Fire Authority
DATE OF MEETING	23 January 2020
OFFICER	Dave Norris, Head of Service Delivery
LEAD MEMBER	Councillor Lesley Clarke OBE
SUBJECT OF THE REPORT	**Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) Inspection Findings Report**
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	Following completion of the first inspection round of all 45 fire and rescue services, HMICFRS published the report into Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service on 17 December 2019, as part of the final tranche of reports.
	The inspection methodology covers three pillars (effectiveness, efficiency and people) against each of which a judgement is given; outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate. There is no overall judgement covering service performance.
	The Service was judged:
	Effectiveness – requires improvement
	Efficiency – requires improvement
	People – good
	Depending on the severity of matters found, HMICFRS may provide suggested areas for improvement, causes for concern and recommendations. A recommendation will always accompany a cause for concern.
	The report for this Service identifies 11 areas for improvement, one cause for concern accompanied by two recommendations.
	The Fire and Rescue Service National Framework document requires fire and rescue services to give due regard to HMICFRS reports and recommendations. Where recommendations are made, the receiving Service is required to prepare, update and regularly publish an action plan detailing how such recommendations are actioned (Fire and Rescue National Framework, section 7.5).
	This Service has built an effective relationship with HMICFRS, which it intends to maintain. Matters raised in the report will be addressed through internal governance structures and reported to Members

	through the Overview and Audit Committee.
ACTION	Noting
RECOMMENDATIONS	That Members note the HMICFRS report and the Service's approach to addressing the report findings.
RISK MANAGEMENT	There were reputational corporate risks to the organisation should we have been graded as inadequate. The Service had already taken steps to mitigate this through having extensive internal and external audits of a number of areas of the Service. Notably, our operations have been subject to external independent assurance. Our Health, Safety and Wellbeing function has been independently audited by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and received a Gold Award.
FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS	Fire and rescue services are not funded for the burden and preparation resource implications of HMICFRS visit, nor is the Service charged. This round of inspections was funded by the Home Office. The Police are top sliced from their government grants to fund the HMICFRS inspections of Constabulary. There has been no mention yet that this might be a future funding model for the inspection of fire and rescue services.
LEGAL IMPLICATIONS	The powers of inspection for fire and rescue services are established by the Policing and Crime Act 2017.. There are no specific legal risks or liabilities anticipated at this time.
CONSISTENCY WITH THE PRINCIPLES OF THE DUTY TO COLLABORATE	Officers have developed our approach to inspection with our Thames Valley Fire and Rescue Service partners, and with 'peer' support from Thames Valley and Gloucestershire Police Forces.
HEALTH AND SAFETY	There are no Health, Safety or Wellbeing implications from this report.
EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY	There are no Equality and Diversity implications as part of the report.
USE OF RESOURCES	Prior to this Service's inspection, a preparation plan was devised for the Service and presented to the Authority on 14 February 2018 with a number of updates prior to inspection.
	The preparations for the on-going relationship with HMICFRS and future HMICFRS inspections are now being led by the Head of Service Delivery, as the designated Service Liaison Officer.
	Communication with stakeholders;
	Engagement and briefings have regularly been carried

	out and points of communication with Members and staff have been programmed.
	The system of internal control;
	Specific areas identified for service improvement have been identified through a number of workshops. These are being captured in relevant departmental plans and in the Operational Assurance Plan. These will be reported on in the usual way and ultimately to the Overview and Audit Committee.
	The medium-term financial strategy;
	No direct implications for the strategy are identified at this time. There may be future implications depending on the long-term funding model for HMICFRS.
	The balance between spending and resources;
	No new capability requirements have been identified as being required to prepare for, and support an inspection. The Corporate Planning Manager oversees preparation of evidence gathering with support from the Service's Resilience and Business Continuity Manager. The Viper system has been designed to capture evidence on an ongoing basis. This allows managers to provide evidence as part of their usual reporting process. Performance Management Board provides further scrutiny of progress towards the delivery of the corporate plan.
	The ethos of the Service will be to continue to deliver the Service's vision and strategic aims and gather the relevant evidence for the HMICFRS on a business as usual basis, rather than as an extra burden. While we develop an understanding of the inspection process and monitor the experience and effect on other Services we will revisit the resourcing needs. We have identified that preparations for aspects of the new Public Safety Plan (PSP) due in 2020 need to be closely aligned with preparations for the HMICFRS. This is reflected in the PSP.
PROVENANCE SECTION & BACKGROUND PAPERS	**Background**
	Chapter four of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 established the legal framework for the inspection of English Fire and Rescue Services. Wales and Scotland have their own mechanisms for assuring Services. The Home Office subsequently awarded a contract to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and consequently they changed their name to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services. Our preparation plans together with our response to HMICFRS' consultation on the inspection methodology was presented to, and considered at, the 14 February 2018 Fire Authority

	meeting (see pages 131 – 162): https://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/9615/1782/8239/FIRE_AUTHORITY_AGENDA_AND_REPORTS_140218-min.pdf

14 February 2018 – Fire Authority Paper: https://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/5315/1782/9364/ITEM_10_HMICFRS_Report_and_Appendices-min.pdf

14 November 2018 O & A preparation update: https://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/3515/4108/8758/ITEM_15_HMICFRS_Update__Appendices.pdf

13 February 2019 – Fire Authority preparation update: https://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/4315/4894/2713/ITEM_13_HMICFRS_Update_FA_12_2_2019__Appendix-min.pdf |
| **APPENDICES** | HMICFRS report into Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service |
| **TIME REQUIRED** | 1 hour |
| **REPORT ORIGINATOR AND CONTACT** | David Norris – Head of Service Delivery

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Fire & Rescue Service
Effectiveness, efficiency and people 2018/19

An inspection of Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service

Contents

About this inspection

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

In carrying out our inspections of all 45 fire and rescue services in England, we answer three main questions:

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

This report sets out our inspection findings. After taking all the evidence into account, we apply a graded judgment for each of the three questions.

What inspection judgments mean

Our categories of graded judgment are:

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

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

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

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

If we find serious critical failings of policy, practice or performance of the fire and rescue service, we will judge it as **inadequate**.

Service in numbers

Public perceptions

	Buckinghamshire	England
Perceived effectiveness of service Public perceptions survey (June/July 2018)	86%	86%

Response

	Buckinghamshire	England
Incidents attended per 1,000 population 12 months to 31 December 2018	10.2	10.4
Home fire risk checks carried out by FRS per 1,000 population 12 months to 31 March 2018	3.9	10.4
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises 12 months to 31 March 2018	2.9	3.0

Incidents attended in the 12 months to 31 December 2018

Total Non-fire incidents 31%

Total Fires 29%

Total

8,192

Total False Alarms 41%
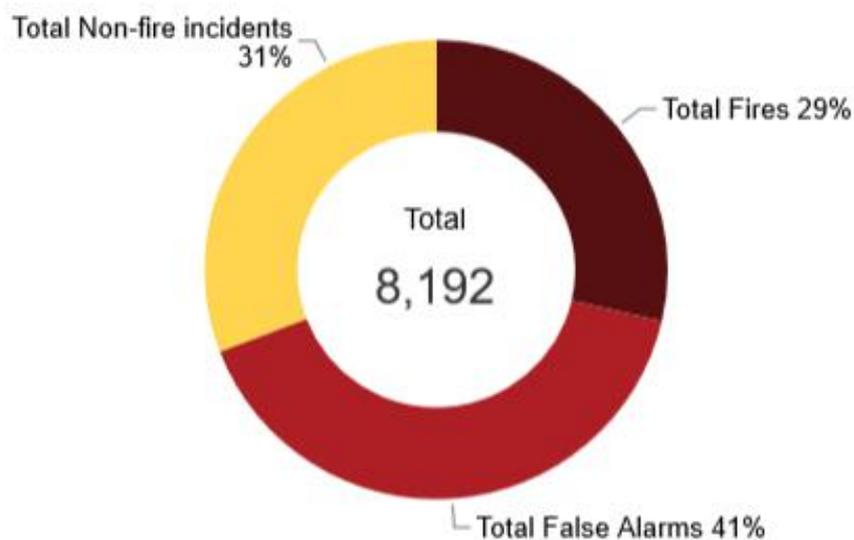
£ Cost

	Buckinghamshire	England
Firefighter cost per person per year 12 months to 31 March 2018	£18.06	£22.38

Workforce

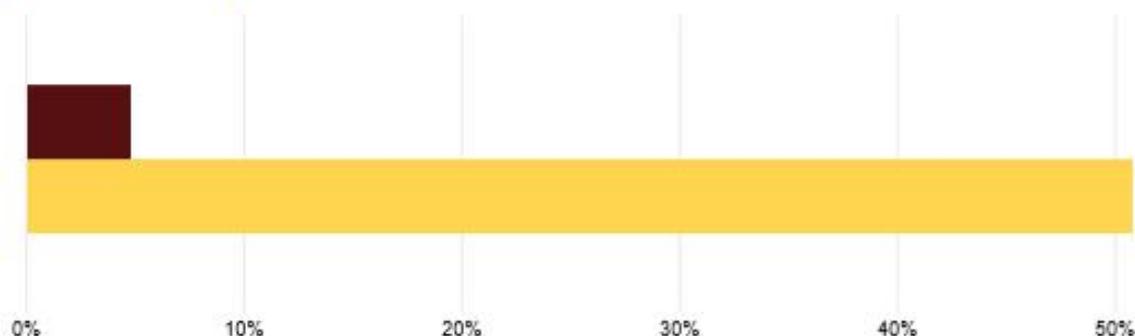|	Buckinghamshire	England
Number of firefighters per 1,000 population As at 31 March 2018	0.4	0.6
Five-year change in workforce As at 31 March 2013 compared with 31 March 2018	-30%	-14%
Percentage of wholetime firefighters As at 31 March 2018	71%	70%

Percentage of female firefighters as at 31 March 2018

● Female firefighters ● Female residential population

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

● BAME Firefighters ● BAME residential population
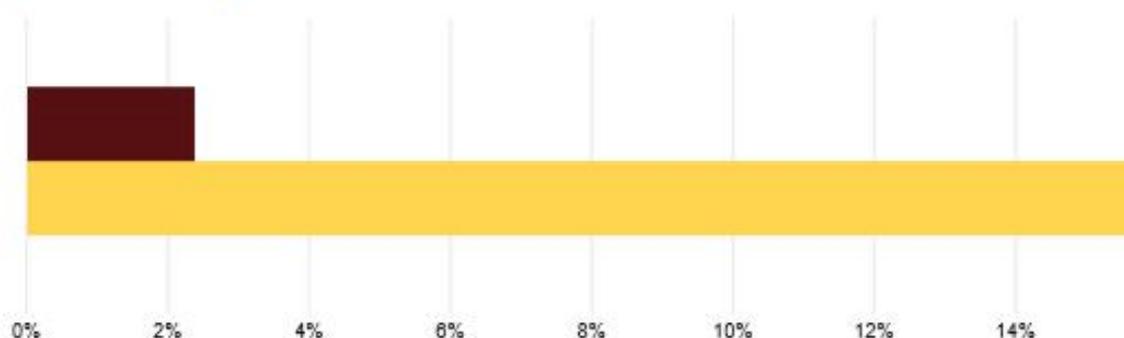
Please refer to annex A for full details on data used.

Overview

⚙ **Effectiveness**	●●○○○ **Requires improvement**
Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies	●●●○ Good
Preventing fires and other risks	●●○○ Requires improvement
Protecting the public through fire regulation	●●○○ Requires improvement
Responding to fires and other emergencies	●●○○ Requires improvement
Responding to national risks	●●●○ Good

£ **Efficiency**	●●○○○ **Requires improvement**
Making best use of resources	●●○○ Requires improvement
Making the fire and rescue service affordable now and in the future	●●○○ Requires improvement

👥 **People**	●●●○ **Good**	
Promoting the right values and culture	●●●○ Good	
Getting the right people with the right skills	●●●○ Good	
Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity	●●●○ Good	
Managing performance and developing leaders	●●○○ Requires improvement	
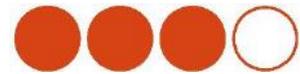
Overall summary of inspection findings

We are satisfied with some aspects of the performance of Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (FRS). But there are some areas where the service needs to make improvements.

The service is facing significant financial constraints and to its credit has developed and implemented an innovative, flexible and graduated approach to operational resourcing. It has adopted an intelligence-led risk and demand model which resources for low level daily demand and infrequent high risk. We recognise that this approach has the potential to be effective. However, the service is not able to sustain this model with the financial challenges it must work with and is ultimately not able to resource its prevention, protection and response activities.

The service requires improvement in its effectiveness. It could be better at how quickly and reliably it:

* responds to fires and other emergencies;
* protects the public through fire regulation; and
* prevents fires and other risks.

But the service is good at understanding the risk of fires and other emergencies. We have no concerns about how it deals with incidents. And its response to national risks is good.

For efficiency we have graded the service as requires improvement. This is fundamentally because it does not have enough people and money. It also requires improvement at making its service affordable now and in future.
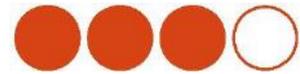
The service is good at looking after its people. It is good at:

* promoting the right values and culture;
* getting the right people with the right skills; and
* ensuring fairness and promoting diversity.

But the service requires improvement to the way it manages performance and promotes leaders.

Overall, we would like to see improvements in the year ahead, but without increased funding, it is difficult to see where progress can be made.

Effectiveness

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

Requires improvement

Summary

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

The service has dealt with budget and workforce reductions over the past ten years. It continues to provide its main functions – namely prevention, protection and response – in increasingly tight financial constraints, striving to provide more with less. To its credit, it has reshaped its emergency response resources so they can meet current risk and demand. To do this it developed a unique risk and demand-led response model. The service has undertaken extensive research to understand where and when demand is greatest and has put in place a flexible workforce plan to achieve its priorities. Despite the service's innovative approach, this model is ultimately unsustainable due to the financial constraints placed on the service.

The service understands the risk of fire and other emergencies and uses a wide range of data to inform this understanding. The service has an effective rolling five-year public safety plan. It collects and uses information effectively. But it could do more to assure itself that it completes all site inspections within the agreed timeframes.

The service requires improvement in the way it prevents fires and other risks. It shares data with other organisations to identify people particularly at risk. The service does attempt to visit those most at risk from fire. But its approach falls far short of the national average. The service does not evaluate its fire and wellness visits and can't measure the impact of such work. It promotes community safety effectively and collaborates well with others such as Thames Valley Police and local authorities.

The service must improve the way it protects the public through fire regulation. Its audit and inspection rates are broadly in line with the average for England. But it is unclear whether the service completes pre-planned audit programme (PAP) inspections of identified high-risk properties within the stated timeframe. The service should ensure it effectively evaluates its current attendance policy on automatic fire alarms and consider, in particular, the impact on operational resourcing and the public. It does work with other organisations but its interaction with local businesses to educate them about complying with fire regulations is limited.

The service requires improvement to how it responds to fires and other emergencies. It has developed and implemented an innovative, flexible and scalable approach to operational resourcing based on an intelligence-led risk and demand model which embraces both immediate response and wider resilience requirements. However, it cannot consistently respond to risk with the resources appropriate to its public safety plan. Commanders have a good understanding of national guidance for decision making. The service holds debriefs and shares information to improve the way it works with staff.

The service is good at responding to national risks. It holds national assets for dealing with a variety of incidents. It works well with Thames Valley police and local authorities and has officers trained to support incidents that involve attacks by marauding armed terrorists.

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies

Good

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

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

Understanding local and community risk

Buckinghamshire FRS has built a well-developed and wide-ranging local and community risk profile. It used this risk profile to develop its most recent integrated risk management plan (IRMP), known locally as the Public Safety Plan 2015–2020.

The service appointed an independent company to consult the public and interested parties when it last produced its IRMP. This generated 232 responses, including 50 people attending public focus groups across Milton Keynes and Buckinghamshire. It used this feedback to shape proposals.

The service uses a wide range of data to inform its risk profiling. This includes information about age, ethnicity, deprivation, health and welfare. It also shares information with other Thames Valley partner organisations such as the police, other fire services and the local resilience forum (LRF). It works closely with others such as

local housing associations, mental health teams and other blue light organisations to reduce the risk of fire and promote community safety.

The service uses geographical software to identify where those at greatest risk of fire are located. To do this it inputs a range of datasets, including historical incident, demographic and health and lifestyle data. The software enables the service to highlight the properties and individuals who are at the highest risk from fire. So, the service can target prevention and protection work where it is most needed.

The service has an ongoing process to understand future risk factors. These might include the built environment, infrastructure (for example HS2) and the county's population and demographic changes.

Having an effective risk management plan

The service's public safety plan effectively sets out how the service will manage and reduce risk in the county. The plan identifies current and future risk factors within the service area such as:

- the ageing population;
- the M40 corridor; and
- house fires caused by risk factors associated with deprivation.

The service has introduced a premises risk management system (PRMS). This gives operational firefighters access to information about prevention, protection and response to help them effectively respond to incidents. It also holds a comprehensive risk register that is linked to the regional risks held by the Thames Valley LRF, of which the service is a member.

The service's public safety plan is in line with the requirements of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England. It reviews its risk information regularly to ensure it is current. It uses these reviews to update the safety plan in response to any changes to the nature and level of local risks.

The service's aims are to:

- prevent incidents that cause harm;
- protect homes, public buildings and businesses from the effects of fire;
- provide a timely and proportionate response to incidents by allocating assets and resources in relation to risk and demand; and
- offer best value for money to Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes residents and ensure that the service is compliant with regulatory requirements.

Maintaining risk information

Buckinghamshire FRS uses its latest incident data and operational activity information effectively to ensure its firefighters understand risk within its area. Each fire station has a TV monitor which provides firefighters with live information on site-specific risk, operational incidents and incident response times.

Firefighters collect information about certain buildings as well as permanent and temporary risks to operational activity. This information is then used to plan firefighting activity. The resulting site-specific risk information (SSRI) is held on [mobile data terminals](#) (MDTs) on fire engines. The service has recently installed a new database which stores all risk information from prevention, protection and response activity. The new system allows staff to access, via an MDT, accurate risk information for all domestic and commercial premises. We found this ensures there is a common understanding of risk throughout the organisation and effective sharing of information between departments and functions. As part of our inspection, we carried out a survey of FRS staff to get their views of their service (please see Annex A for more details). Of 93 firefighters who completed the survey, 91 percent stated that they had a good understanding of the risks they were likely to face when attending operational incidents.

The service undertakes site visits each year. As at 31 March 2019, the service had 1,487 sites that required visiting. In the year ending 31 March 2019, the service had carried out 445 visits on these sites. The service stated that it inspects premises that it defines as "very high risk" annually. High-risk premises get a visit every three years. And the service will then visit medium and low-risk premises every five years. The service expects operational staff to complete site visits each month. But we found limited management of this activity. So, we couldn't determine whether the service is on track to complete all its site visits within the agreed timeframes.

Operational crews receive a range of information about changing risk at the beginning of every shift. This includes weather conditions, road closures, health and safety information, and recent operational incident activity. The service prioritises health and safety, and staff receive regular update bulletins via email.

The service works well with its neighbouring fire and rescue services, Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire, to achieve operational alignment. A senior manager attends regional meetings to discuss and plan for managing local, regional and national risks.

Preventing fires and other risks

Requires improvement

Areas for improvement
- The service should evaluate its prevention work, so it understands the benefits better.
- The service should understand the reasons for its reducing number of prevention visits and consider how it can better target those who are most at risk to fire.

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

Prevention strategy

Buckinghamshire FRS's approach to prevention requires improvement. The service has a clear vision, namely to ensure Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes are the safest places in England in which to live, work and travel. Furthermore, it aims to improve the health, safety and wellbeing of the community, by identifying those groups who are at greatest risk. And it aims to work effectively with health and housing partner organisations to help prevent fires and other incidents from occurring as well as safeguarding those who are most vulnerable.

The service's prevention strategy focuses on four pillars:

- safer homes;
- fires;
- road safety; and
- fire service as a health and wellbeing asset.

Its prevention framework details how the service will target those most at risk of fire. It uses a risk scoring system to prioritise those at greatest risk. It effectively records this information on its premises risk management system.

In the year to 31 March 2018, the service carried out 3,171 home fire safety checks, known locally as 'fire and wellness visits'. This equates to 3.9 visits per 1,000 population which is below the national average of 10.4 visits per 1,000 population. They are available to people at greatest risk from fire or who are deemed more vulnerable from other societal or health and wellbeing risks. During these visits prevention-trained staff provide advice on fire safety and fitting fire alarms. They also give advice on social welfare, and preventing slips, trips and falls. The staff can make referrals to local partners if necessary.

The service is not effective at targeting people who are most at risk from fire. In the year ending 31 March 2018, the service targeted 34.8 percent of fire and wellness visits at households occupied by an elderly person and 12.6 percent to households occupied by a person declaring a disability. These are below the England rate although they have improved since 2016/17. This low percentage is surprising considering the service aims to target those most at risk of fire and use a range of data – including Exeter data – to understand their communities.

Fire and wellness appointments are booked by the service delivery administration team. Operational staff and community safety co-ordinators make the visits. We heard from staff making visits that co-ordination and management could be improved. This would maximise productivity and support better prioritisation.

The service has not evaluated this work, so it can't determine how successful its prevention activity is.

Promoting community safety

Buckinghamshire FRS has several effective programmes supporting its prevention strategy.

The service backs national prevention campaigns run by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and the Home Office. These are locally managed, but we found little senior management oversight.

The service carries out targeted prevention work, too. For example, the service attended local schools in October 2018 during student safety week. It also worked with local boating communities, providing safety advice and checking carbon monoxide alarms.

We found good engagement between the service and with the diverse communities across Milton Keynes and Buckinghamshire. Operational staff told us how they had specifically educated local communities about home fire safety and the dangers of deliberate fire-setting. They used multi-lingual information tools to communicate their message effectively.

The service's prevention team works with a wide range of partners including district and county councils. It will refer households who identify themselves at risk from fire to the appropriate organisation. The service identifies the risk to people using oxygen cylinders in the home. It works with a local provider to identify the premises concerned and gives bespoke safety advice to those individuals.

The service receives referrals from others such as the local police force, ambulance service and housing associations. It effectively provides safety advice to those who are at greatest risk from fire. The prevention team told us how they have trained PCSOs and local housing officers in home fire safety. They have also made joint safety visits targeting those most at risk from fire.

The service hosts blood donation sessions at Aylesbury fire station, working closely with NHS Blood and Transplant. People attending as donors received fire safety advice from the service.

The service effectively engages with other partner organisations to promote the Community Card initiative. This is a multi-agency event at local schools to raise awareness of the role of public sector organisations and promote safer communities across Milton Keynes and Buckinghamshire.

The service trains staff effectively to recognise vulnerable children and adults and to make safeguarding referrals where necessary. It does this through online e-learning packages and face-to-face workshops. We found the service had a good system and staff were confident in identifying safeguarding issues to other agencies. The service managers attend safeguarding board meetings, risk assessment multi-agency panels and multi-agency risk assessment conferences.

Road safety

Buckinghamshire FRS is part of the Thames Valley Road Safety Forum. It works closely with other forum members including Thames Valley Police, Buckinghamshire County Council and Milton Keynes Council.

The service's road safety initiatives are targeted and aligned to NFCC themes and with Thames Valley Police data. For example, staff visit local schools to educate young people in road safety. Operational staff took part in the BRAKE road safety week, the NFCC road safety week and walk to school week. Road safety officers also offer the 'Safe Drive, Stay Alive' programme for schools with children in years 12 and 13.

Fire stations host road safety initiatives such as checking tyre safety, child car seat fitting and Biker Down, which provides first aid and safety advice to motorcyclists during the NFCC road safety week.

Protecting the public through fire regulation

●●○○

Requires improvement

Areas for improvement

- The service should ensure it allocates enough resources to a prioritised and risk-based inspection programme.
- The service should review its response to false alarms to ensure operational resources are used effectively (termed 'unwanted fire signals').
- The service should ensure it works with local businesses and large organisations to share information and expectations on compliance with fire safety regulations.

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

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

Risk-based approach

While Buckinghamshire FRS carries out its statutory duties in relation to protection, more can be done to improve how it ensures compliance with fire safety regulations.

The service has identified three factors in its IRMP and protection strategy that determine the risk focus of the service's proactive audit work. These factors are:

- life risk;
- history of poor compliance; and
- whether the premises are of economic, social or historic impact.

The number of fire safety protection audits completed by the service in the year to 31 March 2018 is the lowest since 2010/11: 364 compared to a peak of 1,433 in the year ending 31 March 2013. However, this equates to 2.9 audits per 100 known premises which is broadly in line with the England rate of 3.

The service has a complex definition of 'high risk'. Premises are scored based on elements such as age of the building, means of escape, occupancy, management of building, active fire prevention systems etc. Should the score be high enough, the premises are added to the service's pre-determined audit programme (PAP). However, there is no provision within this process to identify new or converted buildings or those which have not already been audited.

The service has no target for the number of high-risk premises it has to audit each year. As at 31 March 2019, the service had 952 known high-risk premises and, in the year ending 31 March 2019, had conducted 203 audits (21.3 percent). Protection activities are largely reactive, and the service undertakes limited proactive inspections from their pre-determined audit programme. Audits are mostly completed because of fire safety complaints and following fires in certain buildings. The service engages in a Thames Valley collaborative arrangement with other Thames Valley FRS to provide out-of-hours specialist fire safety advice and take urgent enforcement actions to protect people who are at risk.

The service now has fewer qualified fire regulation inspectors. Numbers fell from 16 as at 31 March 2013 to 10 as at 31 March 2019. Managing this workload with a limited number of qualified inspection officers seriously reduces the service's ability to do proactive work at the highest risk buildings and to fulfil its pre-determined audit programme.

The protection strategy aims to comply with the NFCC competency framework for business fire safety advisers. This is a good model to ensure staff are suitably trained and have the practical experience needed to undertake systematic, consistent and robust fire safety audits.

The service received 1,802 building regulation consultations in the year to 31 March 2019. Of these, 81.7 percent were completed within the required timeframe. This level has remained broadly stable over the last two years.

Enforcement

The service's use of enforcement powers to ensure compliance with fire safety regulations is limited. The number of enforcement notices is low, given the number of audits resulting in an unsatisfactory outcome. Of the 364 audits carried out in the year to 31 March 2018, 66 percent were unsatisfactory. This is high compared to the England average, which is 32 percent. It demonstrates the service is targeting its activities in the right area. But the service should do more to address the overall volume of audits and inspection, which remains low.

A factor behind the service's low levels of enforcement activity is the limited resource available for investigation and prosecution. While we recognise these resourcing concerns, this should not be a reason to avoid acting if necessary, to ensure compliance with fire safety legislation.

In line with the [Regulators' Code](#), the service's main approach is to work with businesses to support compliance rather than using its powers to prosecute. While we recognise this approach, we would still expect services to use their enforcement powers if building owners don't make enough progress.

Working with others

The service has arrangements in place to share information and intelligence with relevant local partner organisations such as the police force and housing providers.

The only local businesses it engages with about fire safety regulations are those involved with [primary authority schemes](#).

The service attends all automatic fire alarm (AFA) activations. This is unusual. Most services now challenge AFA calls to ascertain whether there is an actual fire before [mobilising](#) resource. It has appointed an officer to work with responsible persons in commercial premises to reduce the likelihood of further occurrences. In the year to 31 March 2019, the service received 2,264 requests for assistance to AFAs. Of these, they attended all but three of them. The service's work to reduce these alarms is having some success with repeat offending premises. But overall, we didn't see evidence of sustained improvement. So, the service should consider what more can be done to reduce the pressure of AFA activations on emergency resources.

Responding to fires and other emergencies

Requires improvement

> **Areas for improvement**
> - The service should ensure it has a sustainable system to provide its operational response model.
> - The service should improve the availability of its on-call fire engines to respond to incidents.

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

Managing assets and resources

In the year to 31 December 2018, the service responded to 8,192 incidents. This equates to 10.2 incidents per 1,000 population which is comparable to the England rate of 10.4 over the same period. As at 31 March 2018, the service has 20 fire stations and 30 fire engines. Data provided by the service shows it has two swift water rescue boat teams and four [urban search and rescue](#) vehicles.

Since 2010, the service has seen a reduction in revenue and its workforce and has introduced an innovative risk and demand-led model which resources against low level daily demand and infrequent high risk. The service has undertaken analysis of its incident data and knows that it will need:

- up to 12 wholetime fire engines deployed to operational incidents simultaneously in the same hour on 99 percent of occasions; and
- 13 or more fire engines deployed to operational incidents simultaneously in the same hour on only 1 percent of occasions.

This resourcing model is designed to provide enough fire engines to cover all incidents from predicted low-level daily demand. It also lets fire control increase resources as required to meet infrequent high risk.

The chief fire officer, strategic management board and representative bodies are fully aware of the financial challenges the service faces in managing its resources and have worked constructively to implement the risk and demand-led model. But despite its willingness to do more with less and its potential to be an effective resourcing model, it does not consistently have enough firefighters to crew the minimum number of fire engines to meet this model.

In the year to 31 March 2019, its overall fire engine availability was 47.8 percent which is very low compared to other services. While its 12 wholetime crewed fire engines were almost always available during this same period, the service relies on wholetime, flexible duty and on-call staff to work overtime shifts to keep these fire engines available. As a result, its 18 on-call fire engines were only available 13.6 percent of the time. This reflects the difficulty the service has in recruiting on-call firefighters. This is experienced nationally. The service has introduced a formalised bank shift system to maintain appliance availability, however it cannot afford within its current budget the number of firefighters it needs to resource its risk-based demand-led crewing model.

The Thames Valley Fire Control Service manages emergency calls across Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire. The three fire services respond to calls across borders, to ensure the quickest fire engine is always sent, no matter where the incident occurs. The three services have agreed standard pre-determined attendances for most incidents. The training for control room staff is well managed and mobilisation generally good.

Response

Buckinghamshire FRS is not meeting the response standards it has set itself. The service told us this is because in trying to align reduced resources to areas of greatest demand it does not always reach the outlying areas of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes within the agreed standard. The agreed service standard states that the first operational resource for all emergency incidents would arrive on scene at all incidents within 10 minutes of being mobilised on 80 percent of occasions and 99 percent within 20 minutes. In the year ending 31 March 2019, the first operational resource arrived at the scene of an incident within 10 minutes 73.1 percent of the time and arrived within 20 minutes 97.7 percent of the time.

In July 2018, the service agreed with its fire and rescue authority a different approach to reporting attendance times. This approach better suited the capacity of the risk-based demand-led model to work to an average attendance time no worse than ten seconds more than the average of the previous five-year period. In the year ending 31 March 2019, the service was meeting this new measurement. But this agreement means the response could potentially get worse and the service will still meet its response standards.

The Home Office collects and publishes data on response times by measuring the time between the call being made and the first fire engine arriving at the scene. This provides consistent data across all 45 services. But services measure their own response times in different ways and Buckinghamshire FRS excludes call handling times as part of their response standards.

In the year to 31 March 2018, the service's average response time to primary fires including call handling was 10 minutes and 13 seconds. This is an increase of 12 seconds from the previous year. The service's average response time to primary fires is broadly similar to the average for other significantly rural services.

Command

The service's incident commanders can command assets effectively. Incident commanders receive regular training on thematic-based scenarios such as building fires, road traffic collisions and hazardous materials. The service's training team assesses them. After the assessments, incident commanders receive a score and a development plan. The service assesses commanders for command competence every two years. It provides regular training to all operational personnel for managing incidents and scenario-based training.

Senior officers attend regular training days to review operational incidents, share learning and report findings to operational staff.

The service's policy for incident command reflects national operational guidance. We found commanders at all levels had a good understanding of command including the decision-control process and how to apply operational discretion. Operational staff showed how the incident command pack documents on fire engines assist with and inform decision making during operational incidents.

Keeping the public informed

The service is good at telling the community about incidents. Its communications team can provide information about incidents using the service's social media platforms and local media outlets. The service encourages stations to have their own social media accounts, although we found the use of this varied across stations.

The service has recently run a social media campaign with other Thames Valley LRF partners to advise on preparing for an emergency. In total, according to data provided by the service, the campaign provided 30 pieces of information and guidance.

We found operational staff to be confident in identifying vulnerable people and in recording and reporting safeguarding concerns where necessary. Operational staff could give examples of feedback that came back about referrals.

Evaluating operational performance

The service has a good approach to reviewing incidents, evaluating performance and sharing what it has learned with staff and partner agencies.

Operational staff stated that there are hot debriefs for most incidents. These include other blue light responders where appropriate. For larger incidents, the service holds bigger debriefs. This includes both command debriefs, and multi-agency debriefs for larger and protracted incidents. The service demonstrates good practice when collecting operational information. Its operational assurance team identifies areas for improvement.

We saw examples where important learning points were shared with staff through a variety of means including:

- operational bulletins and newsletters;
- quizzes to test knowledge and understanding of recognised themes;
- an operational assurance newsletter providing monthly information on the previous month's incident activity, referencing relevant policy and procedures along with operational recommendations linked to national operational guidance; and
- an online learning site – the Hub of Education and Training (HEAT) – that includes case studies on national operational learning from incidents across the UK.

The service expects operational staff to record all learning to confirm knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. The service also shares learning nationally. For example, it recently shared information about how it managed a service-wide issue with moisture in breathing apparatus cylinders. This issue could have had a significant impact on the health and safety of operational staff.

Responding to national risks

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Good

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

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

Preparedness

Buckinghamshire FRS has assessed its needs and developed clear plans to supplement resources during a major or long-lasting incident. The Thames Valley Fire Control Service has an overview of the available fire engines. We saw how it can mobilise the quickest fire engine using its mobilisation system. Staff told us that the service provides comprehensive incident command training with incident management skills.

The service has urban search and rescue capability and swift water rescue capability at two different sites. It can deploy these nationally as required.

We found that operational staff can access key risk information on sites across the service area.

Working with other services

The service's intraoperability with Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire FRSs is good. The services have started to procure the same fire engines. This will improve how each service operates at cross-border incidents because staff will be familiar with the equipment on each engine.

We also saw close working with its other neighbouring services. For example, with Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service at Silverstone Circuit, a motor racing track which the service considers a cross-border risk. The service has carried out live and table-top exercises in the last 12 months to ensure both services understand the risk. The service has recently carried out training on Joint Emergency Service Interoperability Principles. It ran workshops for staff with Royal Berkshire FRS about how blue light services can work together in a more effective and efficient manner.

Working with other agencies

Buckinghamshire FRS works closely with other agencies. It is an active member of the Thames Valley LRF. The LRF meets each month to build and test plans against risk within the region. It recently ran an exercise about a terrorist threat within the county. The service is well prepared to respond to a multi-agency incident and has arrangements to respond to a terrorist threat. The service has specially trained personnel who will respond and support a strategic co-ordinating group helping other agencies to deal with large-scale incidents.

In October 2018, the service hosted a national chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear defence exercise. It and other agencies tested local resilience, strategic incident command and cross-border arrangements. Between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019, the service completed two exercises with other fire services, six joint exercises with multi-agency partners and 17 national resilience training events.

The service has effective arrangements to respond to a community risk identified by the LRF including a marauding terrorist attack. It has national inter-agency liaison officers to support incident commanders and the response provided by specialist teams.

Efficiency

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

Requires improvement

Summary

An efficient fire and rescue service will manage its budget and spend money properly and appropriately. It will align its resources to its risk. It should try to keep costs down without compromising public safety. Future budgets should be based on robust and realistic assumptions. Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service's overall efficiency requires improvement.

However, in one sense, it is highly efficient: it has an innovative deployment model which, if better funded, would be a cost-effective way of keeping people safe.

Management and representative bodies deserve much credit for the design and operation of this model. So too does the workforce, on whose goodwill and professionalism it relies. But the service cannot consistently sustain its available resources to meet both daily demand and provide additional resilience to meet infrequent high-risk events in accordance with its risk and demand-led model. It needs to ensure other departments' productivity is not reduced to support the staffing model. The demand-led model has the potential to be effective, but it currently relies too much on its bank-based additional shift system.

The service is good at collaborating with others and has worked to operationally align with neighbouring services and with other blue light partners. This has improved effectiveness and efficiency, reduced costs and made savings.

The service knows its main financial risks. But, despite being aware of these risks, it can't show plans for meeting the potential funding gaps. If any of the risks come about, it will have a significant impact on the service's operation and its future sustainability.

The service collaborates effectively. It has joined with other Thames Valley fire services in procuring fire engines. And it has shared estates with other blue light partners.

Making best use of resources

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Requires improvement

Causes of concern

We have serious concerns as to whether Buckinghamshire FRS has the resources it needs to meet its foreseeable risk. As a result of the financial position the service finds itself in, it doesn't have enough operational firefighters to resource its prevention and protection functions and crew the minimum number of fire engines it says it needs.

Recommendations

At the earliest opportunity, the service should:

- ensure it has the capacity and capability to support its activity in its public safety plan; and
- consult with the people of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes on options to have the most effective and efficient response against the financial environment in which it operates.

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

How plans support objectives

Buckinghamshire FRS is clear about the financial challenges it faces and refers to these risks in its corporate risk register. It recognises the importance of aligning resource to risk and has been creative in achieving more with less. But, despite its innovation, the service will not be able to sustain its activity in prevention, protection and response with the resources it has been allocated due to the financial challenges it faces. The council tax precept (£64.57 per annum for a band D property) was frozen for several years and decreased by 1 percent in 2015/16. As such, the service precept is significantly lower than the national average and is the lowest precept of any non-metropolitan combined authority.

The service has a medium-term financial plan for the period to 2024/25. Its annual budget for 2019/20 is £30.3m. The service's efficiency plan seeks savings of £4.5m between 2015/16 to 2019/20. However, the service told us it forecasts to exceed this amount, anticipating total savings of £5m over the period of the plan. But these savings are being used to cover increased costs.

The service has sound budgetary mechanisms. These reflect the priorities of the public safety plan. Buckinghamshire FRS has allocated resources for prevention and protection across the service at multiple sites. As previously mentioned, the service operates a demand-led model in relation to its operational firefighters. This is designed to allow the service to balance day-to-day demand with extraordinary demand.

It needs to meet normal day-to-day low-level demand for emergency response while maintaining a proportionate and cost-effective response capability for infrequent large-scale high-risk incidents. The service's on-call staff can respond to emergency incidents immediately or in staged incremental time slots. This allows the service to resource appropriately for periods of infrequent high risk and quickly increase the number of fire engines it needs during an operational incident.

But we found the service cannot consistently maintain the number of firefighters and provide the number of fire engines it has committed to in its public safety plan. The service has committed to 12 wholetime appliances and three on-call appliances being available each day.

In the year to 31 March 2018, the firefighter cost per head of population was £18.06. This is considerably lower than the England rate of £22.38. It is one of the lowest costs per head across all fire and rescue services in England and reflects that around a third of its firefighters are on-call.

Productivity and ways of working

As at 31 March 2018, the service had the full-time equivalent of 244 wholetime staff, 101 on-call staff and 104 support staff. This provides a range of working models to support the service in fulfilling its public safety plan.

The service has seen the full-time equivalent total workforce reduce by 30 percent between 2012/13 and 2017/18. It therefore relies on a bank system to offer a flexible resource designed to maintain appliance availability in the event of crewing shortfalls. But, in reality, it struggles to do this. The service recognises it needs to increase the number of firefighters to improve availability and, as at 31 March 2018, the service has recruited 30 wholetime firefighter apprentices.

We heard the service removed operational personnel from protection duties to staff under-resourced fire engines. This affected fire protection duties.

We recognise the service has been creative in doing more with less. But the service does not have enough staff for the risk and demand-led model. And the current budget does not allow additional staffing to increase resilience and sustainability of the system.

The service monitors performance at a strategic level. But we found that station performance management was limited. So, the service can't measure the impact of its prevention and protection work. This information would help it to assure itself that it is targeting resources effectively.

Collaboration

Buckinghamshire FRS proactively meets its statutory duty to consider emergency service collaboration. It is a member of the Thames Valley Emergency services steering group, which includes representation from the police, fire and ambulance services.

The service is leading a partnership with South Central Ambulance Service and Thames Valley Police. This will see all three services co-locating to one purpose-built 'blue light hub' in Milton Keynes. The move to the hub will see the three services moving out of five different sites to work under one roof. It will provide savings to the taxpayer and reduced running costs of £180,000 per year, according to the service's data.

Working with Royal Berkshire and Oxfordshire FRSs, Buckinghamshire FRS now has a single control room covering all three services. It will provide staff savings of £521,000 per year and reduce running costs by £85,000 per year, as well as providing savings to other services.

For each of the projects mentioned, the service and its Thames Valley Fire and Rescue service partners effectively evaluate the work. They ensure a common approach so that they can measure the efficiency and effectiveness of the services they provide to the public.

Continuity arrangements

The service has robust and up-to-date business continuity arrangements. This includes cyber-attack and the resourcing of fire engines. Each department must run an exercise each year to test its business continuity plan. The service's business continuity plan was tested when the resource management team relocated from its Aylesbury headquarters site to Haddenham. The LRF also works with the service and tests against major incidents such as terrorist attacks, industrial action or pandemic flu.

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

Requires improvement

> **Areas for improvement**
>
> - The service should use sound financial management to ensure all additional costs such as pensions liability are accounted for and that there is a contingency plan.

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

Improving value for money

Buckinghamshire FRS has a good track record of achieving savings. Its financial plans consider risks outlined in its public safety plan, 2015-20.

The service is aware of its main financial risks. It believes these to be the withdrawal of government support for the recent increase in employer's contribution to pension schemes; and pay increases agreed by the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services. There is also a risk that the specific revenue grants that the authority receives for urban search and rescue could be discontinued.

Although it is aware of the likely cost of some of these foreseeable risks, the service has no plans to meet these potential funding gaps. There is some doubt about what could be realistically achieved: given the current strain on frontline services, if any of these risks are realised, we anticipate a very significant impact on the service's operation and sustainability.

The service's capital programme was set at £7.6m for 2019/20. This includes the building of the blue light hub in Milton Keynes, which has been delayed, with £6.4m still to be spent on completion of the build. The joint procurement of fire engines and other operational equipment with the other Thames Valley fire and rescue services has resulted in £720,000 savings across all three services.

Innovation

The service makes good use of investment for future innovation. We found the service has introduced an effective business and systems integration project (BASI). This replaces several disjointed systems and has streamlined processes across the service including finance, payroll, HR, fleet, assets and the premise risk management system.

All three Thames Valley FRSs have jointly procured 37 new fire engines over a four-year period. The services anticipate that this will generate savings of £720,000. The three services have also agreed to standardise equipment on fire engines, which will improve operational alignment across the region.

The service has also worked with its Thames Valley fire service partners to jointly procure MDT software. This allows the swift transfer of risk information across all three services.

The service responded to feedback from a culture survey by installing satellite navigation on the MDTs. Before, operational firefighters were using mapping apps on their mobile phones on the way to incidents.

**Future investment and working with others**

If the pension grant funding were immediately withdrawn, the service is forecasting that its reserves would reduce from £11.6m as at March 2017 to £5m by March 2021 and down to just over £2.8m by March 2025. Of the remaining £2.8m, £1.5m is for the general fund, £0.8m is the service share of the control room renewals fund and £0.5m is to fund the continued introduction of firefighter apprentices. This only leaves £12,000 as capital reserves. This level of capital reserves is insufficient to make any future capital investments in property, fleet or IT.

The service generates income by renting operational drill towers to house mobile phone masts. Its data showed us this generates around £0.2m per year. It has also brought in house its treasury management and doubled the rate of return on its investments. The service has decided not to set up a trading arm because it felt the costs were too large compared with the likely benefit.

Buckinghamshire FRS has a positive approach to working with partners to achieve savings. This includes sharing estates with police and other organisations.

In a recent move, the service has joined the Fire and Rescue Indemnity Company, a private company formed by other services to act as a pool for insurance purposes. It anticipates savings of between £0.05m and £0.08m per annum.

People
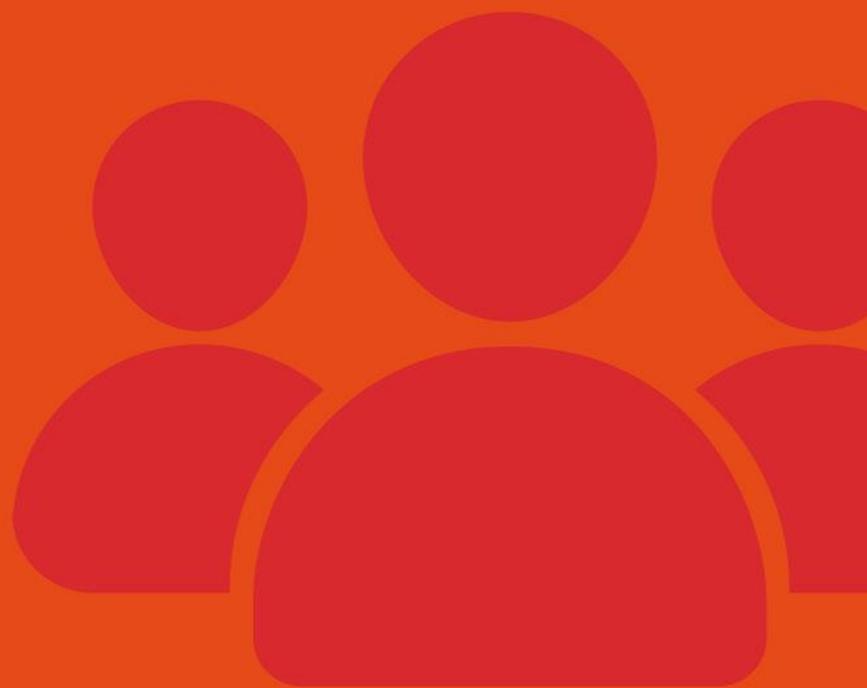
How well does the service look after its people?

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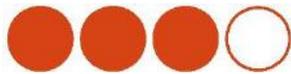
Good

Summary

A fire and rescue service that looks after its people should be able to provide an effective service to its community. It should offer a range of services to make its communities safer. This will include developing and maintaining a workforce that is professional, resilient, skilled, flexible and diverse. The service's leaders should be positive role models, and this should be reflected in the behaviour of the workforce. Overall, Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service is good at looking after its people.

The service takes the welfare of its workforce seriously. It offers a wide range of services including counselling and trauma support. Its health and safety policy defines the responsibilities of staff at all levels and is effectively communicated across the service. Staff feel proud to work for the service to keep their communities safe. The senior management team works to build a positive and inclusive culture.

The service is good at providing a range of training and learning opportunities to its staff and is effective in monitoring and recording staff competency. It is effective in quality assuring the training provided to operational staff and continually reviews what training has been completed. It has a varied programme of training exercises, both within the service and with other blue light partners. Staff spoke positively about how operational learning is shared throughout the service.

The service is making efforts to be a more inclusive employer with the introduction of apprentices. But it can do more to reflect the communities it serves. The service is good at providing opportunities for the workforce to feed back their views and opinions. It effectively communicates to staff using a variety of methods including senior leaders visiting stations and weekly blogs.

The service has arrangements to assess and develop staff performance. But not all appraisals were being completed. It needs to do more to ensure every member of staff gets appraised. We couldn't consider how the service identifies high-potential staff as it has no set process. But staff felt that promotion opportunities across the service were fair and open.

Promoting the right values and culture

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Good

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

Workforce wellbeing

Buckinghamshire FRS fully understands the wellbeing needs of its workforce and is extremely proactive in providing a range of services to support its employees. The service enables staff members to access counselling and physio sessions after any mental health issue or physical injury. Staff can also access a helpline which promotes advice on problems outside work that may affect personal wellbeing.

The service recognises the need to meet the psychological requirements of staff members when attending operational incidents. It carries out critical incident stress debriefing, which is well received by operational staff. Operational personnel told us they felt confident they would receive debriefing if they requested it.

Health and safety

The service recognises the challenge of providing a safe place, safe process and safe person to its employees. Its health and safety policy clearly states the responsibilities of its staff at all levels.

Health and safety information is effectively communicated across the service. This includes regular bulletins and overview of incidents. The service also holds internal safety events.

Operational staff complete bi-annual fitness tests. In the year to 31 March 2019, the service saw a 99.6 percent pass rate. The service provides gym equipment in all fire stations and station physical training supervisors administer the fitness testing and provide support.

Culture and values

Buckinghamshire FRS staff stated that they were proud to work for the fire service to keep their communities safe.

We found the service's leadership encourages interaction and promotes a positive culture in different ways. The chief fire officer hosts birthday forums each month. He invites staff members with a birthday in that month to join him for an informal discussion about what is going on in the service. The leadership team publishes a weekly blog via the service's intranet and responds to service personnel, contacting them via email. Senior leaders visit stations and engage with staff members in a positive manner. Of the 160 respondents to our staff survey, 88.8 percent felt they were treated with respect and dignity. Additionally, of the 160 respondents, 16.3 percent reported feeling harassed and bullied within the last 12 months and 20 percent felt discriminated against at work in the last 12 months.

During inspection, we saw posters encouraging staff to nominate colleagues for the service 'safe awards 2019' which recognise hard work and achievement throughout the year.

Following on from the service's last cultural survey, the service has adopted a "you said, we did" initiative. It has instigated several ideas raised by service personnel. An example of this is roadshows around the service to highlight employee development, promotion processes and maintenance of competency recording. Staff felt that the face-to-face engagement was effective.

Getting the right people with the right skills
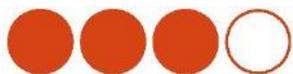
Good

Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service is good at getting the right people with the right skills. But we found the following area in which it needs to improve:

> **Areas for improvement**
> - The service should put in place an achievable succession plan, for the whole organisation.

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

Workforce planning

Buckinghamshire FRS's current workforce planning model runs from 2015-20. The model sets out how the service ensures it has the right number of operational staff with the appropriate skillsets to meet the requirements of its public safety plan. As at 31 March 2018, the service's operational firefighters (full-time equivalent) are 71 percent wholetime. The total full-time equivalent workforce has been steadily decreasing since peaking as at 31 March 2011. Several personnel have left the organisation to join other fire and rescue services, or the private sector, for financial reasons. But we found the service does not test the accuracy of its workforce planning assumptions. So, it cannot be assured that its planning is accurately modelled.

The service has 20 mixed fire stations as at 31 March 2018, with both wholetime and on-call firefighters. It utilises flexible firefighters to cover operational shortfalls across the service. The service is effective in training its staff and undertakes annual validation in core skills such as operational firefighting and wearing breathing apparatus. The service also runs thematic monthly training such as firefighting, road traffic collision training, working at height, and water safety. The service is good at recording this training and showed records detailing operational firefighters' maintenance of competence. Of the 160 respondents to our staff survey, 74.4 percent felt they had received enough training to enable them to do their job effectively.

As mentioned previously, the service operates a risk-based demand-led model which requires on-call staff and flexible-duty firefighters to take additional shifts to ensure the service has 12 wholetime fire engines available on any given day as stated in its public safety plan. The service is effective at providing additional training for on-call staff. They go on a two-week course where they are assessed in operational firefighting and rescue. The service also trains on-call staff in prevention and protection training so that they can assist in site inspections, and fire and wellness visits.

The service is good at identifying the skills and capabilities the service needs to be effective. The service analyses training needs for each area of the service and then allocates training against operational and non-operational requirements to carry out an effective public safety plan.

Learning and improvement

Buckinghamshire FRS provides a good range of training and learning opportunities for its staff. This includes practical and incident command training as well as e-learning theory-based assessment. Of the 160 respondents to our staff survey, 71.3 percent were satisfied with the current level of learning and development.

The service monitors the competency levels of staff using a computer-based system. The training records we inspected were up to date. The HEAT system reflects national standards for operational competence. These include national operational guidance, the fire professional framework and associated national occupational standards.

The training assurance team monitors the quality of training to ensure competency is maintained. This is overseen by seven area trainers. The training strategy group meets every quarter and reviews the level of training completed.

We heard the service regularly carries out training exercises within the service area. It also does cross-border exercises and attends multi-agency exercises at the Fire Service College. It effectively shares learning across the service following incidents, through its robust operational assurance process. Staff spoke positively about how the service learns from operational incidents. Learning is shared via on-call weekly bulletins and an operational assurance newsletter.

On-call firefighters train one night per week. They have further opportunity to maintain competence by working bank shifts with wholetime crews. We found the resourcing model is developing the competency of on-call staff. We also heard how it is promoting inclusivity between wholetime and on-call firefighters.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity
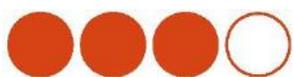
Good

Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service is good at ensuring fairness and promoting diversity. But we found the following area in which it needs to improve:

Areas for improvement

- The service should plan to be more ambitious in its efforts to attract a more diverse workforce which better reflects the community it serves.

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

Seeking and acting on staff feedback

Buckinghamshire FRS seeks feedback through station visits, chief fire officer birthday forums and senior management team blogs. It encourages all staff to contact senior leaders via the service's intranet. The service communicates to its staff via weekly bulletins and newsletters and the service tracks the number of staff who access the information electronically.

The service responded to feedback from their last cultural survey in 2017 by launching a "you said, we did" campaign to highlight changes it had made. One example was identifying some underspend and using it to purchase Velcro badges. These have been applied to new fire kit so that members of the public know they are being served by service personnel.

Staff highlighted several areas where they felt the service could do better. These included providing better management training and supporting future leaders.

Of the 160 staff who responded to our staff survey, 79.4 percent stated there were opportunities for them to feed their views upwards in the service and 61.3 percent were confident that those suggestions were listened to.

The service engages openly with its representative bodies and holds regular structured meetings. Staff representatives overall felt their opinions were valued and consultation on policy was constructive.

The service receives very few formal grievances, but those it does receive are handled fairly, in line with service policy. It reaches resolutions within reasonable timescales.

Diversity

The service workforce does not reflect the community it serves. But it is taking steps to recruit a more diverse workforce. As at 31 March 2018, 2.4 percent of firefighters were from a black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) background. This compares to 15.6 percent of the residential population. And 4.8 percent of firefighters were female.

The service has launched a successful apprentice recruitment programme, employing 37 apprentices as of 31 March 2018, according to the service's data. The service offers familiarisation days and female firefighter days to encourage community members from diverse backgrounds to apply. Of the 14 apprentices who joined in 2018/19, 35 percent were female, and 14 percent were from BAME backgrounds.

An initiative with a media company allowed the service to develop digital audio recruitment advertising. This allows adverts about joining the service to be streamed to people listening to local radio, targeting a specific demographic within Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. This has not made any significant changes to the workforce, but we recognise this as a positive step to recruit a workforce that reflects the communities it serves.

Managing performance and developing leaders

Requires improvement

> **Areas for improvement**
> - The service should put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders.

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

Managing performance

Buckinghamshire FRS has arrangements to assess and develop staff performance. Every member of staff has an annual appraisal with a review of objectives set by their line manager mid-year. This allows staff to review the previous year's performance and to set new objectives for the coming year. Staff spoke positively about the process. But as at 31 March 2019, the service showed varying and low levels of all appraisals being completed.

We heard that the service was not completing all appraisals in a timely manner. And we heard that objectives were not always clear. The service is addressing issues relating to managing performance through its "you said, we did" campaign. We found the service has begun to provide specific training for managers so that they are competent in undertaking appraisals. This training programme will support middle managers and ensure the process is applied consistently across all staff groups. The service provides an aspirational leadership programme. It allows staff to develop

leadership skills that will enable them to manage teams and departments across the service.

The service also offers additional support to individuals to improve service performance. A member of staff has been supported to undertake a specific qualification to help complete departmental plans. Another is undertaking a NEBOSH diploma in health and safety to allow the service to solve its health and safety issues in-house, rather than paying for external advice.

Developing leaders

Buckinghamshire FRS does not have a process for identifying and developing staff with high potential to be senior leaders of the future. We found that its promotion process relies on multiple documents for guidance. It is not easy for candidates to understand. But following the "you said, we did" campaign, the service has started a programme to recognise and develop potential senior leaders. We found the promotion process to be structured and fair, and all candidates were offered feedback and development plans.

Annex A – About the data

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

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

Where we collected data directly from FRSs, we took reasonable steps to agree the design of the data collection with services and with other interested parties, such as the Home Office. This was primarily through our Technical Advisory Group, which brings together representatives from the fire sector and the Home Office to support the inspection's design and development, including data collection.

We give services several opportunities to validate the data we collect to make sure the evidence presented is accurate. For instance, we asked all services to:

- check the data they submitted to us via an online application;
- check the final data used in each service report; and
- correct any errors they identified.

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

Methodology

Use of data in the reports and to form judgments

The data we cite in this report and use to form our judgments is the information that was available at the time of inspection. Due to the nature of data collection, there are often gaps between the timeframe the data covers, when it was collected, and when it becomes available to use.

If more recent data became available after inspection, showing a different trend or context, we have referred to this in the report. However, it was not used to form our judgments.

In a small number of cases, data available at the time of the inspection was later found to be incorrect. For example, a service might have identified an error in its original data return. When this is the case, we have corrected the data and used the more reliable data in the report.

Population

For all uses of population as a denominator in our calculations, unless otherwise noted, we use ONS mid-2017 population estimates. At the time of inspection this was the most recent data available.

2018 survey of public perception of the fire and rescue service

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

However, a minority of the interviews (757) were conducted face-to-face with trained interviewers in respondents' homes. A small number of respondents were also interviewed online via postal invitations to the survey. These face-to-face interviews were specifically targeted at groups traditionally under-represented on online panels, and so ensure that survey respondents are as representative as possible of the total adult population of England. The sampling method used isn't a statistical random sample. The sample size in each service area was small, varying between 400 and 446 individuals. So any results provided are only an indication of satisfaction rather than an absolute.

Survey findings are available on BMG's website.

Staff survey

We conducted a staff survey open to all members of FRS workforces across England. We received 3,083 responses between 8 March and 9 August 2019 from across the 15 Tranche 3 services.

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

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

The results are not representative of the opinions and attitudes of a service's whole workforce. The survey was self-selecting, and the response rate ranged from 7 percent to 40 percent of a service's workforce. So any findings should be considered alongside the service's overall response rate, which is cited in the report.

To protect respondents' anonymity and allow completion on shared devices, it was not possible to limit responses to one per person. So it is possible that a single person could have completed the survey more than once.

Each service was provided with a unique access code to try to make sure that only those currently working in a service could complete the survey. However, it is possible that the survey and access code could have been shared and completed by people other than its intended respondents.

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

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

Service in numbers

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

Perceived effectiveness of service

We took this data from the following question of the 2018 survey of public perceptions of the FRS:

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

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

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

Incidents attended per 1,000 population

We took this data from the Home Office fire statistics, 'Incidents attended by fire and rescue services in England, by incident type and fire and rescue authority' for the period from 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2019.

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

- There are seven worksheets in this file. The 'FIRE0102' worksheet shows the number of incidents attended by type of incident and fire and rescue authority (FRA) for each financial year. The 'FIRE0102 Quarterly' worksheet shows the number of incidents attended by type of incident and FRA for each quarter. The worksheet 'Data' provides the raw data for the two main data tables (from 2009/10). The 'Incidents chart - front page', 'Chart 1' and 'Chart 2' worksheets provide the data for the corresponding charts in the statistical commentary. The 'FRS geographical categories' worksheet shows how FRAs are categorised.

- Fire data, covering all incidents that FRSs attend, is collected by the Incident Recording System (IRS). For several reasons some records take longer than others for services to upload to the IRS. Totals are constantly being amended (by relatively small numbers).

- We took data for Service in Numbers from the August 2019 incident publication. So, figures may not directly match more recent publications due to data updates.

Home fire safety checks per 1,000 population

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

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

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

- Dorset FRS and Wiltshire FRS merged to form Dorset and Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire FRSs before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.

- Figures for 'Fire Risk Checks carried out by Elderly (65+)', 'Fire Risk Checks carried out by Disabled' and 'Number of Fire Risk Checks carried out by Partners' don't include imputed figures because a lot of services can't supply these figures.

- The checks included in a home fire safety check can vary between services. You should consider this when making direct comparisons between services.

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

- After inspection, East Sussex FRS resubmitted data on its total number of home fire safety checks and the number of checks targeted at the elderly and disabled in the year to 31 March 2018. The latest data changes the percentage of checks that were targeted at the elderly (from 54.1 percent to 54.9 percent) and disabled (from 24.7 percent to 25.4 percent) in England. However, as noted above, in all reports we have used the original figures that were available at the time of inspection.

Fire safety audits per 100 known premises

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

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

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

- Berkshire FRS didn't provide figures for premises known between 2014/15 and 2017/18.

- Dorset FRS and Wiltshire FRS merged to form Dorset and Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire FRSs before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.

- Several FRAs report 'Premises known to FRAs' as estimates based on historical data.

Firefighter cost per person per year

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- We calculate BAME residential population data from ONS 2011 census data. This figure is calculated by dividing the BAME residential population by the total population.
- We calculate female residential population data from ONS mid-2017 population estimates.
- The percentage of BAME firefighters does not include those who opted not to disclose their ethnic origin. There are large variations between services in the number of firefighters who did not state their ethnic origin.

- Dorset FRS and Wiltshire FRS merged to form Dorset and Wiltshire FRS on 1 April 2016. All data for Dorset and Wiltshire FRSs before 1 April 2016 is excluded from this report.

Annex B – Fire and rescue authority governance

These are the different models of fire and rescue authority (FRA) governance in England. Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service is a combined FRA.

Metropolitan FRA

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

Combined FRA

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

County FRA

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

Unitary authorities

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

London

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

Mayoral Combined Authority

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

Police, fire and crime commissioner FRA

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

Isles of Scilly

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