



HMICFRS

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary
and Fire & Rescue Services

State of Fire and Rescue

The Annual Assessment of
Fire and Rescue Services in England

2024–25

His Majesty's Chief Inspector
of Fire and Rescue Services

**His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and
Fire & Rescue Services**

State of Fire and Rescue: The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2024–25

**Presented to Parliament pursuant to section 28B of the Fire and Rescue Services
Act 2004**



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Foreword

This is my third annual report to the Secretary of State under [section 28B of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#). It is my first annual report on fire and rescue since the new Government came into power in July 2024. The report contains my assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of fire and rescue services in England, which is based on the inspection reports we published between February 2023 and August 2025.

I also offer my reflections on the progress the fire and rescue sector has made since we started inspecting services in 2018. I highlight the overall improvements, and I acknowledge that, in several important areas, the sector still needs to make further progress.

In April 2025, a machinery of government change moved all responsibility for fire policy from the Home Office to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. This is a valuable opportunity to increase the momentum behind the reform that the sector has long been waiting for.

Fire and rescue services have a crucial role in protecting the public and making communities safe. Across the country, there are numerous examples that show the unwavering dedication and professionalism of fire and rescue service staff.

Alongside the rest of the country, I was deeply saddened by the major incident at Bicester Motion, Oxfordshire, in May 2025. Firefighters Martyn Sadler and Jennie Logan and a member of the public tragically lost their lives. It was a reminder to us all of the inherent risks faced by those who dedicate their lives to protecting others.

Contributions to my assessment

To help form my assessment, I wrote to chief fire officers, chairs of [fire and rescue authorities](#), [police, fire and crime commissioners](#), deputy mayors and other interested parties to gather their views on the state of fire and rescue in England. I received 44 responses. I extend my thanks to everyone who replied and offered their reflections.

I have used other reports, information and analysis made available to me to inform this report. I have drawn on findings from other relevant inspections, such as [our August 2024 thematic report, 'Standards of behaviour: The handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services'](#).

I have also considered information that we have gathered from our consultation events with the sector. This includes our annual chiefs and chairs event, where we meet with chief fire officers and chairs of fire and rescue authorities throughout England to discuss specific topics.

I would like to thank my colleagues at the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#), the Home Office, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Fire Standards Board, the Local Government Association, staff representative bodies and all other public organisations we work with.

I would also like to thank the staff of all 44 fire and rescue services. I appreciate the time and effort that goes into preparing for our inspections, and I commend those who use our findings as an opportunity to improve.

Finally, I express my gratitude to all staff at HMICFRS who carry out and support our inspections.

Changes at the inspectorate

In March 2025, Kathryn Stone OBE was appointed as HM Inspector for police forces and fire and rescue services in the Wales and Western Region. Previously, Kathryn was chair of the bar standards board and a non-executive member of the board of the Crown Prosecution Service. She has also had a long-standing career in public service and advocacy.

It is a pleasure to welcome Kathryn to the team. Her extensive experience will be a valuable asset to the inspectorate.



Sir Andy Cooke QPM DL

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services



Summary

Services are performing well in some areas, and in others they should improve

Progress in our Round 3 inspections

Between March 2023 and August 2025, we carried out our third full round of inspections of all 44 fire and rescue services in England (known as our Round 3 inspections). We include [links to the 44 service reports in Annex B](#), and [a summary of the grades for all 44 services is available on our website](#).

Several services made improvements in our Round 3 inspections. We closed 416 of 695 outstanding [areas for improvement \(AFIs\)](#) and issued fewer AFIs in this round. We also identified 67 examples of [promising](#) and [innovative practice](#) across 25 services.

Overall, 73 percent of the graded judgments we awarded in Round 3 were ‘adequate’, ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’. This means that services demonstrated at least some of the [characteristics of good performance](#) in most areas. And 43 percent of all grades met or exceeded our [benchmark](#) for good performance where we issued good or outstanding grades. Good is the level of performance we expect all services to achieve and is what the public deserve.

But progress across the sector remains inconsistent. We haven’t yet seen the sustained improvement we had hoped for across all services and all our inspection areas. Of the 44 services, 27 had fewer AFIs compared to Round 2. But some services hadn’t made enough progress against AFIs we issued in our previous rounds of inspections. Almost half of the AFIs outstanding in Round 3 remain uncompleted from previous rounds.

The number of [causes of concern](#) we issued stayed broadly the same compared to Round 2. But, in Round 3, seven causes of concern that we initially identified in Round 2 were still outstanding.

There were encouraging signs of progress in services improving their protection departments in particular. We awarded three services an outstanding grade for their protection work. And other services had made considerable progress in improving their risk-based inspection programmes to target high-risk premises and adopt a structured approach to auditing.

I was also encouraged to see continued progress in the sector's response to the [Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 recommendations](#). Many services had improved their operational preparedness, [control room](#) procedures and how they record and share [fire survival guidance](#).

However, I am particularly concerned by the competing pressures that protection staff continue to experience. This is due to increasing demand and ongoing difficulties in recruiting and retaining skilled protection officers. Protection departments may be unable to correctly prioritise other areas of high risk, which could potentially compromise public safety.

Services should have effective governance structures and workforce plans

In high-performing services, strong internal governance often helps to support continuous improvement. In our Round 3 inspections, we found that some services needed to improve their internal governance arrangements. Some services had limited strategic oversight and scrutiny of their operational and corporate functions. Often, these shortcomings weren't properly identified or escalated within the service.

[Fire and rescue authorities](#) have an important role in setting strategic direction, providing oversight and scrutiny and leading improvement. And they need access to timely and accurate information to effectively hold services to account. In our inspections, we identified some services that weren't reporting shortcomings to the fire and rescue authority in a full, transparent or timely manner.

Effective workforce planning is essential to make sure services have the right people with the necessary skills in place. Services should have workforce and financial plans that reflect the risks and priorities they have identified in their [community risk management plans](#). While some services have workplace plans that are aligned with their community risk management plans, many still don't fully understand the capabilities of their workforce or the importance of improving their succession plans. In some services, this is because leadership teams don't effectively oversee staff skills.

I am pleased to report that most services are now increasing their focus on improving productivity. But some services still need to better understand how they use their [wholetime](#) firefighters and take a more proactive approach to maximise efficiency.

Despite decades of sector-wide focus on the need to improve equality, diversity and inclusion, progress remains limited. Some services are using [positive action](#) to help create more inclusive and representative workforces. For example, they are making efforts to improve the fairness and transparency of recruitment, development and promotion processes. But in some services, we found that leaders had little involvement in improving equality, diversity and inclusion.

Similarly, poor values, cultures and behaviour remain widespread. In too many services, staff told us that their senior leaders weren't consistently modelling the expected values of their service. When leaders fail to uphold standards, it erodes trust and weakens morale, which ultimately undermines improvement efforts.

I set out the findings from our Round 3 inspections in more detail in [chapter 1](#).

Services should focus on improving persistent issues to achieve better outcomes for the public

I am encouraged by the notable progress fire and rescue services have made in several areas. However, persistent issues continue to slow the pace and consistency of change across the sector.

In some services, I have seen the positive impact of effective leadership. Leaders at all levels have an important role in shaping culture, setting direction and inspiring progress. Some senior leaders lack the strategic awareness and skills needed to lead effectively. In our inspections, we found that many services were still not considering how to develop leaders of the future. They aren't giving leaders the skills and support they need to carry out their roles effectively.

Equally, a positive organisational culture is essential to foster the behaviours, values and leadership needed to create lasting change in fire and rescue services. I am pleased that some services have introduced independent reporting lines, established [professional standards units](#) and commissioned independent culture reviews. Leaders should set a clear direction, model the service's values and create the right conditions for improvement.

I am concerned that some services haven't significantly improved the recruitment, retention and availability of [on-call](#) firefighters. Some services have introduced initiatives to help widen the recruitment pool beyond the traditional five-minute radius. But, in others, on-call fire engines are often not available due to limited numbers of staff or a lack of training or skills. Services need to make sure that their recruitment processes are as effective and efficient as possible. This will give greater flexibility in working arrangements and attract more people into the roles.

Decisive action will support sector reform

In 2024 there was an election of a new Government and, in April 2025, a machinery of government change moved all fire policy from the Home Office to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. These changes in government responsibilities present a critical opportunity to implement the long overdue and much-needed reform across the fire and rescue sector. The Government must be decisive and follow through on its commitment to reform.

While some services have made progress, persistent issues continue to prevent improvement in certain areas. These challenges prompted us to issue [seven national recommendations to support reform \(which we list in Annex A\)](#). Although we issued six of these several years ago, three remain unaddressed. These recommendations now sit with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Until they are addressed in full, the sector won't be able to give the best possible service to the public. We will continue to use our independent voice to support and guide decision-making around reform.

I remain firmly of the view that extending our powers would support further improvement. We don't have the power to enforce the recommendations we make. Instead, we rely on services voluntarily acting on them, and this doesn't always happen. I have previously called for parity with policing legislation and for our powers to go further to create accountability and promote change. I ask that ministers give this serious consideration.

To help support reform and professionalise the sector, it is critical to establish a College of Fire and Rescue. Although I welcome the Government's renewed commitment to introduce this, it should act decisively. The need to establish the college is long overdue.

Services need to be committed to continuous improvement

To meet current and future challenges, fire and rescue services need to be open to opportunities for continuous improvement. We help with this through our inspections, thematic reviews, spotlight reports and events that promote collaboration and sharing of effective practice.

It is only possible for services to make improvements when they participate fully and openly with our inspection process. Services should use our inspection findings to develop robust improvement plans and make meaningful progress.

Achieving lasting change in the fire and rescue sector requires a system-wide approach. National bodies, such as the Local Government Association, [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) and Fire Standards Board, give valuable support and guidance to services. Services that actively adopt national guidance, align with national standards and embrace support typically perform better in the relevant areas we inspect.

1. Findings from our Round 3 inspections

In this chapter, I draw on the findings from our third round of fire and rescue service inspections.

Services' progress in our Round 3 inspections

In this section, I focus on the overall progress services have made. It identifies themes on the effectiveness of the operational service provided to the public, including prevention, protection and response.

Background: our grading, assessment and data

In March 2023, we started our third full round of inspections of all 44 fire and rescue services in England (known as our Round 3 inspections). In April 2025, we completed our inspection activity and published our final Round 3 reports in August 2025.

We include [links to the 44 service reports in Annex B](#), and [a summary of the grades for all 44 services is available on our website](#).

We didn't give overall grades for effectiveness, efficiency and people as we did in our first and second rounds of inspections. We assessed services against what we judge to be the [characteristics of good performance](#) in each inspection area, and we more clearly link our judgments to [causes of concern \(CoCs\)](#) and [areas for improvement \(AFIs\)](#).

We also expanded our previous four-tier system of graded judgments to five by introducing an 'adequate' grade. As a result, we can state more precisely where we consider improvement is needed and highlight good performance more effectively. These changes mean it isn't possible to make direct comparisons between grades awarded in this round of fire and rescue service inspections with those from previous years.

More information on data and analysis in this report is included in the ['About the data 2023–25' section of our website](#). Our [2023–25 Round 3 inspection methodology is also available on our website](#).

Overall summary of progress and analysis of grades

Several services made improvements in our Round 3 inspections. We closed 416 out of 695 AFIs, which represents 60 percent of the total.

We also identified 67 examples of [promising](#) and [innovative practice](#) across 25 services. I encourage services to refer to the [National Fire Chiefs Council \(NFCC\)'s Positive Practice Portal](#), where these examples are stored.

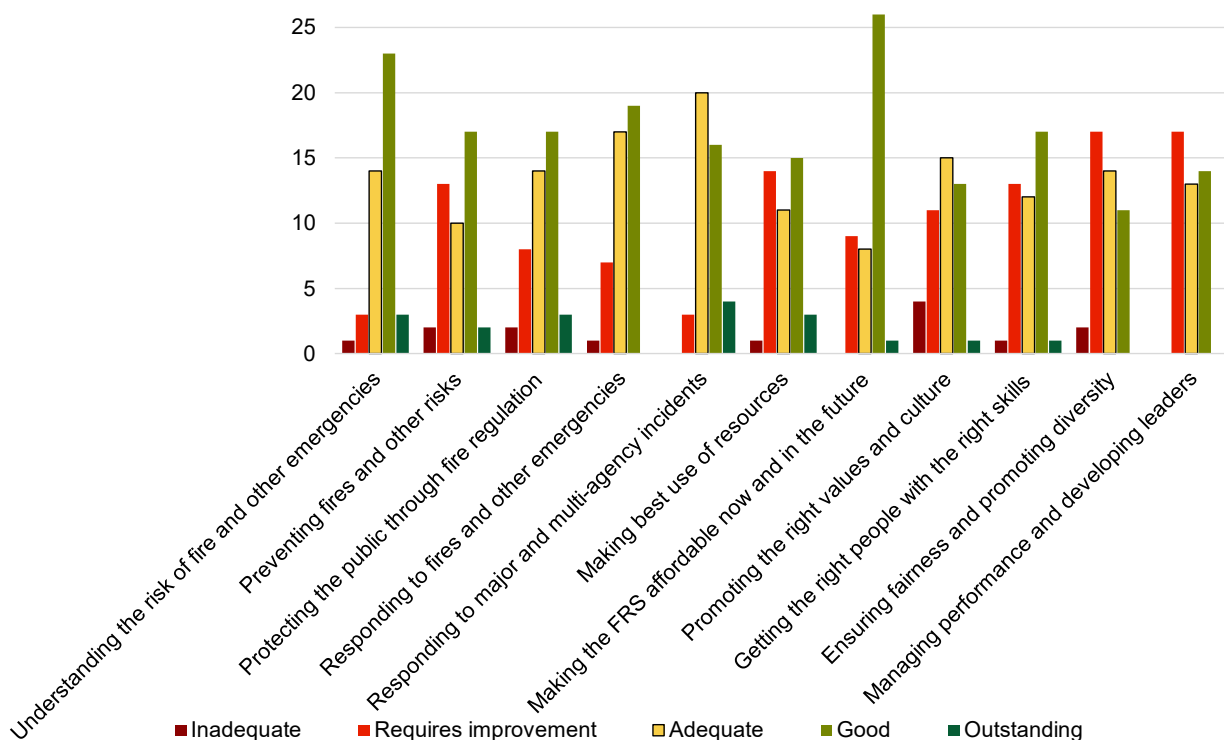
Overall, 73 percent of the graded judgments we awarded in Round 3 were 'adequate', 'good' or 'outstanding'. This means services were able to show at least some of the characteristics of good performance in most areas. And 43 percent of all grades met or exceeded our [benchmark](#) for good performance where we issued good or outstanding grades. This is the level of performance we expect all services to achieve, and it is what the public deserve.

Overall, in this round, we gave the following proportion of grades:

- 4 percent outstanding;
- 39 percent good;
- 30 percent adequate;
- 24 percent requires improvement; and
- 3 percent inadequate.

But progress across the sector remains inconsistent. We haven't yet seen sustained improvement across all services and all our inspection areas. Services performed best in our 'making the fire and rescue service affordable now and in the future' and 'understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies' inspection areas. And services performed most poorly in 'ensuring fairness and promoting diversity', 'promoting the right values and culture' and 'managing performance and developing leaders'. This is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Judgment grades assigned to fire and rescue services in England in our Round 3 inspections



Source: HMICFRS

Areas for improvement

Where we identify an aspect of a service's practice, policy or performance that falls short of the expected standard, we will issue an AFI. During our Round 3 assessments, we issued fewer AFIs than in our last round of inspections (14 percent lower or 95 fewer AFIs). Across our effectiveness, efficiency and people questions, the number of AFIs we issued decreased by 22 percent, 14 percent and 4 percent respectively. Responding to major and multi-agency incidents is the only area in which there was an increase in the number of AFIs issued. These findings show the efforts that some services are making to improve.

In Round 3, 27 of 44 services had fewer AFIs compared to Round 2. In particular, we closed a large number of AFIs in services such as London Fire Brigade, North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service.

But some services hadn't made enough progress against AFIs that we issued in our previous rounds of inspections. Almost half of the AFIs in Round 3 remain uncompleted from previous rounds. We refer to these as 'enduring AFIs', and this is shown in Figure 2.

Where a service lacks the right skills, it may have limited capacity to manage change. This means it may struggle to address AFIs that we issued in Round 2 and make continuous improvements in Round 3.

Figure 2: Areas for improvement in Round 3 by whether they were enduring or newly issued



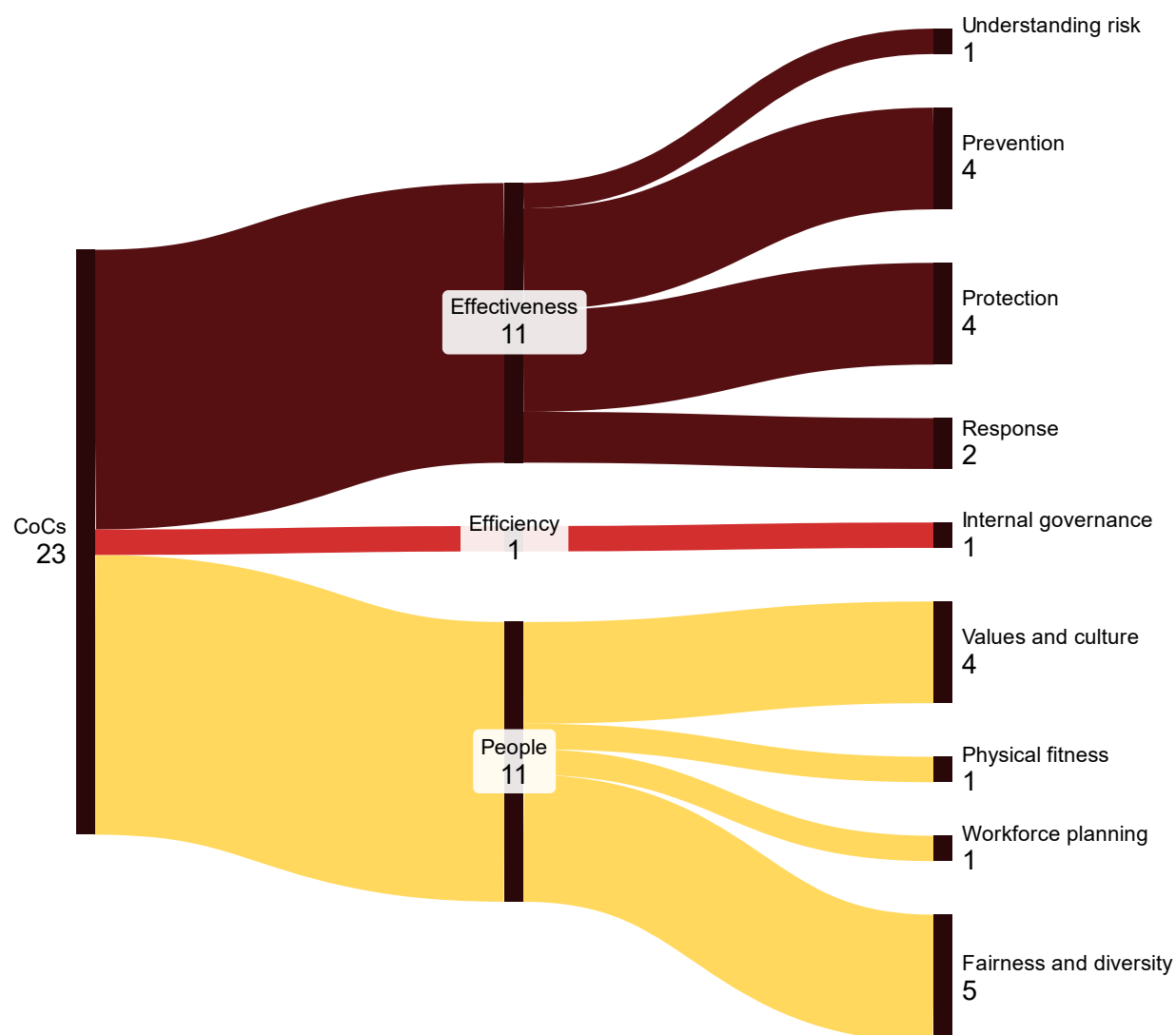
Source: HMICFRS

Causes of concern

In our inspections, if we identify a serious, critical or systemic shortcoming in a service's practice, policy or performance, we will report it as a CoC. The number of CoCs we issued across the 44 services has stayed broadly the same between our Round 2 (24 CoCs in 16 services) and Round 3 inspections (23 CoCs in 15 services).

But there are persistent challenges that continue to affect services. In Round 3, seven CoCs that we initially identified in Round 2 were still outstanding. I am disappointed by the slow progress that these services are making.

Figure 3: Cause of concern in Round 3 according to question



Source: HMICFRS

As shown in Figure 3, we issued 23 CoCs in our Round 3 inspections:

- 11 for effectiveness (1 for understanding risk, 4 for prevention, 4 for protection and 2 for response);
- 1 for internal governance; and
- 11 for people (4 for values and culture, 1 for staff fitness, 1 for workforce planning and 5 for fairness and diversity).

This means that these services aren't identifying and addressing shortcomings in these areas of practice, policy or performance before they become serious, critical or systemic problems.

Our monitoring process

If a service doesn't effectively address our concerns, we may move it to [our enhanced monitoring process, which is known as 'Engage'](#). Encouragingly, three services previously in Engage made enough progress during Round 3 to return to our default 'Scan' phase. We returned London Fire Brigade to Scan in March 2024, Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service in March 2025 and Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service in August 2025.

At the end of Round 3, one service, Avon Fire and Rescue, remained in our enhanced monitoring process. We moved the service to Engage in November 2023.

In Round 3, we issued Avon Fire and Rescue Service with new CoCs for identifying risks, fire prevention, responding to fires and emergencies, and values and culture. In October 2024, following a revisit, we closed the CoC related to responding to fires and emergencies. And in September 2025, following a further revisit, we closed the CoC related to identifying risks. We will next inspect the service in early 2026, as part of our full 2025–27 inspection programme. And we will continue to monitor its progress using checkpoint meetings to focus on the improvements it is making.

Services are making progress to prevent incidents

Fire and rescue services have an important role to keep people safe. They visit people's homes to give fire safety advice, fit smoke alarms and support those most at risk. They also work with schools and communities to teach people how to stay safe from fire.

Between the years ending 31 March 2015 and 31 March 2025, the number of all incidents that fire and rescue services attended increased by 22 percent. The type of incidents attended has changed over time. While fire incidents have decreased, the number and range of non-fire incidents attended, such as road traffic collisions and flooding and water rescues, has increased over the past decade:

- The number of fire incidents has decreased by 8.1 percent from 155,063 in 2015 to 142,494 in 2025.
- The number of non-fire incidents has increased by 69 percent from 125,340 in 2015 to 211,222 incidents in 2025.
- The number of non-fatal casualties has decreased by 16 percent from 7,596 in 2015 to 6,410 in 2025.

Advancements in technology, enhanced safety regulations and the proactive efforts of fire and rescue services can prevent incidents and have helped to keep people safer than they were a decade ago.

Fire and rescue services also have a responsibility to help [safeguard](#) the most [vulnerable people](#) in society. During our Round 3 inspections, we found that services were increasingly effective in identifying vulnerable individuals and giving them tailored fire safety advice through [home fire safety visits \(HFSVs\)](#).

Since our first round of inspections in 2018, the number of HFSVs that services complete each year has stayed broadly the same. But services have improved how they target these visits. In 2021/22, 76.6 percent (337,400 out of 440,381) of all visits across England included at least one vulnerable or at-risk individual compared to 85.1 percent (501,123 out of 588,855) in 2024/25. This means that, despite demands on resourcing, services can more effectively help those most at risk.

In our inspections, we identified several examples of promising practice in preventing fires and managing other risks. Humberside Fire and Rescue Service demonstrated outstanding performance in this area. It has a dedicated team that responds to incidents involving people who have fallen in their homes. We identified a similar initiative in Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Promising practice: Humberside Fire and Rescue Service works well with local health organisations to provide a falls response team

The service has a partnership with local health organisations to provide an [on-call](#) falls response team. This has a significant impact on the local health situation. The team helps more people live in their homes for longer, which reduces demand on local health and care services.

We reported on this initiative in [our 2021/22 Humberside Fire and Rescue Service inspection report](#). Since then, the service has evaluated the effectiveness of this work. It told us that from July 2023 to March 2024, it responded to 969 falls.

When staff respond to someone who has fallen, they also carry out prevention work, such as giving home fire safety advice and installing smoke alarms. This contributes to the service's prevention objectives.

Promising practice: Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service supports vulnerable individuals in Staffordshire by providing a falls response team and a home from hospital team

The service works with West Midlands Ambulance Service and Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care Board to provide a team of specialist Fire and Health Partnership Technicians. These respond to non-[critical incidents](#) for those who have fallen in their home, and support them after their discharge from the Royal Stoke University Hospital.

Between 7 December 2022 and 30 April 2024, the falls response team attended 1,197 incidents. The average time it took them to attend was 38 minutes. Between 4 December 2023 and 30 April 2024, the home from hospital team helped 599 patients return home.

This work links directly to the priorities of the service's [Safety Plan](#) for prevention, including early intervention and targeting those most at risk of fire and other emergencies. The falls response team attending non-critical incidents allows the West Midlands Ambulance Service to focus their resources on incidents where life is at risk. The home from hospital initiative helps avoid unnecessary re-admissions to hospital of people who have been discharged.

We identified another example of promising practice in Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service, which has a project focused on rehabilitating adult fire setters.

Promising practice: Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service's behaviour change programme for adult fire setters helps them gain new skills

The [Atlas Programme](#) is a tailored intervention that aims to rehabilitate adult fire setters.

The project is implemented in collaboration with the Greater Manchester Probation Service and provides support and education to change the behaviour of adults with a history or increased likelihood of deliberately starting fires. The project is the first of its kind and is supported by clinical psychologists to understand the root cause of behaviours and provide positive change.

The course aims to help adults with a history of deliberate fire setting to gain life and employability skills and to reduce their risk. One participant became eligible for long-term accommodation after completing the course. He reported back to the project that it had helped him regain his self-worth, confidence and motivation to continue with his long-term rehabilitation.

Some services need to focus more on their prevention work, particularly in relation to vulnerable people

Although some services have improved their prevention departments, prevention work itself often lacks the long-term focus it needs. This undermines the sector's broader objective: to keep communities safe from fire and other emergencies. In total, we issued 11 AFIs in this area in Round 3.

During our inspections, we repeatedly identified services that allocated resources without properly considering the level of risk. Too many services still aren't consistently using the full range of available risk data to inform their prevention strategies. This results in a failure to effectively target resources at the most vulnerable people. And in some services, we found that they didn't adequately prioritise those most vulnerable from fire in the home. We issued three CoCs in this area.

If services fail to adequately resource prevention work, it can lead to significant and increasing backlogs in HFSVs. This means that some services can't manage these delays appropriately. In our Round 3 inspections, we identified six services that had difficulty managing backlogs.

Some services are too reliant on dedicated community fire safety teams to carry out their prevention strategies. And there are often more HFSVs than these staff can complete alone. In our inspections, we found that fire crews could contribute more to prevention work but were often underused or unsure of their role in this work. Services need to better co-ordinate prevention work across teams so that all staff can contribute to preventing fires.

We commend the efforts services have made in this area. But they should continue to improve their resource allocation and workforce planning. This will help make sure that prevention work is sustainable and alleviate pressure from the backlogs of HFSVs to keep the public safe.

Services have improved the resourcing of and working practices in their protection departments

We found encouraging signs of improvement in protection departments. These departments help to keep people and buildings safe by assuring compliance with fire safety laws such as the [Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005](#).

Notably, we awarded three services an outstanding grade for their protection work, which reflects exemplary performance in areas such as risk-based inspection, audit quality and strategic alignment. These services show a clear understanding of local risk and demonstrate good leadership, and they effectively implement national guidance.

Innovative practice: County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service is using artificial intelligence to support a range of functions

The service is using artificial intelligence technology to help analyse its data and support well-informed decisions, including for risk profiling and proposing work plans for [watch](#)-based crews to improve productivity.

The service has used artificial intelligence to develop its risk-based inspection programme for auditing fire safety management in buildings (places) and categorising [vulnerability in the community](#) (people). It is improving the accuracy of [risk assessments](#), helping to prioritise workloads so they align with the needs of the community and reducing the likelihood of fire and other emergencies. This improves community safety.

Services are improving how they target risk through their risk-based inspection programmes, but some challenges remain

Services use a risk-based inspection programme (RBIP) to decide how often they need to inspect buildings based on the level of fire risk they pose. The RBIP helps to prioritise efforts to effectively reduce fire risk.

In addition to the services that we issued with outstanding grades for their protection work, several other services have made commendable efforts to improve their RBIPs. This includes better targeting of high-risk premises and more structured approaches to audit planning and implementation.

Encouragingly, towards the end of Round 3, many services had started to implement the most recent version of [NFCC](#) guidance on building RBIPs, which was published in February 2025. Where services have adopted this guidance, we found that staff were better able to understand and communicate the rationale for prioritising risk. This leads to more coherent and transparent decision-making.

Services typically categorise fire risk by building type and assign it a score according to the level of risk. Many services continue to struggle to target high-risk buildings, such as hospitals, care homes and buildings with sleeping accommodation. This is often due to inaccurate risk scoring or poor performance management, which may mean some high-risk buildings don't receive the scrutiny needed. In some services, improvements in implementing RBIPs have led to compromises in other important areas, notably communicating with businesses on the importance of complying with fire safety regulations.

Many services have improved their protection work

Under the Regulatory Reform Order (Fire Safety) 2005, services are required to carry out activities, such as fire safety audits, to help identify and address poor practices that could result in fire. Services examine premises and documents to make sure that buildings meet the necessary criteria. If necessary, they then use enforcement powers to make sure that buildings comply with fire safety legislation.

The volume of fire protection work has increased over time, with more services achieving their audit targets. Between 2021/2022 and 2024/25, there was an increase in the total number of services that achieved their target for auditing high-risk buildings in England. This increased from 21.6 percent (8 out of 37) to 36.6 percent (15 out of 41).

The total number of enforcement actions across all services in England increased by 24.1 percent between 2018/19 and 2024/25. Services carried out 17,177 enforcement actions in 2018/19 and 21,323 in 2024/25.

These trends show meaningful progress in improving fire safety compliance, which should lead to better outcomes for the public.

But several services still need to make more progress. They should address:

- the consistency of their audits;
- the robustness of their quality assurance processes; and
- their ability to meet audit targets.

We issued 13 services with AFIs related to managing and resourcing their RBIPs. And we issued 15 AFIs regarding quality assurance of audits and 13 on lack of communication with businesses.

Protection departments experience competing demands

While I am encouraged by the progress I have seen in protection departments, I am concerned that protection staff remain under considerable strain due to the competing demands placed on them.

Protection departments manage essential areas including RBIPs, building consultations, enforcement activity and implementing recommendations from the [Grenfell Tower Inquiry](#). The introduction of the [Building Safety Regulator](#) and the increasing involvement of services to remediate unsafe buildings have further intensified these demands.

During our Round 3 inspections, we monitored the potential impact of introducing the Building Safety Regulator, which was established by the [Building Safety Act 2022](#). Despite the additional pressures it introduced, services told us that they were managing this transition effectively.

However, I am concerned that these competing pressures could make limited resources even more stretched. Protection departments may be unable to correctly prioritise other areas of high risk, which could potentially compromise public safety. Responses to my letter to gather views on the state of fire and rescue services echoed my concerns. Some services reported feeling somewhat unprepared to remediate unsafe medium-height buildings.

Services also continue to experience challenges recruiting, retaining and developing skilled protection officers, which further limits their ability to manage competing demands. This is due to:

- the specialist nature of protection work;
- high demand for these skills across both the public and private sectors; and
- the limited number of university degree programmes in fire engineering.

I encourage the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to discuss expanding educational provision and support for careers in fire engineering with the Department for Education.

Services should continue to improve the capacity and capability of their protection teams

Some services have tried to recruit more protection staff to manage demand. In 2024/25, 20 out of 44 services increased their number of dedicated protection staff from the previous year. However, this is lower than in 2022/23, when 27 out of 43 services increased their total number of protection staff. These figures also include staff who are developing their skills and will take many years to be fully qualified. High workloads and staff turnover mean that progress in training and retaining these staff remains inconsistent.

I welcome the [Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 2 recommendations](#) aimed at strengthening the capacity and capability of protection teams. Once services have fully implemented them, the changes could help address the pressures in the workforce. Services would be able to create clearer career pathways, improve access to specialist training and make the protection staff role more attractive. Introducing a College of Fire and Rescue could also help to further professionalise the sector and make sure services receive the necessary support to improve public safety.

In our 2025–27 inspections, we will continue to closely monitor the performance of protection departments. We will assess how effectively services manage their various protection responsibilities, from audits and enforcement to communicating with businesses and developing the workforce.

Services are making good progress against the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 recommendations

In our inspections, we found that services were continuing to make improvements in response to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 recommendations.

In February 2025, [I wrote to the Government and the sector to give an update on services' progress against the Phase 1 recommendations](#). I reiterated the importance of sustained, co-ordinated action. This mid-point assessment reflected our findings from inspections of 25 fire and rescue services in England. Findings from our subsequent inspections of the remaining 19 services further support the main findings in my letter.

In our Round 3 inspections, we found that many services had improved operational preparedness, [control room](#) procedures and the recording and sharing of [fire survival guidance](#). Many have improved how they manage information during incidents, communicate between control rooms and incident grounds and train staff to respond to high-rise fires.

While it is clear that some services have made progress, the pace of change is inconsistent. Some services still have work to do to fully integrate these practices into day-to-day operations.

For example, we issued AFIs to 16 out of 44 services because their incident commanders and control room staff didn't have an electronic way to share the location of people trapped by fire. Having this system is essential as it allows staff to give updates on the evacuation status of residents. Where a service relied on radio communication and paper-based systems, we often found a breakdown in communication.

London Fire Brigade has acted on the recommendation in this area by investing in a fire survival guidance app.

Promising practice: London Fire Brigade's investment in technology has improved rescue and evacuation information for firefighters

Using a tablet to gather information, the brigade's [fire survival guidance](#) app allows information to be exchanged between [fire control](#) and the scene of an incident. It enables firefighters at the bridgehead (the position where firefighters are carrying out firefighting operations) to see real-time evacuation and fire survival guidance information. This helps them to carry out rescues and receive updates on a changing situation.

I support the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 2 recommendations

I welcome the findings and recommendations of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 2 report, which have already started to create improvements in fire safety and wider protection work across the sector.

The report rightly emphasised that the responsibility for making change happen doesn't just involve individual services. It must be shared with organisations such as the NFCC, the Local Government Association and government departments. This collective responsibility is essential to help prevent future tragedies.

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry's Phase 2 report recommended that a single department should oversee fire and building safety. The transfer of all fire policy to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government brings together responsibilities that may support more co-ordinated work to remediate unsafe buildings and better align fire safety, housing and planning policy.

In the report, three recommendations were directed to us. These all related to London Fire Brigade's performance. We were asked to inspect the brigade as soon as reasonably possible and examine, assess and report on our findings. We have acted on these recommendations, and we [published our findings on 29 November 2024](#).

Through [our 2025–27 inspection methodology \(included in Annex D\)](#), we will continue to monitor progress to help all 44 services implement the lessons from the Grenfell Tower tragedy. We will explore services' responses to major incidents in greater depth. This will include a closer examination of how services are preparing for major incidents, such as how they identify and apply learning.

Services should make sure their mobilisation systems are reliable and support an effective emergency response

In 2024/25, if you called the fire service in England to report an incident, on average, the first vehicle arrived on the scene within ten minutes. This level of responsiveness reflects the professionalism and dedication of fire and rescue services.

We are aware that some services experience issues with the reliability of their [mobilisation](#) systems, which they use to record incident information and dispatch resources. For example, in two services, we issued CoCs related to how they were managing their mobilisation systems. These systems weren't always reliable when receiving and responding to emergency 999 calls. In extreme cases, this could cause delays in dispatching resources, resulting in slower response times for the public.

Our main concern was that the services hadn't appropriately addressed these faults or put effective control measures in place. Control staff reported limited progress in resolving the issues and a lack of updates. This led to them under-reporting further faults because they didn't think action would be taken. In some cases, senior leaders appeared unaware of the full extent of the problems. [Fire control](#) staff and managers experienced unnecessary stress because they couldn't rely on the system in place to do their jobs effectively, which negatively affected their well-being.

There is a risk that other services could experience similar failures if lessons aren't learned. All services should work proactively with the suppliers of their mobilisation systems to make sure they are fit for purpose and don't hinder emergency response.

Where services identify faults, they need to implement suitable control measures, maintain strategic oversight and record the issues. Services should promptly resolve issues and appropriately escalate associated risks. They should also give fire control staff regular progress updates and signpost them to welfare support.

As part of our 2025–27 inspections, we are increasing our focus on how services identify, report and mitigate organisational risks. Resilient systems and well-informed leadership will help services to continue to provide safe and effective emergency responses.

People, performance and making improvements

In this section, I focus on findings related to people, performance and making improvements. It includes findings related to governance and scrutiny, workforce planning, productivity and supporting well-being.

Effective governance and scrutiny are essential for continuous improvement

Fire and rescue services should have robust internal governance arrangements to make sure they are operating effectively and efficiently. Good internal governance and scrutiny allows senior leaders to assure themselves that their service's activities are effective, efficient and align with strategic priorities.

In high-performing services, strong internal governance often helps to support continuous improvement.

Humberside Fire and Rescue Service has a clear and defined internal governance structure to monitor and report on how it manages and spends its budget. It also has a service improvement plan, which it uses to record, manage, monitor and assess the actions it takes in relation to continuous improvement. It reports on the plan and related actions at strategic performance meetings as part of its oversight arrangements to manage the plan effectively.

In our Round 3 inspections, we found that some services needed to improve their internal governance arrangements. In these services, we identified weaknesses in strategic oversight and scrutiny of their operational and corporate functions, particularly in the monitoring and reporting of finances, strategic risks and project delivery. Often these shortcomings weren't properly identified or escalated within the service. For example, a service failed to recognise and review risks for a fire station redevelopment project, which had gone significantly over schedule and budget. And another service didn't have appropriate strategic oversight arrangements to manage financial risks.

[Fire and rescue authorities \(FRAs\)](#) have an important role in setting strategic direction, providing oversight and scrutiny and leading improvement. However, they can't effectively hold services to account without access to timely and accurate information.

In our inspections, we identified some services that weren't reporting shortcomings to the FRA in a full, transparent or timely manner.

FRA governance models vary across England. Some FRAs are a single directly elected person – a mayor or a [police, fire and crime commissioner](#) – while others are made up of elected members from a single county, unitary council or constituent councils. While the specific governance model may differ, what matters most is that the arrangements are effective and fit for purpose.

Devolution (the transfer of powers from national to local government) and local government reorganisation will provide both opportunities and challenges for services. In some cases, it is likely to result in the merger of fire and rescue services. This will present valuable opportunities for these services to improve resilience and create efficiencies by reducing dependence on individuals and allowing resources to be shared. Sharing facilities such as buildings, vehicles and equipment, could generate savings that could be reinvested in priority areas to help services make further improvements.

It can be complex and challenging to successfully manage a change in governance arrangements. It can create uncertainty among staff as well as raise questions around what governance models will be adopted, what the leadership structure will look like and how resources will be allocated. And it can also demand a disproportionate amount of senior leaders' time. A change in governance arrangements involves significant effort. The transition needs to be carefully managed to mitigate risks and fully realise the benefits, and services should be supported by their existing FRAs to achieve this.

Since we started inspecting services in June 2018, there have been seven governance changes:

- Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service merged into a single authority.
- Cumbria, Essex, North Yorkshire, Northamptonshire and Staffordshire fire and rescue services moved to police, fire and crime commissioner governance arrangements.
- North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service subsequently moved to a mayoral governance model.

Lessons from these transitions can offer valuable insights to guide future changes. It is essential that services are given enough lead-in time to effectively prepare and manage the transition between governance arrangements. This is especially important for more complex changes, such as when a county service must separate its budgets, staffing, assets and liabilities from a parent organisation to operate under a mayoral governance model.

In our previous inspections, we have focused on the service given to the public rather than on the accountability structures that make sure fire and rescue services keep their communities safe. Given the clear link between effective governance and operational performance, in our 2025–27 inspection methodology, we will now evaluate how each service is affected by its FRA’s governance, oversight and scrutiny arrangements. We will examine the relationship between each service’s internal governance and their FRA’s governance. We focus on whether the arrangements are robust and make sure the service is effective and efficient at keeping the public safe from fire and other risks. We will also assess whether these arrangements create a positive culture and whether there are standards of conduct to support the health and well-being of the workforce.

Services should have robust financial plans to support them to provide value for money

Good financial plans are essential to make sure that fire and rescue services operate efficiently and provide a sustained service to the public. These plans also support services to make continuous improvements and result in a balanced budget.

In our inspections, we found that most services understood their likely financial challenges. They had generally made realistic assumptions with budgets and considered different financial planning scenarios and potential risks. Inflationary pressures and funding changes are challenges that services need to adapt to. Of the 44 responses I received to my letter to gather views on the state of fire and rescue services, 41 respondents stated that financial pressures were one of the most significant challenges for the sector in 2024. This was the main issue respondents identified.

We encourage all services to fully participate in the NFCC’s financial benchmarking work. By comparing costs and operations with other services, they can identify whether any areas of their expenditure are above average and if they need to review them to provide better value for money.

Services should have the capability and capacity to manage change

Services need to have enough people with the right knowledge, skills and resources to bring about change and implement effective change management processes.

Compared to police forces, most fire and rescue services are relatively small organisations. As at 31 March 2024, on average, police forces in England and Wales employed 5,502 full-time equivalent [personnel](#) compared to 906 staff in fire and rescue services in England. In smaller organisations, any gaps in skills or staffing can make it much harder to manage change because there aren’t extra people or dedicated teams to take on the additional work. On the other hand, larger organisations may be more complex, with different internal structures, which presents its own challenges when implementing change. While size can influence how change

is managed, it isn't the only factor. Each service operates in its own context, and senior leaders need to consider this when implementing change.

We found good change management processes in some services.

Promising practice: Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service effectively monitors, reviews and evaluates improvement

The service has established a programme management office that is supported by a project management framework and toolkit for managers.

As part of this approach, the service has improved evaluation of activity, projects and improvement, which it records in an evaluation portal. This helps it to implement programmes and projects in its annual delivery plan in a controlled and consistent way.

This has led to service improvement, including a more efficient and effective service for the public.

In our inspections, we saw a link between some services lacking the right skills and their capacity to manage change. This means that they may have struggled to address AFIs we issued in Round 2 and make continuous improvements in Round 3.

Some services struggle to attract professional staff in corporate functions. Competitive market salaries can often mean that programme and project managers, analysts and IT professionals can earn more outside the public sector.

Collaboration can give services access to additional resources and expertise. For example, Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service shares back-office functions across estates, finance, fleet, HR and IT with Northamptonshire Police and the office of the police, fire and crime commissioner. This has allowed Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service's internal IT team of 5.5 full-time equivalent staff to access a digital, data and technology department of 165 staff. This has significantly widened the service's access to a diverse range of technical expertise.

Clear internal structures help leaders make decisions and manage change well. They make sure projects and programmes are appropriately scrutinised and challenged, which helps to keep them aligned with their objectives, budgets and timelines. Without these systems, improvement projects are more likely to be delayed or fail to achieve intended benefits.

Promising practice: Kent Fire and Rescue Service robustly reviews projects to make sure they achieve their goals

Since 2021, the service has used a benefit mapping process for all its projects to make sure they achieve their intended outcomes.

The service maps the benefits before the project starts, reviews progress at midpoint and at the end. This robust process has identified projects failing to provide expected benefits at key milestones, so the service stopped the projects.

This level of scrutiny makes sure the service achieves value for money in all the projects it initiates.

Services should use and invest in technology to improve their effectiveness and efficiency

Services should make use of robust IT and technology systems to improve effectiveness and efficiency. They should explore how these systems can help them boost productivity and ultimately achieve better outcomes for communities.

We identified examples of promising and innovative practice where services were using innovation and technology to enhance their effectiveness and efficiency. Artificial intelligence is becoming increasingly influential across society, and some services are starting to explore its potential, particularly when analysing and evaluating data. This supports more informed decision-making and leads to continuous improvement.

Promising practice: Humberside Fire and Rescue Service uses information and communications technology well to provide its prevention, protection and response services

The service has invested in its data analysis team – for example, by employing a data scientist and a deputy data scientist – and the team makes the most of its resources.

The service also uses machine learning to help profile the risk to people from fire and other emergencies. It has introduced an AI policy to support this area of work.

AI also provides the service with information that [safeguards](#) individuals, assures compliance with relevant legislation, and helps staff understand their responsibilities.

Using this technology helps the service analyse and evaluate a range of data and service information. This informs the risk profile and helps the service be more agile in the way it manages risk. It also supports the rationale that underpins the decisions it makes about how to best meet the community's needs.

Innovative practice: London Fire Brigade uses an online portal to efficiently and effectively manage property services and repairs

The brigade's property team developed a property portal. All staff can access it and, for example, request a repair or another property-related service through a series of easily accessible categories of work. The request is logged and goes directly to contractors for action.

Staff can see communications, timelines, and outcomes of all repairs. Sixty percent of all repairs and services are logged through the portal.

The property team extracts portal data to assess the most common repairs and monitor contractors' performance.

The team's work resulted in the brigade winning a national award for facilities management in 2022.

Innovative practice: Kent Fire and Rescue Service has invested in 3D cameras to better understand high-risk sites

The service uses 3D cameras to scan and create models and images of high-risk premises to improve staff's awareness of significant risks and crew safety.

The risk information team can include the 3D models in site-specific risk information. This allows incident commanders to virtually walk through premises. The service can also use the 3D models to familiarise crews with buildings without them having to visit.

While we found promising and innovative practice in some services, in others, outdated IT infrastructure prevented staff from being effective and efficient. For example, some services still use inefficient paper-based processes because they don't have the means to digitise them. Because IT is often needed to support wider service improvements, any IT shortcomings can prevent some services from making important changes. Services also need to be confident that their IT systems are resilient and can withstand cybersecurity incidents.

Some services need to invest in and modernise their IT infrastructure. In 2023/24, the 41 services that submitted a full financial return to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy collectively spent £18.5 million of their capital budgets on IT-related projects.

Capital funding is money that is used for long-term investments in physical assets and infrastructure. Fire and rescue services currently receive no capital funding from the Government. This means that services need to fund capital investments in long-life

assets, such as estates, technology, equipment and fleet, by using revenue budgets, selling capital assets (including unwanted buildings and land) or by borrowing money.

Funding capital investments is a challenge for some services, but it is essential to maintain their capability to respond effectively to emergencies. As part of future reforms to local government funding, the Government should reconsider its position on capital funding for fire and rescue services. Investing in their infrastructure would help create safe and inclusive working environments for staff and better support services to serve their communities.

Despite some progress, services should continue to improve their workforce planning

During our Round 3 inspections, we saw some services with effective workforce plans that detailed the capacity, skills and training needed to achieve the objectives of their [community risk management plans \(CRMPs\)](#). Their plans set out the service's current and future skills requirements and address capability gaps.

For example, East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service has made improvements in this area. In its workforce plan, it considers both current and future staffing needs. This is supported by the [Fire Standards Board's operational competence framework](#), which outlines the necessary skills for firefighters and how services can develop and maintain them. As a result, the service can now respond quickly and effectively to fill staffing gaps through agile recruitment campaigns and promotion pools.

Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service uses a workforce planning tool to assess staff shortages, upcoming retirements and training needs. The service has also introduced new software that supports workforce planning for [on-call](#) firefighters.

We found that services that carried out comprehensive fire cover reviews and implemented their findings were better able to reallocate resources to more effectively manage the risks identified in their CRMPs. This included relocating fire engines, specialist equipment and firefighters to help keep communities safe. And in other cases, changes to duty systems (work patterns) on some stations has improved the efficiency of their emergency response.

For example, in the decade before [our most recent inspection of Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service in 2023](#), the service had carried out three reviews. These comprised two comprehensive spending reviews and an operational response review. These reviews have been effective because they resulted in savings while improving operational response and productivity. As outlined in its strategic plans, the service updated its duty systems so it could better realign its resources to match risk. This allowed it to deploy two [roaming fire engines](#) at on-call stations. Firefighters on these roaming fire engines carry out prevention and protection activities in the local area of the on-call station in which they are deployed.

Promising practice: County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service has effective workforce plans across all its functions

The service has well-established workforce and succession plans that improve its organisational resilience in terms of people, key skills, knowledge and understanding.

The workforce plan, which is reviewed by the service's leadership team, is linked to its [community risk management plan](#). It takes account of any new or emerging risks, including retaining people across staff groups. The service carries out an annual risk assessment to evaluate potential vacancies, their strategic impact and the challenges of recruiting staff with the required skills.

All the service's functions contribute to a 24-month plan, which reviews skills, maintenance of competence, new legislation and national guidance. This helps the service to be resilient and maintain the required level of skills, knowledge and understanding for all areas of service provision.

Although some services have effective workforce plans in place, I am disappointed to see that some services haven't made enough progress in this area. And in some services, a lack of effective oversight from leadership teams continues to delay this progress. It concerns me that too many services continue to operate without a clear understanding of the skills and capabilities of their workforces.

During our Round 3 inspections, we issued 22 AFIs relating to workforce and succession planning. And we issued one service with a CoC for its inadequate organisational level plans. The plans didn't set out and bring together current and future workforce and skills requirements.

Services should consider specialist roles and functions in their workforce and succession planning

Effective workforce planning makes sure that staffing levels are appropriate in all operational areas: prevention, protection and response. A service's workforce and financial plans, including the allocation of resources to all operational areas, should be consistent with the risks and priorities it has identified in its CRMP.

The services with poor workforce plans aren't considering how this affects their ability to achieve the aims in their CRMP. And in some cases, although services have workforce plans, they often don't align with their CRMP. This means they can't effectively consider gaps in skills or capabilities or make informed decisions on which staff to deploy and where. This may cause issues in protection and prevention teams because they don't have enough staff to do their jobs effectively, which affects how quickly they can respond to the public.

Services should consider potential staff shortages as part of their workforce planning. We found that most services prioritised planning for their operational workforce. They actively monitor projected retirement dates and the effect of vacancies on skills and capabilities. This informs the need to recruit and train new and existing staff. The more effective services frequently monitor and update their workforce plans so they can respond quickly to unforeseen circumstances.

By focusing on their operational staff, many services give less attention to planning for their non-operational workforce. Services that don't make contingencies for staff with specialist skills and capabilities, such as protection staff, may have resourcing challenges. In many services, we saw large backlogs in workloads associated with a lack of specialist staff. This led to increased pressures on existing specialist staff to deal with additional workloads. Services should make sure their workforce and succession planning arrangements take full account of specialist roles and functions.

Services should make sure their succession plans are effective

Where services have effective succession planning in place, they can plan for the skills and knowledge they need in the future. It also helps them to manage change effectively. In our Round 3 inspections, we found that many services weren't effectively succession planning.

Services with poor succession plans often don't consider how to make sure their staff have a diverse range of backgrounds. If a service doesn't clearly identify an opportunity for progression and make it accessible to everyone, then the demographic of staff is unlikely to significantly change. As at 31 March 2024, the majority of firefighters at the most senior rank were men: 88 percent (110 people). The proportion of firefighters at the most senior rank who were women has increased over the past decade from 3.8 percent (5 people) as at 31 March 2014 to 12 percent (15 people) as at 31 March 2024.

Workforce productivity is improving, but services still have more to do

It is important that services focus on productivity to make sure they can use their time effectively and give the greatest possible value to the public. In 2023/24, [wholetime](#) firefighter spend represented just over half (52.4 percent) of overall expenditure in fire and rescue services in England, according to data from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy.

Encouragingly, in our Round 3 inspections, we found that most services were increasing their focus on improving productivity. But we also found that services were at different stages in making sure their workforces are productive and aligned with their risk management plans and strategic priorities.

The previous Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire wrote to FRAs to request that they produce and publish annual productivity and efficiency plans. This requirement applied to county and unitary FRAs from 2024/25. Fire and rescue services prepare these plans, which FRAs then approve. This ministerial request expanded on the requirement for FRAs to produce and publish an efficiency plan, which is set out in the [Fire and Rescue National Framework](#). Alongside this, there has been greater emphasis in the sector on using data to oversee how wholetime firefighters are used. This has helped services to focus on improving productivity.

In some services, we identified promising and innovative practices that others can learn from.

Innovative practice: County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service uses a Microsoft Power BI application to record completed staff work tasks

The service's digital, data and technology team has developed an application (app) for its electronic devices to collect information that helps the service to understand and improve its productivity.

The app is already in use for firefighter roles and is now being introduced for other teams, such as emergency [control room](#), protection and prevention teams. Staff enter details of the tasks they have completed during each duty period. The app analyses this information and can produce reports on the output of specific roles. The service is using this information to adjust work routines and increase productivity.

The app has been recognised nationally. The [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) has received grant funding for a sector-wide product to be developed that adopts the service's approach.

Innovative practice: London Fire Brigade's improved use of technology enables the efficient monitoring of firefighter productivity

The fire station performance dashboard enables the brigade to monitor the productivity of staff at fire stations against a range of performance measures. These include:

- percentage of time spent on [home fire safety visits](#) and protection work;
- percentage of time spent on training; and
- average arrival time of first fire engine.

The brigade reports on firefighter productivity in its [community risk management plan](#), 'Your London Fire Brigade'.

This had led to the brigade being able to improve firefighter productivity.

Lancashire and Cumbria fire and rescue services have adopted new ways of working to support improved staff productivity.

Promising practice: Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service has invested in technology to improve staff productivity

The service is innovative in its approach to new ways of working. For example, it now provides iPads on fire engines, so that crews can use fire engines as a mobile office.

Staff can access e-learning, the debrief app and the post-incident activity log on the iPads, which saves recording time. [Watch](#) managers have found this works well, as they are using their time more productively. They can complete administrative tasks on the fire engine while other crew members are carrying out a [home fire safety](#) or business fire safety check. This allows more time back at the station for training and interacting with their watch.

Promising practice: Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service's day crew demonstrates high productivity and efficient use of resources

The 7am to 7pm day crew at Penrith fire station makes a significant contribution to the service's operational assurance and [intelligence](#) functions. The crew consistently demonstrates high productivity and efficient use of resources.

In 2023/24, the operational assurance team completed 97 internal debriefs and 3 multi-agency debriefs. It issued 4 operational assurance letters. Meanwhile, the operational intelligence team reviewed 58 documents, quality assured 54 site-specific risk information files, provided 3 provision of operational risk system training sessions and produced 365 daily bulletins.

The team also led the implementation of [national operational guidance](#). This resulted in the team producing 27 risk assessments, 27 aide-memoires (quick reference guides), and 116 operational intelligence notices to alert crews about new or changed intelligence.

The team completed this alongside its core responsibilities, operational response, protection, prevention, and the maintenance of operational competence.

Some services still need to better understand how they use their wholetime firefighters and take a more proactive approach to maximise productivity. We issued AFIs related to productivity in 14 of 44 services.

We are encouraged that the NFCC has secured grant funding from the Government to build a productivity application for services to use in future. The project is based on [the excellent work County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service carried out](#). I encourage all services to make the most of this opportunity to improve their management information and better inform how they use their wholetime firefighters to improve community outcomes.

If a service effectively understands and manages the performance of its staff, it is likely to increase their productivity. Services need to have good performance management systems to monitor and manage individual, team and overall service performance. These systems should support services to make sure their workforces' time is productive, identify underperformance issues early and take appropriate action. This is essential for services to make sure that individuals and teams are consistently working to clear objectives that align with their CRMP and strategic priorities. High performing services have a strong focus on performance led by their CRMP.

Some fire and rescue services collaborate with ambulance services to respond to life-threatening emergencies and help save lives. By working more closely with ambulance services, fire and rescue services could maximise their capacity and use their resources more effectively. But it is important that services manage such initiatives carefully so that they don't compromise their main responsibilities in prevention, protection, response and resilience. If the Government precisely determines the roles of fire and rescue services and their staff, it will give services clarity on whether their staff should regularly support local ambulance services.

Services must continue to improve equality, diversity and inclusion to better represent and serve their communities

Despite decades of sector-wide focus on the need to improve equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), meaningful change is yet to take place. The sector has made limited improvements, and services have more to do to make sure their workforces, at all levels of the organisation, represents the communities they serve.

Of the 44 responses I received to gather views on the state of fire and rescue services, over half of respondents (25) stated that improving workforce diversity was one of the most significant challenges for the sector in 2024.

The proportion of women in the fire and rescue service has increased in the last decade from 14.4 percent (7,007 people) as at 31 March 2014 to 20.2 percent (8,937 people) as at 31 March 2024. This reflects both an increase in women (up 1,930 people) and a decrease in men in the workforce (down 6,375 people). We are pleased that in the last decade, the sector has almost doubled the number of women firefighters (from 1,782 as at 31 March 2014 to 3,184 as at 31 March 2024), despite the overall workforce decreasing in size.

Likewise, the proportion of people from an ethnic minority background in the workforce has increased over time from 6.8 percent (3,139 people) as at 31 March 2013 to 8.5 percent (3,427 people) as at 31 March 2023. This change reflects both an increase in people from ethnic minority backgrounds (up 228) but also a decrease in people from White British/Irish backgrounds (down 6,227). The sector has more to do to improve ethnic diversity.

Although this data reflects some improvements, the speed of change is disappointing. In our Round 3 inspections, for ensuring fairness and promoting diversity, we gave the following grades:

- 11 good;
- 14 adequate;
- 17 requires improvement; and
- 2 inadequate.

We have never given an outstanding grade for this question. We issued one new CoC in Round 3 for EDI. And we carried over four CoCs from Round 2. It is disappointing that these services haven't made enough progress to allow us to close them.

In total, we gave 73 AFIs for this question in Round 3, 52 of which related to EDI. We found that many services weren't fostering a culture that supports EDI. In some cases, senior leaders had little involvement with improving EDI.

And a lack of good quality [equality impact assessments](#) continues to be a problem. This limits services' ability to fully understand their EDI challenges and identify where they can improve.

Disappointingly, we found that some services still hadn't made sure their facilities were inclusive of all staff. This included making sure that there were adequate facilities for female staff or providing appropriate uniform. We found that nine services still didn't have adequate facilities, and we gave two AFIs to services that weren't doing enough to improve. In one service, we issued a CoC having repeatedly identified issues with its facilities and a lack of appropriate uniform. Services that fail to get these fundamentals right suggest that their leadership teams don't take EDI seriously. This undermines efforts to integrate EDI across the organisation and sets a poor example for staff.

In our 2025–27 inspections, we will maintain focus on EDI and expect to see clear progress. Services need to show greater commitment and tangible improvements in their approach.

Some services are introducing measures to improve EDI

We have seen progress in some fire and rescue services introducing measures to improve EDI. These services are working towards developing more inclusive and representative workforces.

Several services, including Cambridgeshire and Nottinghamshire fire and rescue services, are making efforts to improve the fairness and transparency of their recruitment, development and promotion processes.

Innovative practice: Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service uses assessors from its local community to monitor recruitment

During recruitment interviews for [wholetime](#) firefighters, Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service has external assessors from the community in attendance to provide external assurance and feedback to the service. This reduces [unconscious bias](#) and makes sure that the service is acting according to its own values and behaviours.

This will reduce the risk of discrimination in recruitment and promotion processes.

Promising practice: Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service has made excellent use of its community advisory group to support the development of its policies, procedures and communications

The service works closely with its community advisory group, which includes subject matter experts, members of ethnic minority community groups, county council staff and [police personnel](#) from within Nottinghamshire.

The community advisory group reviews the service's policies and procedures, helping it to become more inclusive. It can also review the service's communications with staff and the public to offer advice on terminology and make sure inclusive language is used. The group has also given feedback on command training scenarios that has helped diversify the scenarios, and on trauma care courses for operational crews. The group's involvement has helped to improve operational staff's knowledge and understanding of diversity, specifically when dealing with incidents and scenarios that include members of the public from a diverse range of cultures and backgrounds.

Although it may be limited, some form of [positive action](#) takes place in most services, such as targeted advertising of roles for under-represented groups. We identified promising practice in Humberside Fire and Rescue Service.

Promising practice: Humberside Fire and Rescue service has a pre-recruitment support programme for people from under-represented groups

The service runs a ten-week programme called Rookie Reds. Its aim is to support, train and guide people from under-represented groups who are interested in joining the fire and rescue service.

The programme includes:

- physical training sessions focusing on techniques used for carrying fire and rescue service equipment, and other firefighter tasks;
- guidance and training on psychometric and situational judgment testing;
- practical sessions on interview techniques;
- increasing knowledge and awareness about the role of a firefighter and the service's ethical principles;
- identifying the demands and challenges firefighters face; and
- individual training programmes to help with specific areas of development.

At the time of our inspection, the service told us 15 staff had been employed after completing the programme.

Services still need to make urgent improvements in values, behaviours and culture

Poor values, negative workplace cultures and ineffective [misconduct](#) management have been persistent themes throughout our inspections.

During our Round 3 inspections, we graded services on how well they promote positive values and culture, and consider the health, safety and well-being of the workforce. For this question we gave the following grades:

- 1 outstanding;
- 13 good;
- 15 adequate;
- 11 requires improvement; and
- 4 inadequate.

We also issued five CoCs to services in this area, one of which was from our previous round of inspections. Four of these CoCs highlighted significant issues in values and culture. We identified 63 AFIs across 31 services: 23 of these specifically related to values and culture.

Unfortunately, in too many services, staff told us that their senior leaders weren't consistently modelling the organisation's values. All four CoCs that we issued for values and culture included an element of concern about the visibility and/or behaviours of senior leaders.

We also gave 12 services AFIs for a lack of visibility and the behaviours of senior leaders not adhering to service values. Most respondents to our staff survey, 68 percent (7,512 out of 11,077), agreed or tended to agree that senior leaders consistently modelled and maintained the service's values. This means that around a third, 32 percent (3,565 out of 11,077), disagreed or tended to disagree that senior leaders consistently modelled and maintained the service's values.

Unacceptable behaviour is still commonplace in some services. In response to our Round 3 staff survey, 14 percent (1,664 out of 11,529) of respondents reported that they had experienced bullying or [harassment](#). This is a slight increase from Round 2, where 13 percent (1,478 out of 11,486) of respondents reported they had experienced bullying or harassment. We found many examples of poor behaviours, particularly on [watches](#), where cultural issues are often most visible. And in some cases, during our inspections, we witnessed inappropriate behaviour firsthand. This included using misogynistic and discriminatory language in front of our staff. We made the respective services aware of these incidents so that they could take appropriate action.

Poor handling of grievances and misconduct continues to erode trust in some services, and some staff lack confidence in processes to report their concerns. This can prevent them from raising issues, so leaders don't have an accurate understanding of the extent of bullying, harassment and discrimination in their service. No one should have to endure bullying, harassment or discrimination in the workplace. The fact that some individuals still believe such behaviour is acceptable, and that some services don't effectively deal with this behaviour, is deeply concerning.

Services should learn from others to support them to create a positive culture

Cultural change can take time. It is important for services to learn from others that have successfully improved their cultures as well as from those that have consistently achieved outstanding or good grades in our values and culture assessment.

Cambridgeshire, Lancashire and Royal Berkshire fire and rescue services have maintained positive cultures since we started inspecting fire and rescue services.

We issued Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service with an outstanding grade for values and culture in all three inspection rounds. Staff told us that senior leaders modelled the service values, worked together as a team and had an open-door policy. Staff feel listened to and are empowered and willing to challenge poor behaviours when they come across them. Managers are trained to have difficult conversations, and a professional standards manager and HR business partners support them to deal with poor behaviour. This has created a positive working culture throughout the service.

In both Cambridgeshire and Royal Berkshire fire and rescue services, senior leaders act as role models. Staff demonstrate positive behaviours and feel empowered and willing to challenge poor behaviours when they come across them. In Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service, staff told us that they felt listened to and that senior leaders were accessible and approachable. And in Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, some staff have completed active bystander training. This has increased their confidence in knowing how to challenge inappropriate behaviours.

To create a positive culture, senior leaders must be visible, accessible and model their service's expected values and behaviours. Services such as London Fire Brigade and Buckinghamshire, Gloucestershire and Greater Manchester fire and rescue services have made significant cultural improvements through visible values-based leadership, strategic focus and well-executed cultural change action plans. These services have developed teams that adhere to their values and have created the right conditions for change. Three of these services made improvements after entering our enhanced monitoring process, Engage.

Promising practice: London Fire Brigade has effective plans that are improving culture

The brigade began a transformation of its culture by producing a comprehensive action plan. The plan supported a structured approach to cultural change with robust governance arrangements to monitor its progress. A dedicated programme team was responsible for the progress of the actions.

As the brigade implemented the plan, staff were involved in developing brigade values. And members of the brigade's community forum were asked for their views. The brigade set up a dedicated professional standards unit to investigate and deal with complaints of bullying, [harassment](#) and discrimination. As a result, the brigade is successfully transforming its culture. Its independent advisory panel and community forum provide ongoing scrutiny of the cultural change work.

Promising practice: South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service's Not on My Watch campaign helps it effectively promote its values

As part of its culture programme, the service has introduced a campaign called Not on My Watch. Its aim is to build an inclusive workplace culture.

The campaign is designed to help staff:

- know what the service behaviours are;
- feel empowered to uphold the behaviours; and
- speak up when staff fall short of the expected behaviours.

The campaign includes a variety of resources, which the service uses in creative ways to sensitively promote discussions about values and culture. These resources include:

- blogs and videos from the chief fire officer and other senior leaders;
- a dedicated area on the staff website for accessing support on workplace issues;
- a manager's guide, which gives supervisory staff information on good allyship (supporting people from under-represented groups), how to hold difficult conversations and where to go to for support;
- podcasts and inclusion stories, which share the lived experience of different staff groups and build a better understanding of difference; and
- an animated infographic, which explains the power of allyship and speaking up for people who may feel marginalised.

The service has carried out some evaluation of Not on My Watch. The evaluation has shown promising outcomes.

Most services continue to support staff well-being, but they need to improve how they monitor working hours

Most services continue to support the well-being of their workforces. There is good well-being support for mental and physical health in over half of services, and this continues to be an area the sector has rightly prioritised.

In response to our staff survey, 91 percent (10,540 out of 11,522) of respondents agreed or tended to agree that they had access to services to support their mental well-being. And 89 percent (10,163 out of 11,522) of respondents agreed or tended to agree with the statement "I am satisfied that my personal safety and welfare is treated seriously".

Innovative practice: Humberside Fire and Rescue Service has introduced time for staff to take personal well-being breaks

To encourage and promote health and well-being, the service gives staff two 30-minute well-being breaks per week to use at their discretion. Part-time staff have one 30-minute break.

People can use this time to participate in an activity that improves or contributes to their health and well-being. This could be walking, using relaxation techniques or taking part in other activities that promote good health and well-being.

Staff told us the initiative improved how they felt in terms of mental and physical health. They feel valued by their employer and see it is an employee benefit.

It is common for wholetime firefighters to have another job. Many firefighters have dual contracts, which means they have more than one employment contract with their service. Or, in some cases, they may have an employment contract with two different fire and rescue services. And some have another job in a different sector.

Most services have detailed policies for staff with more than one job that include working hours and rest periods. Some services monitor the working hours of these staff well. For example, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service monitors staff with dual contracts and checks to make sure these staff take appropriate breaks. And in Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service, HR centrally monitors secondary employment. There are individual fatigue risk assessments in place, and working hours are logged.

However, in many services we found that they didn't adequately monitor the working hours of staff with more than one job. We saw several examples of staff going straight from a wholetime shift to attending an incident on an on-call shift with little or no rest. In our Round 3 inspections, we gave AFIs to 25 services in this area. This shows that over half of services don't have good oversight of working hours for staff on dual or secondary contracts or for staff working overtime. Services should consider how they minimise staff fatigue and associated risks.

Some services seem hesitant to effectively monitor staff working hours as it could affect availability levels. In one service, we issued a CoC because it had inadequate organisational level plans and didn't set out and bring together current and future workforce and skills requirements. The service was relying on its staff to potentially work excessive hours to maintain the availability of its fire engines.

This lack of monitoring of working hours is particularly concerning due to the large number of firefighters with dual or secondary contracts. As at 31 March 2025, there were 3,328 wholetime firefighters who were on dual contracts within their service, and 477 had dual contracts with a different service. During the same period, 5,404 wholetime firefighters had secondary employment outside fire and rescue services.

Services have a legal duty of care for their staff. In particular, there is no excuse for services failing to monitor the working hours of staff who have dual contracts within their workforce. Monitoring the working hours of those with a second job outside the service can be more challenging because it relies on self-reporting. Services need to improve how they approach this.

Failure to monitor working hours poses significant operational and safety risks as well as risks to the individual's well-being. I am particularly concerned that operational staff may attend incidents having worked excessive hours. This may put the staff member, their colleagues and the public at risk as they will be less able to work effectively.

2. Addressing persistent challenges that prevent services from making improvements

In this chapter, I discuss some of the persistent challenges that are preventing fire and rescue services from making improvements.

Services should focus on the main issues that prevent them from making progress

I am encouraged by the notable progress fire and rescue services have made in several areas. However, improvements in other areas remain a challenge. Some persistent issues continue to slow the pace and consistency of change across the sector. It is essential that the sector focuses on addressing these issues to achieve better outcomes for the public.

This section focuses on some of these persistent issues: leadership, values, behaviour and culture and the [on-call](#) duty system.

Improving leadership needs to be at the centre of change

Effective leadership is essential for organisational success and continuous improvement. In our inspections, we found that effective senior leadership had led to improvements in some services. But we repeatedly found that poor leadership was undermining some services' ability to support their workforce and provide an effective and efficient public service.

Leaders should establish clear, strategic plans that staff understand and support. In doing so, they can help create an environment where everyone understands what is expected of them and how their work contributes to the service's goals.

This responsibility isn't exclusive to senior leaders. Leaders at all levels have an important role in shaping culture, setting direction and inspiring progress.

I have seen the positive impact that good leadership can have, particularly in some services that needed to make improvements. Services such as London Fire Brigade and Greater Manchester, Derbyshire, Staffordshire and North Yorkshire fire and rescue services have addressed most of the [areas for improvement](#) we issued in our previous inspections. This has been the result of clear strategic planning, robust action

plans and focused leadership. We have reflected their progress in the grades we have given them.

Good leadership isn't consistent across the sector. We can trace many of the challenges and shortcomings we found in services back to weaknesses in leadership. In several services, we found an absence of strategic oversight, with no clear single improvement plan, poor prioritisation and resource alignment and underdeveloped performance frameworks. Some senior leaders lack the strategic awareness and skills needed to lead effectively.

[Our Round 3 inspection methodology](#) focused on a subset of leadership, specifically how well a fire and rescue service develops its leadership and capability. In our inspections, although we found that some services were making improvements due to effective leadership, services weren't always considering how to develop leaders of the future. Services should focus on developing leaders so that supervisors and middle managers have better training in how to manage, develop and support their teams, including handling difficult conversations. Too often, newly promoted managers are left to learn on the job. This isn't good enough.

In Round 3 of our inspections, we issued an overall grade of 'requires improvement' for managing performance and developing leaders to 17 out of 44 services. These services should focus on improving how they develop leaders at all levels of their organisation.

There are some services that are doing well in this area. For example, some are focusing on developing staff and preparing them to progress to leadership roles.

Promising practice: Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service has put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders

The service has an effective and transparent leadership development framework, based on the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#)'s leadership framework.

The leadership development framework clearly defines behaviours required at each level of management, supports individuals who are looking to develop and continues to develop staff once in new roles.

The service also has a clear promotions pathway framework and communicates requirements to staff in a transparent way. It has worked hard to remove barriers to progression and has a non-assessed application. This means once the period of professional development is complete, individuals who meet the minimum eligibility criteria advertised will be selected for behavioural assessments. If successful, they are taught the skills required in their new role, including leadership, management and incident command.

The service is good at identifying high-potential candidates suitable for development. It has also removed barriers to external applicants and allows candidates to apply for roles where they can demonstrate high potential.

The service's approach to recruiting and developing staff supports strong leadership at all levels.

It is essential for services to have effective succession plans and processes to identify and develop talented staff into leadership roles. Services should retain and nurture high-potential staff. As I mentioned in [the chapter discussing 'Findings from our Round 3 inspections'](#), we found that many services lacked effective succession plans. And many services didn't actively identify or support talent in a structured or transparent way. In some cases, development and promotion were based on outdated models, such as time in service rather than capability and potential.

Talent development and promotion processes should be fair, transparent and based on clear rules that all staff understand and trust. Even unsuccessful applicants should feel that the processes were transparent and fair. Unfortunately, this isn't always the case. In some services, we found that they ran selection processes inconsistently. This included failing to keep records of all interviews and allowing staff to be on an interview panel without training. In response to our staff survey, only 53 percent (6,138 out of 11,529) of respondents agreed or tended to agree with the statement "The promotion process in my service is fair".

Diversity of background, experience and thought is essential to a well-run organisation. Leadership skills outside the sector can also add valuable experience to the service. But some services aren't prioritising diversity and inclusion. We continue to see a lack of representation at all levels, particularly in senior leadership. During our Round 3 inspections, we gave eight areas for improvement related to insufficient progress in recruiting diverse leaders.

While individual services must do more to improve the diversity of their workforces, I also encourage the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to adopt a national approach to recruitment. This would help make sure that fire and rescue services becomes more representative of the communities they serve.

There is a need for greater consistency in how services develop their leaders. The proposed College of Fire and Rescue could help provide a centralised and standardised approach to developing leaders across the sector. Services shouldn't wait for this to be established. They need to make improvements now.

In [our 2025–27 inspection methodology \(included in Annex D\)](#), we are placing greater emphasis on leadership at all levels. I hope this increased scrutiny will help support the improvements the sector urgently needs.

A positive and inclusive culture is essential for lasting change

A positive organisational culture is essential to foster the behaviours, values and leadership needed to create lasting change in fire and rescue services and achieve better outcomes for the public.

As I have discussed in [the chapter on 'Findings from our Round 3 inspections'](#), services still need to make urgent improvements in values, behaviour and culture. Respondents to my letter to gather views on the state of fire and rescue services also highlighted a widespread need for cultural improvement.

Many of those responding to my letter felt that delays to reform prevented cultural change from being integrated across the sector. It is encouraging to see that improving culture in fire and rescue services is a focus for the Government. Earlier in 2025, the Ministerial Advisory Group for Fire and Rescue Reform established a culture and integrity task and finish group. This is intended to promote improvements in integrity, conduct and culture. I look forward to seeing how this work progresses.

The recommendations we made in [our values and culture spotlight report](#) have helped encourage improvement in some services. These services have introduced:

- independent reporting lines;
- [professional standards units](#); and
- greater independence in recruitment, grievance and disciplinary processes.

But only 26 out of 44 services have provided updates on the progress they have made against the recommendations from [our thematic inspection on standards of behaviour](#). The remaining 18 services haven't given us any updates. This lack of progress is disappointing.

My predecessor, Sir Tom Winsor, recommended in his [2019 'State of Fire and Rescue' report](#) that the sector should establish a code of ethics. In May 2021, the Fire Standards Board, in partnership with the [National Fire Chiefs Council \(NFCC\)](#), Local Government Association and the [Association of Police and Crime Commissioners](#), published the [Core Code of Ethics](#). The code sets out clear expectations for how staff should treat and be treated by others, and it empowers them to challenge any behaviour contrary to the code. We have found that most services have incorporated the Core Code of Ethics into their work. But they need to do more to make sure they integrate it throughout everything they do, such as training, leadership practices and policies.

Some services have commissioned independent culture reviews to help them identify how they can make cultural improvements and improve workforce satisfaction. Following serious concerns, the South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority commissioners asked me for assistance in carrying out a full inspection of the service. Having not previously inspected any of the Welsh services, it was a privilege to be invited to inspect it. [We published our findings in May 2025.](#)

I welcome the proactive approach of chief fire officers in commissioning independent reviews where they believe them to be necessary. It is essential for services to pay attention to the findings of these reviews and quickly address recommendations to build trust and create safer, more inclusive workplaces.

Values, behaviour and culture remain a focus in our 2025–27 inspection methodology. We are raising our expectations for services to achieve a ‘good’ grade. It is no longer enough for services to simply promote their values. They need to actively integrate them in everything they do.

Services should maintain an effective on-call duty system to meet community needs

As at 31 March 2024, on-call firefighters accounted for 34.2 percent (11,920 out of 34,900) of firefighters nationally. We continue to be concerned that the sector hasn’t been able to improve the recruitment, retention and availability of on-call firefighters. This is proving particularly difficult in remote rural locations as societal changes have limited the local recruitment pool. In these locations, there are fewer people available to take up the role due to:

- smaller populations;
- a higher proportion of older residents; and
- people commuting out of the area for work.

Of the 44 responses I received to my letter to gather views on the state of fire and rescue services, 25 respondents stated that the on-call model was one of the most significant challenges for the sector in 2024. Twenty-nine services reported that their service was experiencing problems with recruiting on-call staff. Thirty-two services reported difficulties with retaining on-call staff, and 23 reported problems with training them.

Typically, staff at on-call fire stations are firefighters who live and work locally. They can usually respond to their local fire station within five minutes of receiving a call. Many services use flexible working models because they don’t have enough crew members available at on-call stations. These models include employing staff on dual contracts (staff on [wholetime](#) and on-call firefighter contracts with the same service). As at 31 March 2025, there were 3,328 wholetime firefighters who were on dual contracts within their service, and 477 had dual contracts with a different service.

Despite the challenges of the on-call model, we found positive examples of services trialling more flexible ways of working. This allows them to recruit from a wider area so that they aren’t restricted to recruiting people that live or work within five minutes of a station. Some services are working with local businesses to encourage their staff to volunteer. We also saw examples of services trying alternative arrangements, such as providing office space for remote workers who can also staff fire engines when needed.

Promising practice: Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service is improving its on-call availability

The service has an [on-call](#) improvement programme that applies to on-call recruitment, retention and availability. Areas of focus for the programme include:

- a dedicated recruitment vehicle;
- continuous recruitment;
- fit for fire sessions (a fitness and well-being programme for those who are interested in joining the service);
- hybrid working at stations (dedicated spaces for on-call firefighters to work from a fire station to support achieving turnout times);
- non-operational recruitment (encouraging non-operational staff to join as on-call firefighters as their secondary employment);
- alternatives to numerical and literacy reasoning tests;
- employer engagement initiatives;
- offering a range of roles such as crewing the command unit or the aerial ladder platform;
- role adjustment (such as a person becoming a driver or incident commander if they are unable to wear breathing apparatus); and
- on-call availability, recruitment and skills software (newly introduced software that can show where training and local recruitment will make a difference to the availability of on-call fire engines).

The service told us that since August 2024, through this improvement programme, availability has been increased. In December 2024, on-call availability was at 74 percent.

However, in many cases, on-call fire engines were unavailable to respond to emergency calls because services didn't have enough staff. In 2024/25, on-call availability decreased in 70 percent (28 out of 40) of services using an on-call duty system compared to 2023/24. This continued a trend of sustained year-on-year decline seen over the last five years. And, in one service, the overall on-call availability for 2024/25 was as low as 15.4 percent. In some cases, fire engines have to be sent from neighbouring stations, which can cause delays in the service's emergency response due to increased travel times.

On-call fire engines are also often not available because on-call staff don't have the right training or skills to attend the incident. The time commitment to attend training can be a problem for existing on-call firefighters. And it can deter potential recruits when they must balance other professional and personal responsibilities.

From 1 January 2025, the National Joint Council (a body that oversees pay negotiations) revised the retainer fee structure for on-call firefighters. The retainer fee is a payment given for being available to respond to emergencies. This revision was intended to make the on-call role more accessible by providing greater flexibility for people who can't commit to long hours of cover. But many services continue to offer rigid contracts based on a commitment to provide cover at specified periods.

Services have an important role in maintaining the on-call duty system. They should make sure their recruitment processes are as effective and efficient as possible. Services should also consider other incentives to attract more people into on-call roles, such as flexible working arrangements. Once in post, services should make sure that on-call staff feel valued and well-prepared for their role.

The NFCC is carrying out research to help it develop guidance for the sector on improving the on-call duty system. This includes:

- developing new tools to support recruitment and availability; and
- efforts to improve pay and conditions.

In March 2025, [the NFCC introduced new web pages to promote the on-call role on a national scale](#). It also plans to publish a report to raise awareness of the on-call system and share best practice to make it more sustainable. I look forward to seeing the outcomes of this work.

In our 2025–27 inspection programme, we will continue to inspect how services are attempting to maintain and improve their on-call availability. In our reports we will highlight examples where services are adapting their approach and seeing positive results.

Sector reform is an opportunity to make improvements

While the sector has made some progress, there is still more to do to make sure that all services can meet changing demands and provide the best service to the public.

In this section, I discuss how sector reform presents a vital opportunity to create a more consistent, accountable and professional fire and rescue service.

Changes in government responsibilities present an opportunity to advance sector reform

In 2024, there was an election of a new Government and, in April 2025, a machinery of government change moved all fire policy from the Home Office to MHCLG. These changes in government responsibilities present a critical opportunity to implement the long overdue and much-needed reform across the fire and rescue sector. The Government must now be decisive and follow through on its commitment to reform.

Fire policy is now aligned under a single Secretary of State, supported by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Building Safety, Fire and Democracy. It is important to make sure that fire policy receives appropriate attention as MHCLG balances a broad and complex agenda.

Reform in the fire and rescue sector could help to:

- create greater consistency and accountability;
- strengthen leadership;
- raise professional standards;
- modernise the firefighter role; and
- support cultural change.

These are essential steps towards a more effective, inclusive and resilient fire and rescue service. The Ministerial Advisory Group for Fire and Rescue Reform needs to incentivise action. Without a decisive approach, there is a risk that reform efforts will continue to lose momentum.

While some services have made progress, persistent issues continue to prevent improvement in certain areas. These challenges have prompted us to issue [seven national recommendations \(included in Annex A\)](#), many of which reflect long-standing concerns. We made six of these recommendations several years ago, and three are still unaddressed. This highlights the need for renewed focus.

The three outstanding recommendations relate to:

- precisely determining the roles of fire and rescue services and their staff to remove any ambiguity;
- reviewing and reforming the systems for determining pay and conditions; and
- giving chief fire officers operational independence.

These recommendations now sit with MHCLG. The publication of the [Fire Reform White Paper in May 2022](#) marked a significant milestone. But as the proposals for improvement haven't been implemented, the sector has been left without the changes it urgently needs. This has been a missed opportunity to strengthen leadership, raise professional standards and integrate positive values and culture across fire and rescue services.

For example, the Government has yet to introduce a national barred list that holds details of staff who have been dismissed for gross misconduct. This list would help to create accountability and establish [safeguarding](#) standards across the sector. I hope MHCLG will now take this work forward.

Feedback from the sector broadly supports the view that reform has been too slow. Of the 44 responses to my letter to gather views on the state of fire and rescue services, 29 respondents identified the slow pace of reform as one of the most significant challenges facing the sector in 2024. And 38 respondents felt that the time taken to bring about reform has negatively affected the sector. Respondents also highlighted concerns that these delays have left the future direction of the sector uncertain, which makes planning difficult.

Many responses to my letter echoed the themes of our unaddressed recommendations, particularly the need for clarity around the roles and responsibilities of firefighters and the wider responsibilities of fire and rescue services. Until all our national recommendations are addressed in full, the sector won't be able to give the best possible service to the public.

We will continue to use our independent voice to support and guide decision-making around reform, and I will be monitoring progress closely. The Government must now act quickly to implement long-overdue changes and make sure that reform provides the consistent, professional and accountable fire and rescue service that the public expect and deserve. Achieving this will require continued collaboration across the sector, including the Government, the NFCC and representative bodies.

Chief fire officers should have operational independence

Unlike chief constables in policing, chief fire officers don't have operational independence. This can lead to tension between chief fire officers and their authorities, especially when there isn't an agreement on how to make services more effective or efficient.

My predecessor, Sir Tom Winsor, first recommended operational independence in his 2019 'State of Fire and Rescue' report. He argued that chief fire officers were best placed to make operational decisions and should be fully accountable for service performance. I have consistently supported this view and continue to believe that the role of [fire and rescue authorities \(FRAs\)](#) shouldn't extend to giving operational direction. Governance arrangements should enable not constrain effective leadership.

Respondents to my letter to gather views on the state of fire and rescue services also widely supported the need for operational independence. Many respondents expressed concerns that the current governance model can blur lines of accountability and prevent effective decision-making.

HMICFRS needs greater powers to help promote further improvement

The inspectorate's overarching purpose is to make communities safer. Our reports help members of the public to see how their local service is performing and allow them to compare it to other services. We need to have the right legal powers in place for us to inspect as effectively as possible and promote improvements in services that are so urgently needed.

There are some areas where our existing powers and abilities for policing are greater than those for fire and rescue. Under [section 55 of the Police Act 1996](#), local policing bodies are required to publish their response to inspection reports that relate to their local police force. However, there is no legal requirement for FRAs and their equivalents to do the same. Creating parity with the existing policing legislation would undoubtedly lead to continued improvements for the public.

Under section 7.5 of the [Fire and Rescue National Framework](#), FRAs must give due regard to our reports and recommendations. And if we make recommendations directed to them, they must prepare, update and regularly publish action plans detailing how they will be implemented. But there is no legislative requirement, and as a result we don't regularly receive published responses to our inspection reports from FRAs and their equivalents. These responses should be mandatory to make sure improvements happen quickly.

Under [section 54 \(2BA\) of the Police Act 1996](#), local policing bodies such as police and crime commissioners can ask for an inspection of the police force in their area if they think it is needed. FRAs don't have the same option. They can't ask us to inspect their local service.

In my [2022](#) and [2023 'State of Policing'](#) reports, I recommended that we should be given additional legal powers for policing. I also believe that to maintain parity, the Government should consider this for fire and rescue services. Many other essential public services have a regulator. But fire and rescue services don't. Instead, we rely on services voluntarily acting on our findings. Often, services work with us because of our reputation, authoritative voice and the value they see in our recommendations. However, we have repeatedly seen that many services fail to implement our recommendations within the reasonable time frames we set.

Once the operational independence of chief fire officers has been established, I propose that I, as Chief Inspector of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, am given the authority to issue directions to a force or service. This would be in specific, limited circumstances where we identify in an inspection a failure that poses a significant risk to public safety.

In [my 2023 'State of Fire and Rescue' report](#), I therefore recommended that by 1 March 2025, the Home Secretary should introduce amendments to Parliament concerning the inspectors of fire and rescue that:

- place a requirement on fire and rescue authorities to publish comments, within 56 days, in response to HMICFRS inspection reports on their fire and rescue services; and
- allow fire and rescue authorities, as well as mayors, county councils and police, fire and crime commissioners, to request that HMICFRS inspects the fire and rescue services in their areas.

I made this recommendation before the machinery of government changes. I am still firmly of the view that our existing inspection powers should be extended. This recommendation now sits with MHCLG, and I ask that ministers give this serious consideration. Forthcoming policing bills to introduce police reform may present an opportunity for this recommendation to be implemented. It has been done before. For example, amendments to the [Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#), which introduced inspectors of fire and rescue, were made through the [Policing and Crime Act 2017](#).

The Government should establish a College of Fire and Rescue, which would help to professionalise the workforce

In March 2023, I recommended that the Government should establish a College of Fire and Rescue. A dedicated institution would help advance professionalisation across the sector. This recommendation was also included in the [Phase 2 report from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry](#). Responses to my letter to gather views on the state of fire and rescue services similarly highlighted support for creating the college.

A College of Fire and Rescue is essential to professionalise and modernise the fire and rescue service. It could have a pivotal role in developing and strengthening leadership, which would make sure that leaders could meet current and future challenges. It could help to promote consistency, set national standards and develop professional practice. Beyond this, the college could be a central hub of excellence for data, research, innovation and horizon scanning, which would help the sector anticipate and respond to emerging opportunities and risks.

I acknowledge [the Government's renewed commitment to move forward with establishing a College of Fire and Rescue](#). And I recognise the work of the Ministerial Advisory Group's task and finish group, which was set up to inform decision-making on policy design for the college, including its purpose, structure and how it will operate. This work could help maintain momentum and result in change. While the Government has accepted the creation of the college in principle, no timeline has been given for it to be established. I note the Government's plan to carry out another round of consultation in 2025, but to realise its benefits as quickly as possible, it should act decisively.

Delays in establishing the college have been a missed opportunity to build leadership capacity, raise professional standards and create stronger values and culture across fire and rescue services. The need to establish the college is long overdue.

Services should integrate learning and continuous improvement at all levels of the organisation

To meet both current and future challenges, fire and rescue services need to be open to change.

In this section, I discuss why services should embrace all opportunities for learning and continuous improvement.

Services should use our inspection findings to help them make progress

We design our inspection programme to promote improvements across fire and rescue services. Through regular and thematic reviews, spotlight reports and our monitoring process, we help identify strengths, areas for development and examples of [promising](#) and [innovative practice](#). It is essential for services to use our inspection findings to develop robust improvement plans and make meaningful progress.

Our 2025–27 inspection methodology maintains and, in some areas, increases scrutiny to make sure that the public receive an effective service. It is designed to help services overcome barriers and make sustainable improvements that benefit the communities they serve.

It is only possible for services to make improvements when they participate fully and honestly with our inspection process. Attempts to ‘game’ inspections, such as by selecting specific staff for [reality testing](#) or briefing individuals on what to say, undermine the integrity of our assessment. These attempts haven’t been successful in the past. We have identified these practices through our inspection activities or have received reports through our confidential inspection reporting line. Where we find out this might be happening, we will take further action.

Services should share best practice to support improvements

Fire and rescue services need to identify, share and adopt effective approaches to support improvement across the sector. We help with this by hosting events that bring leaders together to exchange ideas and learn from one another.

In April 2024, we worked with Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service to host an event focused on leadership and its role in creating improvement. In June 2025, we held our first joint policing and fire event to explore how both sectors are tackling issues around culture and misconduct. At these events, services and forces shared some of the promising work they have done so others could learn from them.

Services should embrace the support that is offered to them

Achieving lasting change in the fire and rescue sector needs a system-wide approach. Support and guidance for fire and rescue services comes from a range of national bodies, including the Local Government Association, the NFCC and the Fire Standards Board.

We encourage services to work with partner organisations, such as the NFCC, to help them to improve their performance. For example, the NFCC implementation team helps services to adopt new strategies and solutions and make improvements. This team can support services to address an area for improvement we have issued by signposting them to examples of good practice. And services that meet [professional standards for fire and rescue services](#) typically perform better in the relevant areas we inspect. While some services are actively embracing this support, others aren't yet doing so. This means they are missing valuable opportunities to strengthen their performance.

With a proactive approach to learning and improving, and the right focus and collaboration, fire and rescue services can continue to become more effective, inclusive and resilient. This will help services to meet current needs and adapt to future challenges.

Annex A: Our national recommendations

In this annex, we report on the status of each of our seven national recommendations. We also comment on any relevant progress since [my last 'State of Fire and Rescue' report, which we published in May 2024](#). It is important to acknowledge that six of these recommendations were issued by my predecessor, Sir Tom Winsor, in [his first 'State of Fire Rescue' report, which we published in 2019](#). This means that some of these recommendations have been outstanding for six years.

Since we published these recommendations, responsibility for fire policy has moved from the Home Office to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Therefore, MHCLG has given the updates against outstanding recommendations that were originally directed to the Home Office or the Government.

Recommendation 1

As soon as is practicable the Home Office, [National Fire Chiefs Council \(NFCC\)](#) and Local Government Association, in consultation with the Fire Standards Board and [Association of Police and Crime Commissioners](#), should establish a programme of work that will result in consistency in the four priority areas (1. identifying and determining risk as part of the [integrated risk management plan \(IRMP\)](#) process; 2. identifying and measuring emergency response standards and approaches; 3. defining what are high-risk premises for the purposes of fire protection; and 4. setting an expectation for how frequently high-risk premises, and parts of those premises, should be audited for compliance with fire safety legislation).

There should be completion or significant progress in the four priority areas specified above, towards a common set of definitions and standards for fire and rescue services to adopt and apply as soon as reasonably practicable, for each of the four priority areas.

Status: complete

Recommendation 2

As part of the next Spending Review, the Home Office in consultation with the Fire and Rescue Sector should address the deficit in the fire sector's national capacity and capability to support change.

Status: complete

Recommendation 3

The Home Office, in consultation with the fire and rescue sector, should review and with precision determine the roles of: (a) fire and rescue services; and (b) those who work in them.

Status: in progress

The Home Office consulted on this matter in the [White Paper on fire reform](#) that was published on 18 May 2022.

In its response, the Government stated:

“We need fire and rescue services to be able to play a full role in protecting the community, working with health, police and other partners without getting tied up in red tape.”

Since then, in 2024, a Ministerial Advisory Group for Fire and Rescue Reform was established. This group was set up to support the new Government to determine its approach to reforming the fire and rescue sector.

Following discussions with this group, the Government has proposed to explore whether changes to the role and responsibilities of the firefighter are needed. This is intended to help the workforce to develop and increase productivity.

While I welcome the Government's initiative to establish the Ministerial Advisory Group for Fire and Rescue Reform, much-needed reforms to the fire and rescue sector are long overdue. The Government should create the necessary framework and/or legislation to allow fire and rescue employers and representative bodies to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the firefighter. I expect MHCLG to give me an update by 5 April 2026.

Recommendation 4

The Home Office, the Local Government Association, the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) and trade unions should consider whether the current pay negotiation machinery requires fundamental reform. If so, this should include the need for an independent pay review body and the future of the 'Grey Book'.

Status: in progress

In July 2025, I received an update from the Government, Local Government Association, the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) and the employers' side of the National Joint Council for Fire and Rescue Services, which is known as the 'National Employers'.

The National Employers carried out a self-led review of how it handles pay negotiations. At the time of writing, this wasn't yet published.

The review included interviews with the Local Government Association, the National Fire Chiefs Council and other stakeholders. Some National Employers chose not to take part as they disagreed with the idea of changing the pay negotiation process, which they believe is the employers' responsibility.

Importantly, the 'Grey Book', which sets out pay and conditions for firefighters, has been reviewed for the first time in nearly 20 years. This prepares for future conversations on updating the pay structure.

However, as the review is yet to be published, it is difficult to understand the impact it may have. I expect the National Employers to give me an update by 5 April 2026.

Recommendation 5

The Home Office should consider the case for legislating to give chief fire officers operational independence. In the meantime, it should issue clear guidance, possibly through an amendment to the [Fire and Rescue National Framework](#) for England, on the demarcation between those responsible for governance and operational decision making by the chief fire officer.

Status: in progress

MHCLG acknowledges the continuing requests for operational independence. These requests are partly because of upcoming changes to English devolution (the transfer of powers from national to local government) and its implications for the governance of fire and rescue services.

MHCLG also recognises that the National Fire Chiefs Council has urged for clearer demarcation between the role of [fire and rescue authorities](#) and of chief fire officers.

However, at the time of publication, MHCLG didn't intend to legislate to give chief fire officers operational independence. It expects to include work already carried out on schemes of delegation (how fire and rescue authorities assign responsibilities) in an updated national framework.

While I appreciate MHCLG's recognition of the ongoing calls for operational independence, I am disappointed that no legislative action is currently planned to address this. Ongoing changes to governance, particularly under mayoral structures, make it more important than ever to clearly define the role and authority of chief fire officers. I expect MHCLG to give me an update by 5 April 2026.

Recommendation 6

The [National Fire Chiefs Council](#), with the Local Government Association, should produce a code of ethics for fire and rescue services. The code should be adopted by every service in England and considered part of each employee's progression and annual performance appraisal.

Status: complete

Recommendation 7

By 1 March 2025, the Home Secretary should introduce amendments to Parliament concerning the inspectors of fire and rescue that:

- place a requirement on [fire and rescue authorities](#) to publish comments, within 56 days, in response to HMICFRS inspection reports on their fire and rescue services; and
- allow fire and rescue authorities, as well as mayors, county councils and [police, fire and crime commissioners](#), to request that HMICFRS inspects the fire and rescue services in their areas.

Status: In progress

MHCLG officials are working with us on the possibility of extending our powers in relation to the two amendments detailed in the recommendation. Forthcoming policing bills may present an opportunity for this recommendation to be implemented. It has been done before. For example, amendments to the [Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#), which introduced inspectors of fire and rescue, were made through the [Policing and Crime Act 2017](#).

I expect MHCLG to give me an update by 5 April 2026.

Annex B: Our reports published between 30 March 2023 and 14 August 2025

The reports we publish fulfil our statutory duty to inspect and report on the effectiveness and efficiency of [fire and rescue authorities](#) in England. We have published every report on our website and given it to the relevant fire and rescue service.

Fire and rescue service inspections

- [Avon Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Cleveland Fire Brigade](#)
- [Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Essex County Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Humberside Fire and rescue Service](#)
- [Isles of Scilly Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Kent Fire and Rescue Service](#)

- [Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [London Fire Brigade](#)
- [Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Surrey Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [West Midlands Fire Service](#)
- [West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)

Spotlight report

[Values and culture in fire and rescue services](#)

Thematic inspection

[Standards of behaviour: The handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services](#)

South Wales Fire and Rescue Service inspection

[An inspection of South Wales Fire and Rescue Service](#)

Annex C: Our revisit letters

In our inspections, if we identify a serious, critical or systemic shortcoming in a service's practice, policy or performance, we will report it as a [cause of concern \(CoC\)](#). A CoC will always be accompanied by one or more recommendations. When we identify a CoC during our inspections, we normally provide details in the published service report.

When we discover significant service failures or risks to public safety, we report our concerns and recommendations earlier. This is called an [accelerated cause of concern](#).

When we identify a CoC, we require the service to produce an action plan to resolve it. We monitor progress against this plan and will usually carry out a revisit – and further revisits if necessary – to assess progress against each plan. Following each revisit, the regional HM inspector provides written feedback to the chief fire officer. We publish each letter in full on our website. We sent and published revisit letters for:

- Avon Fire and Rescue Service ([first Avon revisit](#), [second Avon revisit](#), [third Avon revisit](#), [fourth Avon revisit](#))
- [Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service ([first Buckinghamshire revisit](#), [second Buckinghamshire revisit](#), [Buckinghamshire progress letter](#))
- Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service ([first Cornwall revisit](#), [second Cornwall revisit](#))
- [Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- London Fire Brigade ([first London revisit](#), [second London revisit](#), [third London revisit](#))
- [North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)

- [Surrey Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service ([first Warwickshire revisit](#), [second Warwickshire revisit](#))

Annex D: Our 2025–27 methodology

We have worked closely with the sector to develop our methodology

Since we started inspecting fire and rescue services in 2018, we have continually evolved our approach to reflect the changing needs of the sector and the communities it serves.

Between 19 August and 15 September 2024, we held a [public consultation on our draft 2025–27 fire and rescue services inspection programme and framework](#).

We asked whether our proposed approach addressed the right areas of fire and rescue service activities. We received 61 responses, the majority from within the sector. I was pleased that we received broad support for each of our proposals and am grateful to everyone who contributed. In [our formal response to the consultation](#), which we published in January 2025, we outlined how this feedback informed our final framework.

In addition to the consultation, we worked with our external reference group and other interested parties and experts to gather further insights into our methodology. This helped us to refine our approach and make sure it focused on the areas needed to help support services to improve.

Before we introduced the [2025–27 inspection programme](#), we tested the new inspection activities using our updated methodology to make sure they were robust and fit for purpose. We used the lessons learned from these trials to fine-tune our processes, and I thank everyone who supported this important work.

In January 2025, [we introduced our 2025–27 round of inspections](#). In September 2025, we started fieldwork in the first three services.

Details of our inspection programme and framework

Summary of our 2025–27 methodology

In our 2025–27 programme, as we did in Round 3, we will continue to inspect all 44 fire and rescue services in England over a two-year period. We will maintain our focus on how effective and efficient services are at carrying out their main functions and how well they look after their people. We have retained our hybrid approach, which combines on-site visits with remote activity. We will continue to gather evidence through interviews, [reality testing](#) and desktop reviews. And we will use the same grading approach as in our Round 3 inspections.

Principal questions

While our three principal questions are unchanged, we have made our methodology more efficient by reducing the number of diagnostic questions from 11 to 10. We have merged our two efficiency questions into one. This removes duplication and allows us to focus more clearly on outcomes for communities and the workforce. We have explained this in more detail in our [principal inspection questions](#).

Service in context

In our 2025–27 inspections, we will take greater account of financial, geographic and demographic context. This will allow members of the public to see how their local service is performing and compare it more easily to other services. These contextual factors won't influence our graded judgments.

Characteristics of good

We have updated our [characteristics of good](#) performance. These characteristics describe the levels of performance a fire and rescue service needs to achieve to be graded 'good'. They help us to make consistent assessments across all services and show services what they are being graded against.

Our consultation showed support for the revised characteristics, with 49 out of 61 respondents agreeing that they are comprehensive.

Increasing our focus on areas of systemic challenge

Our 2025–27 inspection programme includes a greater focus on some of the main areas of systemic challenge in the sector, such as:

- leadership;
- the impact of governance, assurance and scrutiny on services; and
- values and culture.

Leadership

Our assessment of how services look after their people now places greater emphasis on leadership throughout the organisation. This follows strong support for this change in our consultation, with 57 out of 61 respondents in agreement.

We have updated our leadership questions to focus not just on leadership development but also on how effectively leaders communicate their intentions and strategic objectives, model positive behaviours and foster inclusive work environments. We will also assess how well leaders are supported and developed at every level.

In each service report, we will highlight the most important findings on leadership as part of the overall HMI summary.

The impact of governance, assurance and scrutiny

In our earlier rounds of inspections, we focused on the service provided to the public and not on the accountability and scrutiny structures that govern fire and rescue services. In our 2025–27 inspections, we will also consider how [fire and rescue authority](#) governance affects each service.

This change, supported in our consultation, means we will focus on how these governance arrangements support each service to keep the public safe and create a positive culture across the workforce. We aren't inspecting the governance of the fire and rescue authority directly. We are assessing how governance arrangements influence service performance.

Values and culture

In our 2025–27 methodology, we set higher expectations for how fire and rescue services foster and maintain a positive culture. We will assess how well services implement their values in all they do, address poor behaviours and make sure staff feel confident challenging unacceptable conduct. We will also examine how consistently and promptly services handle grievances and disciplinary matters.

Annex E: About us

[Biographies for each of our inspectors](#) and [information about who we inspect](#) are available on our website.

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue



Sir Andy Cooke QPM DL

In April 2022, Andy Cooke was appointed HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary and HM Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services.

His Majesty's Inspectors of Fire and Rescue



Lee Freeman KPM

In August 2023, Lee Freeman was appointed HM Inspector of Constabulary and HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue.



Michelle Skeer OBE QPM

In August 2023, Michelle Skeer was appointed HM Inspector of Constabulary and HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue.



Kathryn Stone OBE

In June 2025, Kathryn Stone was appointed HM Inspector of Constabulary and HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue.



Roy Wilsher OBE QFSM

In October 2021, Roy Wilsher was appointed HM Inspector of Constabulary and HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue.

Assistant His Majesty's Inspector



Nicola Faulconbridge

In October 2023, Nicola Faulconbridge joined HMICFRS as an Assistant Inspector of Constabulary.

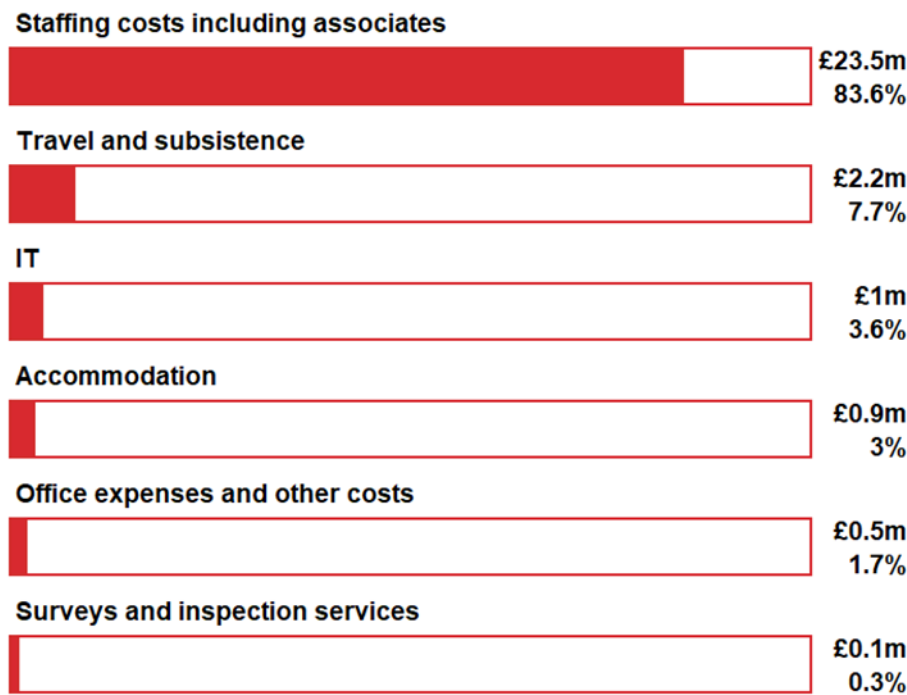
Finances and workforce

Our finances

We are funded mainly by the Home Office. We also receive funding for inspections commissioned by other organisations, such as the National Crime Agency.

In 2023/24, we spent 84 percent of our funding on our workforce, with the rest spent on IT, surveys and other expenses.

Expenditure breakdown 2023/24

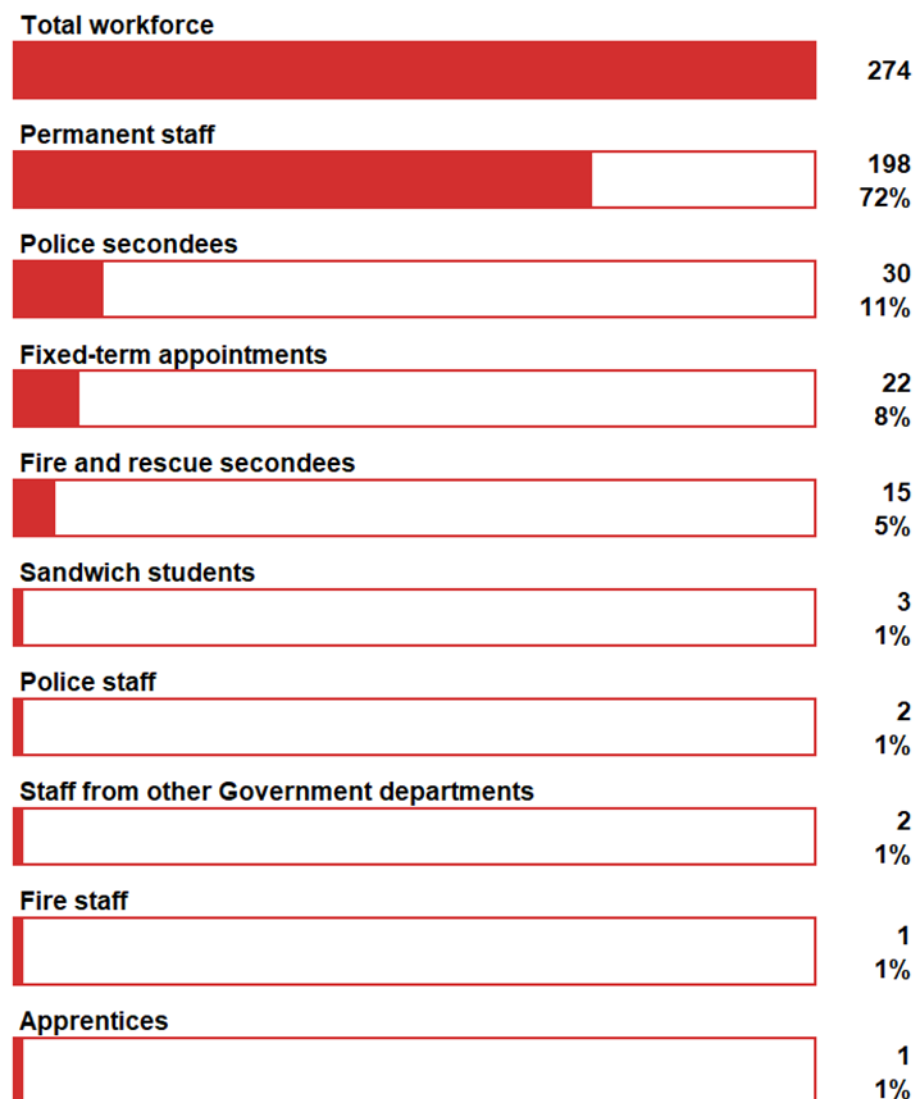


Note: numbers may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

Our workforce

Our workforce comprises the inspectors of constabulary and fire and rescue services, civil servants, seconded [police officers](#) and [staff](#) and secondees from fire and rescue services. We also have a register of associates who provide specialist resource and skills.

Staffing breakdown 2023/24



Note: numbers may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

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