

Fire & Rescue Service 2023–25

Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service

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Changes to this round of inspection

We [last inspected Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service in June 2022](#). And in January 2023, we published our inspection report with our findings on the service's effectiveness and efficiency and how well it looks after its people. We followed this up with a [re-inspection in March 2023](#) to specifically consider the [causes of concern](#) that were previously issued for efficiency and people. And we published our findings in May 2023.

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

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

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

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

This report sets out our inspection findings for Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service.

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

Overall summary

Our judgments

Our inspection assessed how well Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service has performed in 11 areas. We have made the following graded judgments:

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

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

HMI summary

It was a pleasure to revisit Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service. I am grateful for the positive and constructive way in which the service worked with our inspection staff.

Since our last inspection, the service has seen a change in governance. The [police, fire and crime commissioner \(PFCC\)](#) now oversees it.

I am satisfied with some aspects of the performance of Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service in keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks. But there are areas in which the service needs to improve. In particular, the service needs to upgrade its IT provision to improve efficiency, productivity and oversight.

We were pleased to see the service has made good progress against several areas for improvement we identified in our last inspection. For example, it has worked hard to consult the local community to build a comprehensive profile of risk. And it has put in place an effective process to adopt [national operational guidance](#).

But we were disappointed that the service hasn't made enough progress in other areas. For example, it still needs to strengthen its evaluation of prevention work and improve its monitoring of staff working hours.

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

- The service has sound financial plans in place and understands its future financial challenges.
- The balanced budget, detailed capital investment plans and effective scrutiny provide financial stability and improved value for money.
- The service has improved its processes to effectively assess operational performance and share learning.
- Risk information is well maintained and easily accessible to appropriately trained incident commanders.
- The service identifies those most at risk, working effectively with partner organisations, although it needs to make sure it has enough resources to meet demand.
- The service should reduce the number of staff in temporary roles and improve workforce planning for future needs.
- The service should improve its management and oversight of performance.
- The service should address barriers to equal opportunity, including improving equality data.
- The service should carry out [equality impact assessments](#) more effectively to get a clearer understanding of its workforce's needs.

Overall, I am pleased with how Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service has improved since our last inspection. I encourage the service to continue to improve in the areas we have highlighted and look forward to seeing how this benefits the public and the organisation in the future.



Lee Freeman

HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Service in numbers



Profile

	Cumbria	England
Area Square miles	2,634	50,370
Population (thousands) 30 June 2023	505	57,690
Population density Thousands per square mile	0.2	1.1



Cost

Funding Year ending 31 March 2024	£28.0m	£2.5bn
Expenditure per population Year ending 31 March 2024	£59.38	£49.54

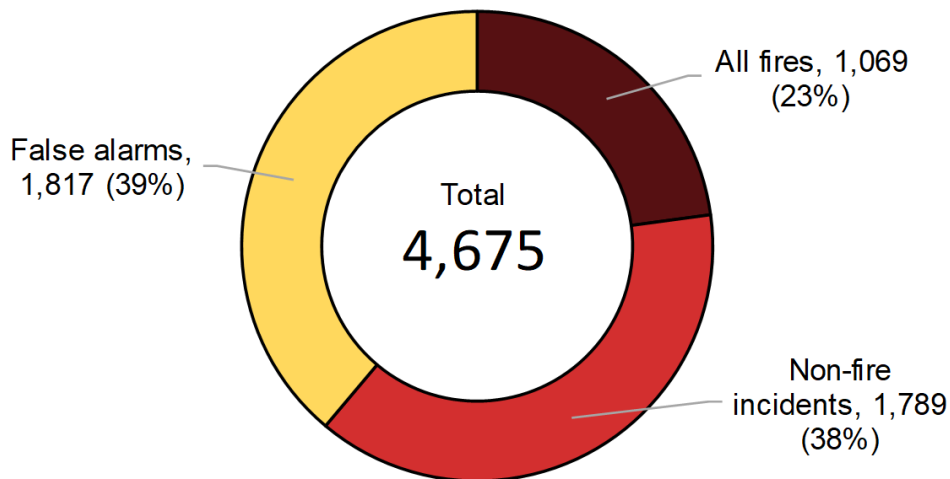


Response

Incidents attended per 1,000 population Year ending 30 September 2024	9.3	10.4
Home fire safety visits carried out by fire and rescue service per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2024	16.5	9.8
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises Year ending 31 March 2024	2.0	2.0
Availability of wholetime pumps Year ending 31 March 2024	100.0%	
Availability of on-call pumps Year ending 31 March 2024	78.5%	



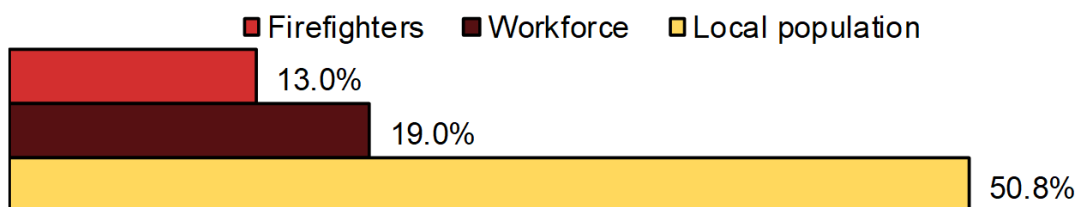
Incidents attended in year ending 30 September 2024



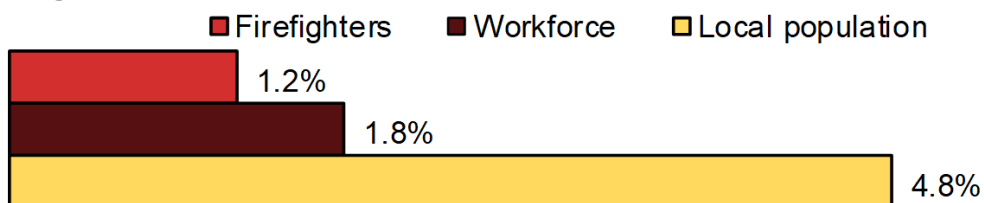
Workforce

	Cumbria	England
Five-year change in total workforce 2019 to 2024	6.6%	1.9%
Number of firefighters per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2024	1.15	0.60
Percentage of firefighters who are wholetime Year ending 31 March 2024	40.0%	65.8%

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



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



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

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies

Good

Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service is good at understanding risk.

Each fire and rescue service should identify and assess all foreseeable fire and rescue-related risks that could affect its communities. It should use its protection and response capabilities to prevent or mitigate these risks for the public.

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

Main findings

The service has strengthened its capability to identify risks and improved how it works with the community

The service has assessed a comprehensive range of risks and threats through its thorough [community risk management plan \(CRMP\)](#) process. It collects information from a broad range of internal and external sources and datasets. For example, the service uses its response data, as well as local and national risk registers.

The service also considers a broad spectrum of research from other organisations and analysis gathered through the [Cumbria Intelligence Observatory](#). This includes future risks, such as the environment, climate change and social, cultural and economic factors. It uses this data to create a risk-based evidence profile that defines the nature and level of risk and demand faced by communities across Cumbria.

The service has improved how it works with the community. It works effectively with the office of the police, fire and crime commissioner (OPFCC), Cumbria Association of Local Councils, and other organisations, such as community groups and support groups. It has consulted with its communities and stakeholders to understand risks and explain how it intends to mitigate them.

The service has an effective CRMP

Once it has assessed risks, the service records its findings in an easily understood CRMP. The current plan covers four years, 2024–28. It complements the PFCC’s police fire and crime plan and sets out 34 priorities.

The plan describes how the service intends to use its prevention, protection and response activities to mitigate or reduce the risks and threats the community faces both now and in the future. For example, it works with other organisations to focus on those people most at risk from fire and other emergencies. And it carries out an operational fire cover review to make sure resources are strategically positioned to meet demand.

The service effectively gathers, maintains and shares a good range of risk information

The service routinely collects and updates the information it has about the highest-risk people, places and threats it has identified. This includes operational risk information.

The service has reviewed its approach to updating operational [intelligence](#) to make sure it manages it effectively. We found that information was initially gathered using a paper-based system. At the time of our inspection, the service was piloting the use of mobile devices.

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

- system records on the database it uses;
- site-specific risk information;
- [home fire safety visit \(HSFV\)](#) files;
- protection files; and
- short-term/temporary risk information.

This information is readily available for the service’s prevention, protection and response staff. This means these teams can identify, reduce and mitigate risk effectively. For example, firefighters can easily access emergency evacuation plans for high-rise premises.

Where appropriate, the service shares risk information with other services and partner organisations, such as the police. The service is a member of the north west risk information group. The group shares and updates risk information to make sure there is an effective cross-border response.

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

We found that not all operational staff were familiar with high-risk premises within their station areas. The service should establish a structured programme of visits to high-risk premises to make sure operational personnel are familiar with these locations. This would support the service to provide an effective and safe response during incidents. The service should monitor and record these visits.

In our last inspection, we identified as an area for improvement that the service should make sure [fire control](#) has direct access to relevant and up-to-date risk information.

The service decided not to provide North West Fire Control with direct access to all risk information. However, we were satisfied that control room staff could access the necessary information when required. We have closed this area for improvement.

The service uses operational activity to help inform its risk profile

The service records and communicates risk information effectively. It regularly updates risk assessments. It also uses feedback from local and national operational activities to inform its planning. For example, it addresses future risks in its CRMP, such as the heightened risk of wildfires. This has led to a shared collaborative arrangement with Westmorland and Furness Council for a specialist off-road vehicle.

Preventing fires and other risks

Requires improvement

Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at preventing fires and other risks.

Fire and rescue services must promote fire safety, including giving fire safety advice. To identify people at greatest risk from fire, services should work closely with other organisations in the public and voluntary sectors, and with the police and ambulance services. They should share [intelligence](#) and risk information with these other organisations when they identify vulnerability or exploitation.

Areas for improvement

The service should make sure it puts effective measures in place to address the backlog of [home fire safety visits](#).

The service should evaluate its prevention activity so it understands what is most effective.

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

Main findings

The service's prevention strategy prioritises those most at risk

The service's prevention strategy is clearly linked to the risks it has identified in its CRMP. The strategy is underpinned by plans for the four main areas:

- home safety;
- road safety;
- water safety; and
- youth engagement.

The service's teams work well together and with other organisations on prevention. They share relevant information when needed. The service uses information to adjust its planning and direct activity between its prevention, protection and response functions.

Prevention activities align with the [National Fire Chiefs Council's \(NFCC\) Person Centred Framework](#) for home visits. The service works closely with adult social care, NHS Digital, local authorities, water supplier United Utilities and road safety forums to identify the most vulnerable individuals.

The service effectively targets its prevention activity

During our 2022 inspection, we highlighted as an area for improvement that the service should develop a clear prevention strategy targeting people most at risk and make sure it carries out proportionate activity to reduce that risk. In this inspection, we found that the service had made enough progress for us to close this area for improvement.

The service uses a risk-based approach. It combines data analysis and direct referrals to effectively prioritise its prevention efforts towards those most at risk from fire and other emergencies. It gathers data and intelligence from partner organisations, external analysts, national statistics and the service's fatal fire report 2011–23.

According to 2023/24 Home Office data, the service carried out 83.1 percent of its prevention visits (6,914 out of 8,320) on those defined as [vulnerable](#) or at risk. This indicates the service is targeting its prevention activity effectively.

The service allocates enough resources to meet its prevention strategy

During our 2022 inspection, we also highlighted that the service should make sure it allocates enough resources to meet its prevention strategy. We found that the service had made enough progress for us to close this area for improvement.

The service has completed a review of resources. Prevention staff told us they felt sufficiently resourced. However, the service should review its resilience arrangements for critical roles. Recent absences have reduced productivity. This has contributed to a backlog of HFSVs.

Staff have the right training to carry out HFSVs

Staff told us they have the right skills and confidence to complete HFSVs. The service gives them appropriate training. The checks cover an appropriate range of dangers that can put vulnerable people at greater risk from fire and other emergencies. Staff consistently follow the NFCC's Safelincs model.

The service needs to make sure HFSVs are completed in a timely and efficient manner

Since our last inspection, the service has developed a more effective partner referral process with, for example, the police and adult social care. This means it can better target those most at risk from fire. In January 2025, it introduced a new intervention process to support the prompt triage and completion of referrals. We found staff had limited understanding of the process and didn't always comply with it.

The service aims to complete high-risk referrals within 28 days. However, at the time of our inspection, we identified 111 cases that were over 3 months old. Of these, 48 were classified as very high risk, and 47 as high risk.

The service should make sure staff have a clear understanding of the intervention process. It should also improve its monitoring of referral completions to make sure it addresses all HFSV referrals promptly.

Staff are confident in reporting safeguarding concerns

Staff we interviewed told us about occasions when they had identified people who needed [safeguarding](#). They told us they feel confident and trained to act appropriately and promptly.

Specialist prevention team staff receive advanced safeguarding training, while operational staff complete a safeguarding and vulnerability e-learning package. However, we found a completion rate of only 64 percent. The service should improve its monitoring of e-learning to make sure staff maintain their competence.

The service works well with other organisations to reduce risk

The service works with a wide range of other organisations to prevent fires and other emergencies. These include local authorities and schools, as well as road and water safety partnerships with breakdown assistance provider the RAC and the RNLI.

The service also has arrangements to receive referrals from other organisations. These include housing providers, adult social care and the police. In 2023/24, the service received 2,345 HFSV referrals from other agencies.

The service routinely exchanges information with other organisations about people and groups at greatest risk. It uses this information to challenge planning assumptions and target prevention activity. For example, in July 2024, the service introduced a pilot with the police to develop resilience in young people at risk of making bad choices. It successfully secured £20,000 in funding from the [Serious Violence Duty](#) operational group to support future courses.

The service's programme for tackling fire-setting behaviour is effective

The service has a range of suitable and effective interventions to target and educate people with different needs who show signs of fire-setting behaviour. This includes an effective fire-setters programme targeted at those involved in [antisocial behaviour](#) linked to wildfires and a Fire Cadets scheme.

When appropriate, the service routinely shares information with relevant organisations to support the prosecution of arsonists. Its fire investigation team works closely with police to determine the cause of a fire and support the police with prosecutions.

The service should improve how it evaluates its prevention work

During our 2022 inspection, we highlighted as an area for improvement that the service should evaluate its prevention work to better understand its benefits. Since then, the service has adopted the NFCC evaluation model. It carried out initial trials on road and water safety prevention activity. The service also evaluated an initiative for young people using the Impactasaurus tool.

However, we found limited evidence of systematic evaluation across the service's broader prevention activities. For example, the service hasn't assessed the effectiveness of its NFCC seasonal campaigns, the HFSV referral process, or several serious fire review cases.

While some progress has been made, the service needs to carry out further work to make sure evaluation processes are understood by everyone. It needs to make sure that it effectively assesses prevention activities and uses the learning to promote continuous improvement. As a result, we have kept this area for improvement open.

Protecting the public through fire regulation

Good

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

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

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

Main findings

The service's protection strategy is effective and linked to risk

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

Protection staff work well with operational crews, effectively exchanging information as needed. For example, inspecting officers and operational staff carry out inspections and audits with businesses to share information and give advice on how to comply with relevant legislation.

Operational staff also carry out 'business engagement' visits to lower-risk premises. They check risk assessments, fire escapes, lighting and other safety measures. They report any issues to a fire safety protection lead, an operational staff member qualified to level 3, who provides guidance and co-ordinates with the specialist fire safety team.

We found that fire safety audits were consistently carried out following fires in commercial premises. The service uses the information to adjust planning and direct activity between its protection, prevention and response functions. This means the service aligns resources with risk.

The service aligns its auditing activity with risk

The service's risk-based inspection programme (RBIP) targets the highest-risk premises. The service told us that between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2024, the RBIP included 1,470 high-risk premises, and 1,375 audits were completed. The audits we reviewed had been completed within the timescales set by the service. However, we found that 95 high-risk premises were carried over from the 2021–24 RBIP to be completed in 2025.

At the end of the 2021–24 programme, the service reviewed the RBIP, which identified 1,654 high-risk locations. The service has adjusted its resources to complete the three-year programme accordingly. Additionally, 13,881 medium-risk premises are subject to sample testing. The 17,146 low-risk premises receive visits from station-based operational staff.

The service should make sure it completes all audits within the RBIP schedule.

The service completes audits to a high standard

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

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

The audits we reviewed were completed to a high standard in a consistent, systematic way and in line with the service's policies. The protection team makes relevant information from its audits available to the wider service. Fire safety inspectors complete a specific form if they identify concerns during an inspection. The service shares this with operational staff, control room staff and its operational planning team.

The service has an effective quality assurance process

The service carries out proportionate quality assurance of its protection activity. It is carried out by sampling protection files and observing inspections in line with the Competency Framework for Business Fire Safety Regulators 2013.

The service inspects its fire safety inspectors twice a year in line with a fire protection workplace assurance sampling plan. Each fire safety inspector reviews one audit per month, and senior fire safety managers review one in four of the fire safety inspectors' audits. We saw plans in place to support staff development needs.

Additionally, the service is a member of the NFCC North West Protection Group, a collaboration of the four north west fire and rescue services. This group has a peer review process.

The service has good evaluation tools to measure how effective its activity is, and to make sure all sections of its communities get appropriate access to the protection services that meet their needs.

The service uses its enforcement powers appropriately

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

It works closely with local authority building control, housing standards and licensing teams, and the Care Quality Commission, to identify risk. The service also works with agencies such as Border Force and [safety advisory groups](#).

In the year ending 31 March 2024, the service issued 387 informal notifications, 4 enforcement notices and 16 prohibition notices. The service didn't carry out any prosecutions from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2024. At the time of our inspection, it was pursuing a potential prosecution.

In the year ending 31 March 2024, the service recorded 401 unsatisfactory audits and carried out 407 enforcement activities following inspection. This indicates the service takes a positive approach to enforcement activity.

The service uploads all enforcement notices to the [NFCC website](#). It also shares enforcement notices with partner agencies, for example local authorities.

The service resources fire safety well

The service has enough qualified protection staff to meet the needs of its RBIP. As at 31 March 2024, it employed 12 qualified protection officers, with an additional 3 in development. This supports the service's comprehensive range of audit and enforcement activities both now and in the future. This capacity is reflected in the completion of 2.0 audits per 100 known premises in 2023/24, matching the national rate for England.

The service is improving resilience and providing alternative career pathways within the protection team by developing support staff through the level 3 fire safety advisor apprenticeship. At the time of our inspection, a member of the prevention team was partway through the programme.

Staff at all levels get the right training and work towards appropriate accreditation. This was evident from operational staff being trained to carry out protection work in their local areas right through to staff with level 4 qualifications who can issue enforcement notices.

The service adapts well to new legislation

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

The Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 introduced a range of duties for the managers of tall buildings. These include a requirement to give the fire and rescue service floor plans and inform them of any substantial faults to essential firefighting equipment, such as firefighting lifts.

The service is supporting the introduction of the [Building Safety Regulator \(BSR\)](#). It has established processes to receive relevant information, including details of high-rise residential buildings undergoing renovation, referred to as under interim measures. The service keeps operational staff up to date. It takes part in quarterly NFCC meetings and monthly BSR regional meetings.

The service has an arrangement to refer any BSR applications to an engineer working with Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service. This is cost-effective due to low numbers of BSR high-risk premises within Cumbria.

Staff are completing training to adapt to the new legislation as part of their fire safety competency framework and North West Protection Group arrangement.

The service works closely with others around fire safety regulation

The service works closely with other enforcement agencies to regulate fire safety. It routinely exchanges risk information with people and organisations, including:

- housing services, Cumberland Council, and Westmorland and Furness Council;
- the Care Quality Commission through joint care home visits;
- individuals responsible for high-rise premises;
- Border Force on the harbouring of illegal migrants; and
- local safety advisory groups.

The service's effective collaboration with partner organisations led to swift enforcement action following complaints about three holiday-let premises. The service issued two prohibition notices. It also contacted the holiday-let website, which removed the properties from its listings.

The service responds to most building consultations in a timely manner

The service responds to most building consultations on time. This means it consistently meets its statutory responsibility to comment on fire safety arrangements at new and altered buildings.

In the year ending 31 March 2024, the service responded to 98 percent of building consultations (339 out of 346) within the required time limit.

The service works effectively with businesses

The service proactively works with businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation. Operational crews receive fire safety training to carry out business engagement visits to low-risk premises, such as shops and retail units. They help owners or occupiers to identify fire safety issues and provide basic advice. Business engagement visit co-ordinators (level 3 fire safety-trained [watch](#)-based personnel) oversee this activity. They are supported by fire safety officers.

The service has effectively reduced the number of automatic fire alarms it attends

The service has implemented an effective risk-based approach to managing the number of automatic fire alarms (AFAs) it attends. Its procedure includes a call challenge and a non-attendance policy.

The service only attends a predefined list of exempt premises and high-risk buildings where people sleep, such as hospitals, care homes and hotels. The service doesn't attend AFAs at low-risk commercial properties unless a fire is confirmed on site. In addition, it monitors attendance at certain types of buildings, as well as repeat false alarm locations, and takes action when appropriate.

For the year ending 31 March 2023, AFAs accounted for 15.7 percent of emergency calls (1,869 out of 11,908). The service didn't attend 45.8 percent of these AFAs. For the year ending 31 March 2024, AFAs accounted for 11.8 percent of emergency calls (1,937 out of 16,400). The service didn't attend 68.1 percent, an increase on the previous year.

This helps make sure fire engines remain available for genuine emergencies and reduces the risk to the public by limiting high-speed travel for false alarms. The service should continue its efforts to reduce both the volume of AFA calls received and the number it attends.

The availability of fire safety expertise outside regular hours is limited

Out-of-hours fire safety expertise relies on a voluntary agreement. Corporate fire safety officers provide advance availability and receive an annual payment for providing advice.

However, the lack of a formal contractual arrangement makes this provision fragile. The service should pursue a more permanent arrangement.

Responding to fires and other emergencies

Good

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

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

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

Main findings

The service's response is linked to identified risks

The service's response strategy is linked to the risks it has identified in its CRMP. Its fire engines and response staff, as well as its working patterns, are designed and located to help the service respond flexibly to fires and other emergencies with the appropriate resources. For example, the introduction of 7am to 7pm day crews at Penrith and Ulverston reflects risk and demand data.

The service manages emergency cover using the Dynamic Cover Tool. The tool shows where the main risks are and where cover needs to be. Officers then work with North West Fire Control to make sure resource is moved to risk. Information is updated in real time.

The service is working to increase fire engine availability, but it needs to make further improvements

To support its response strategy, the service aims for 100 percent availability for its [wholetime](#) fire engines, and 90 percent availability for on-call crews. In 2023/24, the service achieved an overall annual availability of 81.8 percent, with an on-call availability of 78.5 percent.

The service considers on-call fire engines to be available when staffed with three riders. This is known as the 'riding with three' policy. The riders can do less than the standard four riders on a fire engine, but it increases the availability of a response.

The service recognises this is a gap in provision. It has made a risk-based decision, influenced by ongoing challenges in recruiting and retaining on-call staff. Strengthening the monitoring of fire engine availability, whether staffed with three or four riders, could provide better data to achieve readiness with full operational capability.

The service manages the [mobilisation](#) of resources, including those with three riders in a limited capacity, efficiently through the Dynamic Cover Tool. The tool automatically recommends the nearest available resources with full capability, as well as the resource with three riders.

The model supports the appropriate use of the 'riding with three' policy for on-call fire engines with limited capability and the principle of fastest resource mobilising.

The service is meeting its response standards

There are no national response standards of performance for the public. In 2023/24, the service didn't meet its own locally set response standard for attending [primary fires](#) in property.

The service has since reviewed its response standards and set a target to attend all fires within ten minutes. The standards cover both wholetime and on-call fire engines.

In addition, the service has set independent response standards for wholetime and on-call response times. These are 10 minutes for wholetime and 15 minutes for on-call fire engines. At the time of our inspection, the service told us it was meeting these revised targets.

We found attendance times to other incident types, such as road traffic collisions, weren't included in the service's response standards, despite featuring in the CRMP as emerging risks.

Home Office data shows that in the year ending 30 June 2024, the service's average response time to primary fires was 10 minutes and 49 seconds. During the same period, the average response time for predominantly rural services in England was 10 minutes and 48 seconds.

The service has effective incident commanders

The service has trained incident commanders. They are regularly and properly assessed. Following their initial training and qualification, the service revalidates staff skills every two years. This is in line with NFCC guidance.

Incident commanders complete consolidation training in the intervening years. This helps the service safely, assertively and effectively manage the whole range of incidents it could face, from small and routine to complex multi-agency incidents.

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

Fire control staff regularly take part in training, exercises and debriefs

We were pleased to see the service has included control staff in its command, training, exercise, debrief and assurance activity.

The service and North West Fire Control have aligned their debrief policies, and control staff are regularly involved in exercises and incident debriefs. The exercises included scenarios involving high-rise buildings, terrorist incidents and four recent major incidents.

The service's risk information is detailed, up to date and accessible

We sampled a range of risk information. This included the information available for firefighters responding to incidents at high-risk, high-rise buildings and the information held by fire control.

The information we reviewed was up to date and detailed. Staff could easily access and understand it. Encouragingly, the service had completed it with input from its prevention, protection and response staff when appropriate.

The service manages operational intelligence well. We found staff could easily access and understand the information in a variety of ways, including:

- [mobile data terminals](#) on the fire engines, with access to site-specific risk information, hazardous material guidance and vehicle crash data;
- internet-connected devices, with access to service operational procedures, site-specific risk information and supporting information; and
- the service's incident command vehicle.

We also found the service routinely distributed risk information through personal emails, daily bulletins, newsletters and via the service's electronic staffing system.

The service has strengthened its approach to evaluating operational performance

During our last inspection, we highlighted that the service should improve the way it evaluates and shares learning from operational incidents.

As part of this inspection, we reviewed a range of emergency incidents and training events. These included major incidents, fires in domestic and commercial properties, road traffic collisions, water rescue and other complex incidents.

We also reviewed training exercises. These included high-rise buildings and multi-agency training events, such as responses to marauding terrorist attacks and other incidents involving a large number of casualties.

We were pleased to see the improvements the service had made. We have closed this area for improvement.

The service has introduced an operational assurance system, including a comprehensive debrief procedure. A dedicated team, the Penrith gold watch day crew, manages the system. In 2024/25, it carried out 97 internal debriefs and 3 multi-agency debriefs. It monitors improvement actions effectively. It shares learning outcomes in a variety of ways, including quarterly operational assurance newsletters and safety critical notices.

We were pleased to see the service is contributing towards, and acting on, learning from other fire and rescue services and emergency service partners. Penrith gold watch manages this. The service provided an example of sharing [joint organisational learning](#) concerning hazardous materials related to a lithium-ion car battery explosion.

The service is good at applying national operational guidance

During our last inspection, we highlighted that the service should make sure it understands what is needed to adopt [national operational guidance](#), including joint and national learning, and put in place a plan to do so.

We were pleased to see the improvements the service had made. We have closed this area for improvement.

We found that the service routinely follows its policies to make sure that staff command incidents in line with operational guidance. It has a process for updating received information. The service complies with approximately 95 percent of national operational guidance, with a clear plan to address the remaining areas.

The public is kept informed about incidents

The service has suitable systems in place to inform the public about ongoing incidents and help keep them safe during and after incidents. This includes social media and the service's website.

It shares a communications role with the OPFCC. It works well with the Cumbria Local Resilience Forum to warn and inform the public of ongoing incidents.

We found that the service hadn't provided some officers in media roles with appropriate training. We encourage the service to do so.

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents

Good

Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service is good at responding to major and multi-agency incidents.

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

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

Main findings

The service is prepared for major and multi-agency incidents

The service has effectively considered and planned for the reasonably foreseeable risks and threats it may face. These risks are listed in both local and national risk registers as part of its CRMP.

The service has identified risks including:

- climate change, including extreme weather events such as wildfires and flooding;
- marauding terrorist attacks; and
- upper tier [COMAH sites](#) within Cumbria.

It is also familiar with the significant risks that neighbouring fire and rescue services may face, and which it might reasonably be asked to respond to in an emergency. Fire and rescue services within a 10 km cross-border area share risk information. We found that firefighters could easily access risk information from neighbouring services.

The service has an effective method for sharing fire survival guidance

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

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

We found the service has well-developed policies and procedures in place for safely managing this type of incident.

At this type of incident, a fire and rescue service would receive a high volume of simultaneous fire calls. The service has developed an electronic method for sharing [fire survival guidance](#) in partnership with North West Fire Control and the north west fire and rescue services, with all staff using one system. This system allows staff in the emergency control room, at the incident site, and in supporting control rooms to share, view and update actions resulting from individual fire calls.

The service recently implemented this system. It initially provided training to selected operational staff most likely to use the new system. The service told us it planned to expand the training and increase awareness of the new process among all operational staff.

Staff demonstrated proficient use of the system. The service has carried out robust training and exercises to test them.

The service works effectively with other fire and rescue services

The service supports other fire and rescue services responding to emergency incidents. For example, in December 2023 the service deployed resources to support Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service at a large, protracted fire at a waste site.

It is interoperable with all neighbouring services and can form part of a multi-agency response. The service declared four major incidents between December 2023 and January 2025. These included widespread flooding across Cumbria and Lancashire, a serious road traffic collision on the M6 motorway and a large fire in Kirkby Lonsdale.

It also carries out regular exercises with other emergency services. For example, in February 2025, it carried out a multi-agency marauding terrorist attack exercise with police and ambulance services in Keswick.

The service regularly carries out cross-border exercises

The service has a cross-border exercise plan with neighbouring fire and rescue services, helping them work together effectively to keep the public safe.

The plan includes risks from major events at which the service could foreseeably give support or ask for help from neighbouring services. We were pleased to see the service uses feedback from these exercises to inform risk information and service plans.

In 2023/24, the service completed 51 multi-agency exercises, 9 national resilience exercises, and 12 cross-border exercises with neighbouring fire and rescue services.

The service understands and applies JESIP

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

We saw strong evidence that the service consistently followed these principles. This includes its use of JESIP and [M/ETHANE](#) information to make sure multi-agency incidents are managed effectively.

We sampled a range of debriefs the service had carried out after multi-agency incidents and/or exercises. We were encouraged to find that the service is identifying any problems it has with applying JESIP and taking appropriate, prompt action with other emergency services.

The service has taken part in multi-agency exercises addressing evolving risks outlined in its CRMP. These included a joint exercise on Lake Windermere with RNLI and coastguard colleagues. It has also taken part in a [local resilience forum](#) tabletop exercise on widespread flooding, based on a scenario in Keswick.

The service proactively works with partner organisations

The service has good arrangements in place to respond to emergencies with partner organisations that make up the Cumbria Local Resilience Forum. The service is a valued partner. It has representation on the strategic and tactical co-ordinating groups and subgroups.

The service takes part in regular training events with other forum members. It uses the learning to plan its response to major and multi-agency incidents.

The service shares and contributes to national learning

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

The service recognises the importance of sharing learning nationally, as well as locally. The service gave us evidence of sharing joint organisational learning following the explosion of a lithium-ion battery in a car fire after a road traffic collision.

Making best use of resources

Requires improvement

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

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

The service's revenue budget for 2025/26 is £30.1 million. This is a £2.3 million or 8.2 percent increase from the previous financial year.

Areas for improvement

The service should assure itself that all processes in place to support performance management are effective.

The service should make sure it effectively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and outcomes of any collaboration activity.

The service should make sure it has appropriate business continuity arrangements in place. It should regularly review the arrangements and test them to make sure they take account of all foreseeable threats and risks.

Promising practice

The 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.

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

Main findings

The service aligns resources with risk and statutory duties

During our last inspection, we highlighted that the service should make sure it uses its resources across prevention, protection and response functions in a more joined-up way to meet the priorities in its CRMP.

We were pleased to see the improvements the service had made. We have closed this area for improvement.

We found the service now effectively aligns its financial plans with the risks and priorities identified in the CRMP. For example, operational staff provide the full range of prevention initiatives.

The service has based its medium-term financial plan on reasonable planning assumptions, with budget allocation effectively supporting activities. For example, the service told us that it saved £32,000 from the prevention budget to boost reserves, supporting investment in fleet and estate improvement programmes.

Since our last inspection, the service has introduced changes to its crewing and duty systems. These include a 10.5-hour day shift and a trial at Kendal and Barrow fire stations where a single manager oversees two watches.

It has introduced temporary full-time contracts for on-call firefighters at Penrith fire station to support a flexible resource model including the black and gold watch day crew.

At the time of our inspection, the service was in the process of commissioning an operational fire cover review expected to take place in 2025. We look forward to seeing its conclusions and the steps the service takes to make improvements.

The service builds plans on sound scenarios. This helps make sure the service is sustainable and underpinned by financial controls that reduce the risk of misusing public money. As part of developing its 2025/26 revenue budget, the service has introduced [zero-based budgeting](#). Senior managers oversee and scrutinise the service's plans monthly through the expenditure management group to make sure it uses public money appropriately.

The service should do more to improve productivity and how it monitors and manages performance

During our last inspection, we highlighted that the service should make sure that all processes to support performance management are effective.

We were pleased to see that the service's arrangements for managing performance clearly link resource use to its CRMP and its strategic priorities.

Since our last inspection, the service has implemented improvements to how performance is managed, including:

- increased scrutiny by the senior leadership team, who then report to the OPFCC and its executive board;
- reviewing performance indicators to make them more efficient;
- developing Power BI performance dashboards; and
- recruiting an additional data analyst.

The service is taking steps to make sure the workforce is productive. This includes putting in place new ways of working. For example, the service has increased day shift working hours and introduced a station management framework suggesting duties to complete on both day and night shifts.

Despite these improvements, the service still lacks a performance culture and effective scrutiny and accountability. Its use of data and reporting remains incomplete and lacking in detail. For example, response staff don't report completion of HFSVs, fitness test compliance or e-learning completion rates.

The service still relies on some paper-based processes, especially for prevention activities. And some existing IT systems lack efficiency. This results in duplicated efforts, and inconsistencies in how the service records information.

Since our 2022 inspection, the service has reverted to an interim spreadsheet-based asset management system due to reduced confidence in the accuracy of records and the associated costs of the previous electronic system.

As a result, we have kept this area for improvement open.

The service should improve its evaluations of collaborations with other services

We were encouraged to see the improvements the service has made since our last inspection. We were pleased to see the service meets its statutory duty to collaborate. It routinely considers opportunities to collaborate with other emergency responders.

In January 2025, the service established the Executive Board Working Together. The board focuses on shared arrangements between police and fire services under the PFCC, as well as broader collaboration initiatives.

These include a joint chief finance officer and monitoring officer, a shared head of legal, and shared leads for estates, policy and communications. Additionally, the service has plans to share commercial and procurement functions with the OPFCC and Cumbria Constabulary.

Collaborative work is aligned to the priorities in the service's CRMP. This includes an emergency services hub at Ulverston and shared facilities with North West Ambulance Service at Grange-over-Sands.

During our last inspection, we highlighted that the service should make sure it effectively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and results of its collaborations.

Disappointingly, we found that the service had made limited progress. Senior managers acknowledge this. As a result, we have kept this area for improvement open.

The service should improve its business continuity arrangements for industrial action

The service has gaps in its business continuity arrangements for areas in which it considers threats and risks to be high. For example, it doesn't have suitable arrangements in the event of industrial action.

The service has a business continuity policy and a management plan for industrial action. However, we found that both documents lacked sufficient detail. They mainly provide a framework for the service to adapt as necessary during such events.

While the plan outlines expected key decisions, it doesn't offer clear assurance that the service would maintain critical functions in line with statutory requirements. As a result, the service is unable to review and test the plan. It remains reliant on the availability of non-striking staff. This presents an element of uncertainty.

The service is making improvements to its procurement and contract management arrangements

An audit report identified weaknesses with the service's procurement and contract management arrangements. For example, there was missing information in the contracts register and some information was out of date. The service hasn't had a dedicated member of staff responsible for procurement.

In response to these issues, the service is working with Cumbria Constabulary's commercial team to review its contracts register and develop a contracts pipeline. At the time of our inspection, the service told us that it had included new procurement posts in the 2025/26 revenue budget.

There are regular reviews to consider all the service's expenditure, including its non-pay costs. Since our last inspection, the service has procured and implemented its own finance and IT systems. The finance team also works closely with budget holders to review and challenge expenditure.

In the year ending 31 March 2024, the service spent £19.01 per head of population on non-employee expenditure, and £39.58 per head of population in total expenditure. This is higher than the England rate of £11.25 per head of population on non-employee expenditure, and £49.54 per head of population in total expenditure. Following an independent, external value-for-money review, the service has included some recommended saving options in its 2025/26 revenue budget.

It should continue to compare its costs with other fire and rescue services to fully understand whether areas of expenditure are above the expected level.

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

Good

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

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

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

Main findings

The service understands its future financial challenges

We were pleased to see the improvements the service had made since our last inspection. Following the transfer of governance responsibility from Cumbria County Council to the PFCC, the service has developed a sound understanding of future financial challenges.

It plans to mitigate its main financial risks and adapt to the change in governance arrangements. For example, the service secured a capital funding grant from the Home Office to support investment in its estate plans. And the service has plans to increase the level of its reserves to provide greater sustainability and resilience.

The service's underpinning assumptions are relatively robust and realistic. They take account of the wider external environment and some scenario planning for future spending reductions. These include pay and future government funding.

The service told us it had introduced zero-based budgeting for 2025/26. There is a balanced revenue budget for 2025/26. It includes £1.1 million of identified budget reductions and a £385,000 contribution from reserves. The service expects it will identify future savings options through the planned operational fire cover review. And recommendations from the independent, external value-for-money review not included in 2025/26 provide further savings options.

The service has clear plans for increasing its reserves

We were encouraged to see the improvements the service has made since our last inspection. The service has a clear strategy for its reserves, which has been risk and sensitivity assessed.

It plans to increase the general reserve to an acceptable minimum level by 2028/29. At the time of our inspection, the service forecast it would hold £2.7 million of earmarked reserves as at 31 March 2025.

The fleet and estates strategies support the CRMP

We were pleased to see the improvements the service had made since our last inspection. The service's estate and fleet strategies have clear links to its CRMP. Both strategies exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

The service has an £18.8 million capital programme for the period 2024/25–29/30 across fleet, estates, IT and equipment. This includes a £1 million Home Office transition grant in recognition of limited previous investment.

Ownership of fleet and estates transferred to the OPFCC on 1 April 2023. Previously, the fire estate received limited investment. The service has completed a comprehensive condition survey. This is guiding future investment through a ten-year plan.

The service lacks a suitable asset management system for recording data related to the fire estate. It has identified some areas of non-compliance. It is addressing these through an ongoing programme of works.

The PFCC has approved a 15-year capital replacement programme for the fleet. It is aligned with the medium-term financial plan.

The service regularly reviews these strategies so that it can accurately assess the effect any changes in estate and fleet provision, or future innovation, have on risk.

The service still needs to improve its IT systems

The service has developed clear plans to strengthen its IT capabilities, including collaborative work with the NFCC and other fire and rescue services. For instance, it has a memorandum of understanding with Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service regarding the use of the Community Fire Risk Management Information System.

Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service's digital, data and technology strategy sets out a clear direction, and highlights opportunities across several areas. These include data use, performance management and evaluation. However, at the time of our inspection, the service had made slow progress. Staff expressed low confidence in the IT systems. Some still depended on time-consuming paper-based processes. This hinders staff productivity.

During the inspection, we saw how better IT systems could improve efficiency and create capacity in the workforce. We encourage the service to prioritise these much-needed IT improvements, and look forward to seeing progress in this area.

The pace of change has restricted performance

The service has encountered significant challenges in implementing necessary changes since its governance transferred to the OPFCC. Nonetheless, we acknowledge the substantial progress and improvements it has achieved.

The service is continuing to progress projects and service level agreements through a structured management programme. However, the complexity of these projects has restricted the pace of change and the service's overall efficiency and effectiveness. We were encouraged to see the new strategic leadership team prioritising this work. And we look forward to seeing the positive impact of these developments.

Income generation is limited

The service considers options for generating extra income, but its ambition and track record in securing extra income are limited. The service produces some additional income through phone mast contracts and collaboration with other emergency services. The service told us this was an area it would consider further in the future.

Promoting the right values and culture

Requires improvement

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

Fire and rescue services should have positive and inclusive cultures, modelled by the behaviours of their senior leaders. Services should promote health and safety effectively, and staff should have access to a range of well-being support that can be tailored to their individual needs.

Areas for improvement

The service should have effective processes to monitor the working hours of its staff.

The service must make sure that all staff in operational roles have a current and valid fitness assessment.

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

Main findings

The service needs to improve its monitoring of staff working hours

During our last inspection, we highlighted that the service should make sure it has effective means to monitor the working hours of its staff.

Since our last inspection, the service has implemented a secondary employment policy and a recording system to make sure that staff with second jobs don't work excessive hours. The policy includes overtime monitoring.

Despite these improvements, the service isn't effectively monitoring the working hours for staff with dual contracts. As at 31 March 2024, 21.9 percent of wholetime firefighters also had an on-call contract.

The service's arrangements for managing rest periods between on-call, wholetime and specialist role commitments are neither suitable nor sufficient. The service needs to address this issue as a priority. And as a result, we have kept this area for improvement open.

The service should improve its management and monitoring of fitness testing

We found that the management of fitness testing is not rigorous enough. During the inspection, we identified 15 staff in operational roles without a current fitness test.

It was unclear who was responsible for fitness testing and its monitoring. The service must prioritise and address this promptly.

The service has clear values and a positive culture

We were pleased to see the cultural improvements the service had made. The service has well-defined values that staff at all levels understand and demonstrate. Most staff reported enjoying their work and felt valued by the service.

Staff told us that values and behaviours were a priority for the service. Staff consistently described their colleagues as professional and respectful. Several referred to the service's culture as the "Cumbria vibe". The service has implemented the [Core Code of Ethics](#) well and staff understand it.

Staff see senior leaders as role models. Most staff report that they consistently demonstrate the service's values and behaviours and are both visible and approachable.

However, some staff were unsure who the senior leaders were, which might partly have been due to recent changes in the senior leadership team. The team should take steps to strengthen its visibility and rebuild connections across the service following this period of change.

There is a positive working culture throughout the service, with staff empowered and willing to challenge poor behaviours when they come across them.

In our staff survey, 95 percent of respondents (225 out of 237) agreed or tended to agree that their colleagues consistently modelled and maintained the service's values.

The service should make sure that all staff are aware of the well-being support it provides

The service promotes staff well-being. Examples include:

- physical and mental occupational health services;
- information available on SharePoint;
- trained mental health first-aiders; and
- [critical incident](#)/trauma support arrangements.

However, the service doesn't have a dedicated well-being strategy. While the 2024–28 people strategy includes some references to well-being, the service could make its commitment to well-being clearer to its workforce.

Most staff reported that they understood and had confidence in the well-being support processes available. In our staff survey, 88 percent of respondents (226 out of 258) agreed or tended to agree that they felt able to access services to support their mental well-being. And 81 percent of respondents (208 out of 258) agreed or tended to agree that they achieved a good work/life balance.

However, the service could do more to consult its workforce to understand how else it could support individual needs. Some staff weren't sure how to access support and reported limited confidence in the system, citing instances where occupational health referrals weren't followed up.

Occupational health services are provided through a service level agreement with Westmorland and Furness Council. Some staff felt the workforce would benefit from these services being more specific to the fire and rescue service.

The service has good health and safety policies

The service has established clear and effective health and safety policies and procedures. Staff understand them. They are easily accessible and the service promotes them across the organisation.

Since moving from council governance, the service is responsible for health and safety. It has developed a new health and safety framework with updated policies and procedures.

In our staff survey, 95 percent of respondents (244 out of 258) agreed or tended to agree that they understood the policies and procedures the service had in place to make sure they could work safely. And 92 percent of respondents (237 out of 258) agreed or tended to agree that they were satisfied that the service took their personal safety and welfare seriously.

Both staff and representative bodies expressed trust in the service's approach to health and safety.

Staff have expressed a lack of confidence in lone working arrangements

The service has a lone working policy in place, but it recognises the need to review and improve both the policy and its supporting arrangements. Staff use an app that depends on a mobile phone signal. This presents challenges in some areas of Cumbria. We were told staff had limited confidence in this system. The service should review these arrangements to make sure it keeps lone workers safe.

Absence management processes are clear and well promoted

During our last inspection in 2022, we highlighted as an area for improvement that the service should make sure it has effective absence/attendance management procedures in place. Since then, the service has moved away from an HR service level agreement with the council and manages this internally.

We were pleased to find that the service had updated its absence management processes and provided clear guidance to managers. They now feel more confident in applying the procedures. Most staff we spoke to felt that absences were managed well and in line with policy. As a result, we have closed this area for improvement.

Getting the right people with the right skills

Requires improvement

Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at getting the right people with the right skills.

Fire and rescue services should have a workforce plan in place that is linked to their CRMPs. It should set out their current and future skills requirements and address capability gaps. This should be supplemented by a culture of continuous improvement, including appropriate learning and development throughout the service.

Areas for improvement

The service should make sure its workforce plan takes full account of the skills and capabilities it needs to implement its [community risk management plan](#).

The service should assure itself that all staff are appropriately trained for their role.

The service should provide clear and appropriate development for all staff.

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

Main findings

The service needs to improve workforce planning

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

We found limited evidence that the service's planning allows it to fully consider workforce skills and overcome any gaps. For example, reactive workforce planning in the prevention team has led to delays in completing HFSVs. And delays in appointing a communications manager affected the quality of both internal and external communication.

The service doesn't have a formal workforce plan. However, it has established a workforce planning group that meets monthly to review operational requirements. The service makes some effort to align staff skills and capabilities with the requirements of its response, protection and prevention strategies in support of the CRMP. But it needs to comprehensively plan across the entire workforce.

For example, the planning group has effectively identified expected skill gaps among on-call and wholetime firefighters. Also, the service is using on-call staff on temporary wholetime contracts to provide a flexible staffing resource. However, several support staff vacancies remain unfilled, highlighting gaps in workforce planning beyond operational roles.

As at 31 March 2024, the service had a large proportion of its workforce on temporary promotion. These 69 staff represented 10.1 percent of the total workforce. Excessive numbers of staff in temporary roles are an indicator of poor workforce planning. Senior leaders acknowledge the need for improvement in this area and have outlined their plans to address it as a priority.

We recognise that the service has undergone significant change. However, it has been slow to define key roles and build a stable workforce to support its functions, especially in strategic positions. These delays have created gaps in both capability and capacity. The service must now take decisive action to identify future workforce needs and implement a resilient workforce plan, including strong succession planning.

The service must make sure that it trains all staff appropriately for their roles

We were encouraged by the progress the service had made in managing risk-critical skills since our last inspection. It monitors staff competence through a structured three-year training and development framework. The service regularly reviews staff skills and risk-critical safety capabilities through its performance reporting process. It links staff records to its electronic staffing system. This approach helps make sure that operational personnel maintain up-to-date competence.

Nevertheless, the service needs to make further improvements to make sure it provides staff with appropriate training for their roles.

In December 2022, the service decided that watch managers would no longer be required to maintain competence as breathing apparatus wearers. But we found that some watch managers hadn't maintained up-to-date knowledge of breathing apparatus procedures either. We are reassured by the service's plan to address and resolve this issue.

The service should review both the content and oversight of its e-learning modules. During the inspection, we found that completion rates were low across all staff groups. The service told us that equality, diversity and inclusion modules were completed by 67 percent of staff. Only 64 percent of staff have completed safeguarding e-learning, and 61 percent have completed health and safety modules.

We also found that some senior managers responsible for handling media enquiries hadn't received any formal media training. The service should make sure it provides appropriate media training to all officers who carry out this role.

Although the service has a system to review workforce capabilities, it is ineffective and primarily focuses on operational skills. This creates a risk that staff may not develop or possess the broader skills required to meet the current and future needs of the service.

As the service has made limited progress, we have kept this area for improvement open.

The service should provide suitable development for all staff

Although the service provides some learning and development, it doesn't meet the needs of all of its staff, or indeed of the service.

We found that many staff had been promoted without being given role-specific training. At the time of our inspection, the service told us it had developed a course for supervisory managers, but this wasn't included in the annual training programme.

The service's training framework and competence policy are focused on uniformed personnel, with limited provision for support staff. Support staff training is largely restricted to e-learning modules.

At the time of our inspection, the service hadn't provided on-call operational staff with training in some areas that had been prioritised for wholetime staff, for example on equality, diversity and inclusion.

Some staff we spoke to told us that they couldn't access the range of learning and development resources they needed to do their job effectively. This is likely to affect what the service can offer the public.

The service must make sure that all staff receive appropriate and structured development, with learning opportunities consistently provided across the organisation. This is an area for improvement.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity

Requires improvement

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

Creating a more representative workforce gives fire and rescue services huge benefits. These include greater access to talent and different ways of thinking. It also helps them better understand and engage with local communities. Each service should make sure staff throughout the organisation firmly understand and show a commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. This includes successfully taking steps to remove inequality and making progress to improve fairness, diversity and inclusion at all levels of the service. It should proactively seek and respond to feedback from staff and make sure any action it takes is meaningful.

Areas for improvement

The service should identify and overcome barriers to equal opportunity, so its workforce better represents its community.

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

The service should make improvements to the way it collects equality data to better understand its workforce demographic and needs.

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

Main findings

The service needs to further improve diversity in its workforce

In our previous inspection, we highlighted that the service should identify and overcome barriers to equal opportunity, so its workforce better represents its community. This includes making sure staff understand the value of [positive action](#) and having a diverse workforce. We found that the service had provided positive action training to all staff. And staff showed a clear understanding of its benefits. As a result, we have closed this element of the area for improvement.

However, we were disappointed to see the service had made limited progress in identifying and addressing barriers to equal opportunity. This is an essential step towards building a workforce that better reflects the community it serves. We have kept this element of the area for improvement open and revised its wording.

As at 31 March 2024, 1.8 percent of the workforce identified as being from an ethnic minority background, compared to 4.8 percent of the local population and 8.6 percent across all fire and rescue services in England. As at 31 March 2024, 19 percent of the workforce identified as a woman, compared to 50.8 percent of the local population and 20.2 percent throughout all fire and rescue services in England.

As at 31 March 2024, the proportion of firefighters that identified as being from an ethnic minority background was 1.2 percent (5 people). This is a decrease from 1.8 percent (8 people) as at 31 March 2022. The proportion of firefighters who identified as a woman increased from 11.5 percent (69 people) to 13 percent (76 people) over the same period.

As at 31 March 2024, the proportion of staff that identified as a woman in the service by role was:

- support staff – 54 percent;
- wholetime firefighters – 18.5 percent; and
- on-call firefighters – 9.4 percent.

The service has taken some action to understand and remove the risk of [disproportionality](#) in the recruitment process. We found evidence of several improvements including:

- establishing a recruitment team with a strategic aim of making the workforce more diverse;
- use of a gender bias language tool to improve language when creating applications;
- an anonymised application process; and
- virtual workshops for internal and externally advertised roles including representatives from staff network groups.

The service has expanded its recruitment team and fully integrated it within its HR team. It previously operated under a shared arrangement. The service's recruitment policies are robust and inclusive, covering all roles and promoting equal access to opportunities.

The service needs to do more to make sure its recruitment processes are accessible to applicants from a range of backgrounds. We found an inconsistent approach to advertising processes externally. Recruitment campaigns at all levels aren't directed at or accessible to under-represented groups.

The service needs to do more work to improve its approach to equality, diversity and inclusion

In our previous inspection, we highlighted that the service should make sure it has robust processes in place to carry out equality impact assessments and review any actions agreed as a result.

Although the service has a process to assess equality impact, it doesn't properly assess or act on the impact on each [protected characteristic](#). We identified gaps in the equality impact assessment register. These include incomplete or missing assessments. For example, the service hasn't completed an equality impact assessment for its recruitment and promotion processes. As the service has made limited progress, we have kept this area for improvement open.

The service has taken steps to improve its approach to equality, diversity and inclusion. However, it needs to make further progress to make sure everyone in the organisation understands and accepts it.

Since our last inspection, the service has developed relevant policies and procedures. These include:

- establishing a cultures and values board and community scrutiny panel to oversee equality, diversity and inclusion;
- the appointment of a dedicated watch manager overseeing equality, diversity and inclusion priorities; and
- training provided to all wholetime and support staff.

These improvements are relatively recent and have yet to provide the meaningful impact the service needs.

The service has established staff network groups, including:

- mental health;
- armed forces (achieved Bronze and Silver Armed Forces Military Covenant);
- LGBTQ+;
- neurodiversity;
- gender; and

- disability.

The service isn't using the groups to their full potential. It needs to have greater strategic oversight of the groups, and commit to provide the necessary structure, support and direction.

The service makes limited use of equality data to gain insight into its workforce demographics and needs

In our previous inspection, we identified that the service needed to improve how it collects equality data to better understand its workforce demographics and needs.

The service told us that, aside from raising staff awareness about the importance of collecting this data, it had made limited progress. Work in this area has stopped while the service transitions from a council IT system to an internally hosted software platform (FireWatch).

As a result, we have kept this area for improvement open.

Senior leaders ask for feedback from staff

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

Examples include:

- the introduction of a cultures and values board including representation from staff network chairs;
- completion of full staff surveys twice yearly, including data analysis to measure and lead improvement; and
- introducing a confidential reporting line alongside the service whistleblowing procedure.

The service has taken action to address matters raised by staff. For example, it revised the watch manager model at Kendal and Barrow. It changed the watch manager from managing two watches across two stations to managing two watches at the same station because of the excessive travel distances. Staff have received this response positively.

Most staff are confident with the service's approach to dealing with bullying, harassment and discrimination

In our previous inspection, we highlighted as an area for improvement that the service should make sure its staff are aware of the grievance procedure and that it trains staff carrying out grievance investigations.

We are pleased by the service's progress in this area. Improvements include:

- the introduction of a workforce complaints procedure consolidating separate grievance, bullying and [harassment](#) procedures into a single document;
- consultation and communication with staff and trade unions;
- training provided to line managers and welfare officers; and
- the introduction of an anonymous reporting line with QR code technology.

Staff have a good understanding of bullying, harassment, and discrimination, as well as how they can affect colleagues and the organisation. In the 2024 workforce survey, 80 percent of respondents reported being familiar with the workforce complaints process.

Most staff we spoke with during focus groups and interviews expressed confidence in the service's approach to managing bullying, harassment, discrimination, grievances and disciplinary matters. They reported feeling comfortable raising concerns with their line managers.

The service has provided training to make sure all staff understand the appropriate steps to take when addressing inappropriate behaviour.

As a result of this work, we have closed this area for improvement.

Managing performance and developing leaders

Requires improvement

Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at managing performance and developing leaders.

Fire and rescue services should have robust and meaningful performance management arrangements in place for their staff. All staff should be supported to meet their potential and there should be a focus on developing staff and improving diversity into leadership roles.

Areas for improvement

The service should make sure it is transparent and fair when recruiting, developing and promoting staff.

The service should address the high number of staff in temporary promotion positions.

The service should develop a system to identify and develop high-potential members of staff.

The service should make sure there is an effective induction process in place to support new recruits.

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

Main findings

The service has improved its promotion and progression processes, but it needs to make sure they are seen as fair

The service has put considerable effort into developing its promotion and progression processes so they are fair and all staff can understand them. It has created a workforce development group.

Promotion and progression policies are comprehensive and apply to all roles. In our staff survey, 60 percent of respondents (154 out of 258) felt the promotion process was fair, compared with 40 percent of respondents (140 out of 346) in our previous staff survey.

However, our review identified inconsistencies in the management of certain selection processes. And we found incomplete documentation for the workforce development group's decisions and outcomes. Some staff reported concerns about a lack of transparency and consistency in how the workforce development group operated.

We found that not all staff involved in recruitment and selection had completed appropriate training. For example, the service hadn't trained the staff assessing the operational elements of a supervisory manager promotion process. This resulted in inconsistencies in assessment.

The high number of staff in temporary roles is limiting staff development

The service doesn't effectively manage temporary promotions, and we found cases where they had lasted longer than necessary. As at 31 March 2024, 69 staff members, 10.1 percent of the workforce, were on temporary promotion. The longest-standing temporary promotion lasted 1,227 days, with the average duration 328 days.

Some staff expressed feelings of insecurity and pointed out the negative impact of instability and frequent role changes on both individuals and the organisation. The service should take steps to reduce its reliance on temporary promotions, including making improvements to succession planning and workforce development.

This is an area for improvement.

The service needs to improve how it develops leaders and identifies high-potential staff

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

It has some talent management schemes, but these initiatives aren't managed in an open or equitable manner. For example, the service identified two roles suitable for developing high-potential staff. However, these were filled through expressions of interest, leading to inconsistency and raising concerns about fairness among staff.

In our previous inspection, we recommended that the service implement a structured approach to identifying and developing high-potential staff. The service told us it was awaiting the outcomes of trials led by the NFCC and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service before making further improvements. However, a significant gap in succession planning remains, as shown by the high number of staff in temporary promotion roles.

The service needs to do more to effectively implement the December 2022 fire standards [Leading the Service](#) and [Leading and Developing People](#).

This was an area for improvement in our last inspection. The service has made limited progress in this area, so we have kept this area for improvement open.

The service should make sure performance reviews are consistent

The service continues to have an inconsistent process in place for performance and development. It told us it monitored the completion of appraisals. However, not all staff have specific, individual objectives or have had their performance assessed in the past year.

Staff views on the appraisal system are mixed. Some see it as a box-ticking exercise focused solely on confirming competency. Others regard it as a valuable opportunity to discuss personal development and career progression. Those who found it helpful said it had supported their growth. However, at the time of our inspection we noted that the service hadn't linked appraisals to promotion processes.

In our staff survey, 66 percent of respondents (170 out of 258) agreed or tended to agree that the one-to-one conversations they had with their line manager were helping them reach their full potential.

The service should do more to encourage diversity in its leadership

The service needs to actively encourage applicants from diverse backgrounds for middle and senior-level positions. It primarily advertises and fills these roles internally. This limits opportunities to create a more representative workforce. We found that equality impact assessments weren't completed, and several recruitment processes weren't advertised externally. When the service advertises externally, it uses a limited range of platforms.

The service needs to improve the induction process to support new recruits

In our previous inspection, we identified as an area for improvement that the service needed to implement an effective induction process to support new recruits.

The service has made limited progress in this area, and acknowledges that it needs to take further action. It has developed a checklist, but there is no formal process or system to track the induction of recruits or other new staff members. As a result, this area for improvement remains open.

