UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 00.01 ON THURSDAY 19 NOVEMBER 2026

HMICFRS

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

Fire and rescue services 2025–27

Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 00.01 ON THURSDAY 19 NOVEMBER 2026

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Overall summary

In our inspection, we assessed how well Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service has performed in ten areas. We have made the following graded judgments:

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

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.

Changes to this round of inspection

We last inspected Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service in February 2024. And in September 2024, we published our inspection report with our findings on the service's effectiveness and efficiency and how well it looks after its people.

This inspection contains our fourth assessment of the service's effectiveness and efficiency and how well it looks after its people.

In our previous rounds of inspections, we assessed and gave graded judgments for 11 areas. For this inspection programme, we have combined our efficiency areas and reduced the overall number to ten. This is to reduce duplication and concentrate more on outcomes for communities and the workforce. Although we continue to use our five-tier system of judgments, these changes mean it isn't always possible to directly compare grades awarded in this round of inspections with those in previous years.

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

Our inspections provide a rounded assessment of the service. More information on how we assess fire and rescue services and our graded judgments is available on our website.

Terminology in this report

We inspect and report on policing in England and Wales and on fire and rescue services in England only. Our reports contain references to, among other things, 'national' definitions, priorities, policies, systems, responsibilities and processes.

In some instances, 'national' means applying to England and Wales. In others, it means applying to England and Wales and Scotland or the whole of the United Kingdom.

About the data

More information on data and analysis in this report is included in the 'About the data 2025–27' section of our website.

HM Inspector's summary

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

The service is urban with significant rural communities and covers an area of approximately 1,000 square miles. It has a population of 1.2 million which is growing.

Governance for this service is the responsibility of the police, fire and crime commissioner for Staffordshire.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service cost £47.58 per head of population, which is less than the England average of £51.67.

I congratulate Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service on its performance in keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks. However, it needs to improve in some areas to provide a consistently good service. For example, while we found the service had progressed some areas for improvement on ensuring fairness and diversity, more work needs to be done. This is necessary to make sure the service provides strategic direction and support for staff working in the equality, diversity and inclusion team.

We were pleased to find that the service had made progress since our 2024 inspection. For example, it had improved in prevention and protection. As a result, we have closed four of the five areas for improvement highlighted in our 2023–25 inspection report. We only identified one additional area for improvement in this inspection.

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

- The service has strong governance, performance management and financial planning in place, providing effective oversight and accountability.
- The service maintains effective partnerships in prevention which help to target and support vulnerable members of the community.
- The service has made progress in protection, supported by staff retention and a good balance of competence, skills development and increased confidence in the team to use enforcement powers.
- The service is still an active member of the Staffordshire Resilience Forum, but it could improve structures around training and exercising with neighbouring fire and rescue services.
- Despite positive action on equality, diversity and inclusion training and on its monitoring of impact assessments, the service lacks the strategic direction and support in this area to move this work forward.

We found that leaders in the service regularly communicated with the workforce to make sure they understand how their work meets service objectives. Most leaders demonstrated behaviours in line with the National Fire Chiefs Council's Core Code of Ethics and acted as role models. Staff spoke positively about the chief fire officer and deputy chief fire officer. The service had processes in place to identify high-potential staff but knowledge of these processes across the workforce was inconsistent. Leaders are well equipped to lead. They complete the National Fire Chiefs Council's leadership and development programmes, as well as in-house HR training and continuing professional development.

Overall, I commend the service on the changes it has made and expect it to continue working to further improve in the areas we have identified.



Kathryn Stone OBE

His Majesty's Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies

Good

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service is good at understanding risk.

Fire and rescue services should identify and assess all foreseeable fire and rescue-related risks that could affect their communities. They should use their prevention, protection and response capabilities to prevent or mitigate these risks for the public. They should adjust these arrangements as appropriate, following robust feedback, scrutiny and oversight.

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 identifies risk effectively using appropriate data

The service has assessed a suitable range of risks and threats using a thorough community risk management planning process. In its assessment of risk, it uses information it has collected from a range of internal and external sources and datasets. These sources include census and Ordnance Survey data. It also uses incident data, risks identified as part of the Staffordshire Resilience Forum, and local, regional and national risk registers.

The service carries out a geographical risk analysis, which helps it to visualise areas susceptible to specific risks. This helps the service to plan more effectively.

The service puts mitigations in place to address the risks it identifies in its community risk management plan

The service has a community risk management plan (CRMP) which describes how it intends to use its prevention, protection and response activities to mitigate or reduce the risks and threats its communities face, both now and in the future. Once it has assessed risks, the service records its findings in the CRMP. For example, the service has identified domestic dwelling fires as a risk within the plan. The service then details how it will use the National Fire Chiefs Council domestic dwelling risk model to help identify properties more likely to have a fire. This helps the service provide additional support for some of the most vulnerable people in the county, such as through home fire safety checks.

The arrangements described in the plan also take account of the issues identified in the service's corporate risk register, which could compromise the implementation of these activities. For example, funding uncertainty could prevent the service from being able to meet the priorities in its CRMP. The service has set up a transformation board to help mitigate this risk.

The service has continuity plans in place to make sure it can continue to provide a minimum level of risk-critical functions during periods of industrial action.

The service has effective monitoring, feedback and scrutiny arrangements in place to make sure it achieves the aims set out in its CRMP

Senior leaders have effective monitoring, feedback and scrutiny arrangements in place to make sure that the service achieves the prevention, protection and response aims set out in the CRMP.

Where the service isn't meeting its commitments to the public, senior leaders are fully aware of emerging issues and are holding leaders at all levels to account. For example, there are monthly and quarterly updates on key performance indicators. These indicators link to the three priorities in the service's CRMP.

The service has effective governance arrangements in place to monitor performance against the CRMP

To make sure the service is accountable to members of the public and is meeting the commitments it has made to them, it is essential the service has robust oversight and governance arrangements in place. This provides assurance that its plans to reduce or mitigate risk are effective or are being adjusted where they aren't working.

The police, fire and crime commissioner, who is the fire and rescue authority for this service, receives regular, meaningful updates on the arrangements the service has in place for prevention, protection and response. This helps them to hold the chief fire officer to account, set priorities for the service, reduce risk for the public, protect the health and safety of staff and produce a fire and rescue plan. This includes a public scrutiny and performance review that holds the chief fire officer to account. There is also a strategic governance board that links to the commissioner's fire and rescue plan.

Preventing fires and other risks

Good

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service is good at preventing fires and other risks.

Fire and rescue services must promote fire safety, which includes 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, including police and ambulance services. They should share intelligence and risk information with these other organisations when they identify vulnerability or exploitation.

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 its prevention strategy with the risks and priorities set out in its community risk management plan

The service aligns its prevention strategy with the risks it sets out in its community risk management plan (CRMP). The strategy includes seven objectives, which clearly link to the CRMP aim of reducing risk in the local community. Examples include:

- introducing the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) 'Person Centred Framework Guidance' for home fire safety checks; and
- using improved software to help with recording, reporting and safeguarding vulnerable people.

Leaders responsible for prevention have clearly communicated the strategy and main prevention aims to the workforce. As a result, prevention staff understand how they contribute to the prevention aims of the service individually and as a team.

The service's teams work well together and with other relevant organisations on prevention. They share relevant information when needed. The service uses information to adjust its planning assumptions and direct activity between its prevention, protection and response functions. For example, there are three geographical teams of community safety officers and home fire safety check technicians. The size of each team reflects the level of risk in that area. The northern team is the largest, as the service has analysed census, health and incident data and found this to be the geographical area at highest risk.

Prevention activity targets the most vulnerable people

The service uses a risk-based approach to clearly prioritise its prevention activity towards people most at risk from fire and other emergencies. For example, the service has a contact centre to triage calls and referrals from partner agencies, such as the NHS or local authorities. It uses the contact centre and nationally recognised processes to identify very high and high-risk vulnerable people. In the year ending 31 March 2026, the service carried out 7,926 proactively targeted home fire safety checks and 5,420 visits which other agencies had referred to the service.

The service uses a range of information and data to target its prevention activity at vulnerable people and groups, including those from under-represented communities. For example, the service supports the NHS with a falls response and home from hospital team for elderly people. This work helps to prevent readmissions to hospital. Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service also works with people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including young people with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. It identifies people in the SEND and SEMH community who haven't previously received fire safety education and provides education programmes tailored to their needs.

It carries out a range of interventions and campaigns, which it adapts to the level of risk in its communities. Prevention staff and firefighters run education programmes, which are supported effectively by partners, such as the Staffordshire Safer Roads Partnership, the Canal and River Trust, the Safe+Sound Key Stage 2 schools education programme, Staffordshire Police and the local authority prevent delivery lead. They run these education programmes for children of different ages in school, focusing on fire safety, water safety and road safety. The service also follows the NFCC's nationally co-ordinated prevention campaigns.

Staff are competent and confident to carry out home fire safety checks

Staff told us they had the right skills and confidence to carry out home fire safety checks. These checks cover an appropriate range of hazards that can put vulnerable people at greater risk from fire and other emergencies. Personnel use a scoring matrix to target and prioritise people, for example older people, people with health conditions and people discharged from hospital. It also includes people supported by adult and children's social care, people with complex needs, fire-setters, people who are at threat of arson and people identified through referrals or safeguarding concerns.

The service carries out proportionate quality assurance of its home fire safety check activity. It uses the NFCC's training programmes to make sure it provides a consistent service and has improved IT systems to support better reporting and monitoring of cases. The service also completes structured peer reviews using Microsoft Forms. Staff leave feedback cards after visits, for the service to analyse and use to identify improvements.

The service carries out evaluations and uses these to improve prevention services

The service has good evaluation tools in place to measure how effective its activity is and make sure all sections of its communities get appropriate access to the prevention services that meet their needs. For example, the service has evaluated its prevention department restructure, the Safe+Sound education programme, its risk profile, young driver events, the home from hospital service and the secondary fire working group.

These evaluations have led to changes in the service's approach. For example, following its evaluation of the dedicated working group for secondary fires, the service now keeps an action log of secondary fire-related activity. It has improved scrutiny over incidents and carries out targeted interventions at high-risk locations across the county. At the time of our inspection, staff stated that there had been a reduction in the number of deliberate secondary fires they were attending.

Prevention teams consider feedback from the public, other organisations and other parts of the service. For example, staff leave feedback cards and make follow-up calls to those who have received a home fire safety check, to learn what they could do better. Staff also received feedback during an education programme for children who are part of the SEND and SEMH community. This resulted in the service reducing the number of workshops involved, increasing session length and tailoring communications on safety messages, to keep children interested and involved.

The service uses feedback to inform its planning assumptions and change future activity to make sure it focuses on what its communities need and what works.

The service has meaningful partnerships in place to support prevention activity

The service works with a range of other organisations to prevent fires and other emergencies. These include health and social care partners, Staffordshire Police, water safety and road safety partners, education and local authorities, and voluntary and community organisations.

In the year ending 31 March 2026, the service completed 5,420 home fire safety checks that were referrals from other agencies and 1,017 that led to the service making an onward referral to at least one other organisation.

We found good evidence that it routinely referred people at greatest risk to organisations that may better meet their needs. These organisations include health care providers, social services, end of life care and the police. Arrangements are also in place to receive referrals from others. The service acts appropriately on the referrals it receives. For example, the service provides training to partner organisations to spot fire safety concerns. This means that when partners make referrals, the service has information about the occupant and knows they are a vulnerable person.

The service routinely exchanges information with other public sector organisations about people and groups at greatest risk. It uses this information to challenge planning assumptions and target prevention activity. For example, it has data and information-sharing protocols in place with health partners, which support the falls response and home from hospital team. Staffordshire Police supports the service to deal with arson threats, fire-setting behaviours and safeguarding concerns.

The service has effective processes in place to safeguard vulnerable people

In our 2023–25 inspection, we identified that knowledge and understanding of safeguarding among some staff was an area for improvement.

During our 2025–27 inspection, we found that the service has safeguarding training available from levels one to four. It also has appropriate leaders available to support staff through referrals. The service provides training face-to-face. It has a six-monthly knowledge and understanding assessment which helps to assure the service that the training is working. Staff we interviewed told us about occasions when they had identified safeguarding problems. They told us they felt confident and trained to act appropriately and promptly.

The service has made considerable progress in this area and we have closed the area for improvement.

The service works with other organisations to tackle fire-setting behaviour

The service carries out a range of suitable and effective interventions to target and educate people with different needs who show signs of fire-setting behaviour. This includes initial home fire safety checks, identifying fire risks in the home and providing smoke alarms and safety equipment. The service also runs tailored intervention sessions with young people and their families and has a focus on education and support rather than punishment.

The service works well with partners to tackle fire-setting behaviour. One example of this is its work with Cannock Chase District Council, which provided funding for specialist flame-retardant bedding. However, the service should report on how the funding and support it receives have been used. This would provide assurance to partners that their funding is being used appropriately.

When appropriate, the service routinely shares information with relevant organisations to support the prosecution of arsonists. It receives referrals from Staffordshire Police about children and young people displaying fire-setting behaviour, deliberate ignition concerns and antisocial behaviour linked to fire-setting.

However, in the year ending 31 March 2026, the service attended 2,045 deliberate fire incidents, which has increased from 1,681 in the previous year. In the year ending 31 March 2026, the rate of attendance at deliberate fire incidents was 172.5 per 100,000 population. This is higher than the England rate of 121.6.

Protecting the public through fire regulation

Good

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

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 services must have a locally determined, risk-based intervention 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 has an effective fire protection strategy in place linked to the risks it has identified

The service's protection strategy is clearly linked to the risks identified in its community risk management plan.

Leaders responsible for protection have clearly communicated the strategy and main protection aims to the workforce. As a result, protection staff understand how they contribute to the protection aims of the service individually and as a team.

Staff across the service are involved in this activity and effectively share information as needed. For example, fire protection staff carry out post-fire inspections and audits. They identify deficiencies (which are any conditions found during a fire inspection where a fire protection system doesn't meet the required standard). They then share this information across the service and joint control room, using automated Microsoft Forms.

The service then uses this information to adjust planning assumptions and direct activity between its prevention, protection and response functions. This means it properly aligns its resources with risk. For example, when the service finds deficiencies during an audit, it may increase the number of fire engines it sends to premises if involved in an incident.

The service targets its protection activity and aligns it to risk

The service's risk-based intervention programme is focused on its highest-risk buildings. To identify the highest-risk premises, the service uses the National Fire Chiefs Council methodology. It also considers:

- operational research in health modelling;
- incident data;
- property and building information;
- site-specific risk information;
- firefighter safety concerns; and
- community and societal risk.

This provides the service with risk ratings from very high to very low.

If the service identifies a commercial premises as very high-risk, it will audit the premises every three years. If the owner is found not to be complying with fire safety legislation, the service will audit the premises every two years. High-risk premises receive an audit every four years or two years if they are non-compliant with legislation. Fire safety officers carry out the audits of these complex premises. Firefighters support protection activity with medium, low and very low-risk business safety checks on commercial premises.

When we reviewed the service's audits of high-risk buildings, we found it had completed them in the time frames it had set itself and to a good, consistent standard.

The service has identified 576 very high or high-risk premises which it will audit over a three-year period. In the year ending 31 March 2026, the service had completed 568 of the 576. The service was on target and confident it would complete its risk-based inspection programme by the end of the year.

The service has enough competent staff to support its protection priorities now and in the future

The service has enough qualified protection staff to meet the requirements of its risk-based intervention programme. The service has 21 fire safety officers. It has a good balance of skilled fire safety staff and staff in training to support succession. In the year ending 31 March 2026, there were 14 competent staff and 7 more in development. This helps the service to provide the range of audit and enforcement activity needed both now and in the future.

As the service is meeting the targets in its risk-based inspection programme, it has had capacity to complete audits on some medium-risk premises following emerging national risk recommendations. These include premises such as hotels.

Staff get the right training and work to appropriate accreditation. This training follows the National Fire Chiefs Council's 'Competency Framework for Fire Safety Regulators'. The service also provides regular continuing professional development activities to support updates in legislation.

The service told us that since our 2023–25 inspection, no staff have left the fire safety department. The service told us that it is due to this stability in the team that it has been able to improve in this area.

The service can adapt to new legislation

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.

This legislation has led to an increase in the time the service spends assuring the safety of tall buildings. It expects this demand to increase with the increased pace of remediation work that is underway to replace flammable cladding. The service confirmed to us that it has met the requirements for the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 2 recommendations and is assured that all premises requiring audit have received one.

The service is supporting the Building Safety Regulator. It has allocated staff time to carry out training and work on this, including seconding one member of the protection team to the regulator. It expects these arrangements to have limited impact on its other protection activity. It provided us with a positive example of information-sharing between the service and the Building Safety Regulator. A student accommodation development had been partially built and then left exposed to the elements after the original developer went bankrupt. Another company subsequently restarted the building work. By sharing information with the Building Safety Regulator, the service helped to prevent occupation of the building due to ongoing compliance concerns.

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

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

The service completes fire safety audits to a good and consistent 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 risk-based intervention programme;
- after fires at premises where fire safety legislation applies;
- after enforcement action had been taken; or
- at high-rise, high-risk buildings.

In our review, we found the service had completed the audits to a high standard, in a consistent, systematic way and in line with its policies. The service makes relevant information from its audits available to operational teams and control room operators. We saw clear examples of deficiencies, enforcement decisions, support provided to responsible persons and final audit outcomes. Staff record this information on the community fire risk management information system. This is accessible to other departments so they can share risk information. Staff in emergency control rooms can also update information for firefighters who are attending incidents.

The service has improved its quality assurance of fire safety activity

In our 2023–25 inspection, we identified as an area for improvement that the service should make sure it has an effective quality assurance process. This is so that staff can carry out audits to a consistent standard.

The service has now fully implemented its quality assurance framework. Line managers accompany staff on visits every six months. They carry out a review of inspection activity and post-visit actions. Dip sampling takes place across all protection work including audits, consultations and licensing. Staff record quality assurance work on a spreadsheet.

Following these changes, we have closed this area for improvement.

The service has good evaluation tools in place to measure how effective its activity is and make sure all sections of its communities get appropriate access to the protection services that meet their needs. For example, the service works with Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service to carry out annual peer reviews. It assesses the quality of audits, case files, administration processes and decision-making.

Staff are more confident and supported to use their powers of enforcement

The service consistently uses its full range of enforcement powers and, when appropriate, it prosecutes those who don't comply with fire safety regulations. Staff told us that since our 2023–25 inspection, they have felt more confident and supported by the service to use their enforcement powers. Six members of staff hold legal skills qualifications, and a legal provider also supports the service by giving advice and guidance when necessary.

At the time of our inspection, the service told us it had eight live prosecutions ongoing and one closed. The service had used a more efficient approach in cases where responsible owners had admitted to breaching the enforcement action. Summary prosecutions are used in these cases to save public time and money.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service carried out 52 audits which it deemed unsatisfactory. This led to the service carrying out 66 enforcement activities which consisted of 2 alteration notices, 42 informal notifications, 10 enforcement notices and 12 prohibition notices. It didn't carry out any prosecutions in the year ending 31 March 2025. It completed two prosecutions in the five years from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2025.

The service works well with others to support fire safety

The service works closely with other enforcement agencies to regulate fire safety, and it routinely exchanges risk information with them. It works with local authorities' building control services to share post-fire inspection findings and deficiencies found during audits. The service also works with building control services to respond to building consultations and support compliance in new and altered buildings. As well as this, the service works with safety advisory groups, licensing authorities and trading standards.

The service meets its statutory responsibility to comment on fire safety arrangements

Since the year ending 31 March 2021, the service has consistently responded to 100 percent of the licensing consultations it received within the required time frame. In the year ending 31 March 2026, the service responded to 917 of 917 within the required time frame.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service responded to 88.1 percent of building regulation consultations (675 of 766) within the required time frame. It believed this was due to a recording issue as staff hadn't recorded the initial response as contact. In the year ending 31 March 2026, however, the service improved its performance. It responded to 97.1 percent of building regulation consultations (699 of 720) within the required time frame.

This means it meets its statutory responsibility to comment on fire safety arrangements at new and altered buildings.

The service provides fire safety advice and guidance to businesses

The service proactively works with local businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation. The service's business fire safety plan sets out how it will support businesses through engagement, education, enforcement and fire safety legislation. Examples include:

- primary authority schemes to make sure there is consistent fire safety guidance and compliance;
- fire safety advice and guidance via the service's website;
- compliance checks and audits;
- social media campaigns;
- safety advisory groups; and
- webinars and training events.

The service should examine how it can create a consistent approach to sharing information from the safety advisory groups. At the time of our inspection, staff told us they felt there was an inconsistent approach. Not all staff were clear what was expected of them.

Responding to fires and other emergencies

Good

Staffordshire 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 aligns its response strategy to risk

The service has linked its response strategy to the risks identified in its community risk management plan.

Leaders responsible for response have clearly communicated the strategy and main response aims to the workforce. As a result, response staff understand how they contribute to the response aims of the service individually and as a team.

The service locates its fire engines and response staff, and designs its working patterns, to help it respond flexibly to fires and other emergencies with the appropriate resources. For example, following a review of fire cover, the service has assured itself that its fire engines and duty systems are appropriately located to support a response to its communities. This is based on the risk levels it identified in its communities. Staff in the emergency control room monitor risk areas in the county and ask firefighters to move fire engines to cover high-risk areas if needed. This is to make sure that wholetime fire stations are available, as this is where the highest risk is. The service also has an appropriate policy and procedure in place which sets out how it will prioritise fire engines during periods when normal capacity is reduced. A duty officer oversees this and makes decisions if fire engine availability drops below minimum standards.

The service meets its response standards

The service has set out response standards in its community risk management plan and consistently meets them.

The service's standards are broken down into risk areas. For all risk areas, the service aims to have the first fire engine at an incident within the response target 80 percent of the time. Response targets vary from within 8 minutes in high-risk areas to within 10 minutes in medium-risk areas and within 18 minutes in low-risk areas. In the year ending 31 March 2026, the service met these standards 80 percent of the time.

There are no national response standards, but the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) does publish data on response times to primary and secondary fires. However, locally set standards may be calculated differently to the data the MHCLG produces.

MHCLG data shows that in the year ending 31 March 2026, the service's average response time to primary fires was 10 minutes and 47 seconds. This is slower than the average for services that are urban with significant rural communities.

Using this measure, the service's average response time has decreased from 11 minutes and 14 seconds in the year ending 31 March 2025. This improvement is due to a decrease in drive time from 8 minutes in the year ending 31 March 2025, to 7 minutes and 49 seconds in the year ending 31 March 2026. The service has also seen a decrease in the call handling time and crew turnout time to incidents in this period. This has contributed to the service's decreased response time to primary fires.

The service is working to improve fire engine availability

In the year ending 31 March 2026, availability of wholetime fire engines was 98.8 percent. This is the same as the previous year. During the same period, availability of on-call fire engines was 55.5 percent and this has stayed at a similar level over those two years.

The service is aware of a decline in its on-call availability. At the time of our inspection, staff told us this decline had stabilised and that the service has several initiatives in place to improve availability. It is trialling some of these and has already implemented others. These initiatives include:

- where one staff member is required to make a fire engine available, on-call firefighters with other primary employment carry out their other work from the station, where this is possible;
- roaming fire engines support areas of the county where weekend availability is low;
- more flexible contracts for on-call staff, especially at times of the day where availability is required; and
- riding with three firefighters rather than the usual five, to a range of predetermined incident types for on-call stations.

The service manages availability on a daily basis, moving staff and fire engines across the county as and when needed. The service recognises this is an area it should focus on and has a plan in place to improve this.

Risk information is up to date and accurate and the service is making IT changes to improve reliability

The service routinely collects and updates information about the highest-risk people, places and threats it has identified. This includes information on site-specific, temporary and emerging risk.

In the year ending 31 March 2026, the service identified 3,337 sites that pose more risk to firefighters if an incident took place. During the same period, the service visited 671 sites to update its records and familiarise itself with the firefighting risks. This is an increase from the previous year when the service completed 594 visits.

This information is readily available for the service's prevention, protection and response staff. This means that these teams can identify and reduce risk effectively. For example, when staff identify risk information during fire safety audits, they record and share this with departments using Microsoft Forms. This automated process informs fire control or the data team who add more information for operational crews. Where appropriate, the service shares risk information with other organisations, such as local authorities, Trading Standards and the police.

We sampled information on three very high-risk buildings, one high-risk and one medium-risk. This included the information in place for firefighters responding to incidents at high-risk, high-rise buildings and the information held by fire control.

The information we reviewed was up to date and accurate. Staff could easily access and understand it. The service was updating information in a timely manner. This ranged from the same day to 28 days after changes and quality assurance processes. Encouragingly, the information had been completed with input from the service's prevention, protection and response functions when appropriate.

At the time of our inspection, the service was transitioning to new risk information software and hardware. This was due to ongoing reliability issues, which we heard about during our visit, and some inaccuracies in data. The service was aware of the issues and had a clear plan in place to resolve them. It had completed a data cleanse ready for the new system. It was also waiting for the new emergency control room system to go live before transitioning to the new software and hardware.

We are looking forward to seeing the new risk information software and hardware in action.

The service completes proportionate quality assurance of its risk information. Station managers carry this out following updates or changes. Information following updates or changes is available immediately for staff across the service and marked unverified prior to approval. All files we reviewed as part of our inspection were completed within the required time frames.

The service is able to command incidents effectively

The service has incident commanders who are trained, and regularly and properly assessed. Commanders require revalidation every two years, with continuing professional development carried out in the interim. Incident Command Level 1 training is carried out in service and accredited through Skills for Justice. Nationally recognised training providers deliver training for Incident Command Level 2 and above. This helps the service to safely, assertively and effectively manage the whole range of incidents it could face, from those that are small and routine to major and 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).

In the year ending 31 March 2026, the service needed 200 accredited incident commanders to meet its demand. It had 198 accredited and no incident commanders who were no longer accredited but still carried out the same work.

The service should improve the consistency of its debriefing processes

As part of our inspection, we reviewed a range of emergency incidents and training events. These included domestic, commercial and large multi-agency exercises and incidents.

The service has appropriate policies and recording systems in place to support learning from incidents and exercises. We found examples where the service had acted on learning and fed back to staff, such as:

- improved welfare provisions identified at a wildfire in Upper Hulme;
- an operational flash message about positioning and wind direction identified at a factory fire; and
- positioning of blue light partner vehicles inside risk areas at Big Mill in Leek, shared with partners.

However, there was an inconsistent approach across all learning and in how the service shared this. Staff told us about instances where fire control had been included in debriefs at the “last minute” and where staff were still waiting to hear outcomes. We also found that the service was taking longer than 12 months to complete some low-level actions.

We were pleased to find that the service consistently followed its policies to make sure that staff commanded incidents in line with national operational guidance. It updates internal risk information with the information it receives. The service sends operational assurance officers to incidents. They carry out trend analysis and reviews, to learn how the service can improve or make changes.

Fire control staff are well prepared to support the service

We were pleased to find that the service's control staff were integrated into its command, training and exercise activity. Control staff maintain an annual calendar with visits, training and exercises they will take part in so they can prepare to support these events.

Control staff demonstrated a strong understanding of mobilisation procedures, cross-county border support arrangements and risk information systems. The service has appropriate tools and technology in place to support incidents such as those where fire survival guidance is needed and mass casualty incidents. It also uses the 999Eye secure live streaming system to make informed mobilising decisions.

We found that the service had robust operational continuity arrangements in place. It had already used these when it had experienced system failures.

The service has an appropriate process for updating national operational guidance and fire standards

The service is making sure that its policies are in line with national operational guidance. The service uses the Fire Standards Board Implementation Tools and national operational guidance implementation programmes to identify gaps, develop actions and track progress. It communicates changes and updates via operational flash messages, safety flash messages, training updates and email.

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents

Good

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

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 has plans in place to support multi-agency and major incidents

The service has effectively anticipated and considered the reasonably foreseeable risks and threats it may face. It has listed these in both local and national risk registers as part of its community risk management planning. For example, the service is part of the Staffordshire Resilience Forum, which considers national security, risk assessments, the national risk register and the shared local resilience forum risk register. The service is also part of the risk assessment working group.

As part of the Staffordshire Resilience Forum, the working group has identified a risk of accidental fire or explosion at an onshore major hazard site. The forum has multi-agency plans in place for such incidents which it reviews and runs training exercises for, on a regular basis.

It is also familiar with the significant risks that neighbouring fire and rescue services may face, which it might reasonably be asked to respond to in an emergency. These include wide area flooding, tall building fires and the HS2 high-speed railway which is passing through significant parts of the county. Firefighters have access to risk information from neighbouring services. Risk information is shared on ResilienceDirect with neighbouring services 10 km across the borders. This can be accessed on mobile data terminals and on the ResilienceDirect site.

The service is well prepared to respond to multi-agency and major incidents

During this inspection, we considered how well prepared the service is to respond to foreseeable major incidents.

We found that the service had well-developed policies and procedures in place for safely managing these incident types. Staff at all levels understand them, and robust training and exercises have taken place to test them. We found evidence of exercises for vehicles being driven into buildings, bladed weapon attacks, marauding terrorist attacks, tall-building exercises and exercises at high-risk sites across the county. In the year ending 31 March 2026, the service completed 15 multi-agency training exercises. The number of multi-agency training exercises per 1,000 full-time equivalent firefighters is 31.4, which is lower than the England rate of 56.2.

The service is working with other emergency responders to make local communities more resilient. It also benefits from the support of community and voluntary groups such as:

- Staffordshire Valley Voluntary Emergency Network
- Staffordshire Resilience Forum
- British Red Cross
- faith groups
- food banks.

We also reviewed the service's response to a fire at Big Mill in Leek. We found appropriate command arrangements, risk assessments, incident logs and decision-making logs. Good multi-agency working was carried out and the civil contingencies unit supported evacuations to rest centres and contacted building engineers. A 'warn and inform' message was communicated to the public with good use of social media to reduce public attendance at the site and improve safety.

The service works well with neighbouring fire and rescue services but could improve how it carries out joint training and exercises

The service supports other fire and rescue services when they are responding to emergency incidents. For example, there are arrangements in place with neighbouring services to support and receive support for incidents. It is intraoperable with these services and can form part of a multi-agency response.

It has successfully deployed resources to other services and has used national resilience assets. Specialist staff were able to confidently discuss national arrangements and support available when requesting assistance.

However, stations arrange their own cross-border training and exercising instead of having a formal service-wide programme linked to risk. During our inspection, staff in the service described the approach as "ad hoc" and "inconsistent".

The service operates in line with Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles

The incident commanders we interviewed had been trained in and were familiar with Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP).

The service could give us strong evidence that it consistently follows these principles. This included multi-agency training and exercising at a strategic and tactical level, carried out by the civil contingencies unit. We also saw evidence of the service using the joint decision model and it demonstrated a joint understanding of risk during the review of a large-scale incident.

The service works well with other organisations

The service is a valued member of the Staffordshire Resilience Forum. And at the time of our inspection, it chaired the forum and was also represented at the risk assessment working group, communications group, training and exercising group, and the civil contingencies capability and resilience group. The service is part of the major incident readiness board and has national intelligence liaison officers to support and contribute to multi-agency risk awareness. It takes part in regular training events with other members of the forum and uses the learning to develop planning assumptions about responding to major and multi-agency incidents.

The service has a process for using and sharing national operational learning

The service makes sure it knows about national operational learning updates from other fire and rescue services and joint organisational learning from other organisations, such as the police and ambulance services. It shares learning through operational and safety flash messages where necessary and an adjustment to the training it provides on its LearnPro platform if required. The service uses this learning to inform the planning assumptions it makes with other organisations.

Making best use of resources to provide an efficient and affordable service

Good

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service is good at making the best use of its resources to manage risk and to make sure it is efficient and affordable.

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.

Services should continuously look for ways to improve their effectiveness and efficiency. This includes transforming how they work and improving their value for money. They 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 has effective governance and scrutiny frameworks in place

The police, fire and crime commissioner for Staffordshire oversees the service. As a directly elected politician, their governance role includes setting the strategic direction of the service and providing scrutiny to monitor the service's performance and make sure its strategic aims are achieved. This is set out in a fire and rescue plan.

The service has effective strategic oversight arrangements in place to manage financial and resourcing risks, performance and improvement plans. It has effective processes, controls and internal governance arrangements in place to manage strategic risks. The service has good governance frameworks with clear lines of reporting from departments to the strategic governance board. It manages performance through a structured framework. Monthly departmental meetings feed into quarterly performance boards where senior leadership scrutiny is carried out. We saw examples of strategic risks being scrutinised at board level, such as

funding uncertainty, shared service performance and the replacement of the command-and-control system.

The service reports accurate and suitably detailed financial, risk and performance information to the police, fire and crime commissioner. The commissioner and fire service senior leaders meet regularly through informal and formal governance arrangements. Members of the commissioner's office also attend some of the service's internal meetings to provide visibility and scrutiny. We heard that data quality and performance reporting had improved since our 2023–25 inspection. This gives the commissioner's office greater assurance that the analysis which the service carries out supports decision-making.

The service sends medium-term financial planning information and detailed financial reports to the commissioner. The commissioner told us they were aware of the future financial challenges and risks the service faces and were confident that the service's transformation work would help close any funding gaps.

The scheme of delegation clearly sets out responsibilities for the service's senior leaders. There are effective internal governance arrangements in place to hold senior leaders to account for the corporate management of the service. The scheme of delegation is supported by defined terms of reference for boards and committees. These outline the responsibilities, delegated authority, financial controls, attendees and reporting arrangements. We found evidence of scrutiny of projects, such as the mobile data terminal hardware and software replacement. Options, cost, risk and dependencies were challenged prior to approval.

The service aligns its resources to risk

We were pleased to find that the service had made improvements since our 2023–25 inspection. The service's financial and workforce plans, including allocating resources to prevention, protection and response, continue to be consistent with the risks and priorities it has identified in its community risk management plan (CRMP).

The service uses a workforce planning board to assess future requirements. This accounts for retirement and absence, as well as the skills and capabilities needed to implement its CRMP. It has increased resources in protection and IT, where additional capacity has been needed. And the service designed its prevention restructure to focus its resources on its highest risks. Following a review of station locations and duty systems, the service has assured itself that its operational response is appropriate.

The service is using its resources appropriately to mitigate the issues identified in the corporate risk register that affect implementation of its CRMP. For example, funding challenges and shared support services with Staffordshire Police are recorded on the corporate risk register and monitored regularly through appropriate structures. To mitigate against risks, the service has set up its transformation board, which helps to identify areas where it could make savings. The service now has some fire-employed staff working as part of the shared services.

Some staff posts and legal support are paid for through the protection grant funding. The service has considered how it would cope if this funding was reduced or withdrawn. It expects to manage staffing levels by not replacing some staff if they leave. It also has plans to keep administration support in place, so fire safety officers can spend more time carrying out fire safety work. However, it hasn't yet set out how it would continue to provide legal support if the funding stopped.

The service has evaluated its mix of crewing and duty systems. It has analysed its response cover and can show it deploys its fire engines and response staff to manage risk efficiently. The service's recent fire cover review, which assessed station locations, crew arrangements and duty systems, concluded that arrangements remain appropriate. This has also given the service evidence to support future decisions. For example, making the decision to crew fire engines with three on-call firefighters comes at a financial cost to the service. However, the improved fire engine availability and reduced response times to incidents support the service's commitment to the public.

The service is taking steps to maintain availability of its on-call crews. It uses a roaming fire engine in the south of the county. This is staffed by crews from three stations at the weekend. On-call fire engines can attend a range of predetermined incident types with three firefighters. This decision is supported by risk assessments and operating procedures. The service is also trialling a nomadic firefighter approach. This is where on-call staff who can carry out their primary employment from any location are based at stations that require only one firefighter to make a fire engine available.

The service understands its future financial challenges

In 2026/27, the service's net revenue budget is £58.4 million. The net revenue budget for 2025/26 has been adjusted for inflation from £54.4 million to £55.5 million. This means the budget has increased by 5.2 percent between 2025/26 and 2026/27 in real terms. The budget is funded by £36.3 million from council tax, £8.8 million from business rates and £12.2 million from revenue support and other grants. The service's total funding is £58 million, which is £48.90 per head of its population. This is within the typical range compared to all services in England.

The service has a sound understanding of future financial challenges. It understands the effect of the government's Fair Funding Review, future pay awards, inflation costs, future council tax precept levels and police reform affecting its shared support services. The service's medium-term financial plan, covering 2026/27 to 2028/29, shows a forecast savings requirement of between £500,000 and £2.1 million depending on future council tax precept levels.

It plans to mitigate its main financial risks. In 2026/27, the service intends to manage its anticipated and future budget gaps by making savings and some use of reserves. It has set up a transformation board to oversee where it could make savings. The board has developed some costed options on this, along with the anticipated effect on the service. Department leads have also been asked to identify savings options representing 5, 7 and 10 percent of their budgets. This is to identify worst and best-case scenarios for future savings.

Since the 2026/27 net revenue budget was approved, the service told us it had received £840,000 in additional funding. This is to support the service with changing its governance arrangements when police, fire and crime commissioners are abolished in 2028. The service has added the funding to its reserves to help it manage its anticipated funding gap.

Its planning assumptions are relatively robust and realistic. They take account of the wider external environment and some scenario planning for future spending reductions. These include council tax precept levels, pay awards, inflation and reductions in grant funding. The service has also carried out some sensitivity analysis on its financial forecast.

The service builds its plans on sound scenarios. This helps make sure it is sustainable and underpinned by financial controls that reduce the risk of misusing public money. External auditors have provided assurance that there are no significant weaknesses within the service's internal controls on spending.

The service's capital programme is set at £14.5 million, covering 2026/27 to 2028/29. It includes investment in the command-and-control incident management system, hardware and software upgrades for mobile data terminals, IT infrastructure, and digital transformation and estates improvements.

Capital financing costs are 12 percent of the net revenue budget. They are set to increase by 0.9 percentage points by 2028/29 under existing capital plans.

By 2028/29, the service has forecasted debt and reserves to be 6.9 percent and 10.0 percent, respectively, of the net revenue budget. This compares to forecasted levels of 7.6 percent and 13.0 percent, respectively, for 2026/27. This shows that the service expects both debt and reserve levels to decrease over the period of its medium-term financial plan.

The service has a sensible and sustainable plan for using its reserves. This plan includes using reserves to support transformation projects, IT and digital improvements, and to manage future financial uncertainty. The service is also reviewing its reserve levels prior to local government reorganisation taking place.

The service has improved performance management with better oversight and data

We were pleased to find that the service had made improvements since our 2023–25 inspection. The service's arrangements for managing performance clearly link resource use to its CRMP and its strategic priorities.

The service uses data to improve staff productivity, make sure resources are used effectively and efficiently, and provide value for money. Staff use Power BI dashboards to monitor and track key performance indicators and a system called FireCal to monitor productivity. As a result, the service has better oversight of performance and productivity.

There is regular monitoring of performance against key indicators through monthly departmental meetings, quarterly performance reports to senior leaders and a public performance review from the commissioner involving the chief fire officer. This includes performance areas such as:

- fire safety audits
- home fire safety checks
- fire engine availability
- response time.

The service understands how it uses its wholetime firefighters. It collects data on how they spend their time across day and night shifts. It makes the most of its capacity. For example, the service uses the FireCal system to record and monitor operational activity including areas such as:

- training
- hydrant inspections
- premises risk information visits
- home fire safety checks
- low-risk fire safety audits
- providing education programmes
- community safety work.

Fire false alarms are incidents where the service attends a location but, on arrival, discovers that no resources are required to resolve the incident or that no incident occurred. In the year ending 31 March 2026, 35 percent (3,294 of 9,430) of incidents attended in Staffordshire were fire false alarms. The rate of attendance at incidents that were fire false alarms was 2.8 per 1,000 population. This is lower than the England rate of 4.3.

The service has an effective, risk-based system in place to manage its response to unwanted fire signals. In the year ending 31 March 2026, 64.2 percent (3,637 of 5,661) of automatic fire alarm calls weren't attended, which is higher than the England average of 47.1 percent. Emergency control staff challenge calls to prevent unwanted attendances and make sure resources are available for emergencies.

The service is taking steps to make sure its workforce is as productive as possible. This includes putting in place new ways of working. For example, with the introduction of the FireCal system, the service is more informed with data and intelligence around firefighters' productivity. The service has plans to analyse and use this information to make improvements in the future.

The service is making efficiency savings but there is scope to improve benefits monitoring

In 2024/25, the service's expenditure was £56.1 million, which was £47.58 per head of its population. This is within the typical range compared to all services in England.

There are regular reviews to consider all the service's expenditure, including its non-pay costs. This scrutiny makes sure the service gets value for money. For example, the finance team produces comprehensive monthly monitoring reports for budget holders. The service consistently achieves the savings identified in its financial and efficiency plans. It made £1.8 million of its planned £1.8 million savings between 2024/25 and 2025/26. The service has identified a further £400,000 of cashable savings for 2026/27. It is confident it will achieve these through the work overseen by its transformation board.

The service is taking steps to make sure it achieves efficiency gains through sound financial management and best working practices. It is doing this in important areas such as estate, fleet and procurement. The service receives specialist support and guidance through the commercial services shared service with Staffordshire Police. They provide the service with contract management, making sure that procurement legislation is followed and that they are achieving value for money. There is a commercial services dashboard which is monitored as part of the performance framework. To help close the potential funding gap, the transformation board will review all contracts the service has in place. This will help to make sure they are providing what is required, as well as to identify possible savings.

The service monitors and reviews the benefits and results of its collaborations. It can show that the intended outcomes are consistently achieved. This is done through the service's collaboration board which receives reports on strategic risk, benefits and issues. The board then reports any concerns to the strategic governance board.

The service shares facilities with the police and ambulance service across the county, including some co-located police and fire stations. These arrangements provide operational benefits and generate income.

The service reduces risk in the community through its involvement in the falls response and home from hospital team. Although these activities don't provide direct financial benefits, they support vulnerable residents and create opportunities for the service to provide fire safety equipment, advice and guidance.

While there are arrangements in place to evaluate improvement projects, the service doesn't have a benefits realisation framework or benefits register. This is a gap the service is aware of and looking to improve in the future.

There are effective processes in place for fleet and estates to support capital programmes

The service's capital programme and estate and fleet strategies have clear links to its CRMP. For example, the CRMP makes clear that the estates and fleet should support operational delivery, collaboration and community risk reduction. The service achieves this by maintaining a portfolio of fire stations and other support services premises. And it operates a joint emergency transport service to support delivery of fire engines and equipment to firefighters. The service also co-locates with Staffordshire Police to improve collaboration and community access.

Both strategies exploit opportunities to improve effectiveness and efficiency. Through the capital review process, the service uses fleet and estate data to make informed decisions that meet operational requirements. It has achieved efficiencies by making changes to the vehicle fleet and operational equipment, reducing costs and environmental impact.

It consistently carries out estate and fleet projects on time and within budget and manages risks appropriately. Changes it has made include:

- replacing estate vans with electric vehicles;
- introducing hybrid vehicles for the executive team;
- replacing response vehicles with electric alternatives where practically possible; and
- switching to battery-powered rescue equipment.

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

The service is investing in IT to improve resilience and accessibility

The service actively considers how changes in technology and future innovation may affect risk. As part of its digital transformation strategy, the service has identified important themes to support it now and in the future. These focus on cloud migration and better cybersecurity to improve organisational resilience. They also include having physical servers in multiple locations which handle email exchange, applications and fire service systems so they are easily accessible for staff.

It also aims to exploit opportunities to improve effectiveness and efficiency presented by changes in technology. For example, by using CrowdStrike antivirus software the service can free up staff capacity as the software identifies and resolves problems.

The service is using artificial intelligence. It has given a small number of staff a Microsoft Copilot licence to support their work to find out what the benefits are. The service has already received some positive feedback on how it has supported staff with neurodivergent conditions to organise and prioritise their email inboxes.

The service consistently carries out IT projects on time and within budget and manages risks appropriately. Where the service knows there will be delays, it has plans in place. For example, as part of the mobile data terminal software and hardware replacement, it has experienced delays linked to the command-and-control system. This has meant that the service has extended its contract with the previous providers, but costs are charged back to the command-and-control system providers. The service also had robust plans in place to make sure that risk information would still be collected and shared if the project was delayed for a long period.

The service has the capacity and capability to manage change

The service has put in place the capacity and capability it needs to achieve sustainable change. Through the workforce planning board, the service is aware of what it needs to do to support change in the service. We found good evidence of the service having capacity and capability to make changes and achieve savings through the transformation board.

The service manages change through effective projects and programmes. These projects and programmes are managed separately but there are clear internal structures with appropriate governance arrangements. These make sure that progress is monitored, scrutinised and challenged. We saw evidence of projects from initiation document to evaluation following the completion of the project. We also found regular updates for projects which had been delayed, with suitable plans in place should delays continue.

Promoting, embedding and improving values and culture

Good

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service is good at promoting, embedding and improving values and culture.

Fire and rescue services should have positive and inclusive cultures, which are maintained and improved through feedback from staff, scrutiny by leaders and oversight by the fire and rescue authority. Workforce well-being, both physical and mental, should be a priority, and unacceptable behaviour should always be challenged and managed appropriately.

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 defined values, which staff model and understand

The service continues to have well-defined values, which staff understand. We found that staff at all levels of the service showed behaviours that reflect service values. It has implemented the Core Code of Ethics well. Staff understand it and it is integrated within policies and procedures. During our inspection, we saw the code was visible in stations, headquarters, documentation and e-learning provided to all staff.

In our workforce survey, 94 percent of respondents (182 of 194) agreed that their colleagues consistently modelled and maintained the service's values. During our inspection, staff spoke highly of working for Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service and felt the culture within the service was positive.

The service continues to be compliant with safeguarding legislation by completing appropriate background checks for all existing members of staff. The service completes background checks in line with national practice. A panel reviews any disclosures and the service uses the National Fire Chiefs Council risk assessment to make a decision on employment. In the year ending 31 March 2026, 100 percent of existing employees who needed a background check had one.

The service is also reducing the risk of abuse, harm and neglect for both the public and staff by completing background checks on new recruits and, if appropriate, existing staff who are applying for new roles. In the year ending 31 March 2026, 100 percent of new recruits who needed a background check had one.

The service has effective oversight and scrutiny in place for misconduct processes

The service has robust systems in place to take feedback from a range of activity, scrutinise it and understand the impact on staff and the public. Activity includes public complaints, staff grievances and disciplinary action. We found good examples of the service adjusting policies and procedures as a direct result of the scrutiny that had taken place. The service has introduced a professional standards board attended by senior leaders, HR and an independent employment law specialist. The board provides oversight and consistency over serious misconduct cases.

The police, fire and crime commissioner, who is the fire and rescue authority for this service, receives regular, meaningful updates on people issues. This helps them to hold the chief fire officer to account, set priorities for the service, reduce risk for the public and protect the health and safety of staff. This is done through informal and formal meeting structures.

The service uses open and transparent communication to keep the workforce informed

The service has effective arrangements in place to communicate with staff and representative bodies, such as trade unions, and to take account of their legitimate concerns. It has a range of formal and informal arrangements, including:

- station visits;
- Microsoft Teams briefings;
- induction sessions;
- work with trade unions;
- an open-door policy with senior leaders;
- communication through staff networks;
- complaints procedures; and
- anonymous reporting.

In our workforce survey, 77 percent of respondents (150 of 194) agreed that they felt confident in the processes for providing feedback to all levels of leadership.

Individual members of staff, representative bodies and staff network groups we spoke to gave examples of raising legitimate concerns with leaders. The service had been active in resolving them. We heard examples of staff networks influencing changes in women's uniform and incident ground welfare facilities.

In our workforce survey, 63 percent of respondents (122 of 194) agreed that they were confident their feedback would be acted on. Some staff felt they were listened to but reported that they didn't always hear back about changes or suggestions.

The service has appropriate processes in place for dealing with misconduct

There is a positive working culture throughout the service, and staff feel empowered and willing to challenge unacceptable behaviours when they come across them. We found that most staff we spoke to felt confident to challenge unacceptable behaviour. Staff receive training on being active bystanders and dealing with difficult conversations.

In our workforce survey, 82 percent of respondents (159 of 194) told us that they felt safe to challenge unacceptable behaviour in the service.

Staff have a good understanding of what bullying, harassment and discrimination are and their negative effects on colleagues and the culture of the organisation.

In our workforce survey, 6 percent of respondents (12 of 194) told us that they had felt bullied or harassed by members of their service in the past 12 months. And 6 percent (12 of 194) told us that they had felt discriminated against by members of their service during the same period.

We were pleased to find that the discipline and grievance cases we reviewed were all progressed in a timely manner. The service creates and records a timeline of events for each case file to make sure they are dealt with in line with agreed time frames. It records the rationale for why these have been extended or delays experienced. We asked the service to tell us about grievances that were related to conduct matters only (and not to include, for example, those against organisational policy).

As at 31 March 2026, there were 2 live grievances and 29 disciplinary cases. Of these disciplinary cases, 13 were gross misconduct cases.

The service follows the policies and procedures that it has in place. The cases we reviewed were managed by the right people at each step of the process. This led to well-justified decisions with clear reasons. We also saw an example of how the service progressed an informal complaint which it felt would be better dealt with under its grievance procedure. This helped to make sure an appropriate investigation and thorough process were carried out.

The service offers good support to staff who are the subject of disciplinary action, as well as those who raise concerns or grievances or who are victims of bullying or harassment. During our inspection, we saw evidence of the service's welfare officers offering support to all staff involved in discipline and grievance cases. The service also set out clear expectations for the welfare officer and those who they were supporting.

Most staff we talked to had confidence that if they raised a misconduct concern with their line manager, it would be dealt with in an appropriate and confidential manner. However, we heard of an inconsistent approach to some low-level discipline cases which weren't handled in line with the service policy. The service is aware of this and has taken action to make sure this doesn't happen again.

Managers have the confidence and training to deal with grievance and discipline issues and feel able to do so. As part of the leaders' development programme, an employment law specialist provides managers with report writing and investigation training to a consistent standard.

The service can show that it is adapting its processes and sharing with some staff the learning it has gained from dealing with grievance and discipline cases. The service has been providing HR development days for managers, where they share anonymised learning from misconduct cases.

The service has appropriate provisions in place to support staff well-being

The service continues to have effective and well-understood health and safety policies and procedures in place. There is a comprehensive policy which covers governance, responsibilities, risk arrangements, training and performance monitoring. These policies and procedures are readily available, and leaders at all levels promote them effectively to all staff. There is a dedicated team to support the service through health and safety. Managers gain qualifications from the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) and the National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health (NEBOSH). They also receive help and guidance for risk assessment and station audits.

The service has appropriate lone working policies in place and supports staff with technology that tracks their location. The service requires staff to record all lone working visits in calendars.

In our workforce survey, 98 percent of respondents (190 of 194) agreed that they understand the policies and procedures the service has in place to make sure they can work safely.

As at 31 March 2025, 4.2 percent of wholetime firefighters had registered secondary employment. During the same period, 22.6 percent of wholetime firefighters had a dual contract with Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service. The service has effective policies in place, which outline the working time directive and suitable break periods for staff. It is the responsibility of staff to make sure they are fit and available for duty.

The service monitors staff who have secondary employment or dual contracts to make sure they comply with the secondary employment policy and don't work excessive hours. Line managers regularly monitor this to make sure people are fit for duty. The service also includes this in annual development reviews to make sure it has good oversight of staff.

The service also continues to have well-understood and effective well-being policies in place, which are available to staff. A significant range of well-being support is available to support both physical and mental health. For example:

- access to the occupational health team;
- support following traumatic incidents;
- a fitness advisor for physical support; and
- the Fire Fighters Charity.

Most staff were complimentary about the provision for well-being. However, some staff had experienced delays in accessing appropriate mental health support through occupational health. This is something the service is aware of. Staff have access to additional mental health support through the Fire Fighters Charity and the NHS. They can also make use of the mental health first aiders within the service if required.

In our workforce survey, 97 percent of respondents (189 of 194) agreed that they knew how to access support for their mental health through the service. 80 percent of respondents (156 of 194) agreed that service leaders treated their well-being as a priority.

The service is proactive in building resilience among staff, and we found examples of where it had intervened to support an individual's needs. Staff with reasonable adjustments have a workplace passport which identifies what adjustments they need. When they arrive at training courses or have interviews, the relevant people should already be aware and have the necessary requirements in place. We also heard good examples of how the service is supporting staff with technology such as artificial intelligence and compatible laptops for hearing devices.

Training and developing the right people with the right skills

Good

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service is good at training and developing the right people with the right skills.

Fire and rescue services should have a workforce plan in place that is linked to their community risk management plan. The workforce plan should set out 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. And the service should make sure that barriers to the development and progression of all staff groups have been identified and removed.

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 good workforce planning in place

The service has good workforce planning in place. This makes sure that skills and capabilities align with what it needs to effectively carry out its community risk management plan. For example, the service uses a workforce planning board and annual training needs analysis to assess skills and capabilities required for the coming year. The board takes retirement, absence and specialist requirements into account. The service then plans the recruitment and training activity for the coming year. The service also has a reactive approach and can use casual contracts for on-call staff to supplement the wholetime workforce. It also keeps a pool of those successful at interview to support service needs.

Workforce and succession planning is subject to consistent scrutiny in the form of regular meetings to discuss requirements. The workforce planning board meets quarterly and includes the main stakeholders from across the service. The board reviews the number of staff needed across the service, retirement forecasts, absence, promotion requirements and staff on modified duties.

At the time of our inspection, there were a number of staff across all levels in temporary positions due to people having left the service. However, the service was confident that, by the end of 2026, promotion processes would be complete and those staff would be in permanent positions.

The service provides good access to training and development opportunities

Most staff told us that they could access the training they needed to be effective in their roles. In our workforce survey, 90 percent of respondents (174 of 194) agreed that the service gave them the necessary training to carry out their roles. There are development pathways in place for firefighters, a themed annual training calendar, a competency framework for fire safety officers and role-specific training for other areas of the service, such as prevention.

Training isn't just focused on operational skills. It also includes management skills. The service's training plans make sure staff can maintain competence and capability effectively. For example, it has adopted the National Fire Chiefs Council's leadership and development frameworks, which are open to all leaders in the service. The service also provides leaders with a suite of HR courses supported by external specialists in employment law. These include active bystanders, investigations, report writing, employment law, welfare support, challenging conversations and safer recruitment.

In our workforce survey, 88 percent of respondents (171 of 194) agreed that they could access relevant learning and development opportunities. Firefighters receive structured training through an accredited apprenticeship programme, which includes the main aspects of firefighting and rescue. They also receive specialist training for incident command, fire investigation and hazardous materials. Non-operational staff receive role-relevant training, such as teaching qualifications for prevention staff or following the national competency framework for fire safety officers.

Most staff we spoke to felt they had access to relevant training and development opportunities. But these can sometimes be limited for non-operational staff.

The service monitors staff competence through a system called pdrPro. It updates its understanding of staff skills and risk-critical safety capabilities through regular monitoring at station and strategic level. This approach means that the service can identify gaps in workforce capabilities and resilience. It also means that it can make sound and financially sustainable decisions about current and future needs.

There is a culture of learning and improvement

The service promotes a culture of continuous improvement throughout the organisation, and it encourages staff to learn and develop. For example, the service's development team manages career pathways using identified themes, trends and personal development outcomes. The service uses the National Fire Chiefs Council's leadership and development programmes to support staff, as well as internal courses to manage people effectively. The service has also introduced a scoring matrix to identify potential talent and it gives staff members access to tailored development.

We were pleased to find that the service had a range of easily accessible learning and development resources. These included:

- e-learning;
- news updates;
- face-to-face training; and
- emails with safety information.

They allow staff to do their jobs effectively.

The service has identified parts of its training and development provision that some staff have found difficult to access or use. We are pleased to find that the service had taken proactive steps to remove these barriers. For example, all staff can now access the service intranet on personal devices. This makes information more accessible and better supports parts of the service, such as on-call staff, who have limited opportunities to view this during weekly training nights.

However, some staff felt that the service could do more to improve access to operational training for the on-call workforce. We found examples where some staff had taken annual leave from primary employment to attend training courses or weren't able to book suitable times.

Ensuring fairness and diversity

Adequate

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at ensuring fairness and diversity.

Recruiting, retaining and developing a diverse and 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 work with local communities. Each service should make sure that staff throughout the organisation firmly understand and show a commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). This includes successfully taking steps to remove inequality and making progress to improve EDI at all levels of the service. It should proactively encourage feedback from staff and respond to it and make sure any action it takes is meaningful.

Areas for improvement

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 assure itself it has the capacity and capability it needs to improve equality, diversity and inclusion throughout the organisation.

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 fair recruitment processes, but workforce diversity remains below local population levels

As part of this inspection, we reviewed a range of recent recruitment campaigns for firefighters, supervisory and senior managers.

We found that the service had an open, fair and honest recruitment process for existing staff or those wishing to work for it. There is an effective system to understand and remove the risk of disproportionality in recruitment processes. For example, adverts are open for two weeks, with operational adverts open for four weeks. The service also has anonymised shortlisting in place to make sure people are selected for interview through a published scoring criterion.

However, while the service collects data from recruitment campaigns, it wasn't clear how it uses this to inform future recruitment or make changes.

The service has put considerable effort into developing its recruitment policies so that they are fair and applicants can understand them. Scoring criteria are defined and in line with the National Fire Chiefs Council's Core Code of Ethics and Leadership Framework. Adverts include a role profile, background service information, safeguarding statement and offer of reasonable adjustments if required.

Its recruitment processes are comprehensive and cover opportunities in all roles. The service advertises recruitment opportunities internally and externally. We found examples of the service using LinkedIn and Indeed to reach a wider audience. This has encouraged applicants from diverse backgrounds, including those applying for middle and senior leadership roles.

The service has made some improvements to increasing staff diversity at all levels of the organisation. We saw evidence of positive action being carried out in relation to recruitment campaigns. But some of this doesn't seem to be having the expected effect on increasing diversity across the workforce.

In 2024/25, 3 of 101 new joiners (where ethnicity is known) were from an ethnic minority background.

As at 31 March 2025, 3.2 percent (27 people) of the service's staff were from an ethnic minority background compared to 8.4 percent in the local population and 6.4 percent throughout all fire and rescue services in England. All staff reported their ethnicity.

For the same period, 18.1 percent (152 people) of the service's staff were women compared to an average of 20.8 percent throughout all fire and rescue services.

The proportion of firefighters from an ethnic minority background decreased from 3.8 percent (25 people) as at 31 March 2024 to 3.4 percent (23 people) as at 31 March 2025.

The proportion of women firefighters increased from 8.4 percent (55 people) to 9.7 percent (66 people) over the same period.

The service supports progression through inclusive processes, though some staff question the transparency of promotion

We found positive examples of where the service had identified and addressed barriers that disproportionately prevented people from particular groups from progressing. We heard how the service contacted candidates who failed at certain points in the recruitment process to see what support and guidance they could help with. This includes fitness days or speaking to firefighters already in the role.

The service's promotion and progression processes are comprehensive and cover opportunities in all roles. Following meetings of the workforce planning board, the service plans these processes approximately six months in advance. It then publishes dates on the service promotion hub, so staff are fully aware of what is coming and when. Advice and guidance are available to staff on interview techniques, scoring criteria, role profiles, background information and the service's safeguarding statement. The service anonymises shortlisting and offers reasonable adjustments.

During our inspection, some staff felt that processes weren't transparent and described them as being too reliant on interview.

In our workforce survey, 65 percent of respondents (126 of 194) agreed that promotion processes in the service were fair.

There is a lack of strategic direction for equality, diversity and inclusion

Despite continuing to prioritise some EDI activity, the service lacks a clear strategic direction for improving outcomes. At the time of our inspection, both the EDI strategy and public sector equality duty document remained in draft with approval planned for September 2026. Without an agreed strategy, there is a risk that the service could consider EDI activity in isolation and not align it to clear organisational objectives.

While the service has made some improvements in areas such as training, communication with staff and equality impact assessments, these arrangements aren't yet understood throughout the service or consistently applied. The service has introduced a standard impact assessment template and improved monitoring arrangements for the outcomes. Any changes requiring board approval should also have an appropriate equality impact assessment in place. But we found that some assessments didn't allow enough time for appropriate consultation to be carried out or to include key stakeholders.

The service has developed several ways to work with staff on EDI issues that affect them. These include face-to-face EDI training that focuses on difficult conversations and the difference between positive action and discrimination. In our 2023–25 inspection, we identified staff understanding of EDI and positive action as an area for improvement. During our 2025–27 inspection, we found that most staff had a good understanding of EDI and positive action, so we have closed this area for improvement.

The service has five staff networks in place, some of which have terms of reference and regular meetings. However, others aren't as established. There is senior leadership representation to make sure issues or concerns raised are given the platform they deserve. The service is seeing some of the effects of working with the networks. This includes the women's network being pivotal in influencing policy and welfare changes, and the neurodiversity group supporting workplace passports and dyslexia assessments. In our workforce survey, 87 percent of respondents (169 of 194) agreed that they felt comfortable being themselves at work.

The service has acted to address matters staff have raised. It has processes in place for staff to raise feedback directly with senior leaders during station visits or through everyday interaction. Senior leaders were described as open and visible. The service also has appropriate complaints and grievances processes, anonymous reporting, and whistleblowing policies in place, to support staff to raise concerns. Staff have received these actions positively. Representative bodies and staff associations reported that the service worked with them well on EDI issues. There are regular informal and formal trade union meetings, which staff described as supportive. Representatives felt they were well informed on matters that affect their members and involved in work early on to provide challenge and scrutiny.

Leading people effectively

Good

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service is good at leading its people.

To be effective, fire and rescue services should identify and develop leaders throughout the organisation. Leaders should be able to translate and communicate the objectives of the service's community risk management plan to all staff and the public in a meaningful way. They should communicate openly, build trust, challenge unacceptable behaviour and use every contact with staff to maintain and improve a positive culture.

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

Main findings

Leaders are open and transparent in their communications with the workforce

Senior leaders are effectively communicating the aims and objectives in the community risk management plan to staff at all levels. They are doing this in a variety of ways, which promotes open, two-way communication. Senior leaders have regular informal and formal meetings with teams, communicate openly and transparently, and share service information in newsletters. An internal and external communications framework and strategy details different channels used to meet the varying needs of staff. We found that this approach was supported by leaders at all levels who make sure staff understand the service's aims and objectives.

As a result, staff have trust in their leaders. In our workforce survey, 86 percent of respondents (166 of 194) agreed that senior leaders clearly communicated the service's objectives.

The staff we spoke to understood how they contributed to the aims of the community risk management plan individually and as a team.

The service has a process to identify leaders, but some staff were unaware of it

We found that the service had well-understood arrangements in place to identify talented leaders. The service has effective succession-planning processes in place. These allow it to effectively manage the career pathways of its staff, including roles that need specialist skills.

Staff clearly understand and trust career development pathways. And the service proactively removes any barriers and supports all staff in accessing leadership development opportunities. The service is part of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) direct entry scheme and doesn't replace operational roles like-for-like. Where possible, it opens roles to operational and non-operational staff.

There are talent management schemes in place to develop leaders and high-potential staff. However, not all staff are aware of them. The service has introduced a scoring system during annual reviews to identify talent. High-scoring staff are offered access to development tools, such as personality tests, which then inform the training the service provides for them. Though the process was in place, we found some of the workforce didn't know about it.

In our 2023–25 inspection report, we identified this as an area for improvement. With an annual process now in place, as well as a scoring system to identify talent and a tailored approach to develop individuals, we have closed this area for improvement.

The service plans and advertises all talent and leadership opportunities fairly through its promotions hub for all staff to consider. All staff can see what is coming and when, and there is support and guidance available for those who want to apply for these opportunities.

The service has put considerable effort into developing its promotion and progression processes so that they are fair and all staff can understand them. The service has clear advertising, support available through guidance and scoring criteria in place. All its processes are in line with the NFCC Leadership Framework to make sure it provides a consistent approach.

The service could improve how it makes sure there is consistency in scoring applications and interviews. Following shortlisting, we found no moderation process for scoring when numerous panels or panel members were used. This can create distrust in the processes.

The service manages selection processes consistently. And it uses temporary promotions appropriately to fill short-term resourcing gaps. As at 31 March 2025, 7.3 percent of the workforce were on temporary promotion. The average length of temporary promotions was 362 days, which is higher than the England average of 295 days.

At the time of our inspection, the service was aware of the number of staff in temporary positions. It was confident that, following promotion processes in 2026, people would be in permanent positions.

Leaders are well trained to support the workforce

Leaders are well equipped and receive appropriate training, which helps them to confidently manage a range of challenges. Development is available through the NFCC's leadership development programmes from supervisory to executive level. The HR team also support leaders with people training such as:

- safer recruitment
- interviewing
- behaviour-related training
- Core Code of Ethics
- active listening
- handling grievances and disciplinaries
- having challenging conversations
- objective setting
- absence management.

Where possible, the service incorporates role-play into the training to make it more interactive.

The service has some coaching and mentoring programmes in place, which are developing leaders. Leaders are exposed to different management scenarios that match and stretch their skills. The service finds external support for those newly promoted and uses mentors within the management development programme. However, some staff felt there was a lack of coaching and mentoring available following unsuccessful promotion processes. They also told us there was an inconsistent approach to feedback following outcomes.

The service equips its leaders to deal with staff performance and development

Leaders are equipped to confidently manage staff performance and deal with any poor performance or behavioural issues.

There have been improvements in the service's performance management system, which allow leaders to effectively develop and assess the individual performance of all staff members. For example, each member of staff has individual goals, objectives and regular performance assessments. There are annual performance reviews, which are linked to the Core Code of Ethics and prioritise welfare.
The service also organises specific HR training on difficult conversations. And it has clear policies on disciplinary action to make sure staff have the tools to manage performance effectively.

The service has seen an increase in the number of completed annual performance reviews across the workforce. But we found there was an inconsistent approach, with some reviews consisting of a questionnaire and others of a letter. The service should establish consistency in the way it carries out reviews so that staff can have confidence in the system.

Leaders act as role models to create a positive culture

Most leaders at all levels act as role models. For example, staff we spoke to were positive about the chief fire officer and deputy chief fire officer. They praised their visibility, openness and positive communication with the workforce. Some staff said there was a family feel within the service. However, there were still a few leaders who didn't act as role models, with some staff describing their behaviours as "hit and miss" at middle management level.

In our workforce survey, 75 percent of respondents (145 of 194) agreed that leaders at all levels promoted a positive culture.

As a result, leaders are maintaining and constantly developing the positive culture we found throughout the organisation. Culture is a clear priority and the focus on well-being is supported by the well-being, inclusion and culture board.

Leaders are active in challenging misconduct, including bullying, harassment and discrimination. And staff trust them to take their concerns seriously.

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