



HMICFRS

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

State of Fire and Rescue

The Annual Assessment of
Fire and Rescue Services in England

2023

His Majesty's Chief Inspector
of Fire and Rescue Services



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

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The Annual Assessment of
Fire and Rescue Services in
England 2023**

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



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Foreword

This is my second report to the Secretary of State under [section 28B of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#). It contains my assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of fire and rescue services in England, based on the inspection reports we published between 20 January 2023 and 31 March 2024.

I also offer my reflections on the fire and rescue sector's progress since we started inspecting fire and rescue services in 2018. In this report, I will comment on the overall improvement it has made, as well as how it has contributed to public safety. I will also comment that, in many respects, there is still more to do.

To help form my assessment, I wrote to chief fire officers, chairs of fire and rescue authorities and other interested parties to seek their views on the state of fire and rescue in England. I extend my thanks to everyone who replied and offered their thought-provoking insights.

I have used other reports, information and analysis made available to me, which includes our interactions with the sector. This includes the findings from [our 'Values and culture in fire and rescue services' spotlight report](#), which we published in March 2023. It also includes our initial findings from our thematic inspection on staff misconduct.

I have considered information we have gathered from events such as our annual chiefs and chairs event, where we meet with chief fire officers and chairs of fire and rescue authorities throughout England to discuss specific topics.

I would like to thank my colleagues at the National Fire Chiefs Council, the Home Office, Fire Standards Board, Local Government Association, staff representative bodies and all the other public organisations we often work with. Finally, I express my profound gratitude to all HMICFRS staff for their significant contributions to my assessment and for everything they do to support our inspections.

Changes at HMICFRS

In June 2023, HM Inspector (HMI) Matt Parr CB left the inspectorate after nearly six years of service. And in March 2024, HMI Wendy Williams left the inspectorate after nine years of service. As the leads for many of our inspections, Matt and Wendy contributed to significant improvements in both police forces and fire and rescue services. I wish to thank Matt and Wendy for their years of dedicated public service, and I wish them every success in the future.

In 2023, we welcomed two new HMIs and an assistant HMI. In May 2023, Assistant HMI Shantha Dickinson joined us on secondment from Hampshire & Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service. Shantha provides additional support for our fire and rescue service inspections and contributes to our wider work.

In August 2023, HMI Lee Freeman KPM joined us from Humberside Police. Lee holds the regional role for ten fire and rescue services, several regional police forces, and is the senior responsible owner of PEEL and counter-terrorism inspections.

Also in August 2023, HMI Michelle Skeer OBE QPM joined us from Cumbria Constabulary. Michelle holds the regional role for 12 fire and rescue services and several regional police forces. She is the senior responsible owner of our inspections for: protecting people from violence and abuse; police engagement with women and girls; improving the police response to domestic abuse; and child protection.

I extend a warm welcome to Lee, Michelle and Shantha. We will undoubtedly benefit from the wealth of experience they have brought with them.



Andy Cooke QPM DL

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services



Introduction

Fire and rescue services play a vital role in helping to keep the public safe. There are countless examples of the dedication of fire and rescue service staff to their roles. They achieve this by working well together, and with other organisations, to respond to a wide range of activities and incidents. For example, in 2023 we saw fire and rescue service staff tackling major incidents to serve their local communities, such as flooding. Fire and rescue service staff also played a crucial role in contributing to overseas efforts in Morocco and providing support to Ukraine.

In many respects, 2023 was a difficult year for many services. They faced challenges such as:

- financial pressures, including pay and non-pay inflation;
- a significant staff pay increase, which was above the level most services had planned for in their budgets – the agreement was made after many 2023/24 budgets had been set;
- challenges in recruiting and retaining some staff, such as on-call firefighters, fully trained protection staff, fire engineers and IT professionals;
- preparing for industrial action and any impact on industrial relations; and
- the consequences of serious storms, including flooding in many areas.

Services need to be able to adapt to address these challenges, as well as those of the future. And they need to continue to make improvements and adapt to meet the changing needs of their communities.

HMICFRS helps services address such challenges. We make communities safer by supporting sustainable improvements in fire and rescue services. We provide services with a clear indication of what is working well and what needs to improve, and we make recommendations to bring about positive change. We do this through our inspections, spotlight reports and monitoring processes, and by promoting innovative and promising practice.

Our inspection programme has demonstrated it can promote improvements. We have found that, since we started inspecting, many services have made considerable progress. And we aren't just witnessing improvements at local level; national bodies have also made progress in response to the recommendations we have issued to them.

Yet, through our inspections, we have continued to find deficiencies in the performance of services. We are finding that aspects of some services' performance are getting worse. This is hugely concerning, as this means a few services aren't providing the service the public deserves.

In February 2023, we started our Round 3 inspections. So far, we have published inspection reports for 15 of 44 services. Six of the services we have inspected are struggling to make improvements, and we have issued eight new causes of concern to seven services. Every service is different and the types of problems we find, and the effects of those problems, can vary from service to service. Some of the services we inspected early in this round had also performed poorly in Round 2. This can affect our view on the overall progress the sector has made. But there are some common themes. Unfortunately, so far in our third round of inspections we have seen grades fall in some services in relation to:

- protection;
- multi-agency incidents;
- values and culture; and
- getting the right people with the right skills.

We have placed a further two services, Avon Fire and Rescue Service and Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, into our enhanced monitoring process called 'Engage', as we have concerns about their performance. They join Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service, which has been in Engage since 2022. London Fire Brigade was removed from Engage in March 2024. This is the highest number of services that have been in Engage since we introduced the process. It reflects the growing knowledge and depth of our inspection processes and our knowledge of services' performance.

The reasons behind the declining performance in services is complicated and varies depending on each service's context. Some of the services we have inspected so far this round have improved. But some systemic challenges are preventing services from being as efficient and effective as they can be.

Chapter 1 sets out the systemic challenges facing the fire and rescue sector. It covers four points:

- the fire and rescue sector has made some good progress at a national level, but the Government must press ahead with reforms;
- values, culture and the management of misconduct need to urgently improve;
- fire and rescue service leaders need to take a strategic approach to service improvements; and
- HMICFRS needs additional powers to continue to make communities safer.

The first two points we have raised before, often multiple times. But after two years as chief inspector, the final two points are new observations that I make. All these systemic challenges need concerted action from national bodies, including the Government. Some need concerted local and national effort from the service.

We have often been disappointed by the slow progress to address the national recommendations we have made. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the amount of time that has elapsed, I am now making a further recommendation on the basis of our ever-expanding evidence of the efficiency and effectiveness of the fire and rescue service. Hopefully, reform to resolve systemic challenges in the sector will soon be forthcoming; it is long overdue.

Chapter 2 sets out our interim findings from our Round 3 inspections in more detail, drawing out some of the key themes we have found so far.

Chapter 1: Systemic challenges are slowing improvement

The fire and rescue sector continues to make good progress at a national level

Since we started our fire and rescue service inspections in 2018, we have seen many national problems that have hampered improvement for local communities. These problems led [HMICFRS to issue six national recommendations five years ago](#).

Our recommendations covered major structural aspects of the fire and rescue sector. Our recommendations, as well as their statuses, are detailed in [Annex A: Our recommendations](#). The six recommendations broadly covered:

1. Removing unjustifiable variation, including in how the sector defines risk.
2. Making sure the sector has sufficient capacity and capability to bring about change.
3. Precisely determining the roles of fire and rescue services and their staff, to remove any ambiguity.
4. Reviewing and reforming the systems for determining pay and conditions.
5. Giving chief fire officers operational independence.
6. Establishing a code of ethics.

Since we made those recommendations, good progress has been made in some areas. We have reported recommendations 2 and 6 as complete, which relate to change capacity and a code of ethics respectively.

Since my [2022 'State of Fire and Rescue' report](#), recommendation 1, which related to the consistent definition and management of risk, has been completed. This is an important step forward for the sector, which has been the result of a large programme of work by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), the Home Office and Local Government Association. Defining and managing risk in a consistent way will help to make sure the public are kept safe, no matter where they live in England.

Our national recommendations aren't the only areas of sector progress. The NFCC has continued its work to develop national fire and rescue policy on a range of important topics, including in response to our ['Values and culture in fire and rescue services'](#) spotlight report recommendations. Some of these policies have helped

services to make progress against our recommendations. For example, they have several programmes and products to improve leadership, behaviour, talent management, safeguarding and continuing professional development. I commend the NFCC's proactive focus to promote improvement in these areas.

The Fire Standards Board continues to develop a range of standards to improve consistency, which many services have adopted. Our inspection framework is designed to have due regard to the standards as part of our inspections, and will continue to do so. This means that those services that have adopted and implemented the standards will find themselves better set up for our inspections.

Challenges faced by the sector, such as the unsustainability of the on-call duty system, require a system-wide and constructive response from all relevant bodies.

The remaining three national recommendations are a matter for the Government. Slow progress made against these recommendations has been noted in my last three 'State of Fire and Rescue' reports.

The Government must prioritise reform

On 18 May 2022, the Government published its consultation White Paper, '[Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service](#)'. I welcomed it as a landmark moment in fire and rescue reform and said it contains the right proposals to make a material difference. On 26 July 2022, the public consultation on the White Paper closed. At the time of my 2022 'State of Fire and Rescue' report, the Government still hadn't published its response to that consultation.

On 12 December 2023, 16 months after the public consultation closed, the Government published its '[response to the Fire Reform White Paper](#)'. Like the White Paper, in theory, the response mostly contains the right proposals to make a material difference to addressing some of the systemic barriers the sector faces and to completing our remaining recommendations.

I was pleased to see that the proposals from the consultation response include:

- creating legislation to give chief fire officers operational independence;
- making the responsibilities of fire and rescue authorities and chief fire officers clearer in respect of separating strategic and operational planning and governance;
- commissioning a review of the pay negotiation processes; and
- taking action to improve integrity and culture in fire and rescue services through better training and more open recruitment practices.

Given some of the serious issues we have highlighted, including the need to improve culture in the sector, change is urgently needed. If implemented correctly, reform can help resolve some of these issues. So the most important thing now is that improving the sector through reform cannot be delayed further – the Government must make this a priority.

Of the 37 services that wrote to me, 27 felt that the delay to reforming the sector has led to some problems, including hampered decision-making and a continued lack of investment. Twenty services said that the delay may reflect the fact that the Government has an insufficient appetite for reform in fire and rescue. And seven services stressed the importance of legislating to give chief fire officers operational independence. Decisions on using resources to meet commitments in [community risk management plans](#) should be for each chief fire officer to make. But some services are restricted in how they can introduce the meaningful change required to meet the priorities set by fire and rescue authorities.

It was disappointing to see that the consultation response doesn't include deadlines for implementing the proposals. It would be beneficial for both the sector and the public if the Government publicly committed to an achievable timescale for making the changes.

We recommended that the roles of fire and rescue services and their staff be clarified to reduce the potential for ambiguity. In its White Paper response, the Government said that the roles of fire and rescue services and their staff is clear in legislation. Many in the sector will likely disagree with this position, and may point out the need for greater clarity of the roles of fire and rescue services and their staff in relation to matters such as wide-area flooding. I will be interested to see if any progress is made in completing this recommendation through the White Paper response proposals.

The Fire Brigades Union has considerable influence

In previous reports, we have highlighted the considerable influence of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). Unions can play an important role. While they have their members' interests at heart, at times this influence has stood in the way of progress and gone against services' values. In our values and culture spotlight report, we highlighted that FBU slogans, such as "member with backbone" printed on t-shirts and the term "scab" used openly on social media, could have the potential to create rifts and deepen divides between fire and rescue service staff. This undermines the positive effect that a strong staff association can bring and risks harming the culture in a service by ostracising people who don't conform rather than supporting colleagues to, for example, raise concerns.

The FBU's interpretation of the role of a firefighter has been rigid, which may not benefit the public. In previous reports, we have covered examples of this, which support the need for sector reform. It is encouraging that the White Paper response includes plans to review the outdated structure for negotiating pay and terms and conditions. I also welcome the Government's plans, as set out in the White Paper response, to create legislation that gives chief fire officers operational independence, so that they can make deployment decisions and operationally prepare without the need for prolonged negotiations. The Government removing any potential for ambiguity over the role of a firefighter would also help. These changes may also

encourage more positive working cultures, making fire and rescue services better places to work.

Services need to improve their values, culture and misconduct management urgently

Fire and rescue services carry out a vital public service that helps people in our communities every day. But since we started inspecting them in 2018, we have repeatedly found evidence of poor values, culture and behaviour.

This led us to recommend in [our 2019 'State of Fire and Rescue' report](#) that the sector should establish a code of ethics. In May 2021, the Fire Standards Board, in partnership with the NFCC, Local Government Association and the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, published the [Core Code of Ethics](#). It is pleasing to see that many services have adopted and follow the code.

But many of the findings from our second full round of inspections, which we carried out between February 2021 and August 2022, were highly concerning. And in late 2022, London Fire Brigade published an ['Independent Culture Review'](#) report, which also contained disturbing findings. As a result, the Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire commissioned us to produce a spotlight report setting out our findings on values and culture in fire and rescue services. On 31 March 2023, [we published our report](#).

We focused on the values and culture of all 44 fire and rescue services in England and drew on the evidence we collected during all our fire and rescue service inspections since 2018. We examined what was working well and what needed to change, and established the barriers that prevent services from making improvements.

No matter how well an organisation is led and managed, some staff will sometimes behave inappropriately. Inspection is a snapshot in time. We gather a wide range of evidence before coming to conclusions and making a graded judgment. We also rely on fire and rescue service staff speaking openly with us. Even services that we have graded as good in values and culture may have some staff who behave inappropriately.

In the past, services haven't always disclosed significant cultural or misconduct matters to us as they developed an understanding of the inspection process and relationships with our inspectors. In early 2023, I placed a formal requirement on all chief fire officers to provide information to us about significant misconduct matters that arise in their services. We now regularly receive notifications from them about such matters. Services need to have the policies and practices in place that reduce the likelihood of poor cultures forming or staff demonstrating poor values and behaviour.

In our second round of inspections, we found that, while some services had made some improvements to values and culture (examples of promising and innovative practice are included in the spotlight report), too many needed to do more.

On the basis of our findings on values and culture, in our second round of inspections we issued:

- [causes of concern](#) to five services;
- requires improvement or inadequate grades to 17 services; and
- 66 [areas for improvement \(AFIs\)](#) across 35 services.

On the basis of our findings on fairness and diversity, we issued:

- causes of concern to five services;
- requires improvement or inadequate grades to 26 services; and
- 72 AFIs across 32 services.

In our staff survey, staff reported bullying, harassment and discrimination in every fire and rescue service in England. During the fieldwork for our second round of inspections, we found examples of racist, homophobic and misogynistic behaviour in a quarter of fire and rescue services in England. Such behaviour was often excused as “banter”.

For example, we heard of a case where a senior officer referred to a Black colleague using a racial slur and put it down to “having a laugh”. We also heard of another instance where two male firefighters joked with a female firefighter that they were “going to rape her”, and the three of them acted out the rape together. These individual incidents taken together are indicative of a wider problem. Some members of staff said they felt unable to report bad behaviour for fear of reprisals. One person said their “card would be marked” if they raised concerns and another described it as “career suicide”.

We therefore issued 35 recommendations, 20 of which are aimed at chief fire officers, one at chief constables and 14 at relevant national bodies, including the NFCC, Fire Standards Board and Home Office. They include calls for:

- robust background checks on all fire and rescue service staff;
- fire standards to be reviewed in relation to staff misconduct; and
- secure systems for staff to raise concerns.

I am pleased that, of the services that wrote to me, 24 said that our spotlight report has increased their focus on values and culture.

The deadline for all our recommendations aimed at chief fire officers has now passed. I applaud the many services and national bodies that have taken steps to progress our recommendations. In due course, we intend to publish an update that details the progress services have made and the work they still need to do.

In particular, I welcome the swift work on background checks to make sure only the right people can join or stay in the fire and rescue service. The Government has amended [Schedule 1 of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 \(Exceptions\) Order 1975](#). These amendments came into force on 6 July 2023 and now all fire and rescue authority employees are eligible for Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. This has been supported by NFCC guidance on the use of DBS checks in fire and rescue services. In addition, the Fire Standards Board has amended three of its standards, which now include statements on the requirement for background checks and making safeguarding an integral part of how services should operate.

Despite the positive initial progress in most areas, there is always room for improvement. Continuing to create the right values and culture in the service requires an unrelenting focus from leaders at all levels.

In July 2023, following our values and culture spotlight report, we were commissioned by the then Home Secretary to carry out a thematic inspection of the handling of misconduct allegations in fire and rescue services. Dealing with misconduct effectively is one of the primary ways that leaders can signal what behaviours aren't acceptable. It also brings justice for aggrieved parties and means that people who shouldn't be working in the fire and rescue sector are removed.

Our inspection concluded in January 2024, but we haven't yet published our findings. In the inspection, we assessed services' end-to-end misconduct processes and the underlying causes of misconduct, such as those linked to cultural issues. We focused on:

- how services identify potential misconduct; in particular, how confident staff are to raise grievances, and how proactive managers are in their use of discipline procedures;
- to what extent services' policies on discipline, complaints, grievances and whistle-blowers are adequate, and how well those policies are implemented in practice;
- to what extent investigations, hearings and appeals for misconduct are effective; and
- whether any groups of staff are disproportionately affected by misconduct.

To support the inspection, we gathered evidence from all 44 services in England and carried out fieldwork in 10 services. We chose these services to provide a diverse representation throughout the country and to include small, large, urban and rural services. They also include a range of governance systems in the sector.

We reviewed each service's policies and strategies for managing misconduct and a sample of discipline and grievance cases, background checks, and training records. We also visited a variety of stations and held interviews and focus groups with staff at all levels and in a wide range of roles.

Taken together, this evidence gives us a highly detailed picture of misconduct throughout the country and how services try to manage it. We are currently analysing and triangulating this evidence, and we are refining our findings and recommendations. We aim to publish our final report in summer 2024.

So far, our evidence suggests that unacceptable behaviour remains commonplace, but there are some signs of improvement. Ten percent of the workforce responded to our staff survey. Forty-one percent of respondents (1,802 out of 4,422) reported that they had witnessed misconduct in the previous 12 months and 34 percent (1,509 out of 4,422) said they had experienced it directly. This is far too high.

Nevertheless, there is some evidence of positive change. Almost all staff understood what constitutes acceptable behaviour. And in many services, there was evidence of senior leaders making a concerted effort to further improve understanding of and role model positive behaviours.

In many cases, unacceptable behaviour that persists occurs in small pockets. In particular, some individual [watches](#) and teams can be insular, resistant to change and value conformity over diversity. In that environment, unacceptable behaviours, such as bullying, harassment and discrimination, can become normalised.

In most services, staff know how to raise concerns if they experience or witness misconduct. But in some services, we found that staff have low confidence in the options available to them. They often believe that:

- people who raise concerns can be disadvantaged for doing so;
- any following action would be ineffective; and
- processes will be long, intensive and potentially distressing for them.

Many staff members therefore prefer to try to deal with problems informally, if at all.

Likewise, in some services, supervisors and managers don't have the confidence to use formal performance management and discipline processes. On too many occasions, they prefer to try to deal with unacceptable behaviour informally, if at all. Dealing with poor behaviour informally can often be appropriate, but sometimes it isn't.

A lack of training is the most frequent reason that supervisors and managers lack confidence in dealing with inappropriate behaviour. This includes general training about managing staff and specific training on performance management and discipline procedures.

Because of the lack of confidence we have seen in the formal processes for grievances and discipline, we consider that it is likely that the true number of misconduct cases in fire and rescue services is much higher than the number of those reported. In some cases, processes aren't even started, which means that complainants of bullying, harassment or discrimination can live in misery for months or years.

Services need to address the concerns that staff, supervisors and managers have about how misconduct is handled and restore trust in their systems.

Fire and rescue service leaders need to take a more strategic approach to service improvements

The importance of strategic leadership cannot be overstated. In a few of our most recent inspections, including Essex, Greater Manchester, Norfolk and Northumberland fire and rescue services, we have seen how strong and effective senior leadership has led to improvements. Their chief fire officers have achieved this by focusing on the fundamental aspects of their services in a strategic and people-centred way.

But, in too many fire and rescue services, we saw leaders at all levels weren't being strategic enough in their approaches. This particularly applied to senior leaders at assistant chief fire officer level and above.

Too many senior leaders are failing to see the big picture. This can lead to them making ineffective decisions that prevent their services from adequately addressing the current and future challenges they face. Ultimately, this has the effect of making the public less safe.

Such challenges include failing to link the risks outlined in their community risk management plans to how they run their services now and planning for the future.

We also find leaders often carry out multiple programmes of improvement work to meet fire standards and respond to our inspection findings. For example, if a service complies with the fire standards, it is likely to receive positive inspection grades. But, too often, this work is carried out in isolation, with leaders failing to recognise that services operate as a system and that pieces of work are related. Leaders would do well to make sure their improvement programmes are more connected and, therefore, efficient and effective.

We have found some smaller services struggle to improve in relation to their capacity. Strong leadership will always be essential to services' performance, but limited resources due to size and ability to employ the right specialists, such as IT experts, can reduce their capacity to improve.

Finally, we often find that leaders don't fully understand the barriers they face to making improvements and meeting the needs of their communities. For example, the problems we have identified in values and culture, described above, have remained hidden for many years. They were brought to light only through inspection, specific incidents and adverse media coverage, with some chief fire officers unaware of the prevalence and scale of these issues in their services.

The Government should establish a College of Fire and Rescue

It is perhaps unsurprising that we find many senior leaders lack the skills and strategic awareness they need to be effective. A demonstration of strategic leadership is expected when assistant chief fire officers and above are appointed, and the Fire Standards Board's new [Leading The Service](#) standard should help in this area. While there are courses in fire and rescue, such as the NFCC-run Executive Leadership Programme, there is no agreed compulsory course or development required to become an assistant chief fire officer or above. And the existing courses haven't been reviewed to make sure they are fit for purpose. This means that the process to recruit chief fire officers varies and there are inconsistencies in the training and development they receive.

This points to the urgent need for a College of Fire and Rescue. We recommended that a college be established in our values and culture spotlight report. We were pleased to see that the Government's 'Response to the Fire Reform White Paper' included proposals for a college, and I look forward to seeing the Government's plans develop in this respect.

The police service requires that all chief officers and staff undergo an executive [leadership programme](#), run by the [College of Policing](#). Entry to the programme is competitive and requires submission of an extensive portfolio. It is possible to fail, which means that those who pass the course must show they can lead others to a high standard.

Given the challenges many fire and rescue services face regarding leadership, an equivalent course should be made available for potential chief fire officers. This course should be mandatory before any assistant chief officer or above is appointed.

In the White Paper consultation, 74 percent of respondents agreed that the sector needs a leadership programme for senior leaders. This has been included within the White Paper response proposals. But only 53 percent of respondents agreed that such a leadership programme should be mandatory. Twenty percent neither agreed nor disagreed and 28 percent didn't support the proposal. As a result, the Government didn't commit to making the course mandatory.

The Government should stay firm in its proposal and shouldn't be dissuaded by the small percentage who don't agree. Given the evidence, establishing a mandatory leadership programme is the right thing to do, before existing staff enter senior leadership positions, and it should be one of the first offerings of the new College of Fire and Rescue. Equivalent accredited learning and experience should also be accepted by services for candidates who apply for senior positions from outside the sector.

The selection of who goes on such a course and becomes a chief fire officer is equally as important as the content of the course itself. Leadership teams need diversity, including people with different protected characteristics and diversity of thought, to be effective, innovative and well-equipped to tackle challenges. Currently, leadership within the fire and rescue service isn't diverse enough. According to Home Office data, in the year ending 31 March 2023, the majority of firefighters at the most senior ranks (chief fire officer, deputy chief fire officer and assistant chief fire officer) were male (89.2 percent) and the majority were also White British/Irish (95.4 percent). These figures exclude 14 individuals who didn't state their ethnicity and 2 who didn't state their gender.

While some services have improved the diversity of their leadership, they can't always explain how they intend to continue to improve diversity throughout their leadership roles. There is a general stagnation in the sector, with some chief fire officers being rehired, and a lack of innovative thinking on how to improve diversity among senior leaders. The rehiring of the same individuals into senior posts and a lack of proactivity to improve diversity in leadership teams is partly due to services' poor succession planning.

To improve diversity of thought in leadership teams, more strategic thought needs to be put into attracting candidates from outside the sector. Strategic thought also needs to be put into supporting staff from underrepresented groups to progress to more senior roles and making sure that individuals entering senior roles having the support and training they need. I am therefore pleased to see a commitment in the White Paper response that the Home Office will fund the development and piloting of wider direct entry schemes through the NFCC. This should help make the sector more diverse.

A College of Fire and Rescue would provide a central, consistent source of guidance and materials that could help services to develop staff, nurture talent and create the senior leaders of the future who are equipped with the skills to think strategically. Of the services that wrote to me, 18 said that a College of Fire and Rescue would have the potential to bring greater standardisation and consistency to the sector. And 12 services said that it could increase professionalism, competency and capacity in the sector. In the White Paper response, the Home Office committed to continuing to work with sector leaders, the frontline and existing comparable organisations, such as the College of Policing, as they develop the most appropriate model for a College of Fire and Rescue.

There are several options for how a College of Fire and Rescue could be established and opinions on which option is best vary. One of these is to create a College of Fire and Rescue as part of the infrastructure of the College of Policing. Many chief fire officers and national fire and rescue service bodies don't support this option and consider that a college should be established to work closely with the NFCC. But I firmly believe that is the most effective and efficient thing to do.

Effective leadership requires a set of skills that is common throughout different sectors. The College of Policing has well-established programmes and materials that could help train leaders in fire and rescue services. And it would have the capacity to provide effective training to current and potential leaders in the sector.

The College of Policing has developed a National Centre for Police Leadership, which focuses on developing existing leaders and leaders of the future. It sets standards for leadership and provides guidance, tools and development opportunities for everyone in policing. The National Centre for Police Leadership supports forces in their provision of the leadership programme to officers, staff and volunteers throughout England and Wales. It is a five-stage development programme, with each stage intended to provide a consistent standard of leadership development throughout someone's career.

Given there is a wealth of materials that could be adapted to the sector, a College of Fire and Rescue should be a faculty established in partnership with the College of Policing. It should, however, have an independent budget and separate leader who can't be directed on certain matters by the College of Policing chief executive.

Of course, the fire and rescue sector faces a unique set of risks and requires a unique set of skills – it should never become a subset of policing. But I believe greater collaboration is essential in the context of limited resources. This is the best way available to swiftly and effectively make the improvements that are so urgently needed. This route would bring the benefits of shared back-office resources and training while maintaining the independence of fire and rescue.

HMICFRS needs more powers so it can continue to make communities safer

The inspectorate's overarching purpose is to make communities safer. Members of the public want fire and rescue services and police forces to succeed in their duties to keep them safe, spend public money wisely and treat people with fairness and respect.

We work on behalf of the public and ask fire and rescue services and police forces the questions we believe the public wish to have answered. We use our expertise to interpret the evidence and publish our findings, conclusions and recommendations in an accessible format. Our reports help the public to see how their local service is performing and allow them to compare it to other services.

In an ideal world, services would voluntarily co-operate with HMICFRS and legislation wouldn't be required to carry out effective inspections. Sadly, this isn't the case. We have seen a few services attempt to influence the outcome of our inspections. This includes services selecting specific members of staff ahead of our reality testing and briefing them on answers in advance. Such attempts to influence the inspection process in this manner are unacceptable and risk undermining the process.

To date, because of our vigilance and robust processes, these attempts haven't been successful. Instead, we have seen a broad pattern of declining performance during our Round 3 inspections. We have also seen that services aren't taking enough action in response to our previous reports and recommendations.

We have inspected police forces since 1856. We only started inspecting fire and rescue services in 2018, after amendments made by the [Policing and Crime Act 2017](#) to the [Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#) created inspectors of fire and rescue services. But we need to have the right legislation in place for us to inspect most effectively, which will lead to services making the improvements that are so urgently needed.

We have powers to require fire and rescue services to give us any information that we reasonably need for the purposes of inspection and to enter premises. Yet there are still some areas where our current powers and abilities for policing are greater than those for fire and rescue, which I detail below.

The Government should make it a legal requirement for fire and rescue authorities to publish a response to our inspection reports

In policing, under [section 55 of the Police Act 1996](#), local policing bodies are required to publish their response to inspection reports that pertain to their local police force. They must do so within 56 days of the report being published. That process was designed to make sure that chief constables are held accountable for acting on our inspection findings.

There is no legislative equivalent for fire and rescue authorities and their equivalents. Instead, under section 7.5 of the '[Fire and Rescue National Framework for England](#)', fire and rescue authorities must give due regard to our reports and recommendations and – if we make recommendations to them – prepare, update and regularly publish an action plan detailing how recommendations are being implemented. The framework isn't a mandatory legislative requirement. Recommendations are also only a small part of our inspection reports: a more rounded response would be helpful.

As a result of the current framework, we don't routinely receive published responses to our inspection reports from fire and rescue authorities and their equivalents. Worryingly, as at April 2024, 13 fire and rescue authorities and their equivalents hadn't published action plans in response to our values and culture spotlight report recommendations. A further 17 authorities had only published partial information. Many didn't publish anything at all until after we reminded them of their responsibilities in this regard.

This lack of response to our reports and recommendations poses a material risk to services making improvements. I therefore urge the Government to make it a legislative requirement for fire and rescue authorities to publish a response to our reports within 56 days. Fire and rescue authorities should be required to seek and

include the comments of the chief fire officer and to specifically comment on any recommendations.

Fire and rescue authorities should be able to request a commissioned inspection

Another area of disparity relates to commissioned inspections. Under [section 54 \(2BA\) of the Police Act 1996](#), local policing bodies such as police and crime commissioners can request and commission the inspectors of constabulary to inspect the police force in their area. This can include a request to inspect a particular part or activities of the force.

For example, in October 2023 we published our report on our '[Inspection into Thames Valley Police](#)', which was commissioned by the police and crime commissioner. In this inspection, we examined whether there had been any lost opportunities in how the force dealt with information and intelligence relating to a serving officer.

These arrangements to request an inspection are used regularly by local policing bodies and help them to fulfil their duty to secure an efficient and effective police force. But no equivalent provision exists in fire and rescue. Fire and rescue authorities can't request us to inspect their local service, even if they may find this useful. The Government should legislate so that fire and rescue authorities can request a commissioned inspection.

Our existing inspection powers should be extended

Granting the powers described so far would create parity with the existing policing legislation and would undoubtedly lead to continued improvements for the public. But, sometimes, we have found even the existing policing legislation doesn't go far enough.

In my [2022 'State of Policing' report](#), I said that many other safety-critical, monopoly, essential public services have a regulator. But police forces don't.

The same is true of fire and rescue services. We don't have the power to enforce the recommendations we make. Instead, we rely on services voluntarily acting on them. A lot of the time, services do so because we have developed a good reputation and an authoritative voice, and they also see the value in our recommendations. But unfortunately we have seen, on too many occasions, services haven't completed our recommendations within the reasonable time frames we have set.

Ultimately, for policing, I reached the conclusion that additional legal powers should be introduced. The Government has since said that legislative change won't be possible within this Parliament, which is understandable given the need for the Home Office to develop clear proposals, publicly consult and have a suitable bill in which to include any draft provisions. But, if the changes I recommended are put forward in future, consideration should be given to maintaining parity with fire and rescue services.

Among those additional powers, I said that there should be a requirement for additional organisations to respond to recommendations we make to them. This recommendation is relevant to the fire and rescue service. As previously described, the current non-mandatory responses apply to fire and rescue authorities only and are insufficient. In addition, there is no formal requirement for any other bodies, such as the NFCC, to respond to our recommendations. Widening the requirement beyond fire and rescue authorities in relation to our recommendations would make sure that we can bring about system-wide change.

I also said that the Chief Inspector of Constabulary should have the ability to give directions in relation to a police force in certain, limited, circumstances where an inspection identifies a failing that poses a significant risk to public safety. This is because there have been many recent occasions where police forces have failed to discharge their functions in an effective manner and, as a result, have placed the public at significant risk of harm. A direction could have potentially rectified these situations in a timelier fashion, and kept the public safe and saved public money.

Just as forces shouldn't be allowed to fail, neither should fire and rescue services. As Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services, I am both independent of Government and best informed about the efficiency and effectiveness of fire and rescue services. This power could potentially be introduced for fire and rescue services too, once the operational independence of chief fire officers has been established. A direction would be reserved for exceptional circumstances. In most cases, we would continue to rely on our reports and recommendations to enact change.

National recommendation 7

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

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

Chapter 2: Interim findings from our Round 3 inspections

Summary

In March 2023, we started our third full round of inspections of all 44 fire and rescue services in England, known as our Round 3 inspections. These inspections are now well underway.

From March 2023 to 31 March 2024, we published 15 reports from our Round 3 inspections of Avon, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Cornwall, Essex, Greater Manchester, Hereford and Worcester, Lincolnshire, Merseyside, Norfolk, Northumberland, Surrey and Warwickshire. Our findings in these inspections have informed this report. Links to these 15 reports can be found in [Annex B](#).

We continued to seek the fire and rescue sector's views when designing our third round of inspections, including through our inspection programme consultation. We no longer assess in tranches and we now publish reports as soon as possible. This means that the time between inspection and publication is shorter, so services can respond to and learn from our reports faster. We also introduced an 'adequate' grade, in between 'requires improvement' and 'good', which has provided a much better reflection of the appropriate grade.

For more information about our inspection methodology, our graded judgments and monitoring process, please visit [our web page 'How we inspect fire and rescue services'](#).

Unfortunately, so far in our third round of inspections we have seen grades fall in some services in relation to:

- protection;
- multi-agency incidents;
- values and culture; and
- getting the right people with the right skills.

While we appreciate the introduction of the new 'adequate' grade may be a contributory factor in some grades moving backward, too often we are seeing a deterioration. But it is worth noting that a reduction in grade, particularly from good

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

The performance of some services has greatly declined since our last inspection. Six of the 15 services we have inspected for the Round 3 inspection are struggling to make improvements. In the services that are struggling, we often found they didn't have sufficient capacity and their staff often don't have the skills they need to manage change throughout the service. This can be a result of:

- insufficient oversight or organisational planning;
- challenges with recruitment (especially recruiting to posts requiring specialist skills, such as protection and IT, as salaries often can't compete with those offered in the private sector);
- unequal access to funding, which can lead to inadequate funding allocated for change management resources; and
- insufficient support or training for existing staff.

We also found that, for some services, these problems are compounded by inefficient and ineffective IT systems. These services have failed to address AFIs we have previously given them: six services have received more AFIs this round.

Of the 15 services we inspected, 7 services have 12 causes of concern in place, of which 8 are new and 4 have been carried over from Round 2. Seven causes of concern relate to services' effectiveness and five relate to how services treat their people.

In particular, the causes of concern we have issued are on:

- prevention;
- protection;
- values and culture; and
- fairness and diversity.

While we have seen performance declining in some services, others have made large improvements. This has been reflected in the grades we have given them and the AFIs we have closed since we last inspected them. Greater Manchester, Hereford and Worcester and Northumberland fire and rescue services have notably reduced their numbers of AFIs since our previous inspection.

We are also continuing to find instances of [promising](#) and [innovative practice](#) in fire and rescue services. Identifying and sharing positive practice is a key part of [our 2023 to 2027 strategy](#). It gives services the opportunity to learn from each other by seeing what is working elsewhere and applying it to their own circumstances. We believe this is a vitally important part of our work, as it gives services a greater opportunity to build on positive work, rather than only focusing on improving poorer performing areas.

So far, we have found 21 examples of promising or innovative practice throughout the 15 services we have inspected in this round.

While we include positive practice in each individual service's report, we also want to make it as easy as possible for other fire and rescue services to find. We have worked with the NFCC to develop the [Positive Practice Portal](#), which it introduced during 2023. The portal allows services to easily access and search for positive practice. We will continue to contribute to it and support the NFCC on its development.

Services also have a responsibility to identify, implement and share positive practice to promote system-wide improvement. In April 2024, we held a positive practice event in partnership with Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service. Chief fire officers from all services in England were invited to the event, which focused on promoting improvement through leadership. It included sessions from the NFCC, Fire Standards Board, College of Policing and services that are performing well or have made improvements. We intend to host more of these events in future.

I hope that services will find this work beneficial. I encourage them to use the NFCC's portal and our events to share their learning and learn from others.

Fire and rescue service leaders need to do more to improve working cultures

Leaders who get the basics right will likely see other areas of improvement as a result. This includes creating a supportive and inclusive working culture, and making sure this it is accepted, understood and followed by everyone working in the service.

It is well documented that staff well-being, productivity, efficiency and motivation are linked to compassionate and fair working cultures. Fire and rescue service staff at times work under pressure and in dangerous situations. They need to be able to trust and depend on one another for their own safety.

Additionally, values and culture have an effect on the quality of service provided. In our second round of inspections, 12 of the 17 services we issued a 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' grade in relation to values and culture (almost two thirds) were also issued a 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' grade for their effectiveness.

It has therefore been encouraging to see that many services have responded promptly to our values and culture spotlight recommendations.

These concerted efforts have been reflected in some services' grades, which have improved since our previous round of inspections. We have seen positive cultures led by senior teams bringing about improvements in Cheshire, Essex, Greater Manchester, Hereford and Worcester, and Northumberland fire and rescue services. These services have integrated the [Core Code of Ethics](#) into their values and staff at all levels demonstrate positive behaviours.

Innovative practice: A new board is helping Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service transform its culture

The service has created the Culture First Board to oversee and scrutinise its approach to transforming organisational culture.

Improving organisational culture is a priority within the service's annual delivery plan. To achieve this, the service has adopted a culture-first approach, and its Culture First Board forms an important part of its governance structure. The board is co-chaired by the chief fire officer and an external former police deputy chief constable and includes representation from trade unions and staff groups.

The board scrutinises all major projects and programmes to make sure there is a positive and respectful culture at the heart of the service's work.

Additionally, service-initiated cultural reviews, including in Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service and London Fire Brigade, have reflected how seriously services are taking the matter.

Yet cultural change is notoriously difficult and isn't something that can happen overnight. This is evidenced in our latest findings. We gave a 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' grade for values and culture to 5 of the 15 services we have inspected. Three services' grades have declined in this area since their previous inspection.

As part of our evidence gathering, we carry out a staff survey. There were 3,461 respondents to our staff survey for the 15 services we have inspected so far. Of those, 16 percent (563 people) said they had been bullied or harassed at work in the last 12 months.

In one service, despite its efforts to improve its culture, we found evidence of unacceptable behaviours. Such behaviour included staff dismissing sexist and inappropriate language as "banter". Worryingly, some staff in this service said they weren't confident in reporting these issues. We were also told there was a disconnect at various levels of the service, including between senior and middle managers. This is a clear example of leaders needing a more rigorous approach to improving their service's culture.

While many services have a statement of values, we still see that these values aren't always consistently demonstrated in how staff, particularly leaders, behave. Of those who responded to our staff survey, 97 percent (3,344 out of 3,461) said that they were aware of their service's statement of values. But only 68 percent (2,282 out of 3,344) agreed that their leaders modelled and maintained these values. If leaders aren't setting an example by modelling the values that they expect their staff to follow, the culture in their service is unlikely to improve.

Leaders at every level, but particularly senior leaders, need to regularly seek feedback from staff and either act on it or explain why they aren't doing so. This is an important way of bringing about cultural change and improving how fire and rescue services operate.

But this is an area of weakness for many fire and rescue services. Only 62 percent (2,134 out of 3,461) of staff survey respondents said they were confident that their ideas or suggestions would be listened to in their service. We hope that this will improve in future. In response to our spotlight report recommendations, all 44 services now provide an independent reporting line that their staff can use as a confidential way to raise concerns outside their own service.

A lack of diversity and inclusion is affecting public and staff trust

Leaders need to make sure their services are diverse and inclusive workplaces. Morally, it is the right thing to do. It also makes organisations more likely to provide effective services and to be trusted by their communities.

But too many services we have inspected so far in Round 3 hadn't improved their approach to equality, diversity and inclusion. We have issued 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' grades for fairness and diversity to 6 of the 15 services we have inspected so far in this round.

The lack of an effective approach to diversity and inclusion in those services is negatively affecting the trust that both the public and staff have in the service. Even those services that have received an 'adequate' grade or above could unquestionably do more.

Too few members of the public think that fire and rescue services will treat people fairly, regardless of who they are. As part of our evidence gathering, we carried out a public perceptions survey. Of the 2,081 respondents to our survey, only 63 percent (1,321) thought their local fire and rescue service treated everyone fairly regardless of who they are. This rate is too low. Every member of the public should be able to trust that the service they will receive from fire and rescue service staff will be fair.

Too many members of staff believe they have been discriminated against. In response to our staff survey, 16 percent of respondents (551 out of 3,461) said they had been discriminated against at work in the last 12 months. This rate is unacceptably high.

One way to tackle the problems of public perception and staff discrimination is for fire and rescue services to make sure their [equality impact assessments \(EQIAs\)](#) are fit for purpose. All public sector organisations have a legal obligation to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation. They also must have due regard to advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations between those who have protected characteristics (as defined in the [Equality Act 2010](#)) and those who don't. Services should carry out this duty by assessing the equality impact of everything they do.

In our values and culture spotlight report, recommendation 27 covered the need to carry out effective EQIAs:

“By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should make sure their equality impact assessments are fit for purpose and, as a minimum, meet the requirements of the National Fire Chiefs Council equality impact assessment toolkit.”

While all services we have inspected so far in this round have an EQIA process, many of them are inconsistent. More work is needed in this area. In particular, not all policies requiring an EQIA have been through the process. Service leaders should make sure the implementation of this recommendation makes a difference for staff and communities and isn't seen as a box-ticking exercise.

Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service has updated its EQIA framework and improved its EQIA process, which it is sharing nationally. This process has been simplified. It is easy to follow, all protected characteristics are considered, the impact is assessed, and the positives and negatives are analysed. There is good governance, and the service consults all relevant staff groups for advice or where there is an impact. All actions proposed are assigned to a lead and have clear time frames for completion.

Our evidence shows the negative impact it can have on staff if an EQIA isn't done, or isn't done well enough. Four services we have inspected in Round 3 so far had inadequate facilities for female staff. In one instance, we issued a cause of concern. The service in question had limited access to welfare and hygiene facilities at incidents for its staff, and staff didn't have access to gender-appropriate uniform and personal protective equipment.

Another way to reduce the problem of public perception and staff discrimination is improving the representation of fire and rescue service staff in comparison to their communities.

No service is representative of the number of women that make up its local population, although gender representation is slowly increasing. According to Home Office data, the number and proportion of women working in fire and rescue services have increased in the past 10 years from 14.4 percent in 2013 to 19.4 percent in 2023 (representing an increase of 1,247 women). But this is partly due to turnover of staff, including a decrease in the number of men (a decrease of 7,951 men). Most women are in 999 fire control room and non-operational roles. Only 8.7 percent of firefighters are women.

Representation of people from an ethnic minority background also continues to be poor. There have been minor improvements, but not enough. While the number and proportion of people from an ethnic minority background have also increased in the last 10 years, from 6.8 percent in 2013 to 8.5 percent in 2023 (an increase of 3,427 people), this is partly due to turnover of staff, including a decrease in the

number of staff from White British/Irish backgrounds (a decrease of 6,227 people). Only 8 percent of firefighters are from an ethnic minority background.

Services should consider innovative ways they can improve the diversity of their staff through both recruitment and retention, and making their organisations more inclusive places to work. There are some examples of positive work already underway, which services should build on.

Promising practice: Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service has improved its maternity and menopause provisions

In order to help give fair employment opportunities to all, Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service has installed sanitary provisions on all its fire engines, as well as pop-up tents that serve as a place of privacy. This is particularly aimed at helping those who are pregnant or going through the menopause. The service also offers education activities to help provide menopause support to those who need it.

Staff should be supported, developed and have the skills they need to carry out their jobs effectively

When leaders put good workforce and succession planning in place, they are more likely to have the staff with the skills and experience they need. Successful planning includes considering career pathways, recruitment processes and retention.

Despite us repeatedly raising concerns around how ineffectively many services carry out workforce planning, we still aren't seeing enough progress.

So far, we have issued an overall grade of 'requires improvement' in relation to leadership and capability to 8 of the 15 services we have inspected so far in this round.

These services aren't taking innovative approaches to succession planning, which has led in some instances to longstanding vacancies in support and specialist roles. This can lead to increased workloads and pressure on other staff who still need to meet demands. And it can lead to a downward spiral of increasing staff turnover, ultimately creating more vacancies.

We have seen several instances of positive practice where services are supporting staff development.

Innovative practice: Cheshire Fire and Rescue service has put in place processes to help staff with their career progression

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service has created a toolkit (called the fire staff career change toolkit) and a detailed fire staff career directory to help staff with their career progression.

The staff career directory sets out the possible career routes available to staff. It extensively details the different roles and responsibilities in the service in a reader-friendly way. The toolkit then provides guidance for staff on how to create a career change action plan in conjunction with the staff appraisal process.

The toolkit and directory are intended to increase staff diversity and make the most of talent, while also improving staff retention.

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

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

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

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

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

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

But in some services we have found there is a lack of training in softer skills, such as management skills, health and safety, equality, diversity and inclusion or safeguarding.

Staff should be able to access development opportunities regardless of their role, rank or protected characteristics. Only 63 percent of respondents to our staff survey (2,196 out of 3,461) agreed that there was equal opportunity to develop in their service.

We have found that non-operational and on-call staff don't have appropriate access to development opportunities, often in contrast to operational and wholetime staff. We have also found instances in this round of on-call firefighters struggling to access the required training, and reporting fewer opportunities than their wholetime colleagues, which can affect their pay. We have previously told services they should address both issues.

Managers need to give more consideration to the well-being of their staff

Perhaps due to the difficult and often distressing work of fire and rescue services, they are generally good at looking after the physical and mental health of their staff following an operational incident. In response to our staff survey, 91 percent of respondents to this question (3,134 out of 3,454) agreed that their service provides access to support for mental well-being and 91 percent (3,139 out of 3,454) agreed that these services would be offered after a workplace incident where appropriate.

But some services still have more to do to improve the provisions they have in place to support and improve the physical and mental health of their workforce.

In response to our staff survey, 33 percent (1,136 out of 3,461 people) said that they discuss their personal well-being and/or work-related stress with their manager on a weekly basis and 26 percent (902 out of 3,461) said they discuss it on a monthly basis. Only 22 percent (745 out of 3,461) said they discussed it on a quarterly or yearly basis. Worryingly, 20 percent of respondents (678 out of 3,461) said they had never discussed their personal well-being and/or work-related stress with their manager.

It is common for wholetime firefighters to have another job, which is referred to in the sector as 'secondary employment'. Additionally, many firefighters are on dual contracts, which means they hold more than one employment contract with their service or in some cases hold an employment contract with two different fire and rescue services. For example, a wholetime firefighter may work as an on-call firefighter in between their full-time shifts.

As at 31 March 2023, there were 3,143 wholetime firefighters on dual contracts within their service, and 391 had a contract with a different service. And we found that 5,092 wholetime firefighters had secondary employment outside fire and rescue services.

But too many services don't effectively monitor secondary employment of their wholetime firefighters, including their dual-contracted staff who may also have an on-call contract, either with the same service or another service. So far, we have issued AFIs to six services in this respect. In one service, we found their policy wasn't

explicit about rest periods. In another, they had a high proportion of firefighters with secondary employment or dual contracts, but no process to manage or monitor the hours they worked. We found some staff who had up to four employment contracts and didn't understand their responsibilities to update their employer or make sure they were fit to work. This problem could lead to staff working excessive hours, potentially being unsafe to work and putting the public at risk.

Services are struggling to maintain an effective on-call duty system

Most services we have inspected so far in this round are negatively affected by long-standing problems with availability of on-call staff, particularly during traditional office hours. The on-call duty system is facing decline and is becoming unsustainable. This sentiment is shared by 25 of the services that wrote to me, with 24 stating that they experienced issues with recruiting and retaining on-call staff.

Of the 41 services that have on-call availability figures, 80 percent (33 services) have shown a decrease in the availability of their on-call staff between the financial years 2021/22 and 2022/23. This decrease in numbers of on-call staff is concerning and services are having to think innovatively about how they intend to tackle this problem.

In some services, some fire engines are rarely used or are unavailable to respond to incidents due to the availability of on-call firefighters. In some services, we have also found examples of poor staff availability affecting response times.

Alongside recruitment, retention and availability of on-call staff, on-call fire engines often can't be used because on-call staff don't have the right training or skills. For example, some on-call firefighters experience delays in the availability of training or difficulties in taking leave from their primary employment for training courses, affecting their ability to drive fire engines or use breathing apparatus. Projects aiming to address this problem have sometimes been limited in scope or superseded by other areas of risk in the service.

This problem has been compounded by the fact that role of a firefighter and the training requirements needed to maintain competency are becoming more complex. A requirement for increased training disproportionately affects on-call firefighters, as they are often expected to maintain the same level of skills and specialisms as wholetime firefighters. Services should work to understand if their on-call firefighters need to have the same skills as their wholetime counterparts as part of their wider understanding of their community risk management process.

The sector needs an evidence-based approach to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their on-call duty systems. The NFCC is researching this issue and potential solutions, which include examples of positive practice. The sector also needs greater flexibility in how it can respond to incidents, as currently there is too much rigidity surrounding terms and conditions. This can lead to lengthy negotiations between services and unions. The review of the systems for

negotiating pay and conditions of firefighters should help with this issue, provided it is carried out effectively.

Services will need to identify the main factors influencing recruitment, retention and availability to make their systems sustainable. Of the 15 services that wrote to me, 12 suggested a combination of solutions to address the issue. These included more Government investment, legislative changes, better staff compensation, more flexible work patterns and alternative resourcing models. We look forward to seeing potential areas of promising and innovative practice in this area and the work of the NFCC.

Promising practice: Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service can adjust resources using its assured level of risk process

The service's 'assured level of risk' process is a dynamic working practice that allows resources to be adjusted based on risk.

If a station area has an increase in incidents or risk, the service can move resources from [on-call](#) stations to help with prevention and protection work. It does this by increasing available working hours and training. This work is monitored and when the service feels the risk has been reduced, it moves this resource to other locations in need.

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

Since the '[Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1' report](#) was published in October 2019, the NFCC has been monitoring fire and rescue services' self-certified progress against the recommendations set out in the report.

In June 2023, the Home Office published its '[Thematic update on progress against the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 Recommendations](#)'. During our Round 2 inspections, we considered services' progress against the recommendations. The Home Office's report broadly aligns with our own findings. Additionally, all 37 services that wrote to me in response to my request for evidence for this report said that they have made very good progress with implementing the recommendations. They all have action plans and governance arrangements in place to manage progress.

However, given the importance of this topic, and that to date services have self-certified their work, we decided there should be some additional independent inspection activity. As part of our Round 3 methodology design, we have added additional question sets to further explore services' progress against their Grenfell Tower action plans.

Included within this is a new desktop exercise, where we test the communication process between the fire and rescue service control room and incident ground to see how effectively they implement [fire survival guidance](#). In the exercise, we test the 'stay

put' policy. This policy gives guidance on what to do in 'stay put' cases, which is where there is an assumption that a fire is contained in its flat of origin and that only residents in that flat need to evacuate. We then test the full evacuation procedure by introducing the assumption that the fire is no longer contained in the flat of origin, and that all residents need to be evacuated.

In late 2024, we will provide the Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire with a detailed update on our findings, by which time we will have gathered enough evidence to make a rounded assessment. But we have some initial observations based on the 15 inspections we have carried out so far.

Overall, most services are progressing their action plans well, as reflected in the self-certified progress that they are submitting to the NFCC. But there are some areas that services are having difficulty with.

First, most services we have inspected so far are heavily reliant on inefficient paper-based systems to provide them with the information they need when responding to incidents in high-rise residential buildings. Most have also been unable to implement an electronic system to communicate evacuation information between where the incident is taking place and the control room. This can mean that those working in the control room may not have the necessary information to manage calls and provide fire survival guidance.

Only 4 of the 15 services inspected so far in Round 3 have electronic systems for sharing this evacuation information. Services should reduce their reliance on paper-based systems as soon as possible. Where IT solutions are implemented, they must be reliable.

Second, although some form of training on the evacuation procedures has been given in all services, it was inconsistent throughout services. And it was clear to our inspection staff that where training was limited to e-learning, or where staff hadn't carried out in-person, practical exercises, their understanding was less well developed. This was particularly noticeable in services with a high proportion of on-call firefighters, as allocating time for training can be challenging. Services should evaluate staff learning and make sure that training is implemented in line with service risks.

Finally, there has been limited progress to explore how information may be shared between the control rooms of different emergency services. There is national work underway to introduce a multi-agency incident transfer service, which will allow emergency services to share electronic incident records. This should reduce the time it takes other emergency services to respond to incidents if they are also needed. The system is currently in use in Wales, but it is unclear how long it will take to implement in England. It is intended that this system will run adjacent to existing control room operating systems.

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry has concluded its hearing for Phase 2, and I understand that the panel is preparing its final report. When it is released, we will give due consideration to the Phase 2 report and any recommendations it contains. The sector must learn the lessons from the Grenfell Tower fire, and we will continue to help it to do so.

Many services need to improve how consistently they carry out protection work

When considering the activities carried out by staff in fire and rescue services, most people will be aware that they respond to fires and other emergencies. Services also carry out other activities, including fire prevention and fire protection work.

Prevention work focuses on the people most at risk of fire, mainly in their homes. Preventing incidents occurring in the first place is the best outcome to keep people safe. Given the high costs involved in responding to incidents and in repairing damage they cause, it is also the most cost-effective outcome. Services carry out a range of prevention activities, such as safe-and-well visits in people's homes, and educate the public on matters relating to road, water and fire safety.

When services carry out protection work, they follow the provisions established in the [Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005](#), which is concerned with the safety of premises from the risk of fire. This includes working with businesses to educate and support them in connection with the risks of fire in their buildings.

As part of this work, services carry out fire safety audits, examining premises and documentation to make sure that buildings meet the necessary criteria. If necessary, they use enforcement powers to require that premises are made compliant with fire safety legislation. Buildings covered by this legislation includes high-rise residential premises and businesses.

Of the 15 services we inspected so far in this round, 8 were inconsistent in their approach to fire protection audits. Most of these services also had unsuitable quality assurance processes and were failing to meet audit targets.

The NFCC has produced a range of guidance for services on how they should build a risk-based inspection programme to carry out their protection work. But we have found services don't always approach this in the same way. More consistent guidance is expected under the NFCC's definition of risk project, which we hope will address this issue.

A frequent reason why services aren't carrying out enough audits is a lack of staff with the appropriate skills. Some aspects of fire protection work can be highly complex and require specially trained staff. Between 2018/19 and 2022/23, 75 percent of services increased their number of competent protection staff. But with increased demand for protection work following the Grenfell Tower fire, this isn't enough.

Many services are struggling to recruit and retain enough staff – even with additional Government investment. The reasons behind this seem to be competitive pay for protection staff in the private sector combined with a lack of degree courses for fire engineers at universities. This will remain a significant challenge for the sector in the coming years. To alleviate the pressure on services, the Government should continue its short-term funding and consider a more long-term strategy to recruiting and retaining the right number and quality of protection staff.

After services have carried out a fire safety audit, they may need to use their enforcement powers. We have found that services are more confident in using enforcement powers. Enforcement action has increased by 14.9 percent since 2018/19, with 38,840 instances of action taken in 2022/23. This will help keep communities safer. But some businesses feel that audit and enforcement activities are punitive measures rather than ways to make their premises safer. We haven't seen services do enough to improve this perception by educating and supporting businesses about the risks of fire in their buildings. Services need to increase their efforts to work positively with businesses.

Working in partnership with other agencies is one way to make audits and enforcement more effective, while also building better relationships with businesses.

Promising practice: Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service works effectively with partner agencies to jointly target risk

The multi-agency targeted enforcement partnership is an effective collaboration between Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service and other enforcing authorities.

The partnership allows effective sharing of risk information and joint working between agencies including:

- West Mercia Police;
- local authority housing;
- Trading Standards and other regulatory services;
- His Majesty's Revenue and Customs;
- the Home Office; and
- Border Force.

The strategy provides an effective and efficient approach. It means that enforcing authorities can access premises in a single visit to ensure compliance with relevant legislation, including fire safety. This protects those who are at high risk and makes the communities of Herefordshire and Worcestershire safer.

The [Building Safety Act 2022](#) established the building safety regulator, which is part of the Health and Safety Executive. This new regulator should help services in the area of fire protection by bringing greater oversight to the safety and standards of buildings and implementing the new regulatory framework for high-rise building.

The regulator will:

- oversee the safety and standards of all buildings;
- help and encourage the built environment industry and building control professionals to improve their competence; and
- lead the implementation of the new regulatory framework for high-rise buildings.

Services and the NFCC have worked well to prepare for the introduction of the regulator. We have found robust planning in place in some services, which will help them to understand the likely impact of the regulator and how they may need to adapt their work.

Leaders of services should consider using their resources in a more strategic way

Improving productivity of the workforce is important because it helps to make sure funding is being used as efficiently as possible. We found that improving productivity had become an increasing focus for most of the services we recently inspected, but there was still much more to do. As part of their governance role, fire and rescue authorities (and equivalent bodies) are required to scrutinise performance to make sure intended outcomes are being achieved efficiently and effectively.

Services are at different positions with how they are making sure their workforces are productive and contributing as much as possible to their risk management plans and strategic priorities. We have issued AFIs related to productivity to 7 of the 15 services we have inspected so far. The most common cause of issues we found was a lack of strategic oversight from leaders. Some smaller services are struggling to improve: limited resources can inhibit their leaders' capacity to improve.

Services are better at preventing fires by targeting those most at risk. But they could achieve more by improving staff productivity. While levels of [home fire safety check](#) activity have yet to reach pre-pandemic levels, they have been steadily increasing and services have improved their focus on targeting those most at risk from fire. But our most recent inspection findings show that services could achieve more by increasing the productivity of their crews, as we have seen them rely too much on prevention teams to achieve service strategies.

Some services use their capacity to respond jointly to life-threatening emergency incidents with the ambulance service. These schemes have real benefits, which includes saving lives. While these schemes shouldn't come at the expense of services' core functions in relation to prevention, protection, response and resilience,

services could use their capacity and fire engines more productively by working more closely with the ambulance service.

Some collaboration agreements have ended or are ending. These decisions have been made on the basis of a review of the benefits the agreements were providing. But seven services we have inspected aren't effectively monitoring, reviewing and evaluating the benefits and outcomes of their collaboration activity to inform decisions.

Wholetime firefighters are an important resource for keeping the public safe. According to data from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, throughout England, in the financial year 2022/23, wholetime firefighter spending represented 52 percent of overall expenditure in fire and rescue services.

During a shift, firefighters spend much less time at incidents compared to the police and ambulance service staff. Some services didn't have a good enough understanding of how staff were spending their time when they weren't attending incidents. As a result, these services can't be assured that they are making the most of their capacity. For example, in one service, on some stations we visited, almost 25 percent of the day shift was taken up with refreshment breaks and stand-down periods. There always needs to be some spare capacity within services so they are ready to respond to fires and other incidents at short notice. But too much spare capacity is inefficient.

When services have a good understanding of how they use their wholetime firefighters, this helps them identify how they can better use their capacity to support their risk management plans and strategic priorities. For example, following a project to understand how its wholetime firefighters used their time, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service set an annual target of 6,500 hours to be spent on more productive tasks, such as prevention and protection activities.

Services need data to make continued improvements in this area. There needs to be a continued focus by services on improving data quality so they have meaningful organisational intelligence to inform how they use their wholetime firefighters. This will help them to assess and monitor changes in wholetime firefighter capacity over time, supporting decision-making.

Some services consider the overall productivity of staff when making resourcing decisions.

Promising practice: Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service makes excellent use of the people and resources available

The service has four different duty systems (work patterns) for firefighters, which are aligned with emergency response demand (in 2022, 65.5 percent of all incidents occurred during the day) and contribute to improving productivity and efficiency.

These systems are [wholetime](#), low-level activity and risk, day crewing wholetime retained and hybrid.

This range of options allows the service to be flexible if there is a high number of incidents or where there is a large-scale incident. This assures that its response standards are consistently achieved. The service's target is to have the first fire engine in attendance at life-risk incidents in 10 minutes on 90 percent of occasions. The service reports that this was achieved on 95.4 percent of occasions in 2021/22.

The duty systems and performance management arrangements support high levels of workforce productivity. This means that when firefighters aren't responding to emergency incidents, their time is used efficiently, which helps the service achieve the objectives in its [integrated risk management plan](#). For example, this includes carrying out prevention-related home visits, gathering risk information, fire safety inspections and other core work, such as competency-based training. Staff carry out these activities at the most appropriate times of the day.

The service makes good use of key performance indicators and uses data to evaluate and monitor the success of its objectives. Data is scrutinised at middle and senior management level through formal meeting groups, such as the operational board meeting and the performance management group.

Managing individual and team performance collectively makes a difference to overall productivity. Managers need to create a culture of accountability by using a range of data and information to identify poor performance and praise good performance. Often, these arrangements are insufficient. Of the 15 services we have inspected so far, 8 needed to improve the way they managed performance. In some cases, poor performance management led to prevention and protection targets not being met or a lack of assurance on the quality of work carried out.

IT is also an important tool to support productivity. We have seen that technology can be used to improve how productive firefighters can be when away from a fire station. For example, the introduction of Wi-Fi and electronic devices means that operational staff can complete other work in the fire engine while other crew members are carrying out community and business safety activity.

Yet IT still hinders eight of the services we inspected from improving the productivity of their staff and paper-based systems, which are inefficient, continue to be used.

We are currently considering how, in our next round of inspections, we could inspect the accountability structures that govern fire and rescue services. Any proposals for inspecting fire and rescue authorities (and equivalent bodies) will be included in our formal consultation on our next inspection programme and framework.

Annex A: Our national recommendations

In this annex, we report on the status of each of our six national recommendations. We also comment on any relevant progress since [my last 'State of Fire and Rescue' report](#), which was published in January 2023.

Recommendation 1

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

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

Status: complete

Identifying and determining risk as part of the integrated risk management plan process

The NFCC and Home Office funded the NFCC's Community Risk Programme, which was designed to develop a single method for services to use so they identify and assess risk in the same way. The programme published a suite of products to support services so they can use this method successfully. The NFCC has provided guidance on the following topics on its website to support services in the development and management of their community risk management plans:

- decision-making;
- hazard identification;
- risk analysis; and

- process evaluation.

These documents are in addition to the provision of other NFCC initiatives and guidance, which include:

- a Framework for Evaluation of Fire and Rescue Service Interventions;
- an update to the Economic and Social Value Report;
- publication of the National Risk Methodology for Road Traffic Collisions, including corresponding mapping files for each fire and rescue service; and
- development of digital tools to support the National Risk Methodology for Domestic Dwelling Fires.

All documents, guidance and tools are available to services and NFCC members on the NFCC website. As at April 2024, the only remaining piece of work in relation to this recommendation was the Other Building Fires Risk Methodology, which the NFCC stated was close to completion.

The Community Risk Programme closed at the end of 2023, and the NFCC is now working with services to adopt the guidance, which will be reviewed and updated periodically.

Identifying and measuring emergency response standards and approaches

The Fire Standards Board has published 16 Fire Standards, which include:

- operational preparedness;
- operational learning;
- operational competence;
- prevention; and
- emergency response driving.

In February 2021, the Fire Standards Board published its standards for operational competence, operational learning and operational preparedness. In October 2022, an Operational Response implementation guide and other guidance documents were published in support of the standards.

Work to measure incident response standards is part of the NFCC's operational planning process. The NFCC has established a new Data Analysis and Insights function to lead its work on guidance for incident response standards.

Defining what are high-risk premises for the purposes of fire protection and setting an expectation for how frequently high-risk premises, and parts of those premises, should be audited for compliance with fire safety legislation

In addition to its continued work on high-risk premises, the NFCC has continued to co-ordinate the building risk review programme. This programme provides the most up-to-date information on a subset of buildings that is in the jurisdiction of the new building safety regulator.

In October 2021, the NFCC Protection Policy Reform Unit published '[Preliminary Guidance Technical Note: Higher Risk Occupancies](#)' for national fire and rescue services. This informed by national and local learning. It sets out risk factors and categories of higher-risk occupancies and describes how they can be considered in risk-based inspection programmes and other protection activity.

As at April 2024, the NFCC's Other Building Fires Risk Methodology work was in its final stages. This methodology will be translated into definitive higher risk occupancies guidance and will complement detailed national guidance for protection functions on approaches to risk-based interventions.

Recommendation 2

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

Status: complete

Recommendation 3

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

Status: in progress

The Home Office consulted on this matter in the White Paper on fire reform that was published on 18 May 2022. On 26 July 2022, the consultation closed. On 12 December 2023, the Government published its [response to the Fire Reform White Paper](#).

In its response, the Government states:

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

By 1 June 2024, we expect the Home Office to provide detailed plans as to how it will complete this recommendation. Once published, I will review any progress made and will consider issuing a revised completion date.

We welcome the Home Office’s proposals to create legislation to give chief fire officers operational independence and the review of the pay negotiation processes. Once I have received an update on these areas, in relation to recommendations 4 and 5, I will then review any progress made and will consider issuing a revised completion date.

Recommendation 4

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

Status: in progress

The Home Office consulted on this matter in the White Paper on fire reform that was published on 18 May 2022. On 26 July 2022, the consultation closed. On 12 December 2023, the Government published its [response to the Fire Reform White Paper](#). The response states:

“We want to work with fire employers and unions to address the call for change that has come through in the consultation responses in relation to the operation of the National Joint Council. In the first instance, we will support the National Joint Council secretariat to rapidly review its mechanisms, operations and transparency whilst considering the changes that it is clear consultation respondents want to see. This includes but is not limited to how to better reflect the specific needs of England in pay negotiations and decisions and to account for different FRA [fire and rescue authority] circumstances.”

The response also states:

“This should be an inclusive process and should be completed by early 2024.”

We welcome proposals to address this recommendation and understand that this process will be completed by June 2024. Therefore, by 1 August 2024, we expect the Home Office to provide an update on the review of the National Joint Council’s mechanisms, operations and transparency, and further detailed plans as to how it will

complete this recommendation. I will then review any progress made and will consider issuing a revised completion date.

Recommendation 5

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

Status: in progress

The Home Office consulted on this matter in the White Paper on fire reform that was published on 18 May 2022. On 26 July 2022, the consultation closed. On 12 December 2023, the Government published its [response to the Fire Reform White Paper](#). The response states:

“The Government will legislate at the earliest opportunity to give CFOs [chief fire officers] operational independence. This will include a new statutory definition of a Chief Fire Officer and a Fire and Rescue Service. Currently, the requirement for the provision of all fire and rescue functions is attributed to FRA [fire and rescue authorities] in the FRSA 2004 [Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004].

Through our provisions on Operational Independence, we will outline clear demarcations of responsibility. We will facilitate the introduction of a standardised scheme of delegation, supported by regulations and guidance setting out the detail of this demarcation. The intention for this is to create clear lines of responsibility where they do not already exist and to strengthen existing schemes of delegation already in place.”

We welcome proposals to address this recommendation. By 1 August 2024, we expect the Home Office to provide an update on their intentions to legislate. I will then review any progress made and will consider issuing a revised completion date.

Recommendation 6

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

Status: complete

Annex B: Our reports – 20 March 2023 to 31 March 2024

The reports we publish fulfil our statutory duty to inspect and report on the effectiveness and efficiency of fire and rescue authorities in England. Every report has been published in full on our website and given to the relevant fire and rescue service.

Fire and rescue service inspections

- [Avon Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Essex Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Surrey Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)

Spotlight report

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

Annex C: Our revisit letters

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

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

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

- [Avon Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- London Fire Brigade ([first London revisit](#), [second London revisit](#), [third London revisit](#))
- [North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Surrey Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service](#).

Annex D: Our future inspections

Despite some systemic challenges and issues in individual services, the fire and rescue sector has made some positive progress in the last few years. We need to have the greatest impact on driving further improvements by taking the most effective approach to inspection.

In addition to continuing with our third round of inspections and publishing our misconduct thematic report, during 2024 we will consider what our future inspections should involve in 2025 and beyond.

Our researchers have evaluated our second round of fire and rescue service inspections, which took place in 2021 and 2022. They used a range of methods, such as interviews, surveys, observations and data analysis, to assess both process and impact. They explored internal processes, such as our meetings to discuss evidence and graded judgments, and examined external-facing processes and products, such as our inspection reports.

The evaluation has helped us understand the impact we have had in the sector, and how we can be even more effective in future by revising our approach. We will publish a report later in 2024, where you will be able to read more about the evaluation findings.

We wish to thank those who participated in the evaluation. We have gained invaluable insight from the sector through the evaluation, and it wouldn't have been possible without their contributions.

Annex E: About us

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

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue



Andy Cooke QPM DL

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

His Majesty's Inspectors of Fire and Rescue



Lee Freeman KPM

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



Michelle Skeer OBE QPM

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



Roy Wilsher OBE QFSM

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

Assistant His Majesty's Inspectors



Shantha Dickinson

In May 2023, Shantha Dickinson joined HMICFRS as Assistant HMI.



Nicola Faulconbridge

In October 2023, Nicola Faulconbridge joined HMICFRS as Assistant HMI.

Finances and workforce

Our finances

We are funded mainly by the Home Office. We also receive funding for inspections commissioned by others (such as the National Crime Agency).

We spent 84 percent of our funding on our workforce, with the rest spent on IT, surveys and other expenses.

Expenditure breakdown 2022/23

Staffing costs including associates



Travel and subsistence



IT



Office expenses and other costs



Surveys and inspection services



Accommodation

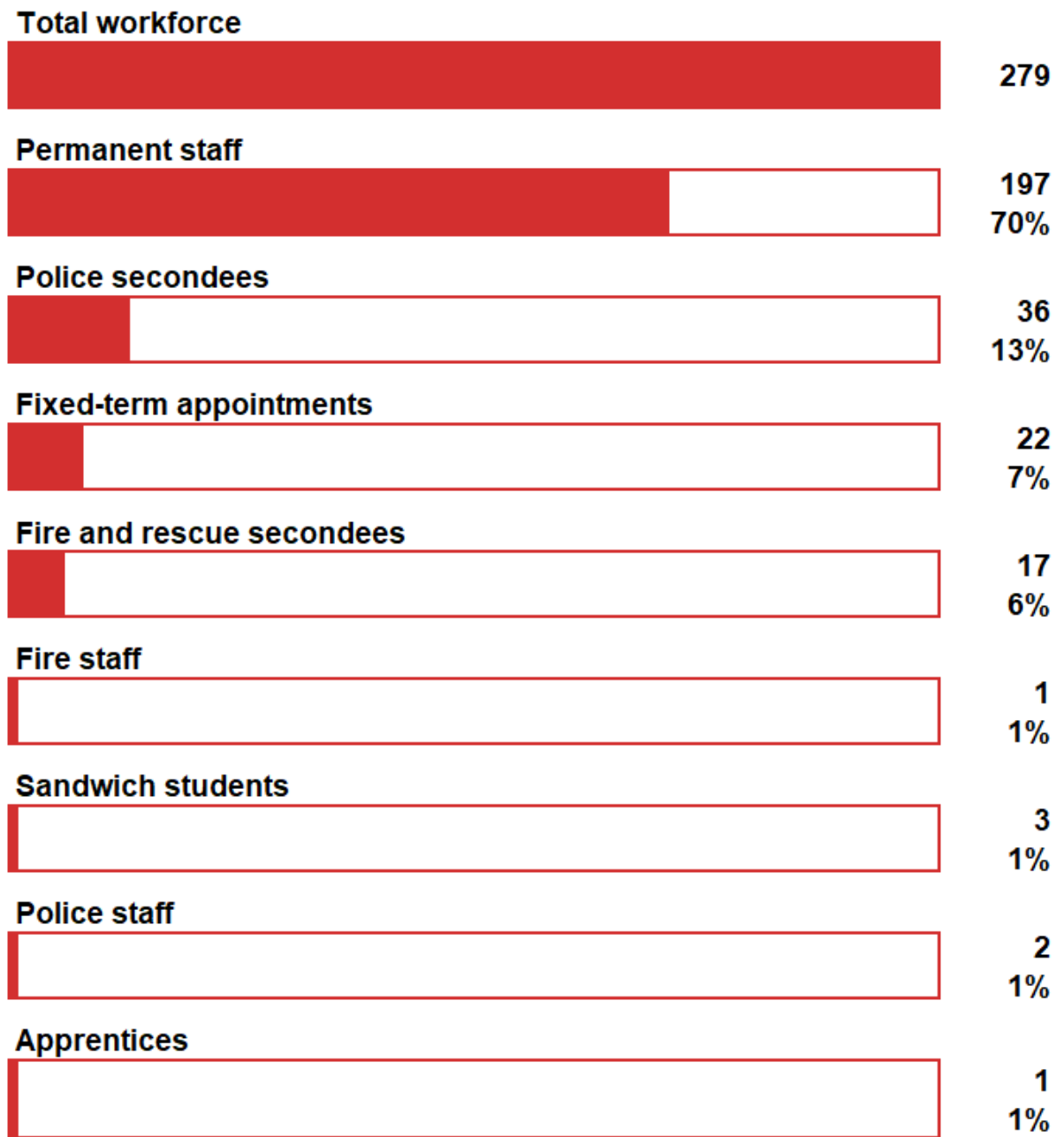


Note: numbers may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

Our workforce

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

Staffing breakdown 2022/23



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

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