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

Fire and rescue services 2025–27

Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service

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Overall summary

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

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

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

Changes to this round of inspection

We last inspected Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service in May 2023. And in November 2023, we published our inspection report with our findings on the service's effectiveness and efficiency and how well it looks after its people. We followed this up with a re-inspection in August 2024 to specifically consider the cause of concern that was previously issued for cause of concern that we had issued previously, which set out how the service needed to improve equality, diversity and inclusion. And we published our findings in September 2024.

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

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

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

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

Terminology in this report

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

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

About the data

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

HM Inspector's summary

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

The service is predominantly rural and covers an area of 2,292 square miles. It has a population of 784,000, which has grown by 3.7 percent since 2020/21.

Governance for this service is the responsibility of Lincolnshire County Council. Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue falls under the community safety scrutiny committee.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service cost £46.98 per head of population, which is less than the England average of £51.71. The service has restructured its main areas of business.

I was pleased to find that the service had made progress across several areas since our May 2023 inspection. For example, in protection, the service's alignment of activity with risk is improving and it has created a new risk methodology. It has also improved its data and intelligence to provide it with more assurance that it is auditing against the highest-risk premises in the county.

But I was disappointed to find that the service hadn't made progress in some other areas. For example, we were disappointed by the lack of progress in making sure all locations have appropriate facilities. We have highlighted this area for improvement in our last two reports. The service has also made limited progress with improving some of its stations and making them more inclusive.

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

Overall, the service is improving in several areas such as understanding risk, prevention, protection, values, culture and leadership.

But there is limited progress in some areas that were previously identified for improvement, including estate improvements, and the quality and reliability of operational risk information. This is reflected in the gradings.

The service has many strategies and plans in place to address these issues, but it needs to do more to make sure that these achieve real improvement and tangible outcomes at departmental and station level.

The service has a clear roadmap for its infrastructure modernisation, data and intelligence, improving system efficiency, and cybersecurity and compliance. It has several systems and hardware that are ineffective and limit performance. However, the service is taking some positive steps to improve systems. It has upgraded its mobilising system and it has bought a new client relationship management system that will make the processes for prevention, protection and risk information more efficient.

Overall, we found that the service's senior leadership had taken positive steps to listen, and be more visible, to staff. And it has improved its organisational leadership offer and the development programmes available at all levels.

During our inspection, we found innovative and promising practice by the service in its prevention and community resilience work. This year, the service is celebrating 26 years of effective collaboration with partner organisations in co-responding when providing support to medical emergencies.

We were pleased to learn of new partnerships, such as with the University of Lincoln, to support the service with academic research and evaluation work.

Overall, I commend the service on the changes and progress it has made and expect it to continue working to resolve the further areas for improvement we have identified.

Lee Freeman KPM

His Majesty’s Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies

Good

Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service is good at understanding risk.

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

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

Main findings

The service is effective at identifying risk in the community

The service has assessed a suitable range of risks and threats using a thorough community risk management planning process. In its assessment of risk, it uses information it has collected from a range of internal and external sources and data sets, taking account of both local and national risk registers. For example, the service uses data from health and social care, and the deprivation index. It also uses risk modelling based on historical incident data to develop a comprehensive community risk profile.

The service has consulted with its communities effectively. Encouragingly, it targeted those people it particularly wanted to hear from, including those most at risk, young people and people from under-represented communities. It told us that the response rate to its consultation had increased compared to its previous work in this area.

The service's community risk profile provides risk assessment methodologies, performance data and analysis of current and future risk. Service decisions are evidence-based. And it uses an external company to help it understand and quantify risks so that it can use people and fire engines most effectively. The service has also partnered with the University of Lincoln for academic research and evaluation work.

The service understands and identifies the risk of fire well but could strengthen how it records this

Once it has assessed risks, the service records its findings in an easily understood plan called the 'Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2024–28'. This plan describes how the service intends to use its prevention, protection and response activities to mitigate or reduce the risks and threats its communities face both now and in the future. For example, the CRMP clearly outlines the service's four strategic priorities:

- safer communities;
- service delivery;
- value for money; and
- people.

But the organisational risks described in the plan don't fully reflect some of the issues identified in its corporate risk register. Although the corporate risk register lacks some detail, we found the additional risk information was recorded in the individual department risk registers.

The service could broaden its analysis of emerging risks to make it more comprehensive. It uses the PESTELO methodology to assess risks. However, we found some emerging risks, such as battery energy storage systems, modern construction materials and lithium-ion batteries, were referenced but not fully analysed.

The CRMP and community risk profiles don't consistently direct action at a station level. This means that firefighters don't consistently understand what these objectives mean to them and how these influence their station activity. We found some evidence of the service communicating its CRMP objectives through a range of visual prompts, briefings and target setting via a divisional reporting tool.

The service has robust continuity plans in place to make sure it can continue to provide a minimum level of risk-critical functions during periods of industrial action. The service has used risk modelling to work out the minimum cover required and has identified its critical service delivery locations.

The service has carried out a thorough analysis of its fire cover to make sure it has the most effective cover and ability to respond to incidents.

The service told us it was piloting a new software application to optimise on-call availability, recruitment and how it uses staff skills. This will allow the service to better understand availability of fire engines, improve awareness of incident demand and high-risk areas, and provide a more data-led approach to recruitment and training. We look forward to seeing the results of this at our next inspection.

The service effectively monitors how it is implementing its strategic objectives

Senior leaders have effective monitoring, feedback and scrutiny arrangements in place to make sure the aims they have set out in the CRMP for prevention, protection and response are being achieved.

Where the service isn't meeting its commitments to the public, senior leaders are fully aware of emerging issues and are holding leaders at all levels to account. The service has a quarterly performance management board that reviews its key performance indicators (KPIs). Performance is also reported to the quarterly Lincolnshire County Council community safety scrutiny committee.

There are clear accountability arrangements in place with the fire and rescue authority

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

The fire and rescue authority receives regular, meaningful updates on the arrangements the service has in place for prevention, protection and response. This helps it to hold the chief fire officer to account, set priorities for the service, reduce risk for the public and protect the health and safety of staff.

We found evidence of a robust oversight process with scrutiny and assurance through various boards, committees and meetings. For example, Lincolnshire County Council reviews decisions and performance at the overview and scrutiny management board and community safety scrutiny committee. Internally, the service has an oversight and assurance board and performance management board meetings.

The service has clear oversight and governance arrangements in place, although the corporate KPIs are limited and don't cover all main functions. For example, the service doesn't have defined KPIs for:

- operational staff fitness;
- staff absence;
- safeguarding;
- adverse safety events and reporting of injuries, diseases and dangerous occurrences regulations;
- fleet performance; or
- IT performance.

We found that CRMP and community risk profiles didn’t clearly link to the community risk planning fire standard. And there were areas that weren’t fully covered, such as sustainability impacts, cross-border risk identification, organisational learning and national resilience arrangements. But we were assured that the service was working towards adopting fire standards and we look forward to seeing the results when this work is completed.

Preventing fires and other risks

Good

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

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

Innovative practice

Learning from tragic incidents has led to effective national collaboration to improve caravan fire safety

Following tragic caravan fires, the service developed clear caravan fire safety guidance and helped create the National Fire Chiefs Council caravan fire working committee to share the guidance nationally.

The service worked with partner organisations to identify more than 1,000 people living permanently in caravans and put together a plan to carry out safety work across 26 sites. To make sure the information reached everyone, including some under-represented communities, the guidance was translated into multiple languages.

This work shows collaboration across the service, including prevention, protection and operational teams, as well as effective partnership working with parish and district councils and caravan site groups.

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

Main findings

There is a clear prevention strategy targeting the most vulnerable people

The service's prevention strategy is clearly aligned with the risks identified in its community risk management plan. The service also carries out a robust joint strategic needs analysis with Lincolnshire County Council to review and understand the wider community risks and issues in the county.

The strategy highlights how the service will target interventions, using data and intelligence to focus on the most vulnerable people in the community.

The service uses a risk-based approach to clearly prioritise its prevention activity towards people most at risk from fire and other emergencies. The range of vulnerabilities is included in the SHERMAN risk matrix model:

- smoker;
- hoarder;
- elderly;
- reduced mobility;
- mental health;
- alcohol misuse; and
- needs care or support.

The service has a range of interventions, which it adapts to the level of risk. Households identified during a visit as higher risk are offered extra support.

Leaders responsible for prevention have clearly communicated the strategy and main prevention aims to the workforce. There is an annual service plan to make sure they stay focused on the highest-priority tasks. As a result, prevention staff understand how they contribute to the prevention aims of the service individually and as a team.

The service's teams work well together and with other relevant organisations on prevention. They share appropriate information when needed. The service uses information to adjust its planning assumptions and direct activity between its prevention, protection and response functions. For example, through the operational learning board, it has improved how it exchanges information across departments. Risk information is shared in this meeting and temporary risks, such as hoarding and oxygen users, are added to site-specific risk information.

The service has made changes to how it manages prevention activities

In our last inspection, we identified that the service should improve how it manages prevention activities on stations. The service has now introduced a Microsoft Power BI dashboard to measure the effectiveness of its prevention activities, which it reviews monthly.

The service has a clear target to deliver 10,000 home fire safety visits (HFSVs) a year. But we found that it wasn't consistently communicating the expected number of visits to its workforce. Most wholetime firefighters were aware of their HFSV targets, but not all prevention staff were.

On-call firefighters don't routinely take part in prevention work, but part of the service's prevention strategy expects on-call firefighters to carry out post-incident prevention work.

The service carries out detailed analysis of progress against targets and presents the results to the performance management board. However, the process of recording HFSVs is inefficient and we found that, due to this, some staff still used paper-based recording. This means that sometimes information is duplicated and recording takes longer.

We were pleased to find that the service had bought a client relationship management system that should make these processes more efficient. It expects to introduce the system in September 2026 and we look forward to seeing the results of this. As a result, we have now closed this area for improvement.

The service targets those most at risk from fire and other emergencies

The service uses a range of data to clearly prioritise its prevention activity towards people most at risk from fire and other emergencies. The service aims to visit very-high-risk people within 5 days and high-risk people within 11 days. Most files that we reviewed showed that the service was meeting this time frame.

In 2024/25, the service carried out 86.8 percent (8,089 out of 9,316) of its HFSVs in households which contained at least one at-risk or vulnerable person.

A person may be considered vulnerable because they:

- are aged 65 years or older;
- are disabled or immobile;
- live alone;
- are a smoker or have a history of drug abuse;
- have poor mental health; or
- have learning difficulties.

The service uses a range of information and data to target its prevention activity at vulnerable individuals and groups including those from under-represented communities. Staff work with young people through the well-established fire cadet scheme and targeted school talks. We were pleased to learn that the service was increasing its fire cadet provision and was setting up two further cadet schemes at Sleaford and Grantham Fire Stations.

The service has dedicated staff assigned to the Lincolnshire Road Safety Partnership. The partnership has developed 2Fast 2Soon, which aims to change young drivers' attitudes and perceptions. The service also provides the national Biker Down initiative.

It carries out a range of interventions and campaigns, which it adapts to the level of risk in its communities. These are informed by intelligence and focus on issues identified at a local level. The service has a campaign plan that aligns to the National Fire Chiefs Council's (NFCC's) campaigns calendar.

The service also follows the nationally co-ordinated events and education packages led by the NFCC such as StayWise, student fire safety week, electrical fire safety week, dementia action week, chimney fire safety week and boat fire safety week.

However, we also heard that some staff members weren't aware of processes to review fatal fires and didn't routinely take part in these reviews. The service should improve its process and time frames for fatal fires review and make sure that all relevant staff are aware of these.

Some staff lack confidence in carrying out HFSVs

Some staff told us they had the right skills and confidence to carry out HFSVs. These visits cover an appropriate range of hazards that can put vulnerable people at greater risk from fire and other emergencies.

Staff use simple cards, based on the NFCC's key prevention factors, to provide guidance. But some staff still lacked confidence. For example, most on-call firefighters that we spoke to felt insufficiently prepared and described training as ineffective. Operational crews would also benefit from more formal training in how to carry out some prevention interventions.

The service carries out appropriate quality assurance of its HFSV activity. Supervisors quality assure visits carried out by service advocates and operational crews. They observe visits, review completed records and complete a feedback form. There is a record of all quality assured visits and a key performance indicator for this.

The service evaluates the effectiveness of its HFSVs

The service has good evaluation tools in place to measure how effective its activity is and make sure all sections of its communities get appropriate access to the prevention services that meet their needs. For example, we found that the service considered the impact of its prevention activities by:

- monitoring progress against key performance indicators;
- quality assuring its HFSVs;
- using the NFCC economic and social value tool; and
- carrying out follow-up surveys with people who have had an HFSV to track behaviour change.

Prevention activities take account of feedback from the public and other parts of the service. But we found limited evidence these took account of feedback from other organisations. The service should evaluate the impact of some of its partnerships to better understand the benefits they provide and whether they are achieving intended outcomes.

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

The service works well with others in preventing fires and other risks

The service works with a range of other organisations to prevent fires and other emergencies. These include the NHS, sensory services, adult social care, East Midlands Ambulance Service, Age UK, neighbourhood teams, housing officers, local councils, veterans, the Women's Institute, schools, youth offending teams and youth restorative teams.

The service is also part of several partnerships including the Lincolnshire Road Safety Partnership, 'Right Care, Right Person', the Safer Lincolnshire Partnership and an arson task force.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service carried out 9,316 HFSVs. The service completed 3,510 HFSVs that were referrals from other agencies and 194 that led to the service making an onward referral to at least one other organisation.

We found good evidence that it routinely referred people at greatest risk to organisations that may better meet their needs. These organisations include partner agencies, such as Lincolnshire Social Services, Community Care, Wellbeing Links and Age UK. The service also has arrangements to receive referrals from others such as hospital discharge teams. And it uses an online home safety self-assessment tool with external partners to improve referrals.

The service routinely exchanges information with other public sector organisations about people and groups at greatest risk. For example, the head of prevention is part of the multi-agency intelligence network and the service uses this information to target its prevention activity.

The service has also collaborated with the University of Lincoln to carry out more in-depth analysis and research on the behaviours that put individuals at increased risk from fire.

The service has developed clear guidance to improve caravan fire safety

Following tragic caravan fires, the service took a lead role in improving caravan fire safety. It created clear safety guidance, which is now being developed as national best practice. The service has successfully engaged with affected communities, although it is too early to know whether this work has led to fewer caravan fires. We have highlighted this as innovative practice and look forward to seeing the longer-term impact of this prevention work.

There are effective processes in place to safeguard vulnerable people

Staff we interviewed told us about occasions when they had identified safeguarding problems. They told us that they felt confident and trained to act appropriately and promptly. The service has a clear safeguarding policy and a designated lead for safeguarding. All staff we spoke to were confident in how to make a safeguarding referral and had received appropriate training. The service provides both online and face-to-face safeguarding training for the operational crews on stations.

The service offers a good range of programmes to address fire-setting behaviour

In the year ending 30 September 2025, the service attended 620 deliberate fire incidents, which had increased from 419 in the previous year. The rate of attendance at deliberate fire incidents was 78.5 per 100,000 population. This is lower than the England rate of 131.4.

The service carries out a range of suitable and effective interventions to target and educate people with different needs who show signs of fire-setting behaviour. This includes an arson task force that works closely with Lincolnshire Police and the Firesetters Intervention Scheme. The service provides a robust programme including school and home visits. All prevention staff are trained in providing this intervention and receive referrals directly from partner organisations, mainly the police.

The service provides a route for children and young people with behavioural issues to access fire cadet schemes and the Firesetters Intervention Scheme.

When appropriate, it routinely shares information with relevant organisations to support the prosecution of arsonists.

Protecting the public through fire regulation

Adequate

Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at protecting the public through fire regulation.

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

Area for improvement

The service should make sure it allocates enough resources to cover its core protection functions so it can consistently carry out business engagement interventions and quality assure its risk-based inspection programme.

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

Main findings

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

The service's protection strategy is clearly linked to the risks identified in its community risk management plan. The protection strategy identifies the protection risk profile and several risk-based community safety protection activities to mitigate and manage some of these risks. The service carries out a range of interventions including:

- fire safety audits;
- thematic activities (targeting emerging or increasing risks);
- business engagement and education;
- consultations; and
- enforcement work.

Leaders responsible for protection have clearly communicated the strategy and main protection aims to the workforce. There is an annual service plan to make sure leaders focus on the highest priority tasks. As a result, protection staff understand how they contribute to the protection aims of the service individually and as a team.

The service has an operational risk information group where departments can share risk information. But we were told that not all departments attended this meeting. The service should make sure all departments are represented so that it can be confident information is shared effectively.

Protection work sometimes happens in isolation rather than across the whole service. We found that some protection information wasn't shared effectively, or in a timely manner. For example, staff told us that the safety advisory group often didn't share event risk information within the agreed time frames. The service should make sure that it has a robust process for temporary event risk information.

The service has a prioritised and targeted risk-based inspection programme

The service's risk-based intervention programme is focused on its highest-risk buildings and it told us that from April 2026 it will be using a new risk methodology. This will cover all premises and consider a range of factors including local authority data, Office for National Statistics data and fire service emergency cover codes (a data classification system to categorise building occupancy, risk areas and model response times).

The service also told us that it planned to further improve the methodology with live data sharing using a new client relationship management system. We look forward to seeing the progress of this when it is implemented.

We were pleased to find that, since our last inspection, the service had improved how it aligned activity with risk and created a new risk methodology. It has also improved its data and intelligence so it can be sure that it is auditing against the highest-risk premises in the county. And it has included improved data sets from Experian, the Care Quality Commission (CQC), the Food Standards Agency, historical audits and complaints.

In 2024/25, the service identified that there were a total of 50,655 regulated premises in Lincolnshire. The service told us operational crews carried out checks on around 5 percent of low-risk premises using the risk-based intervention programme method and other information, such as Experian data. The fire safety team focuses on higher-risk premises.

When we reviewed the service's audits of high-risk buildings, we found it had completed them in the time frames it had set itself for its high-risk and high-rise premises. Most files also had a log of work with businesses and the responsible person was notified of the audit outcomes.

The service has a total of 1,707 known high-risk premises. In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service set itself a high-risk building audit target of 705 audits. It almost achieved this target as it carried out 695 high-risk building audits. This is 98.6 percent of its target achieved.

The service categorises risks clearly and prioritises the timing of inspections according to risk and premises type. For example, all high-risk premises that include sleeping accommodation receive an audit every 12 months.

The service has temporary arrangements to address insufficient protection team resourcing

The service doesn’t have enough qualified protection staff to meet the requirements of its risk-based intervention programme. At the time of our inspection, the protection department was working at 60 percent capacity (9 out of 15 staff allocated in the structure). To overcome this and meet statutory requirements, the service moved skilled wholetime staff into the protection teams on secondment and offered some retired staff fixed-term contracts.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, there were 14 competent protection staff (level 4 diploma in fire safety) and 4 staff in development. This is an increase compared to the previous year when there were 10 competent protection staff and 6 staff in development. At the time of our inspection, the service had recently restructured to provide additional protection posts and strengthen its ability to provide cover 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. But not all these vacancies were filled. We found that the staffing issues were still affecting some core protection activities. For example, we were told that a strategic decision was made to put some business engagement activities on hold.

The service has recognised this issue. At the time of our inspection, it was up-skilling wholetime supervisory managers to a level 3 diploma in fire safety to provide the department with greater resilience.

We found that staff had the right level of training and worked to appropriate accreditation in line with the National Fire Chiefs Council national competency framework. The service offers level 3, level 4 and level 7 diplomas that cover a range of skills, including how to complete initial audit proformas, carry out effective enforcement and Police and Criminal Evidence Act interviews, and prepare for court cases. New team members receive peer support.

Overall, we found that the staffing model wasn’t sustainable and didn’t effectively resource core business engagement and quality assurance work. As a result, we have issued an area for improvement for the service to make sure it allocates enough resources to cover its core protection functions so it can consistently carry out business engagement interventions and quality assure its risk-based inspection programme.

The service can adapt to new legislation

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

This legislation has led to an increase in the time the service spends assuring the safety of tall buildings. The service told us it hadn't been too adversely affected by these changes. The service expects demand on its protection activity to increase with the increased pace of remediation work that is underway to replace flammable cladding. The service has identified 19 tall buildings affected by these changes, which are now included in its risk-based inspection programme. We found that it had also set up a working group to address the Grenfell Tower Inquiry recommendations.

The service is supporting the Building Safety Regulator. It expects these arrangements to have a manageable impact on its other protection activity. But this increase in regulatory duties, combined with limited staffing and capacity in the protection department, may place additional pressure on resources as remediation activity increases. We were assured that the service had now contacted all responsible people to discuss the work required. It visits these high-rise buildings regularly as part of routine inspections to monitor and check their progress.

The Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 introduced a range of duties for the managers of tall buildings. These include a requirement to give floor plans to the fire and rescue service and inform it of any substantial faults to essential firefighting equipment, such as firefighting lifts. We found the service had appropriate arrangements in place to receive this information. There is a form on the service website for the responsible person to complete. This is sent to the service's integrated risk team.

When the service doesn't receive the right information, it takes action. And it updates accordingly the risk information it gives its operational staff.

The service told us that it would further assess the impact of remediation work to high-rise buildings (including those 11 to 18 metres tall) and this would be part of the protection department plan for the next 12 months. We will review progress against this plan at our next inspection.

Staff lack confidence in the accuracy of the recording system

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

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

In our review, we found the service had completed the audits to a satisfactory standard but some post-incident activity wasn't carried out within the required time frames.

The service makes relevant information from its audits available to operational teams and control room operators. But we found that the recording system made this difficult. For example, we saw that staff found it hard to navigate and had no confidence in the accuracy of information recorded. Some historical premises information was also difficult to find.

We were assured that the service had a plan to resolve this and had already bought a new client relationship management system, which it expected to implement in September 2026. However, as this wasn't in place at the time of our inspection, we couldn't assess its effectiveness. We look forward to seeing how this system works at our next inspection.

The service needs to improve its quality assurance activity

The service has a quality assurance process in place, but we found that it wasn't carrying out proportionate quality assurance of its protection activity.

At the time of our inspection, we found that only 4 of the 24 required minimum files had been quality assured in the last six-month period and recorded on the service's monitoring spreadsheet. The service told us this work had stalled due to the capacity issues in the department. This means the service can't measure how effective its activity is and make sure all sections of its communities get appropriate access to the protection services that meet their needs. As a result, we have issued an area for improvement.

The service uses most of its enforcement powers where necessary

In our last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should assure itself that its use of enforcement powers prioritised the highest risks and included proportionate activity to reduce risk.

In this inspection, we found the service consistently used its full range of enforcement powers and, when appropriate, it prosecuted those who didn't comply with fire safety regulations. We heard an example where the service had fully evacuated a high-rise residential building following a prohibition notice due to serious fire safety concerns. The service worked effectively with the local authority to move all affected residents to temporary accommodation. We have therefore closed the area for improvement.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service carried out 322 audits which were deemed unsatisfactory. During this period, the service also carried out 382 enforcement activities, including 5 alteration notices, 317 informal notifications, 43 enforcement notices and 17 prohibition notices. It carried out 0 prosecutions. It completed 0 prosecutions in the five years from 31 March 2020 to 31 March 2025.

We were pleased to see that the service would respond to enforcement issues 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

In the enforcement files we sampled, we found some inconsistencies with required time frames and follow-up activities. This was made worse because staff were unable to access the necessary files on the system and information was held in different places. We heard some staff were storing enforcement information on a Microsoft SharePoint site as it took too long to upload enforcement images and files to the system.

The service planned to use the new client relationship management system to resolve these issues. However, as this wasn't in place at the time of our inspection, we couldn't assess its effectiveness. We look forward to seeing how these changes affect protection work in the future.

The service works well with other agencies

The service works closely with other enforcement agencies to regulate fire safety, and it routinely exchanges risk information with them. For example, we found that the service worked with the Building Safety Regulator, the county housing standards group, the CQC and local housing authorities.

We saw examples of joint enforcement with partner organisations and the service is represented on the monthly multi-agency intelligence network meeting where partners share risk information. The service is also a member of the Lincolnshire Event Safety Partnership, part of the local resilience forum, which provides a strategic framework of consistent advice to local events across the county.

The service works with identified sports grounds, for example Lincoln City and Boston United football clubs and Market Rasen racecourse, and protection managers attend local authority safety advisory groups.

The service doesn't have any qualified fire engineers but can call on regional arrangements when needed. There was also evidence of effective work with an external consultancy firm who offered legal advice for a premises where the service was considering prosecution.

The service doesn't always respond promptly to building and licensing consultations

The service doesn't always respond to building consultations on time. In the year ending 31 March 2025, it responded to 87.9 percent of building consultations (420 of 478) within the required time frame. It also completed 86.1 percent (260 out of 302) of licensing consultations within the relevant timescales in the same period. This means it doesn't consistently meet its statutory responsibility to comment on fire safety arrangements at new and altered buildings.

The service has improved how it works with businesses although capacity issues are affecting this work

We were pleased to find that, since our last inspection, the service had improved how it worked with businesses. We found that it shared information and promoted compliance with fire safety regulations through various means including social media campaigns, hosting webinars with businesses and giving fire safety talks to the NHS, adult services team, Lincolnshire Chamber of Commerce, Lincolnshire accommodation guild, district councils and Lincoln Hospital. The service also uses its website effectively to signpost businesses to timely and clear guidance.

The service shares post-audit findings with other regulators such as the CQC.

The service has a business engagement calendar and, in 2025, it completed 11 out of 23 activities. But, disappointingly, we found it had to put some of its planned work on hold due to staff capacity issues.

In our last inspection, we identified the lack of business engagement in protection activity as an area for improvement. We are satisfied that the service now works with businesses effectively. We have therefore closed this area for improvement.

Responding to fires and other emergencies

Adequate

Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at responding to fires and other emergencies.

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

Areas for improvement

The service should make sure its firefighters have good access to relevant and up-to-date risk information.

The service should make sure its mobile data terminals are reliable so firefighters can easily access up-to-date risk information.

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

Main findings

The response strategy is clearly linked to the community risk management plan

The service has linked its response strategy to the risks identified in its community risk management plan and can provide dynamic cover across the county through its assured level of response (ALOR) model.

Leaders responsible for response have clearly communicated the strategy and main response aims to the workforce. This is done through an annual service plan to make sure the focus is on the highest-priority tasks. As a result, response staff understand how they contribute to the response aims of the service individually and as a team.

The service locates its fire engines and response staff, and designs its working patterns, to help it respond flexibly to fires and other emergencies with the appropriate resources. For example, the ALOR model makes sure that the service has the minimum required number of fire engines and operational staff available to respond to emergencies across the county. It used an external company to create a risk profile for the county and help develop this response.

Since our last inspection, the service has introduced a new crewing office that now co-ordinates daily deployments of available wholetime staff to ALOR stations. This makes sure resources are used efficiently and provides greater resilience.

The service meets its response standards

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

In 2024/25, the service's response standard was 11 minutes for dwelling fires (excluding late fire calls) and 15 minutes to all other incidents (excluding late fire calls, dwelling fires and co-responder incidents). The service's average response time to dwelling fires is 9 minutes 41 seconds, and to all other incidents is 11 minutes and 39 seconds.

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

MHCLG data shows that, in the year ending 30 September 2025, the service's average response time to primary fires was 11 minutes and 27 seconds. This is slower than the average for services that are predominantly rural.

Using this measure, the service's average response time has increased from 11 minutes and 7 seconds in the year ending 30 September 2024. This decline is predominantly due to an increase in crew turnout time, which has increased from 2 minutes and 35 seconds to 2 minutes and 48 seconds during the same period.

On-call availability has continued to decrease since our last inspection

In the year ending 31 March 2025, availability of wholetime fire engines was 99.4 percent. This is a slight increase from the previous year when availability was 99.3 percent. During the same period, availability of on-call fire engines was 72.7 percent. This is a decrease from the previous year when availability was 75 percent.

The service commits to the public that it will have 23 fire engines available at all times. In 2024/25, the service told us 23 fire engines were available 98.1 percent of the time.

This data doesn't take account of the changes the service has made as part of its resourcing project. One of the main areas of focus in the project was improving fire engine availability and reducing the need to backfill from on-call services.

At the time of our inspection, the service had started a wholetime firefighter recruitment campaign. It was also reviewing its duty systems as part of a wider review to address the decline in on-call fire engine availability. Not all changes had been fully implemented yet, but the service told us it was confident fire engine availability would improve. We look forward to seeing this work progress in the future.

The service needs to continue to improve how it identifies, gathers and maintains risk information

The service routinely collects and updates information about the highest-risk people, places and threats it has identified. It has adopted the provision of operational risk information system (PORIS), a nationally recognised framework for managing strategic and tactical risk information. This information includes short-term risks such as oxygen users and hoarders, short-term event risks and longer-term building and site-specific risks.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service had identified 1,894 sites that posed more risk to firefighters if an incident took place. During the same period, the service visited 1,065 of these to update its records and familiarise itself with the firefighting risks at the sites. This is an increase from the previous year when the service completed 611 visits.

The service provides training to those who are expected to carry out the risk visits. This includes a requirement to complete the site-specific risk information e-learning package about how to carry out the PORIS risk assessment. At the time of our inspection, the service told us it had a 91 percent completion rate for this training.

Since our last inspection, the service has changed how risk information is managed. This is now managed divisionally on stations rather than centrally, and firefighters carry out the risk visits. But we found that this hadn't resolved some of the issues that we identified in our previous inspection, and the service still didn't have an effective process to make sure it gathered and recorded relevant and up-to-date risk information.

The service has formal governance for organisational risk monitoring through the monthly operational risk information group. However, we found that risk information wasn't always readily available for the service's prevention, protection and response staff. This means that these teams can't identify and reduce risk effectively. We saw examples of risk information not being reliable, accurate or up to date. And we found that the service had a backlog of risk information, some of which related to high-risk premises files, that hadn't been reviewed within the time frames it had set.

We also found major reliability and accuracy issues with risk information systems, including how this information was accessed from mobile data terminals (MDTs). Most station staff we spoke to had lost confidence in using MDTs for accessing risk information. And the service told us that in the last year, 311 primary faults and 106 secondary faults were reported. Although most faults were resolved, staff were frustrated in having to continually report these and this was negatively affecting the service culture.

We were assured that the service was aware of the site-specific risk information backlog. This is recorded in the divisional reporting tool and there are escalation routes. The service believes that the new client relationship management system, due in September 2026, will resolve some of these inefficiencies.

The service acknowledges that there are difficulties with its MDTs and it has a 12 month plan to replace the hardware and software. The full MDT replacement is scheduled for November 2026 and the service gave us the dates for the implementation plan. Considering this evidence, we have issued an area for improvement that the service should make sure its MDTs are reliable so firefighters can easily access up-to-date risk information.

At our last inspection, we issued an area for improvement that the service should make sure its firefighters had good access to relevant and up-to-date risk information. We found that it still needed to do more to make sure its risk information about people, places and threats was accurate and up to date. And it needs to continue making improvements to assure itself that its processes are effective. Therefore this area for improvement will remain open.

Staff have confidence in their incident commanders

The service has incident commanders who are trained and regularly and properly assessed. This helps the service to safely, assertively and effectively manage the whole range of incidents it could face, from those that are small and routine to major and multi-agency incidents.

In 2024/25, the service needed 248 accredited incident commanders to meet its demand. It had 239 accredited and no incident commanders who were no longer accredited still carrying out the same work.

The service told us it had recently received investment from the county council to support its incident command training. It planned to roll out an accredited incident command qualification and maintenance of competence at all levels.

The service highlights when incident command practices require improving in its operational debriefs and it shares learning effectively through the operational learning group.

In our workforce survey, 88 percent of respondents (206 of 235) agreed that the last incident that they attended where they weren't in command was commanded effectively. But we found limited evidence of the service equipping fire control supervisors with incident command awareness training as required by national operational guidance.

We found that some commanders weren't consistently confident or proficient in independently using ResilienceDirect to support situational awareness and decision-making during major incidents.

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

Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles training is also provided through the Lincolnshire Resilience Forum for all emergency services.

The service shares operational learning but this doesn't create meaningful change

As part of our inspection, we reviewed a range of emergency incidents and training events. These included domestic incidents, commercial premises and a large multi-agency incident. The service's debrief policy clearly explains the different types of debriefs and when they should be carried out.

The service has a clear debriefing and quality assurance process in place, and there are processes in place to share organisational learning through the operational learning board.

The debriefs we sampled were carried out in line with the service's policy. We found that debrief feedback went through the operational learning board. Identified learning was shared through a range of methods including bulletins and safety flashes. We also reviewed the service's submissions to national and joint operational learning from one of their recent multi-agency exercises. The service identified several actions which remained open at the time of our inspection.

We found that the lack of a digital system remained an issue. Some forms are paper-based and there is a single point of failure due to how this work is completed. This means that there is limited resilience and gaps in ability to provide a timely response. As a result, all debriefs have a one-month completion time frame. The service needs to review time frames for debriefs to assure itself that the risk critical information is shared in a timely manner and that identified recommendations create improvement.

The service responded to learning from incidents to improve its services to the public. But we found limited evidence that the learning identified translated into meaningful change.

Fire control staff aren't regularly involved in training, exercises and debriefs

We were disappointed to find that the service's fire control staff weren't always included in its command, training, exercise, debrief and assurance activity. Control staff are invited to contribute to incident debriefs following incidents and exercises but very often their workload prevents them from taking part.

At the time of our inspection, half of the control staff didn't have the capacity to carry out exercises or prioritise some of their development. We also found that control staff had the lowest uptake in performance development reviews (52.4 percent completed).

Since our last inspection, the service has introduced a stand-alone control function and back-up control arrangements.

In October 2025, the service upgraded its mobilising system. During the early stages of implementation, faults in the new system delayed the deployment of resources. The service has since applied fixes to address these issues and has strategic oversight in place.

Some control staff told us that the upgraded system wasn't meeting their expectations and that mobilising tasks now took longer. While some disruption is expected when introducing a new system, the service needs to do more to support control staff during the change. This includes providing suitable training and support to help them use the system and reduce the impact on day-to-day operations.

Control staff told us that clear arrangements were in place with a neighbouring fire and rescue service to manage overflow calls. Since our last inspection, the service has also introduced a standby control at Market Rasen. Following the system upgrade, it has tested business continuity arrangements with most staff. But we found that the service wasn't yet exercising and testing these arrangements consistently.

The service should assure itself that all control and on-call staff take part in service cross-border exercises. And it should provide command awareness training to its control supervisors and managers.

The service aligns its policies and training to national standards

The service is making sure that its policies are in line with national operational guidance. And operational training is aligned to this. The service has implemented this guidance as part of the East Midlands regional approach. It has also used the National Fire Chiefs Council strategic gap analysis tool to identify gaps and record the rationale where policies aren't aligned to national operational guidance.

We found that, due to system downtime, the strategic gap analysis updates hadn't been kept up to date. This is on the departmental risk register and the service is working through the updates.

We also found that the service was working towards adopting the Fire Standards. At the time of our inspection, it was fully compliant with three standards: emergency response driving, operational learning and the Core Code of Ethics. The performance management board oversees Fire Standards compliance on a quarterly basis and there is a central tracker available for monitoring.

The service provided evidence of joint operational learning. This included a submission from a recent multi-agency exercise. At the time of our inspection, actions resulting from this learning remained open.

The service has a highly successful co-responding model for medical emergencies

The service's co-responding work is highly successful. There are 26 stations that respond to medical emergencies on behalf of East Midlands Ambulance Service. During our inspection, the service celebrated 26 years of this successful collaboration and has secured further funding through the integrated care board.

Fire service staff have been trained to provide life support until the ambulance service arrives. Staff we spoke to were proud to be involved with this work. The public is made safer through the early intervention that co-responders provide. The service runs the co-responding model on a cost neutral basis.

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents

Adequate

Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at responding to major and multi-agency incidents.

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

Area for improvement

The service should make sure it is well prepared to form part of a multi-agency response to a terrorist incident and that its procedures for responding are well tested and all staff understand them.

Promising practice

Community emergency response teams support local response work

Using funding from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the service has established several community emergency response teams across the county. These teams help create the community emergency plans for their local area.

At the time of our inspection, the service had worked with most parishes and wards, and 25 percent had developed their community emergency plan. There is also a dedicated community resilience role with responsibility for leading this work and the service envisages that this will increase the uptake further.

This community resilience work has been showcased at national forums and is informing national policy discussions about emergency planning and voluntary sector integration work.

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

Main findings

The service understands its national and local risks well

The service has effectively anticipated and considered the reasonably foreseeable risks and threats it may face. It has listed these in both local and national risk registers as part of its community risk management planning. For example, the service is part of the local resilience forum (LRF) risk working group that plans for major incidents around known significant risks in the county. It uses the community risk registers to develop the community risk profile and has identified coastal flood, river flood and pandemic risks.

The service is also familiar with the significant risks that neighbouring fire and rescue services may face, which it might reasonably be asked to respond to in an emergency. We found that it had carried out cross-border exercises to prepare for these risks, but not all staff attended these. Firefighters have access to risk information from neighbouring services. Information is shared within 10 km of bordering services and is available for staff on mobile data terminals and ResilienceDirect. Staff told us that they didn't have access to some over-border information; for example, hydrant information.

The service has robust plans and policies to respond to major incidents but should strengthen how these are tested

During this inspection, we considered how well prepared the service was to respond to foreseeable major incidents including a severe weather event, a flood, and an incident involving a marauding terrorist assault (MTA).

We found that the service had well-developed policies and procedures in place for safely managing these incident types. For example, there is a comprehensive LRF multi-agency incident guidance document in place for major incidents. The service has a further operational response policy providing guidance on the national response assets and strategic holding areas.

The service has also completed the National Fire Chiefs Council strategic gap analysis to assess its preparedness for major incidents, including additional resource requirements and media liaison arrangements.

We found that not all staff at all levels properly understood the policies and procedures the service had in place. We found that there was a good level of understanding among staff in leadership and managerial roles, but some wholetime and on-call firefighters and fire control staff had limited knowledge.

The service carries out exercises involving other multi-agency partners and neighbouring fire and rescue services. This helps them work together effectively to keep the public safe.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, the service completed seven multi-agency exercises, four national resilience training exercises and five training exercises with neighbouring fire and rescue services. During the same period, the number of multi-agency training exercises completed per 1,000 full-time-equivalent firefighters was 14.2, which was lower than the England rate of 54.5. The number of exercises with neighbouring services completed was 10.1, which was lower than the England rate of 24.5.

The service has an annual exercise plan and, since our last inspection, has held various exercises including testing high-rise, MTA, flooding and water rescue procedures. We were assured that Donnington specialist MTA responders were trained and assured through national resilience training.

During our inspection, we found that there were inconsistencies in staff attending exercises. Most operational staff that we spoke to had very limited awareness of MTA procedures and hadn't been part of an exercise. We also found that the service didn't exercise at all of its high-risk premises.

In our workforce survey, 43 percent of respondents (100 of 235) agreed that their service effectively carries out joint training or exercises with neighbouring services. And 66 percent of respondents (156 of 235) agreed that their service effectively carried out joint training or exercises with other agencies.

The service provides non-specialist responder MTA training through an MTA awareness e-learning package that staff complete every four years. We found that, despite most staff completing this online training, some staff still lacked awareness of MTA procedures.

Therefore, we have issued an area for improvement that the service should make sure it is well prepared to form part of a multi-agency response to a terrorist incident, and that its procedures for responding are well tested and all staff understand them.

The service should also make sure that all staff groups are provided with an opportunity to exercise, including wholetime firefighters, on-call firefighters, and fire control staff.

The service is able to respond to major and multi-agency incidents and leads the LRF

The service works well with other emergency responders to make local communities more resilient. It has good arrangements in place to respond to emergencies with partner organisations, including Category 1 responders, Lincolnshire Police, East Midlands Ambulance Service and local authorities, that make up the Lincolnshire LRF. These arrangements include multi-agency exercises to make sure they are prepared for major incidents.

We found that the service played a leading role in the LRF, which is chaired by the chief fire officer, and benefited from a dedicated county emergency centre for major incidents/emergencies.

During our inspection, we reviewed the service's response to a major storm incident in January 2025. We found that it was effective and the service worked well with other agencies. We were pleased to see the service contributed to the multi-agency debrief following this incident and implemented learning from it. For example, it identified 14 recommendations and it is tracking progress through its programme management board.

As a result of this, the service can show that the plans it has in place to declare and respond to a major incident, co-locate with other emergency responders and record and share learning are fit for purpose.

Staff have a good understanding of Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles

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

The service could give us strong evidence that it consistently followed these principles. This included JESIP training that the LRF provided to all emergency services incident commanders every 12 months.

We sampled a range of debriefs the service had carried out after multi-agency incidents and exercises. We were pleased to find that the service had identified any problems it had with applying JESIP and took appropriate, prompt action with other emergency services. In all debriefs we saw, incident commanders carried out risk assessments and applied an appropriate command structure. All debriefs had appropriate messages sent including M/ETHANE messaging. We were also told that some staff benefited from co-location with other emergency services at a tri-service station and this could make debriefing easier.

The service works collaboratively with neighbouring services

The service supports other fire and rescue services when they are responding to emergency incidents. For example, there are arrangements in place to support, and receive support from, neighbouring fire and rescue services, such as when responding to floods. It is interoperable with these services and can form part of a multi-agency response. The service has carried out exercises with neighbouring services including Humberside, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Services.

The service has agreed mutual aid arrangements (known as 13/16 agreements) with all neighbouring fire and rescue services (Derbyshire, Humberside, Leicestershire, Norfolk, Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire) and has clear guidance about national resilience and capabilities.

The service uses national resilience assets, such as a high-volume pump. This is used to provide or remove large volumes of water at an incident. It regularly uses this equipment both inside and outside its service area.

The service uses community emergency response teams to develop local emergency plans

We were pleased to see how the service was working closely with LRF emergency planning teams to establish several community emergency response teams across the county. We heard about an example where one of these teams was used during a response to a storm in January 2025 and strengthened community resilience as a result.

The service is leading this community resilience concept both regionally and nationally, and it is supporting national policy discussions. Therefore, we have highlighted it as promising practice. We look forward to seeing how it develops further and what impact it has on community resilience once more parishes across the county have been engaged.

The service shares the national operational learning effectively

The service makes sure it knows about national operational learning updates from fire and rescue services and joint organisational learning from other organisations, such as the police and ambulance services. It uses this learning to inform the planning assumptions it makes with other organisations.

The service has a nominated person to manage national operational learning and joint organisational learning. It shares information and actions at the organisational learning board and has a process for cascading information internally and externally.

It has also shared national learning from the Grenfell Tower and Manchester Arena incidents in training sessions.

The service, jointly with the LRF, has thoroughly evaluated how well prepared it was to respond to a major incident, identified lessons learned and taken action.

But we found that some firefighters weren’t aware how learning from debriefs was shared across the service. While they assumed learning was passed on by managers, they couldn’t consistently identify how outcomes were reflected in wider policy or practice change.

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

Adequate

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

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

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

Area for improvement

The service should assure itself that it is making the most of opportunities to improve workforce productivity and develop future capacity using innovation, including technology.

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

Main findings

There are effective governance and scrutiny arrangements in place

As part of Lincolnshire County Council, the Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Authority oversees the service. Its governance role includes setting the strategic direction of the service and providing scrutiny to monitor the service's performance and make sure its strategic aims are achieved. The authority is part of Lincolnshire County Council's overall governance arrangements.

The service has effective strategic oversight arrangements in place to manage financial and resourcing risks, performance and improvement plans. It has effective processes, controls and internal governance arrangements in place to manage strategic risks.

The service has an organisational decision-making framework and is well integrated with Lincolnshire County Council's governance and financial accountability processes. The service is also aligned with the internal audit process.

The service has various board meetings to keep it accountable, such as the oversight and assurance management board that reviews its risk registers and provides oversight of the budget, and the performance management board that reviews performance and improvement plans.

The service reports accurate and suitably detailed financial, risk and performance information to the fire and rescue authority. We found that the service had a structured and mature approach to governance, financial risk and internal control.

Senior leaders provide members with quarterly performance reports on the agreed performance framework. These reports include information such as:

- whether response standards have been met;
- details about associated deaths and injuries from fire;
- the percentage of fire safety visits to target groups and households with vulnerable occupants;
- performance against its risk-based inspection programme; and
- the percentage of building regulation applications responded to within the agreed timescale.

There are effective internal governance arrangements in place to hold senior leaders to account for the corporate management of the service. There are several committees that provide a robust scrutiny process. For example, the community safety scrutiny committee provides oversight, particularly about performance measures.

The chief fire officer and fire authority chair meet frequently to discuss performance, and the fire authority chair has access to a Microsoft Power BI performance dashboard. However, we found that important measures such as completion of fitness testing, accident reporting, safeguarding referrals, absence figures and risk information records weren't included in these reports. Adding this information would strengthen transparency and allow the fire and rescue authority, along with senior leaders, to be held fully accountable for overall performance.

The scheme of delegation clearly sets out responsibilities for the service's senior leaders. The chief fire officer holds overall responsibility for the fire service and may delegate duties as required. This ensures continuity of leadership, clear operational command arrangements and strong financial leadership. Decision-making powers are clearly set out, supporting organisational efficiency while maintaining member oversight where appropriate.

However, we found that objectives set for senior leaders were broad and lacked detail. For example, there were no clear success measures or timescales set for the chief fire officer. The service should define these objectives to provide clearer accountability.

The allocation of resources is proportionate and aligned to risk, but the service should make sure it has enough staff to support protection work

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

The service carried out a major staffing review to address challenges, including the need for more capacity and stronger capabilities across the organisation. This led to several changes.

The service increased the number of staff in fire control and wholetime stations. It introduced a crewing office to improve how it deploys resources. And it added watch manager support roles to wholetime stations.

In prevention, the service introduced a dedicated leadership role and increased staff numbers. And in protection, it created an out-of-hours provision for enforcement.

The service also created a new talent, resourcing and learning team. And it restructured the central support team to better provide essential support functions, such as communications and engagement.

The service's resourcing for response is clearly based on risk and demand. It could strengthen this by filling all vacancies that it has identified in the revised structure. Despite carrying out this resourcing project, we found that there still weren't enough protection staff to carry out its work. This meant some work had to be paused, such as petroleum licensing work and business engagement. We have issued an area for improvement in the 'Protecting the public through fire regulation' section that the service should make sure it allocates enough resources to cover its core protection functions.

We were assured that the service didn't rely on protection grant funding for any established posts in the team's structure, but it had used some of this funding for a temporary post. The service told us its resourcing wouldn't be affected if this grant funding was withdrawn. It has also used some of this funding to buy the new client relationship management system. The service also uses the protection grant funding to upskill its wholetime supervisory managers to improve resilience in the department.

The service has analysed its response cover and can show it deploys its fire engines and response staff to manage risk efficiently. The service uses dynamic cover, making sure that when risk is highest it has more fire engines available where they will be most effective.

We found that resource allocation for response still relied on backfilling and overtime arrangements from on-call staff. During our inspection, the service started its wholetime recruitment process and was reviewing its duty systems to minimise the need for backfilling posts. The service has also added the watch manager support roles to wholetime stations and was implementing this at the time of our inspection. Therefore, it was too early to tell whether this has stabilised staffing arrangements. We look forward to seeing what impact it has on staffing levels.

We also found that, despite having a much lower overtime spend per head of workforce than the average across England, the service needs to do more to maintain the availability of its on-call fire engines, which has continued to decrease since our last inspection.

Our previous inspection found that the service needed to show a clear rationale for the resources allocated between prevention, protection and response activities, and be consistent with the risk and priorities in the CRMP.

At the time of this inspection, the service had only recently started workforce planning but we are pleased with the improvements it had made. Although it is too early to see the full impact of some of these activities, this work has helped the service align resources to the priorities within the CRMP. Therefore, we have closed this area for improvement.

The service understands its future financial challenges

In 2025/26, the service's net revenue budget allocation was £28.3 million. The net revenue budget for 2024/25 has been adjusted for inflation from £26.5 million to £27.9 million. This means the budget increased by 1.4 percent between 2024/25 and 2025/26 in real terms. The increase was to address budget pressures from inflation and the nationally agreed pay award. Its parent authority, Lincolnshire County Council, entirely funds the budget.

The service has a sound understanding of future financial challenges. It plans to mitigate its main financial risks. For example, the service records its risks, including its financial risks, on its corporate risk register. This is extensive in scope, but the level of detail for each risk is limited. The service has identified that its lack of pensions expertise is a risk and has agreed a new member of staff at Lincolnshire County Council will help to provide capacity for pensions-related work.

Its planning assumptions are relatively robust and realistic. They take account of the wider external environment and some scenario planning for future spending reductions. These include uncertainties about future pay settlements, cost increases for employee pension contributions, the national change in availability payments for on-call staff, and the fire control programme revenue following the service’s departure from the East Coast Consortium arrangement.

Through Lincolnshire County Council’s governance and assurance structure, the service builds its plans on sound scenarios. This helps make sure it is sustainable and underpinned by financial controls that reduce the risk of misusing public money.

The service’s capital programme is part of Lincolnshire County Council’s wider capital plans. The county council manages capital financing costs. The service’s capital plans include its fire engine replacement programme and upgrading the facilities at the Waddington training centre, although progress on some of the estate developments has been limited. The 2025/26 capital budget was £4.1 million, an increase from £3.8 million in 2024/25.

Lincolnshire County Council holds the service’s reserves. There is a robust process in place for the service to access them if needed. For example, the service can access the county council’s contingency fund to cover any unforeseen cost pressures. The service told us it did this following publication of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry’s phase two report so it could adequately respond to the recommendations.

Performance management is improving but could be stronger

We were pleased to find that the service had made improvements since our last inspection. The service has introduced the Microsoft Power BI performance management tool and has oversight of performance through a performance board, which are positive steps. The service’s arrangements for managing performance clearly link resource use to its CRMP and providing value for money is one of the service’s strategic priorities.

The performance reports cover a wide range of areas, including prevention, protection and response data. However, as already noted, the service would benefit from strengthening these reports further. We also identified limited oversight to make sure that recommendations from operational debriefs or equality impact assessments were completed effectively.

The service uses data to improve staff productivity, make sure resources are used efficiently and effectively, and provide value for money. The service understands how it uses its wholetime firefighters. It collects data on how they spend their time across day and night shifts. However, we found that station staff had limited knowledge of how this data fed into the wider performance monitoring.

For example, we found the service had carried out a workforce productivity study involving its day crew and wholetime stations to review working time that was available and used to carry out station activities, such as community fire safety and incident activities. The service used this analysis to inform prevention and protection targets based on capacity and resource availability.

But we found that the service didn't always make the most of its capacity and there were divisional differences in how activities were managed. There were some stations that demonstrated limited planning and inefficiencies in some recording processes as they used paper-based processes and diaries. We also found some positive examples of well-structured shifts balancing training, prevention and risk visits. At the time of our inspection, supervisory managers didn't have access to the Power BI performance management tools.

The service is taking action to manage its response to unwanted fire signals

Fire false alarms are incidents where the service attends a location but, on arrival, discovers that no resources are required to resolve the incident or that no incident occurred. In the year ending 30 September 2025, 33.9 percent of incidents attended in Lincolnshire were fire false alarms. The rate of attendance at incidents that were fire false alarms was 3.1 per 1,000 population. This is lower than the England rate of 4.3 in England.

In the year ending 31 March 2025, 23.1 percent (2,995 out of 12,952) of emergency calls to the service were automatic fire alarms. Of these, 48.8 percent weren't attended, which is higher than the England average of 44.6 percent. This has decreased from the previous year when the proportion of automatic fire alarms not attended was 64.5 percent.

The service has an unwanted fire signals reduction policy and appropriate call challenge procedures are in place. These include:

- challenging calls where the only indication of fire is the alarm sounding;
- employing statutory powers under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 to improve the management of premises where it has been identified that this is poor;
- periodic review of unwanted fire signal-type calls attended to allow it to offer targeted support; and
- engagement and education to support fire safety arrangements within non-domestic premises.

The performance management board oversees the key performance indicators for unwanted fire signals. The service doesn’t charge premises for persistent unwanted fire signals.

The service achieves its planned savings, but there is scope to improve benefits monitoring

In 2024/25, the service’s expenditure was £37.1 million, which is £46.98 per head of its population. This is within the typical range compared to all services in England.

There are regular reviews to consider the service’s expenditure, including its non-pay costs. This scrutiny makes sure the service gets value for money. Expenditure is monitored and scrutinised through departmental budget reviews, at a budget managers monthly meeting and at the oversight and assurance management board monthly meeting. And the capital programme is subject to a comprehensive process of scrutiny, analysis and monitoring by Lincolnshire County Council.

Data provided by the service shows it made £93,000 of its planned £93,000 savings between 2022/23 and 2023/24. The service has increased income generation from providing training courses. The service is also exploring options to maximise income generation following the purchase of Waddington training centre.

The service is taking steps to make sure it achieves efficiency gains through sound financial management and best working practices. It is doing this in important areas such as estate, fleet and procurement. The service has access to Lincolnshire County Council’s procurement team and uses its procurement processes. It uses procurement frameworks, and it works directly with partner organisations at a regional level. This helps it get the best possible purchasing power.

The service carries out an annual review of its partnerships. It does this to make sure the intended benefits and outcomes are achieved. But we found that financial analysis and monitoring of these partnerships was limited.

Through its partnership with East Midlands Ambulance Service and Lincolnshire Integrated Voluntary Emergency Service, the service continues to provide a more efficient service to the public. Its co-responders work from 26 locations across the county and respond to cardiac and respiratory arrest and similar life-threatening emergencies. The integrated care board funds this work in full.

While the service told us it reviewed benefits at a project closedown stage, we found that its benefit register lacked detail. A more comprehensive benefits register would help the service be sure that it is achieving expected outcomes.

The service's progress in estates improvement is constrained by difficulties with securing capital funding

The service's capital programme and estate and fleet strategies have clear links to its CRMP.

The service's estate is managed on a corporate basis within the county council, and the capital budget is held centrally rather than allocated to the service itself. The fire fleet and equipment is a separate item in the county council's capital programme.

We found that the service intended to upgrade and redevelop several stations. But we were disappointed to find that there had been little improvement in the facilities since our last inspection. Not all stations provide appropriate, accessible and equitable welfare facilities and some don't provide adequate arrangements for decontamination.

While the service has carried out a decontamination project and introduced clean zones in most of its stations, we found examples where firefighters were washing their face masks in the kitchen area because the station facilities weren't appropriate.

The service is aware of these issues and has a robust programme of condition surveys in place to assess the suitability of its assets and identify the need for current and future maintenance, repairs and wider infrastructure improvements.

In 2025, an asset management plan was agreed which will guide the property portfolio planning for the next five years. It details the service's commitment to improvements and upgrades, including contaminants and facilities for staff. It also identified 33 fire stations with issues relating to facilities, including 21 stations that had no separate area for male and female changing. We provide further detail about this in the 'Ensuring fairness and diversity' section.

The service's progress is constrained by difficulties with securing capital funding. While Lincolnshire County Council provides robust scrutiny of the capital programme, the service has to compete with other departments and fire station improvements are prioritised against other county council buildings.

At the time of our inspection, the service was exploring purchasing options for the fire engine replacement programme. This is to make sure all options are considered for the fire engine replacement programme.

The service still needs to improve its technology to support change and improve efficiency

The service sometimes considers how changes in technology and future innovation may affect risk. The service has made some IT improvements since our last inspection. For example, it has introduced Power BI and Microsoft 365. It has also updated its mobilising system and bought a new client relationship management system, which it anticipates will go live in September 2026.

We found that staff were still frustrated with limitations in IT systems and hardware which reduce efficiency and productivity. We were told that the service's systems for prevention, protection and risk were "clunky and outdated" and didn't allow staff to directly input data into the system. Instead, staff record visits on a form which is sent to another team to add to the system. The new system will allow the service to improve its processes and, at the time of our inspection, the service had just bought tablets to allow direct input of home fire safety visits.

We found evidence that the service's mobilisation system faults had affected response. The service addressed these faults during our inspection.

The service has recognised that its IT systems don't support efficient working and many members of staff, at all levels of the service, gave us examples of inefficiencies caused by a lack of digital systems. There are clear inefficiencies in some recording processes with staff relying on paper-based forms or spreadsheets they have created. Paper-based systems include:

- home fire safety visits and protection audits records;
- on-call payments processing; and
- leave requests.

In addition, operational debriefs rely on manual processes and, overall, data sharing isn't automated.

Paper-based systems make simple tasks more difficult. This affects most areas of work and means the service can't achieve all its aims.

We found that the service was considering the use of artificial intelligence for risk profiling and resource deployment. The service has commissioned a risk data analysis project to model current and future risks. The outcomes would inform future resource planning and ensure value for money while maintaining timely response standards.

We were assured that the service had a clear digital roadmap for infrastructure modernisation, data and intelligence, system efficiencies, cybersecurity and compliance. It had a five-year time frame to achieve this. We were told that budget for future expenditure hadn't been agreed and financial constraints could create further delays in it achieving this roadmap.

The service needs to assure itself that it is making the most of opportunities to improve workforce productivity and develop future capacity through the use of innovation, including technology. This was an area for improvement in our previous report and we are keeping it open.

The service demonstrates effective arrangements for managing change

The service manages change through effective projects and programmes. It has a clear internal structure with appropriate governance arrangements to make sure progress against projects and programmes is monitored, scrutinised and challenged.

The service also benefits from dedicated programme management support from Lincolnshire County Council and the fire engine replacement programme was one of the main projects.

The service's project register shows eight live projects including the fire engine replacement project, client relationship management project and designing and implementing of a control mobilising system and secondary control function at Market Rasen.

Each project has an assigned project manager and are assured through project and programme boards. The service has recognised the need to invest in project management skills for all staff who lead on projects. Each project is required to have a business case, a cost-benefit analysis and an equality impact assessment. We found that some details were missing from the project register, such as forecasted end dates. And the service could include more information to improve assurance about how it was mitigating significant project risks.

The service encourages staff to suggest new ideas and innovations through an innovation group. The purpose of this group is to allow staff to make proposals and keep up with new ways of working.

However, in our workforce survey, 45 percent of respondents (144 of 320) agreed that senior leaders in their service managed change well and 55 percent of respondents (176 of 320) disagreed. But staff we spoke to were positive about how the service was managing the client relationship management project and were pleased about how the service has worked with them.

Promoting, embedding and improving values and culture

Adequate

Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at promoting, embedding and improving values and culture.

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

Area for improvement

The service should make sure all staff understand and demonstrate its values.

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

Main findings

The service has well-defined values but more work needs to be done to make sure all staff demonstrate them

The service has a clearly defined set of values, but it should improve awareness of them at all levels. For example, the service has carried out work to put in place its 'trust, help, respect, include, value, empower' (THRIVE) values and align these with Fire Standards and national best practice. Most staff are aware of the service values, but during our inspection we heard about some behaviours that didn't meet the standards expected and of staff not consistently modelling service values.

We were encouraged by the cultural improvements the service had made. It has implemented the Core Code of Ethics well, staff understand it and it is integrated within policies and procedures. We found the Core Code of Ethics was part of recruitment, promotion and development pathways, but it wasn't clearly linked to all wider council policies.

In our workforce survey, 86 percent of respondents (275 of 320) agreed that their colleagues consistently modelled and maintained the service's values. But 62 percent of respondents (199 of 320) agreed that senior leaders consistently modelled and maintained the service's values.

Staff told us that they felt the culture was improving and was more people-focused, and we were given examples of a positive cultural shift where challenge and discussion of behaviour was now normalised. We also found evidence that the service used the Core Code of Ethics and Leadership framework in its recruitment processes to make sure candidates had the right values and behaviours at entry level.

The service continues to be compliant with safeguarding legislation by completing appropriate background checks for all existing members of staff. In the year ending 31 March 2025, all existing and new employees who needed a background check had one.

The service has effective oversight and scrutiny arrangements in place

The service has robust systems in place to take feedback from a range of activity, scrutinise it and understand the impact on staff and the public. Activity includes public complaints, staff grievances and disciplinary action. We found good examples of the service adjusting policies and procedures as a direct result of the scrutiny that had taken place.

At the time of our inspection, the service was also working on improving its healthy behaviour policy to better apply to operational staff. A separate audit team reviews and audits HR-related policies to make sure they continuously comply with employment law changes.

We found that there were clear lines of reporting in place with oversight and scrutiny by the senior leadership team. There was also an oversight process in place to minimise potential for disproportionality in how the service manages cases involving protected characteristics. We saw the HR dashboard that contained demographic data covering a range of protected characteristics.

Data is shared at the corporate diversity steering group that scrutinises compliance with the public sector equality duty.

The fire and rescue authority receives regular, meaningful updates about people-related issues. This helps it to hold the chief fire officer to account, set priorities for the service, reduce risk for the public and protect the health and safety of staff.

Some staff lack confidence that feedback will be acted on

The service has limited arrangements in place to communicate with representative bodies, such as trade unions. This reduces opportunities for them to collaborate and work together.

Trade unions told us they felt there was no joint forum for them to collaborate with the service. But the service told us that the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), Fire and Rescue Services Association and Unison were invited to the health and safety committees. The FBU and Fire and Rescue Services Association are also invited to the contaminants working group.

We were told there was a joint committee in the past. The service would benefit from re-establishing this.

Some staff feel service consultation about change isn't meaningful. Early consultation with representative bodies is limited and there are different levels of engagement. For example, the FBU has formal meeting structures in place whereas other representative bodies have more limited arrangements. Individual members of staff, representative bodies and staff network groups we spoke to gave examples of when they had raised legitimate concerns with leaders but action wasn't always taken.

Not all staff have confidence that the service will act on their feedback. In our workforce survey, 63 percent of respondents (203 of 320) agreed that they felt confident in the processes for providing feedback to all levels of leadership. And 47 percent of respondents (151 of 320) agreed they were confident their feedback would be acted on.

Most staff are comfortable to challenge unacceptable behaviour and the service has a range of ways for staff to raise concerns

There is a positive working culture throughout the service, and staff feel empowered and willing to challenge unacceptable behaviours when they come across them. Most staff we talked to were confident that if they raised a misconduct concern with their line manager, it would be dealt with in an appropriate and confidential manner. But we found that some staff didn't have confidence in the service's disciplinary and grievance processes, and didn't want to raise concerns for fear of retaliation.

Staff have a good understanding of what bullying, harassment and discrimination are and their negative effects on colleagues and the culture of the organisation. The service has introduced challenging behaviour training, and there has been an increase in HR cases and independent reports. Staff have multiple routes to raise concerns and most feel confident using these. In our workforce survey, 74 percent of respondents (237 of 320) agreed that they felt safe to challenge unacceptable behaviour in their service.

In our workforce survey, 12 percent of respondents (39 of 320) told us that they had felt bullied or harassed by members of their service in the past 12 months. And 12 percent of respondents (39 of 320) told us that they had felt discriminated against by members of their service during the same period.

While unacceptable behaviours still exist, the service is dealing with these and there has been an increase in HR cases

In our last inspection, we identified an area for improvement that the service should make sure all staff understand and demonstrate its values.

During this inspection, we were made aware of some behaviours that didn't meet the standards expected and some staff weren't consistently modelling service values. We heard about examples including:

- misogynistic and bullying behaviour towards some staff;
- staff fear of retaliation if raising a concern;
- staff members moved between departments after reports of misconduct rather than dealing with the issues; and
- inappropriate exchanges of images and messages using WhatsApp.

We also found on-call firefighters felt they weren't treated fairly in comparison to wholetime staff in relation to access to personal protective equipment and other equipment. And we saw an example of a review of a team's structure with limited updates on progress or outcomes, which affected team morale.

Disappointingly, we also received reports of misogynistic behaviour, bullying and harassment, and unacceptable behaviour by some leaders. And we were given examples of some staff reporting colleagues displaying this behaviour.

We are encouraged to see some evidence that the service is dealing with unacceptable behaviour. However, it needs to do more to make sure that all staff understand and demonstrate its values. Therefore, we are keeping this area for improvement open.

The service follows its procedures for discipline and grievance cases but needs to do more to learn from these

We were pleased to find that that most discipline and grievance cases we reviewed were progressed in a timely manner. But some cases we examined didn't adhere to the timescales outlined in the service's disciplinary and grievance policies. The service also has support from independent investigators at Lincolnshire County Council. We asked the service to tell us about grievances that were related to conduct matters only (and not to include, for example, those against organisational policy). The service should assure itself that it consistently records the rationale for decisions and outcomes made during the HR cases.

As at 31 March 2025, there were 0 live grievances and 13 disciplinary cases. Of these disciplinary cases, 7 were gross misconduct cases. The average length for a discipline case to be open was 114 days. This is slightly above average for England, which is 111 days.

The service follows the policies and procedures that it has in place. We found the grievance and disciplinary processes were generally satisfactory but record keeping was inconsistent. The service needs to strengthen how it records its rationale for suspensions and outcomes throughout its case management.

The service offers good support to staff who are the subject of disciplinary action, as well as those who raise concerns or grievances or who are victims of bullying or harassment. The service offers welfare support including:

- employee support and counselling;
- appointed welfare officers;
- line manager support;
- trade union representatives;
- mental health first aiders; and
- signposting to the Fire Fighters Charity.

Most managers have the confidence and training to deal with grievance and discipline issues and feel able to do so. The service offers managers the opportunity to 'buddy up' with independent investigators to support them through the process.

However, the service can't fully show that it is adapting its processes or sharing with staff the learning it has gained from dealing with grievance and discipline cases. We found that the service didn't consistently feed back outcomes of behaviour or HR cases to the wider organisation for shared learning.

The service has good well-being provisions in place and prioritises both mental and physical health

In our last inspection, we issued an area for improvement that the service should make sure well-being provision was accessible to all staff.

In this inspection, we found the service had effective and well-understood health and safety policies and procedures in place. Its strategic intentions for health and well-being are included in its people strategy for 2025–28. These policies and procedures are readily available, and leaders at all levels promote them effectively to staff.

In our workforce survey, 90 percent of respondents (287 of 320) agreed that they knew how to access support for their mental health through their service.

As at 31 March 2025, 5.3 percent of wholetime firefighters had registered secondary employment and 25.1 percent were on a dual contract within the service. The service has effective policies in place. It monitors staff who have secondary employment or dual contracts to make sure they comply with the secondary employment policy and don't work excessive hours.

The service has a comprehensive secondary employment policy in place, clearly outlining working hours and types of work permitted. But we found evidence that working hours weren't consistently managed and not all managers adhered to the existing policies.

The process to monitor rest periods for the day crewing model is adequate, but we were told that some staff faced significant workload pressures and capacity issues.

We were pleased to see that the service had improved its well-being provision since our last inspection. It also has well-understood and effective well-being policies in place, which are available to staff. A significant range of well-being support is available to support both physical and mental health, including:

- Fire Fighters Charity occupational health services;
- counselling peer support and mental health first aiders; and
- specialist trauma trained councillors.

The service is proactive in building resilience among staff, and we found examples of where it had intervened to support an individual's needs. The service has developed a new mental health and well-being offering for all staff and promotes this in all communications.

However, it needs to make sure it routinely provides support following repeated exposure to traumatic incidents. We found that some staff weren't aware of what support was available through occupational health services. And we were told that the service was reviewing its processes for post-incident traumatic support and outsourcing support to a new provider.

In our workforce survey, 62 percent of respondents (197 of 320) agreed that service leaders treated their well-being as a priority. Staff reported that they understood and had confidence in the well-being support processes available. We have therefore closed this area for improvement.

The service doesn't have effective fitness testing and support

The service should assure itself that it has effective fitness testing processes in place and support is available for staff to maintain and improve their fitness. We found that the service provided baseline fitness testing equipment and was looking to purchase additional equipment. But staff told us that the equipment wasn't standardised across stations and that some on-call stations, such as North Hykeham and Mablethorpe, didn't have adequate space for storing and using this equipment.

The service should prioritise and promote the physical and mental health of all staff, focusing on prevention and early intervention. In addition, support arrangements for staff members who might not pass their fitness test are limited.

The service has identified the improvements needed in its fitness testing provision. At the time of our inspection, most operational staff were in date for their annual fitness reviews.

Training and developing the right people with the right skills

Good

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

Fire and rescue services should have a workforce plan in place that is linked to their community risk management plan. The workforce plan should set out current and future skills requirements and address capability gaps. This should be supplemented by a culture of continuous improvement, including appropriate learning and development throughout the service. And the service should make sure that barriers to the development and progression of all staff groups have been identified and removed.

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

Main findings

The service has introduced workforce planning and early results suggest it is working well

The service has good workforce planning in place. For example, it has developed a workforce plan and there is good strategic oversight. This makes sure that skills and capabilities align with what it needs to effectively carry out its community risk management plan and to support its medium-term financial plan.

The service is continuing to develop its long-term forecasting of recruitment needs. Its firefighter recruitment activity links better with its workforce planning and training needs analysis. The service has recognised the gap in this area and is increasing the training team's capacity to provide additional courses. We found that the service had reprioritised its courses to meet additional recruitment demands for on-call stations and has increased training capacity.

Workforce and succession planning is subject to consistent scrutiny through regular meetings to discuss requirements. The service is aware of its staffing shortfall. It has introduced an internal resourcing board “to review establishment vacancies, temporary promotions and substantive postings on a regular basis to ensure fair, transparent and efficient staffing decisions”. This supports workforce planning and makes sure that business needs are met in line with organisational priorities. The service has also introduced ‘workforce succession’, better linking it to recruitment, succession and training, which a resourcing board oversees. However, at the time of our inspection, this wasn’t yet fully in place.

Since our last inspection, the service has also carried out a major resourcing project that led to several restructures across its prevention, protection and response teams, and strengthened its professional development and business support teams. But some of these changes have had an impact on other areas. For example, the removal of watch manager support roles and their return to wholetime stations has affected the management of on-call stations as deputy divisional commanders now additionally carry out the station manager role.

The service has also taken effective action to support people on the on-call recruitment waiting list. For example, by inviting candidates to shadow staff, attend drill nights or chat with operational crews. But we found there were some inconsistencies in how information was recorded during recruitment and promotion activities.

The service makes sure staff have the skills and capabilities to effectively carry out their roles

Most staff told us that they could access the training they needed to be effective in their roles. They can follow a training planner and keep track of progress in the training system. In our workforce survey, 78 percent of respondents (248 of 320) agreed that their service gave them the necessary training to carry out their roles.

Training isn’t just focused on operational skills. The service’s ‘Training and development plan 2024–28’ also includes management skills, disciplinaries and hearings, safeguarding, and health and safety training. Regular reporting provides clear oversight of the competency of station-based staff.

However, the service could widen its offering for non-operational skills such as project management, assessor training and investigation skills. The service recognises the need to invest in these skills.

The service’s training plans make sure staff can maintain competence and capability effectively. For example, the service has effective processes in place to identify and create an alert when training for an operational skill is due to expire. Development conversations support succession planning and identify potential staff for targeted development.

In our workforce survey, 79 percent of respondents who had operational roles (194 of 247) agreed that they could access relevant learning and development opportunities.

Although the service provides some learning and development resources, these don't meet the needs of all its staff. Face-to-face training for on-call firefighters is limited and training is mainly via e-learning. Some on-call staff told us that they would benefit from more discussion, questioning and practical reinforcement.

The service monitors staff competence through its training system. It regularly updates its understanding of staff skills and risk-critical safety capabilities, which means that the service can identify gaps in workforce capabilities and resilience. It also means that it can make sound and financially sustainable decisions about current and future needs.

At the time of our inspection, the service had recently bought a new digital system called One File to monitor competence of new firefighters in development. But we were told there had been limited support available during this transition.
Some managers didn't know how to best support those completing this development programme. The service would benefit from increased assessor training and equipping managers with the skills to use the One File system effectively. Some staff told us that using this new system had created a significant amount of additional work, and that they hadn't had training to assess competence of their staff using this digital solution. The service has already recognised the need to increase digital literacy and project management skills across its workforce but more needs to be done to support managers in transition to new systems and digital solutions.

The service promotes a culture of learning and development

The service promotes a culture of continuous improvement throughout the organisation, and it encourages staff to learn and develop. For example, it has a clear process in place to share learning from debriefs and audits. Safety flashes and service action notes are used to share information from learning within Lincolnshire and the East Midlands region. The service's senior management board has clear oversight through the operational learning board.

We were pleased to find that the service had a range of easily accessible learning and development resources. These included an equality, diversity and inclusion intranet page with toolkits and advice about neurodiversity. These resources help staff to do their jobs effectively.

The service has identified parts of its training and development provision that some staff have found difficult to access or use. We are pleased to find that the service has taken proactive steps to remove these barriers.

We found evidence of performance development reviews being used to support development conversations and staff gave us examples of how these conversations had helped them. The service would benefit from a central record of these to give it strategic oversight of succession risks, capability gaps and development themes.

Ensuring fairness and diversity

Requires improvement

Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service requires improvement at ensuring fairness and diversity.

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

Areas for improvement

The service should make sure all locations have appropriate facilities for all staff.

The service should make sure it has robust processes in place to carry out equality impact assessments and to review, monitor and complete any actions agreed as a result.

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

Main findings

The service needs to do more to increase staff diversity

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

We found that the service had an open, fair and honest recruitment process for existing staff or those wishing to work for it. There is an effective system to understand and remove the risk of disproportionality in recruitment processes. For example, since our last inspection, the service has improved how it attracts and recruits people from diverse backgrounds. While divisional positive action plans are in place to support targeted recruitment, not all stations are fully using these yet, and some staff still have misconceptions about positive action. The service has made improvements in this area but more needs to be done. The service needs to continue educating its staff about the importance of this work as there are still some who don't fully understand the benefits of a diverse and inclusive workforce. Not all staff understand how staff networks can benefit them.

The service has put considerable effort into developing its recruitment policies so that they are fair and applicants can understand them. Potential on-call recruits are assigned a dedicated talent, resourcing and learning advisor.

The service's recruitment processes are comprehensive and cover opportunities in all roles. Recruitment opportunities are advertised internally and externally. This has encouraged applicants from diverse backgrounds, including those applying for middle manager and senior leadership roles.

The service has used an external self-assessment tool to evaluate talent, inclusion and diversity and its work across the organisation. It has also improved its data-led monitoring of recruitment diversity and has effectively worked with some under-represented groups as part of its on-call recruitment initiatives. The service has educated staff about the difference between positive action and positive discrimination.

The service has made some improvements to increase staff diversity at all levels of the organisation. It is using analytics to understand who is attending events and at what point people are dropping out of its recruitment processes. This helps to show what needs to be changed to help people develop the right skills to complete the selection and recruitment process.

In 2025, 2 out of 71 new joiners (where ethnicity is known) were from an ethnic minority background.

As at 31 March 2025, 0.8 percent (6 people) of the service's staff were from an ethnic minority background compared to 4 percent in the local population and 6.4 percent throughout all fire and rescue services in England. However, 0.7 percent of staff hadn't stated their ethnicity.

In the same period, the proportion of firefighters from an ethnic minority background was 0.7 percent (4 people), which is the same as in the previous year. The service still needs to do more to attract individuals from ethnic minority groups, although some work has been done with communities from eastern Europe (a White minority ethnic group that is widely represented in Lincolnshire).

As at 31 March 2025, 15.7 percent (112 people) of the service's staff were women compared to an average of 20.8 percent throughout all fire and rescue services. This is an increase from 14.3 percent (97 people) the year before.

The proportion of women firefighters stayed the same at 8.6 percent (51 women) over the same period. This is despite the service making good efforts to increase the number of women in the service to better reflect its communities. For example, it has worked with Women in the Fire Service UK and actively targeted women's gyms and football clubs to increase gender diversity.

The service opened its wholetime recruitment during our inspection and we look forward to seeing how this work has progressed.

The service has gaps in career progression across the workforce and staff lack confidence in its processes

We found positive examples of where the service had identified and addressed barriers that disproportionately prevented individuals from particular groups from progressing. For example, we found that the service had provided reasonable adjustments to staff with neurodivergent conditions.

Each staff member has individual goals and objectives and regular performance assessments. But we found that this wasn't the case for all staff and that there was no central place to record these.

The service's promotion and progression processes are comprehensive and cover opportunities for staff in operational roles. There are fewer promotion opportunities available for non-operational staff, but the service has recognised this and it is an objective in the resourcing project. There are wider development opportunities available for staff within Lincolnshire County Council and the resourcing project has increased roles for non-operational staff at all levels.

We found that there were some differences in the requirements for on-call and wholetime staff in the promotion process, and staff perceived this to be unfair. The service should consider reviewing its processes to make sure these are fair and consistent and that staff have confidence in them. This will also ensure consistency and fairness in the selection and promotion process.

The service should continue to do more to develop career pathways and opportunities for development for all staff. There is limited use of positive action in its promotion processes.

The service prioritises EDI but needs to do more to make sure staff fully understand EDI objectives

Although the service continues to prioritise EDI, this wasn't fully embedded at the time of our inspection. It makes sure it can offer the right services to its communities and support staff with protected characteristics.

During this inspection, we reviewed a range of policies that affected different parts of the service including:

- talent, resourcing and recruitment;
- fitness and absence management;
- health and safety;
- disciplinary and grievance (part of Lincolnshire County Council policies); and
- harassment and bullying (part of Lincolnshire County Council policies).

The service has an effective process in place to assess equality impact but the process isn't always followed. We found that the quality of equality impact assessments (EQIAs) remains inconsistent and the service doesn't consistently carry out an EQIA on all new or amended policies, procedures, projects or service changes. We recognise the service has taken some positive steps. For example, the EQIA considerations are now part of senior leadership team decision-making and most managers have completed National Fire Chiefs Council EQIA training.

When the service identifies negative impacts for staff, it doesn't always record how it will address this in its EQIAs. We found that there was no central log of EQIA actions to monitor implementation across the service. Individual policy owners are responsible for the actions and there is very limited strategic oversight. There is no evidence that actions are followed through, reflected in the policy or project or result in change.

We have therefore issued an area for improvement that the service should make sure it has robust processes in place to carry out EQIAs and to review, monitor and complete any actions as a result.

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

In our workforce survey, 81 percent of respondents (258 of 320) agreed that they felt comfortable being themselves at work.

The service has acted to address matters staff have raised. Representative bodies and staff associations reported that the service worked with them well on EDI issues. Staff networks have access to senior leadership sponsorship to create influence at a strategic level. While staff networks exist and there is strategic intent, more needs to be done to remove barriers and promote the benefits of staff networks to the wider workforce.

The service would benefit from having a regular EDI training refresher so that all staff fully understand the EDI objectives.

Some fire stations lack appropriate, inclusive facilities

In our 2021 and 2023 inspections, we issued an area for improvement that the service should make sure all locations had appropriate facilities for all staff.

In this inspection, we were disappointed to find the service had made limited progress with improving facilities at some of its stations and making them more inclusive.

The service priority repair and maintenance projects for 2025/26 involve improvements to Spalding and Grantham fire stations. We found similar issues to those in our previous inspection, including a lack of gender-appropriate changing facilities, staff not being able to prepare for their fitness testing and some inadequate arrangements for decontamination.

The service has recognised most of these deficiencies in its estate. In 2025, its strategic asset management plan showed that 33 out of 38 fire stations had priority 1 issues relating to facilities.

Apart from identifying the impact of these issues though the completion of the EQIAs, we have seen limited evidence the service is taking steps to reduce these. It needs to do more to mitigate the impact identified and make these facilities more inclusive and accessible for all staff. Therefore, we are keeping this area for improvement open.

Leading people effectively

Adequate

Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at leading its people.

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

Area for improvement

The service should assure itself that staff understand and have confidence in its processes to identify, develop and promote leaders.

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

Main findings

Leaders communicate effectively across the service in open and transparent forums but need to do more to act on staff feedback

Senior leaders effectively communicate the aims and objectives in the CRMP to staff at all levels. They do this in a variety of ways, which promotes open, two-way communication. For example, since our last inspection, the service has developed a new communications and engagement strategy which contains a range of internal communications and feedback methods, such as:

- regular senior leadership team visits to all stations and departments;
- chief fire officer video blog;
- one-to-one sessions at all levels;
- monthly cascade newsletter and weekly information bulletin;
- Ask SLT – an open question forum with senior leaders;

- ‘back to the front week’; and
- on-call improvement group.

We found that leaders at all levels supported this approach and made sure staff understood the aims and objectives.

As a result, staff have an increased level of trust in their leaders. In our workforce survey, 62 percent of respondents (198 of 320) agreed that senior leaders clearly communicated the service’s objectives.

The service has improved its communication channels and leaders are becoming more visible. But it needs to make more improvements. For example, some staff told us that they felt they hadn’t been listened to, leaving them feeling disengaged. We also found inconsistencies in communication across the service’s three divisions and staff told us that contradictory messaging sometimes went to each division.

There are also inconsistencies when communicating with operational crews. For example, we found some leaders hadn’t clearly communicated important decisions and rationale, such as the removal of co-responding from a station and the impact of the resourcing project. While we recognise that the service is making some progress, it has more to do to make sure all leaders understand the importance of communications.

The staff we spoke to understood how they contributed to the aims of the CRMP both individually and as a team.

The service needs to do more to make sure its promotion and progression processes are fair

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

Staff clearly understand and trust career development pathways. And the service proactively removes any barriers and supports all staff in accessing leadership development opportunities.

The service has a training and development plan for 2024–28 that provides a clear offer for leadership at all levels, from incident command courses to leadership programmes.

There are talent management schemes in place to develop leaders and high-potential staff. The service is clearly investing in leadership development by offering different levels of leadership programmes including MBAs, executive leadership programmes and Lincolnshire County Council senior leadership programmes. While there is no formal pathway for these leadership programmes, we spoke to several individuals who were provided with accelerated progression opportunities.

The service has introduced one-to-one ‘ambition and potential for development’ conversations to identify and support its aspiring leaders. The service told us that in 2025 the completion rate for this was 68 percent, but leaders told us this needed to be part of the annual performance development review (PDR) conversations.

The service uses temporary promotions to fill short-term resourcing gaps. As at 31 March 2025, 7.6 percent of the workforce were on temporary promotion. The average length of temporary promotions was 249 days, which is lower than the England average of 295 days.

The service advertises all talent and leadership opportunities fairly through its strategic and internal resourcing boards. We heard of positive examples of this for operational staff, including an example of three staff being allocated places on the newly piloted Lincolnshire County Council leadership programme. However, we also heard of a perceived lack of opportunity for those in non-operational roles. The service should make sure all staff can access opportunities.

The service needs to do more to make sure its promotion and progression processes are fair. In our workforce survey, only 53 percent of respondents (171 of 320) agreed that the promotion process in the service was fair.

We found some examples of non-operational staff being given development opportunities, but there was no clear pathway and often this relied on doing training that wasn’t specific to their role. The service’s progression framework risks disadvantaging staff who don’t follow traditional operational pathways. And it needs to do more to remove these barriers to progression. Staff told us these barriers had left them demotivated and undervalued. Therefore, we have identified an area for improvement that the service should assure itself that staff understand and have confidence in its processes to identify, develop and promote leaders.

Leaders are equipped to lead

We found that the service had leaders in place who were well equipped to lead. There is strong evidence that the service provides leadership development at all levels, including:

- National Fire Chiefs Council supervisory and middle leadership development programmes;
- MBAs, apprenticeships in leadership;

- level 5 and level 6 ILM accreditation;
- internal mentoring opportunities; and
- coaching from Lincolnshire County Council.

The service has a good process in place for leaders to manage performance and development. Staff have specific and individual objectives or have had their performance assessed in the past year. In our workforce survey, 63 percent of respondents (201 of 320) agreed that the service's performance management systems allowed them to achieve their potential.

But we found the service was providing limited training to help leaders confidently manage the range of challenges they face. The service provided challenging-behaviour training, which increased staff confidence to raise issues, but staff told us that not all managers had confidence to deal with performance-related issues.

The service has coaching and mentoring programmes in place, which are developing leaders. Leaders are exposed to different management scenarios that match and stretch their skills. This means the service has leaders who are confident to step up to the next level of management when opportunities arise.

The service is consistent in its feedback approach to those who are unsuccessful at interview stage for leadership roles and promotions.

The service should make sure it is managing the individual performance of all staff

There isn't a good performance management system in place that allows leaders to effectively develop and assess the individual performance of all staff members. For example, most staff have had PDRs but these aren't centrally recorded. And, while some staff found them supportive, some PDRs lacked meaningful objectives.

The service should introduce a central repository for its PDRs and 'ambition and potential for development' discussions to provide strategic oversight. At the time of our inspection, the service had only recently introduced quality assurance to make sure these discussions were robust.

Staff aren't confident in the performance and development arrangements in place. The service has improved its oversight of performance management, but some performance isn't reported through key performance indicators. It has introduced a performance management dashboard, but not all managers have access to this tool.

Senior leaders are committed to improving culture, behaviour and values in the workplace but not all leaders act as role models

We heard senior leaders were committed to improving culture, behaviour and values in the workplace. The senior leadership team has taken positive steps in working with its staff but this work needs to continue.

We were disappointed to find that some leaders didn't always act as role models. We received reports of misogynistic behaviour, bullying and harassment, and unacceptable behaviour by some leaders. For example, unacceptable use of WhatsApp to share inappropriate images and messages, some managers not talking to on-call staff and displays of favouritism to some firefighters over others.

In our workforce survey, only 58 percent of respondents (185 of 320) agreed that leaders at all levels promoted a positive culture.

Additionally, 27 percent of respondents who wanted to leave the service within the next 12 months (13 of 49) stated that they wanted to leave the service due to poor leadership.

In 2025, the service rolled out a series of challenging-behaviours training courses that have had a positive impact. We were told that, since the training, the service had seen an increase in reports that had come through FRS Speak Up, its independent reporting line. And there has been an increase in disciplinary and grievance reports to HR.

But we were also given examples of managers avoiding difficult conversations and allowing inappropriate behaviour to continue. Leaders should be active in challenging misconduct, including bullying, harassment and discrimination. We would like to see the service improve further in this area and an increase in staff trust in the process as a result.

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