

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: PERFORMANCE AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE
DATE: 22ND NOVEMBER 2023
REPORT OF: HEAD OF PEOPLE & ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
AUTHOR: CARMINE RABHANI

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON HMICFRS VALUES AND CULTURE
REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

Purpose of Report

1. This report provides an update on the work undertaken to address the recommendations of the HMICFRS Spotlight Report into Values and Culture in Fire and Rescue Services

Recommended: That

[1] the progress outlined in the report be noted.

Background

2. Due to a number of concerns HMICFRS undertook a review of values and culture in the Fire and Rescue Service based on the inspections they had undertaken.
3. The report highlighted examples of bullying, harassment, discrimination and racism, sexism and homophobia across a number of Services.
4. The spotlight report was published on 31st March 2023 and contained 35 recommendations. 20 of these recommendations were specifically to be actioned by individual Fire and Rescue Services.
5. Prior to this spotlight report the independent culture review of London Fire Brigade was published in November 2022 and highlighted a number of similar concerns but was focused more specifically on that particular organisation. Work has been undertaken to feed the learning and/or recommendations from the LFB into our wider improvement plans.
6. Following the publication of the spotlight report, an action plan was drafted for CFRS and good progress has been made in relation to meeting the majority of recommendations within the required timescale. Only two areas require further work, these being the use of EDI data, and having plans in place to ensure the Service can meet the two key Fire Standards.

7. Therefore, 15 out of 17 (88%) recommendations where the deadline has passed, have been completed. Of the 3 remaining recommendations which have deadlines which fall in 2024, the work in relation to DBS has already commenced, with the other two relating to misconduct and grievances requiring further information to be published by the NFCC before we can take any meaningful action.

Information

8. The table below outlines the activity which has been undertaken in relation to each recommendation.

Number on Spotlight report	Recommendation	Due date	Service Update summary	Is action complete?	Date completed
34	With immediate effect, chief fire officers should review their implementation of the Core Code of Ethics and make sure it is being applied across their services.	30/3/23	The Code of Ethics was rolled out across the service in Spring 2023. Workshops and e-learning have been launched and the code has been incorporated into HR processes and policies. For example a Code of Ethics based question is now included within interviews for selection processes at all levels. Display boards on stations and in Headquarters have been updated for visibility.	Yes	30/3/23
17	With immediate effect, chief fire officers should notify HMICFRS of any allegations that have the potential to constitute staff gross misconduct that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - involve allegations of a criminal nature that have the potential to affect public confidence in FRSs; - are of a serious nature; or - relate to assistant chief fire officers or those at equivalent or higher grades. 	30/3/23	Information was provided in February 2023 in respect of live cases, following the initial HMICFRS request. A process is now in place as part of the service's fact find and investigation process to identify future cases which require disclosure. This will be co-ordinated by the Service Liaison Officer and Head of People and Development.	Yes	30/3/23

32	By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should, as a priority, specify in succession plans how they intend to improve diversity across all levels of the service. This should include offering increased direct-entry opportunities.	1/6/23	<p>CFRS has existing plans in place to improve the diversity of its workforce and is achieving good results. CFRS has a High Potential Development scheme and is also developing an Accelerated Progression Scheme for existing staff which will help to improve diversity at all levels.</p> <p>An action plan has been drafted to outline the steps the Service will make to diversify its workforce further.</p> <p>Currently CFRS is focusing its energy and resources on development and progression for existing staff rather than a direct entry scheme for new staff.</p> <p>The recruitment and attraction group meets quarterly to consider how the service should target and advertise roles to those from specific backgrounds, including the provision of dedicated positive action events in advance of all Wholetime recruitment campaigns. The service monitors the progression of those with protected characteristics in key recruitment campaigns to ensure there is no disproportionality and to inform areas to focus on within future positive action and pre-recruitment engagements.</p>	Yes	1/6/23
28	By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should review how they gather and use equality and diversity data to improve their understanding of their staff demographics, including applying and meeting the requirements of the National Fire Chiefs Council equality, diversity and inclusion data toolkit.	1/6/23	CFRS has been gathering and analysing EDI data in its business-as-usual activity for many years. An Equality Steering Group meets quarterly to review that data and an annual report is provided to the Performance and Overview committee. Work is underway to review our current data format against the NFCC toolkit to ensure our existing approach complies with these requirements.	Ongoing	

			Due to our long standing commitment to collecting workforce equality data, the service already has higher than average disclosure rate for all characteristics when compared with the England average. Data from the Digital Analysis Pack indicates: Ethnicity: 3.7% non-disclosed vs 8.8% average, Sexual Orientation: 19.3% non-disclosed vs 32.0% average, Religion: 21.1% non-disclosed vs 29.8% average.		
23	By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should seek regular feedback from staff about values, culture, fairness and diversity, with due regard to the 'leading and developing people' standard. They should show how they act on this feedback.	1/6/23	CFRS have an active Staff Engagement Forum that incorporates a wide range of interventions and schemes, and which generates direct feedback from staff. The forum also meets directly with the CFO on a monthly basis. A staff suggestion scheme, Ignite, is open to all staff and submissions are considered by the staff engagement forum who then progress the best suggestions for consideration by the SLT. A staff survey is conducted every two years, the results of which are discussed with staff at departmental and stations levels as well as service-wide. There is also an ongoing "You said, we did" campaign which demonstrates how the service acts on feedback. A continuous programme of station visits by SLT members is in place to facilitate open dialogue.	Yes	1/6/23
21	By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should make sure there is a full, 360-degree feedback process in place for all senior leaders and managers (assistant chief fire officer equivalent and above) in service.	1/6/23	The existing 360 degree feedback process is fit for purpose for all levels of leadership across the service and is already regularly used as a personal development tool. Consideration has been given since the recommendation was issued as to how we increase its use and expand across a greater number of managers.	Yes	1/6/23

			<p>Timetabling of wider implementation has now been agreed commencing with all of SLT and those undertaking promotion boards in September 2023. Further expansion will take place in due course, with cognisance of 'survey fatigue' if this is launched to all managers immediately, and capacity constraints for our Learning and Development Team to conduct the process which includes individual feedback sessions.</p>		
20	<p>By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should have plans in place to ensure they meet the "Fire Standards Boards leading the service standard" and its "leading and developing people standard".</p>	1/6/23	<p>The implementation and gap analysis tools for both standards have been completed with an action plan being developed to address any areas of non-compliance. The Service's People Board will satisfy itself that the Service is meeting the relevant standards during Autumn 2023.</p>	Ongoing	
5	<p>By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should make sure they provide accessible information for all staff and members of the public on how they can raise concerns and access confidential support (including through external agencies). Chief fire officers should also make sure accessible information is provided on how concerns and allegations will be investigated in a way that ensures confidentiality and is independent of the alleged perpetrator.</p>	1/6/23	<p>Our service intranet includes a dedicated "Who do I turn to" section containing information as to how staff can raise concerns. This includes an independent 'Safecall' facility whereby staff can confidentially report concerns to an external company who will report this into a single point of contact within the service for further consideration. This has been in place for over 10 years.</p> <p>For the public, there is a dedicated section of the website which includes details on our complaints procedure the option to escalate unsatisfactory resolution of concerns to the monitoring officer and/or the local government ombudsman. Whilst we encourage the public to address concerns directly with us this section of the website also includes links to both the 'Safecall' facility described above and the HMICFRS independent reporting line.</p>	Yes	1/6/23

			Concerns and allegations are investigated in accordance with our disciplinary policy which requires a minimum level role to be appointed as the investigating manager dependent on the seriousness of the allegation. Investigations are conducted objectively and discreetly with oversight from HR Business Partners; for more serious allegations, the investigating manager may be appointed from another area of the service to ensure an independent assessment takes place.		
4	By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should assure themselves that updates on how concerns are being handled are shared with those who have raised them. The updates should be given in an accessible way that encourages trust and confidence in the service response. Consideration should be given to creating a professional standards function to handle conduct concerns in service (or from an external service) to have oversight of cases, to make sure they are conducted in a fair and transparent way and to act as a point of contact for all staff involved.	1/6/23	<p>HR Business Partners (HRBP) oversee internal matters of complaint in conjunction with relevant managers, and structured grievance and disciplinary policies are in place and available for all staff to access; these outline the process for handling and investigating a concern in detail. A personal contact officer who isn't involved in the investigation is assigned to cases of allegations of serious misconduct to provide a single point of contact. This applies for both internal and external complainants. They will provide ongoing updates regarding the investigation (where appropriate), welfare checks, and signpost to additional sources of support/information.</p> <p>Consideration has been given to the professional standards function in respect of casework, however appetite is low based on the current arrangements that work well with the HRBP as they have oversight and ensure fairness and transparency. The low number of cases which require investigation would also mean that a dedicated function would not necessarily provide an efficient solution from a value for money perspective.</p> <p>Consideration is to be afforded to the reintroduction of KPIs to encourage more timely resolution of</p>	Yes	1/6/23

			complaint by investigating managers in discipline and grievance cases. In future this would be reported to the People Board.		
3	By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should review the support available for those who have raised concerns and take any action needed to make sure these provisions are suitable.	1/6/23	Support is provided to complainants through the personal contact officer role. The new Personal Contact Officer will be the liaison between the complainant and the service and will provide any required welfare support including signposting to other services such as mental health first aiders and our occupational health provision. A guidance document has been produced that outlines their role. The external complaints procedure and website have been updated to reflect the introduction of the Personal Contact Officer role.	Yes	1/6/23
27	By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should make sure their equality impact assessments are fit for purpose and, as a minimum, meet the requirements of the National Fire Chiefs Council equality impact assessment	1/6/23	There is a well-established process in place for EIAs, with a template and toolkit available on the intranet and support offered from the services EDI advisor. This is in line with the NFCC toolkit and template which has been reviewed and adopted with some local additions. The NFCC screening template has also been adopted.	Yes	1/6/23
33	By 1 August 2023, chief fire officers should develop plans to promote progression paths for existing staff in non-operational roles and put plans in place to reduce any inequalities of opportunity.	1/8/23	As a result of an AFI identified in our Round 2 inspection, the Service has taken extensive steps to improve the progression and development opportunities available to our Green Book staff. This has included development of our Wider Horizons programme which aims to encourage development and progression for these staff across the Service. This work has been identified by HMICFRS as innovative practice in our Draft R3 report. All of the service's development activities including our 'Step Into Leadership' and 'Step Up' programmes are open to non-operational staff as are all other development opportunities including our degree apprenticeship programme. The improvements we	Yes	1/8/23

			have made to our appraisal process also support managers in identifying and developing these staff in the same way as we do for operational colleagues.		
18	By 1 August 2023, chief fire officers should provide assurances to HMICFRS that all parties are supported in relation to ongoing investigations.	1/8/23	<p>As per earlier recommendations, the Service has extensive provisions in place to provide welfare support to individuals involved in ongoing investigations; this includes individuals who are being investigated, those who have raised concerns, or other parties such as witnesses. The personal contact officer role provides a dedicated manager for individuals to speak with should they have any concerns. As per other recommendations the PCO can signpost individuals to additional support including mental health resources and our occupational health provider who can provide counselling if this is required.</p> <p>The Service's Attendance Management board provides a strategic oversight to review the progress of ongoing investigations on a monthly basis to ensure they are progressing quickly enough and will also assure that the parties involved have been provided with sufficient support and that welfare considerations have been made by the investigating manager and the PCOs assigned to each party.</p>	Yes	1/8/23
22	By 1 September 2023, chief fire officers should make sure there is a full, 360-degree feedback process in place for all other leaders and managers in service. The process should include gathering feedback from a wide range of sources including colleagues and direct reports.	1/9/23	As per earlier recommendation 21, a timetable to roll out the existing 360 feedback tool to all managers in the Service has been agreed by SLT. Due to resource constraints within the L&D team, and the impact of 'survey fatigue' on colleagues across the Service which would be experienced if all managers were completed simultaneously, this will take place using a phased approach over the next 18 months.	Yes	1/9/23
26	By 1 October 2023, as a precursor to the development of the College of Fire and Rescue, chief fire officers and the National Fire Chiefs Council should work with the	1/10/23	The Service has a range of internal leadership programmes in place as well as access to a number of external programmes. Our OD Manager is currently on the project group for the NFCC Middle Manager	Yes	1/10/23

	Home Office to consider how they can improve the training and support they offer to staff in management and leadership development. This should include authority members in respect of their assurance leadership roles and should ensure that opportunities are offered fairly across all staff groups.		Leadership Programme and has helped to shape it ready for launch.		
24	By 1 October 2023, chief fire officers should put plans in place to monitor, including through the gathering and analysis of staff feedback, watch and team cultures and provide prompt remedial action for any issues they identify.	1/10/23	As outlined earlier, the Service already has a range of staff engagement channels available to staff to provide feedback or alternatively to report any concerns. There is now additional monitoring of culture within the organisation through the People Board.	Yes	1/10/23
1	By 1 October 2023, chief fire officers should make sure their services provide a confidential way for staff to raise concerns and that staff are aware of whistleblowing processes.	1/10/23	The Service has had Safecall in place for 10 plus years. The Whistleblowing procedures have been re-publicised to staff.	Yes	1/10/23
9	By 1 January 2024, chief fire officers should: - immediately review their current background checks arrangements, and make sure that suitable and sufficient background checks are in place to safeguard their staff and communities they serve; and - make sure that appropriate DBS check requests have been submitted for all existing, new staff, and volunteers, according to their roles as identified by the Fire Standards Board.	1/1/24	A significant piece of work is currently underway within People & OD to review our current arrangements and how the changes to legislation on DBS should be implemented within CFRS. A final proposal for implementing the new DBS arrangements will be presented to SLT on 11 th December 2023.	Ongoing	
14	By 1 March 2024, chief fire officers should provide assurances to HMICFRS that they have implemented the standard on	1/3/24	At time of writing no new standards in relation to this area have been published. However the Service	Ongoing	

	misconduct allegations and outcomes handling.		already has robust procedures in place which comply with the Grey Book, and the ACAS Statutory Code.		
12	By 1 March 2024, chief fire officers should provide assurances to HMICFRS that they have implemented the standard on staff disclosure, complaint and grievance handling.	1/3/24	At time of writing no new standards in relation to this area have been published. However the Service already has robust procedures in place which comply with the Grey Book, and the ACAS Statutory Code.	Ongoing	

Financial Implications

9. The additional work arising from these recommendations will largely be resourced from existing budgets and resources, where this is not possible additional budget growth bids will be submitted.

Legal Implications

10. No specific legal impact identified, other than changes to legislation enabling the DBS work to be carried out.

Equality and Diversity Implications

11. Any subsequent changes to policy will also require a review of the existing EIA.

Environmental Implications

12. No impacts identified.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE