

## HMICFRS Values and Culture Report: Recommendations and Approach

### Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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### 1 Executive Summary

This report presents the Service's approach and action plan to the recommendations made to the sector in the His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Values and Culture in the Fire and Rescue Services report

### 2 Recommendations

The Standards, Audit and Performance Committee is asked to note the report.

### 3 Background

On 30 March 2023, the HMICFRS published a report entitled "Values and Culture in Fire and Rescue Services", attached at the Appendix to the report. This report followed the Independent Culture Review of London Fire Brigade carried out by Nazir Afzal OBE in 2022 and scrutiny by national media, most notably ITN.

The HMICFRS report focused on serious issues having a detrimental impact on the sector. The HMICFRS had recorded such events in more than half (at least 26) of fire and rescue services (FRS).

These include:

- bullying, harassment, and discrimination;
- lack of fairness and diversity; and
- reporting and handling of concerns, including allegations of misconduct.

The HMICFRS findings included:

- Improvements in some services' values are not always reflected in staff behaviours
- Bullying, harassment and discrimination are, to varying degrees, still problems in all services
- Subgroups, including watches, can foster unacceptable behaviours and poor cultures.
- Staff need a secure way to raise concerns
- Background checks of fire and rescue service staff need to improve to reduce risk of harm to both staff and the public
- A positive culture is created in services where leadership is visible, transparent and fair
- Supervisors and middle managers need to be better trained in how to effectively manage, develop and support their staff
- Most services need to do more to improve their equality, diversity and inclusion
- Progression opportunities limit diversity in leadership teams

#### **4 Service Approach and Actions**

On receipt of the report the Service immediately carried out a gap analysis which forms the basis of the Service Action Plan.

The Service convened a special Service Management Team (SMT) meeting and agreed to fully accept the report and work towards meeting all the recommendations.

Chief Fire Officers are requested to action 20 of the 35 recommendations, with the remaining recommendations responsible for action by the Government, Local Government Association (LGA), Home Office, National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), Police and the College of Fire<sup>1</sup>. There are also recommendations that link to implementing national fire standards that are yet to be written and are not expected until late 2023.

The recommendations timelines vary from June 2023 to March 2024 for Chief Fire Officers and up to January 2025 for the other responsible organisations.

The Service is committed to implementing the recommendations, prioritising those that are currently within its gift and as such has set up a weekly implementation board which is chaired by the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Support).

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<sup>1</sup> College of Fire does not currently exist but is anticipated to form part of a future government recommendation in a forth coming White Paper.

The Service has responded proactively to HMICFRS recommendations requiring immediate action. Notifying the HMICFRS of any allegations that have the potential to constitute gross misconduct and progressing a previously started review into the implementation of the Core Code of Ethics produced by the Fire Standards Board.

The Service has already acted on recommendations made from its Womens Safety Survey of 2022 by scoping out a 24-hour independent confidential reporting line for staff to use. This is a key recommendation of the HMICFRS report and is at an advanced stage with a preferred supplier engaged.

The HMICFRS also recommended that Services adopt an independent investigatory approach to gross misconduct cases linked to culture and values. The Service currently has an external contractor that provides discipline grievance and investigation training to staff. Discussions had previously taken place with this supplier about providing independent investigation support for certain cases however, at that time it was felt unnecessary partly due to the extremely low number of cases. Discussions have now recommenced to ensure the Service can access this independent investigation capability from this current supplier.

## **5 Conclusions**

The Service fully accepts the report and recognises the challenges posed by the variety of timelines associated with the recommendations.

Implementing the recommendations is a priority for the Service and progress will be monitored by ACFO (Service Support) who will chair a weekly progress board and report back to SMT.

The Service is in a positive position as some of the recommendations are already standard practice in Shropshire. The Service also has advance plans in place to meet some of the other recommendations as this work was planned prior to the report and is already in progress. However, to ensure adequate resources are available and noting the challenging timeframe, an additional Human Resources Officer is being recruited on a fixed term contract.

The Service has had an extremely low number of bullying and harassment cases over the last decade and currently no live cases. Data on grievance and discipline has been provided to the HMICFRS as part of the HMICFRS data collection since 2018.

## **6 Capacity**

An additional Human Resources Officer is being recruited on a 12-month fixed term contract to support the project. Transformation and Collaboration are coordinating and leading the Service response this will impact on existing workloads.

## **7 Fire Alliance / Collaboration / Partnership Working**

All aspects and opportunities will be shared across the Alliance as the Service proceeds through implementing the recommendations.

## **8 Financial Implications**

The cost of recruiting an additional Human Resources Officer on a 12-month fixed term contract is £51,918.

Additional costings will be identified as contracts are negotiated to action recommendations that the Service will need to procure (e.g. the confidential reporting line).

## **9 Legal Comment**

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. Legal advice will be sought on an ongoing basis, as appropriate, in relation to the implementation of strategies and policies designed to meet individual recommendations of the HMICFRS report.

## **10 Community Safety**

A lack of trust and confidence in the Service could reduce the willingness of the community to engage with the Service thus increasing community risk.

## **11 Environmental**

There are no environmental impacts arising from this report.

## **12 Equality Impact Assessment**

Full EQIAs to be completed following completed actions from each of the recommendations.

## **13 Health and Safety**

There are no health and safety impacts arising from this report.

## **14 Fire Standard Core Code of Ethics and Human Rights (including Data Protection)**

This work involves both current and future fire standards.

## **15 ICT**

There are no ICT impacts arising from this report.

## **16 Insurance**

Failure to meet HMICFRS recommendations could increase corporate risk to the Service from civil action.

## **17 The On Call Service**

There will be a communication requirement to mitigate the impact on all staff when independent investigations are carried out in the future. All aspects of change will need to be supported by appropriate change management.

## **18 Public Value / Service Delivery**

Implementing these recommendations in full will support Service Delivery and provide public value.

## **19 Reputation**

Failure to implement these recommendations will have an adverse effect on the Service reputation. The Service will drive the change by continuing to lead in a visible, accessible, honest and transparent way.

## **20 Security**

There are data security issues with how sensitive data is stored and shared with partners.

## **21 Training**

All recommendations will have an element of training, this is being assessed as part of the delivery phase.

## **22 Appendix**

HMICFRS report - Values and culture in fire and rescue services

<https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/values-and-culture-in-fire-and-rescue-services.pdf>

## **23 Background Papers**

There are no background papers associated with this report.