

# PFCC and FRS and CC HMICFRS Inspection response record

Version:

<b>FRS</b>	Staffordshire
<b>Police and Crime Commissioner</b>	Ben Adams
<b>Chief Fire Officer</b>	Rob Barber
<b>Chief Constable</b>	Chris Noble
<b>Title of inspection</b>	<a href="#">Values and culture in fire and rescue services</a>
<b>Inspectorate</b>	 <p>His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire &amp; Rescue Services</p>
<b>Summary of inspection</b>	We have repeatedly expressed concern about values and culture in the fire and rescue service since we began inspections in 2018.
<b>Grade</b>	
<b>Recommendations</b>	<p><b>Raising concerns</b></p> <p><b>Background checks</b></p> <p><b>Misconduct handling</b></p> <p><b>Leadership</b></p> <p><b>Management and leadership training and development</b></p> <p><b>Diversity data</b></p> <p><b>Improving diversity</b></p> <p><b>The Core Code of Ethics</b></p>
<b>Areas for improvement</b>	

## Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner's initial response

In preparation for this HMICFRS report and following the [Independent Culture Review of London Fire Brigade](#) undertaken by Nazir Afzal OBE in November 2022 PFCC Ben Adams is reassured that Staffordshire FRS have undertaken a thorough review of the recommendations; what is in place for employees and what actions need to be taken. The action plan is documented and tracked within the governance structure of the FRS ensuring actions from the recommendations relevant to Staffordshire are being delivered. The recommendations from this wider HMICFRS report are currently being reviewed in the context of Staffordshire's progress and will be added to the internal monitoring process to ensure improvements are embedded and sustained.

Furthermore, I have sought confirmation that Staffordshire's Chief Constable is appropriately using their Common Law Police Disclosure powers in circumstances involving employees of fire and rescue services as per Recommendation 10.

## Chief Fire Officer's response

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service fully accept the recommendations from HMICFRS through the Values and culture in fire and rescue services. The report is a difficult read for fire and rescue services but we must acknowledge and recognise the short falls and failings within our sector. We are reviewing all of the recommendations in detail, assessing where improvements are needed and developing an action plan to meet the requirements. I will be monitoring progress through my senior leadership team and governance structure to ensure that changes are effective in supporting cultural change in the sector. SFRS has been proactive in addressing behaviours which don't meet our expected standards detailed in the Core Code of Ethics, this has been reiterated through my Statement of Intent. We will continue to work tirelessly to promote a positive and inclusive working environment for all.

With respect to the particular actions the following progress can be reported:

**Recommendation 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.**

The Service has introduced a confidential and independent process which provides staff with a process to raise concerns. This is called 'Say So' and is now in its second year of implementation. We have used staff platforms such as intranet, email, team meetings and in person to ensure that all staff are aware of how staff can raise concerns. The Service has an established whistleblowing policy which is available to all staff via the intranet.

**Recommendation 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**

Mental Health first aiders will be trained by the beginning of September in order to further support this. A welfare day (an off-site overview of all the support currently available including sessions from the Fire Fighters Charity, Occupational Health, the providers of the Thrive App and Employee Assistance Programme) was completed in April 2023 and mental health first aider training has been arranged to be completed for Autumn 2023.

The Service continually reviews the support available for those that have raised concerns, and can offer a number of support options. The Employee Assistance Program is available through which the Service already offers support with both personal and professional problems that could be affecting home or work life, health and general well-being. Confidential support is available to all staff including those who have raised concerns, through this programme. Counselling and advice can be provided by fully qualified professionals. This is an independent service designed to assist alongside Occupational health offer, the firefighter's charity provision and THRIVE app.

A further element of support can be provided in the form of a professional wellbeing nurse for those raising a complaint or are subject to an internal investigation.

**Recommendation 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**

The Service has been exploring the engagement of an independent investigator to assist with improving the fairness and transparency of the investigation process. A provider has now been selected and will be undertaking an investigation into allegations raised through culture conversations. The provider will produce a report / standard that can be replicated across the Service, and if successful we will further engage independent investigators for the most serious allegations.

**Recommendation 5 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.**

We currently have a well-established policy for both internal and external complaints. On the Service website there are details as to how members of the public can raise concerns through an automated form. There is also an accessibility statement on the external website. Information for staff members is available through the intranet. Information on how concerns and allegations can be investigated, ensuring confidentiality and independence is detailed in our whistleblowing and disciplinary and grievance policies and procedures. We have requested our Internal Auditors to review the Whistleblowing Policy as part of our Internal Audit Plan for 2023/24. The Audit will be completed in July 2023 and will provide assurance that our Policy is robust and also highlight any areas for improvement.

### **Background checks**

**Recommendation 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.**

The Service is working alongside Staffs Police, and an administrator from the police is currently completing a gap analysis around the DBS checking. The results of this analysis will determine future policy and procedure in this area.

### **Misconduct handling**

**Recommendation 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. These areas are being developed alongside the Leadership and Development Fire standard.**

Workshops are being conducted with senior members of staff in attendance to shape this review and any development and policy is being rewritten with the current recommendations in mind.

No further action can be completed until national guidance falls out of recommendation 13 from the Fire Standards Board

**Recommendation 14 By 1 March 2024, chief fire officers should provide assurances to HMICFRS that they have implemented the standard on misconduct allegations and outcomes handling.**

These areas are being developed alongside the Leadership and Development Fire standard.

Workshops are being conducted with senior members of staff in attendance to shape this review and any development and policy is being rewritten with the current recommendations in mind.

No further action can be completed until national guidance falls out of recommendation 13 from the Fire Standards Board

**Recommendation 17 With immediate effect, chief fire officers should notify HMICFRS of any allegations that have the potential to constitute staff gross misconduct that: 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.**

The Service has responded to HMICFRS recent request for information regarding allegations of this nature. The Service will continue to notify HMICFRS of cases of a serious nature in the future and put in place a process for notification.

**Recommendation 18 By 1 August 2023, chief fire officers should provide assurances to HMICFRS that all parties are supported in relation to ongoing investigations.**

Internal processes have been reviewed including the case tracker and disciplinary procedure. This includes looking for patterns in cases either by location, trends in behaviour and regular meetings with representative bodies.

Additional investigation training is planned, initially with the HR Team to then be rolled out to the rest of the Service. The Service continues to provide and promote a number of support mechanisms individuals as stated in recommendation 3. The services of an independent company have also been employed to look at three historical cases, in addition to providing an independent review of our ways of working this will also have the added benefit of providing a report that can be utilised going forward as an organisation.

### **Leadership**

**Recommendation 20 By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should have plans in place to ensure they meet the Fire Standards Board's leading the service standard and its leading and developing people standard.**

Strategic managers are in the process of reviewing the Standard and completing a gap analysis to help formulate the Services plans for compliance.

An internal Fire Standards implementation Board has been established to support the gap analysis process of all Fire Standards and provide strategic direction of prioritisation and oversight of action plans.

**Recommendation 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.**

A new suggested format, based on an external appraisal, is currently being developed by IT to be used internally. In order to Achieve a 360 degree feedback the Service will enhance our existing appraisal process by including a peer engagement / review stage including feedback from customers, partners, and direct reports. Whilst the service acknowledges the HMICFRS recommendation, the intention is to begin this process by looking at the implementation of a 180 degree feedback process in the near future.

**Recommendation 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.**

A new appraisal document is currently with IT to be created into an online form that can easily be shared with both parties.

In order to Achieve a 360 degree feedback the Service will enhance our existing appraisal process by including a peer engagement / review stage including feedback from customers, partners, and direct reports.

**Recommendation 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.**

An independent company has been engaged to provide feedback to the Service with a bespoke survey based on questions developed by a working group.

We have a regular face to face briefing, which has included items of values, culture, fairness and diversity and this includes a mechanism for individuals and teams to feedback and for Principal officers to understand and communicate issues raised. We have recently completed a service wide request to raise issues of concern following a direct response to recent media focus on the sector and further HMICFRS papers regarding culture. Following a return of summary points from all departments on points raised during culture discussions the senior leadership team have conducted follow up visits to further explore opinions and experiences of the workforce.

**Recommendation 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.**

As with recommendation 23 a survey is being created by an independent company to provide feedback to the Service based on a questionnaire that will be designed with input from a working group.

Any issues identified by staff will be investigated in the first instance and this will be raised via the Service's internal governance structure for board review. Any remedial action will be discussed and agreed by board.

#### **Diversity data**

**Recommendation 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 toolkit.**

The Service has an established process and pro-forma to demonstrate due regard to the General Duty of the Equality Act 2010. The Service calls these People Impact Assessment (PIA). All Board papers require a reference narrative to the Equality and Diversity implications in the decision making processes and these are then captured within the PIA in the following development, action, trials, guidance, strategy and policy.

All Policy which goes through the Service document production function, and by definition needs to be consulted on internally, will not be released for consultation until it has an accompanying PIA received by the document production department.

The Service is undertaking work to review both the process and pro-forma, to ensure that any mitigation required in a decision is both widely consulted on, reported on where mitigation action is required, monitored and kept under review.

The Service publishes its PIAs on our website as part of our Publication Scheme responsibilities. This is also an element of the review to ensure they are up to date and relevant. The Service aim to get this review complete as soon as is practicable possible over the next 2 months and are aiming for 1st June 2023.

**Recommendation 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.**

Data is collected around EDI at the recruitment stage now as well as for members of staff joining the organisation. This has increased the identification and understanding of EDI trends for the organisation. This is also discussed at workforce planning board as a standing agenda item.

### **Improving diversity**

**Recommendation 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**

Through the Workforce planning board, forecasting and succession planning is a standing agenda item. This has recently complimented by the addition of a Positive Action Coordinator post, who is completing positive engagement within local communities in order to change perceptions and to promote the fire service as a career option. School engagement is already underway from primary age updates.

**Recommendation 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.**

In the Service's most recent restructure of the Senior Management Team, there were 3 posts at Area Manager level that were introduced. In order to improve the development opportunities for non-operational staff, one of these Area Manager posts was made available to both operational and non-operational members of staff to take a position within the Senior Management Team. The Service is participating in the national pilot for direct entry with the creation of an additional Station Manager role within the organisation.

Apprentices and internships are now a consideration as each vacancy arises to provide opportunities within support staff for a wider range of people.

### **The Core Code of Ethics**

**Recommendation 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.**

Since formally agreeing to adopt the CCoE, this has been included in all recruitment being sent out to candidates and being included in interviews. This is also being added to all policies and frequently considered as part of any disciplinary action as a guide to behaviour. Senior Managers have all been allocated one each of the 5 ethical principles to champion which has been communicated to all staff via internal communications. All promotion processes are centred around the Core Code of Ethics.

## **Chief Constable's response**

**Recommendation 10 By 1 September 2023, chief constables should make sure they are appropriately using their Common Law Police Disclosure powers in circumstances involving employees of fire and rescue services.**

The Force has a dedicated Police Common Law Disclosure Officer (PCLDO), who coordinates all common law disclosures on behalf of the Chief Constable.

Common Law Police Disclosure is a power given to the police to ensure where a public protection risk has been identified, the police will pass information to the Fire and Rescue Service.

The assessment for disclosure is based on the offences alleged and whether those offences, if transferred to their employment, would put children, vulnerable persons or the wider public at risk of harm.

If a safeguarding risk is identified then the PCLDO would contact the Fire and Rescue Service concerned and make a formal disclosure of offences alleged / charges and/or bail conditions.

It would then be for the Fire and Rescue Service to determine whether they believed the individual poses any risk in their role and to take any action they deem necessary.

### Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner's overall comments

I am pleased with the progress the Fire Service is making in response to HMICFRS recommendations and progress will continued to be monitored through our regular governance boards. I expect Staffordshire Police and Staffordshire Fire Service to build on the collaborative relationship already in place and work to ensure vetting requirements support the ongoing programme of shared estate across the two services here in Staffordshire. Updates will continue be shared at future Fire Public Performance Meetings.