



Safest People, Safest Places

Combined Fire Authority

20 June 2023

Values and Culture in Fire and Rescue Services Spotlight Report

Report of Director of People and Organisational Development

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Combined Fire Authority (CFA) of the outcomes of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Values and Culture Report and the internal review of County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Services (CDDFRS) practices against the recommendations made.

Background

2. On the 30 March 2023, HMICFRS released its spotlight report "Values and Culture in Fire and Rescue Services" (appendix B) which was commissioned by The Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire. The report draws on the evidence collected through all inspections since 2018 and recent data requests around the handling of misconduct cases and background checks of current and new employees.
3. It highlights there are still a significant number of services who are graded as requires improvement or inadequate in values, culture, fairness, and diversity which is a stark warning for the sector with two Services put into enhanced monitoring.
4. Recent allegations against staff in several services, which have been featured in the media, are both shocking and saddening and have quite rightly, heightened public, sector and staff awareness and concerns about these issues. It is only right that higher standards are demanded in organisations like our own who have a responsibility to keep the public safe, and where public trust and confidence are so important.
5. This paper gives an overview of the findings and sets out a gap analysis of CDDFRS ways of working and initiatives to outline our current position and identify any areas of risk and improvement. The paper and action plan were presented to the Human Resources Committee on the 16 May 2023 who will take ownership of monitoring progress of the plan.

Report Overview

6. The report highlights that across the sector, over half of all complaints made are linked to inappropriate behaviour and bullying and harassment. It also highlights that background checks undertaken for new and existing staff are insufficient and more worryingly, it raises a common theme across the sector that staff are afraid to raise concerns due to fear of reprisal.

7. The report concluded the following:
 - a) Improvements in some services' values are not always reflected in staff behaviours.
 - b) Bullying, harassment and discrimination are, to varying degrees, still problems in all services.
 - c) Subgroups, including watches, can foster unacceptable behaviours and poor cultures.
 - d) Staff can feel unable to challenge or report poor behaviours and need a secure way to raise concerns.
 - e) Background checks of fire and rescue service staff need to improve to reduce risk of harm to both staff and the public.
 - f) Allegations of misconduct should be handled appropriately.
 - g) Supervisors and middle managers need to be better trained in how to effectively manage, develop and support their staff as well as more widely in equality, diversity and inclusion.
 - h) Most services need to do more to improve their equality, diversity and inclusion.
 - i) Progression opportunities limit diversity in leadership teams.

8. The review set out 35 recommendations which focused on the following key areas:
 - a) Raising Concerns
 - b) Background Checks
 - c) Misconduct Handling
 - d) Leadership
 - e) Management and Leadership Training and Development
 - f) Diversity Data
 - g) Improving Diversity
 - h) The Core Code of Ethics
 - i) The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England

9. A gap analysis has been undertaken (appendix A) which outlines the Service position within these areas which have been RAG rated to help prioritise actions. It is acknowledged that there is always more to do and improvements to be made to any process or ways of working however the key objective of the analysis is to highlight any immediate actions required and provide some assurance to members of the Services position with regards to the recommendations.

Conclusion

11. The report highlights the need to see change across several areas but mostly about creating an inclusive environment underpinned by values and behaviours. The

Service are committed to driving and creating a fair and supportive working environment and this is a key theme for our People Strategy 2023 /26.

12. The Service is well placed to address several of the recommendations with already established and well embedded processes in place such as background checks, confidential reporting lines, policies and procedures and undertaking staff engagement activities however there are a few areas identified where we can strengthen.
13. Our recent HMICFRS inspection report graded the Service as 'Good' overall in the People Pillar and 'Good' in all four sub diagnostics. It noted the service has well-defined values that are understood by all staff, the Core Code of Ethics has been implemented, we have supportive wellbeing initiatives, good health and safety processes and more importantly staff are confident in the service's approach to tackling bullying, harassment and discrimination and disciplinary matters. Whilst the inspection process is not an in-depth review, it provides the Authority with assurance that our processes relating to People and Culture are working and embedded.

Recommendations

14. Members are requested to note the content of the report.

Katherine Metcalfe, Director of People and Organisational Development, Ext.5665

HMICFRS Values and Culture in Fire and Rescue Services

| No. | Recommendation | Owner | Due Date | Status | Progress |
|-----|---|-------------------------------|----------|---------------------|---|
| | Raising Concerns | | | | |
| 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. | CDDFRS | 1 Oct 23 | Complete | April 23 Independent complaints service available via DCC (Whistleblowing). Staff can report incidents anonymously with no fear of the repercussions. Independent reporting Service through Safecall Raising a Concern at Work procedure in place |
| 2 | By 1 October 2023, National Employers, the Local Government Association and the National Fire Chiefs Council should review any current independent arrangements whereby staff can raise concerns outside their FRS. They should then ensure that all FRS staff have access to an independent reporting line that can be used as a confidential way to raise concerns outside their own FRS. | National Employers, LGA, NFCC | 1 Jun 23 | Not owned by CDDFRS | CDDFRA and CDDFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this 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. | CDDFRS | 1 Jun 23 | Ongoing | April 23 Robust Dignity at Work and Fairness at Work Policy and Procedure in place (which are utilised) and allow for staff to move locality or perpetrators to be suspended. Dignity at Work Advisors in place (posters and online) Suicide prevention officers in place (posters and online) Mental Health First Aiders in place (posters and online) |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|--------|----------|---------|--|
| | | | | | Welfare officers appointed to both parties as support (details included in correspondence). Access to Employee Assistance is advised through correspondence. Option for external investigation where required. Union support made available for members. Code of Ethics implemented and integrated. EDI training for managers via e-learning and face to face learning included in Leadership Programmes. |
| 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 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. | CDDFRS | 1 Jun 23 | Ongoing | April 23 Independent reporting Service through Safecall offers an online platform where concerns are shared, and updates are given both ways. Welfare officers appointed to both parties as support (details included in correspondence). They can be used to gain updates. Both parties are advised who is the IO and so can contact them for updates. Dignity at work advisors are available to support either party. External investigations can be undertaken. ER register kept outlining the concern raised and any outcomes / appeal. Professional Standards department not deemed as feasible due to ongoing budgetary pressures. Could be re-evaluated if a high number of complaints are made. |
| 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 | CDDFRS | 1 Jun 23 | Ongoing | April 23 External complaints (from public) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear procedure in place (AD/2/11). |

| | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|---|
| | <p>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> | | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints can be made by a range of different methods (social media, online, in writing, telephone). • There is an accessible leaflet available advising how complaints will be treated. • Complaints are all recorded on the web form and the data is stored securely with only designated people having access. • Generally, complaints are handled internally however, there are routes to externally investigate should the need arise. • There have been no complaints or concerns raised with the professionalism of our staff when undertaking HFSC's. <p>Internal complaints (from Staff)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear procedures for Fairness at Work and Dignity at Work are in place. • Dignity at Work Advisors in place (posters and online) • Suicide prevention officers in place (posters and online) • Mental Health First Aiders in place (posters and online) • Welfare officers appointed to both parties as support (details included in correspondence). • Access to Employee Assistance is advised through correspondence. • Option for external investigation where required. |
|--|--|--|--|--|---|

| | Background Checks | | | | |
|---|--|----------------------|----------|---------------------|---|
| 6 | By 1 January 2024, the Home Office, working with the Ministry of Justice, should make sure that the Government incorporates fire and rescue authority employees within the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 so that they are eligible for the appropriate DBS checks. | Home Office | 1 May 24 | Not Owned by CDDFRS | CDDFRA and CDDFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation |
| 7 | By 1 May 2024, the Home Office, working with the fire and rescue sector, should make sure that the Police Act 1997 (Criminal Records) Regulations 2002, or a similar appropriate legislatively enabled solution, makes detailed provisions for fire and rescue services. | Home Office | 1 May 24 | Not Owned by CDDFRS | CDDFRA and CDDFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation |
| 8 | <p>By 1 December 2023, the Fire Standards Board, in liaison with the National Fire Chiefs Council, should review the existing relevant standard(s) and underpinning guidance. It should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clearly state the requirements for background checks undertaken by services; • clarify the minimum requirements (including levels of DBS checks) for all roles, particularly roles where staff have access to vulnerable members of the public; • define the standards required to embed a culture across fire and rescue services that empowers all members of staff and local communities to report concerns; and • be subject to review following any legislative change. | Fire Standards Board | 1 Dec 23 | Not Owned by CDDFRS | CDDFRA and CDDFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation |

| | | | | | |
|----|--|----------------------|----------|---------------------|---|
| 9 | <p>By 1 January 2024, chief fire officers should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 | CDDFRS | 1 Jan 24 | Complete | <p>April 23</p> <p>Baseline personal security checks are undertaken on all prospective employees to safeguard the Service and the communities it serves.</p> <p>The checks that are undertaken prior to employment with the Service are Identity, Qualification, references (minimum 2 years), medical, DBS (where appropriate), right to work in the United Kingdom.</p> <p>We undertake a basic DBS check on all prospective staff at the point of entry regardless of role.</p> <p>We undertake enhanced DBS checks for those working in Community safety teams and with our cadets.</p> |
| 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. | Police | 1 Sep 23 | Not Owned by CDDFRS | CDDFRA and CDDFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation |
| 11 | By 1 December 2023, the Fire Standards Board, in liaison with the National Fire Chiefs Council, should review the existing relevant standard(s) and supporting guidance to clearly state how services should handle staff disclosures, complaints and grievances. | Fire Standards Board | 1 Dec 23 | Not Owned by CDDFRS | CDDFRA and CDDFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this 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. | CDDFRS | 1 Mar 24 | Not started | <p>April 23</p> <p>Awaiting Standard to be released</p> <p>Current process for fire standard implementation sits with the Project Board and Project Assurance Manager. Once available, the process for FS implementation will be actioned.</p> <p>All completed standards are agreed by SLT.</p> |

| | | | | | |
|----|---|----------------------|----------|---------------------|---|
| 13 | <p>By 1 December 2023, the Fire Standards Board, in liaison with the National Fire Chiefs Council, should review the existing relevant standard(s) and supporting guidance to clearly state how services should handle misconduct and safeguarding-related allegations and outcomes. These should include requirements to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conduct and complete investigations, whether or not the staff member under investigation leaves; • consider whether the incident requires immediate dismissal; • provide training for staff who are carrying out investigations; and <p>ensure the diversity/neutrality of the investigation panel/person.</p> | Fire Standards Board | 1 Dec 23 | Not Owned by CDDFRS | CDDFRA and CDDFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation |
| 14 | <p>By 1 March 2024, chief fire officers should provide assurances to HMICFRS that they have implemented the standard on misconduct allegations and outcomes handling.</p> | CDDFRS | 1 Mar 24 | Not Started | <p>April 23</p> <p>Awaiting standard to be released. Current process for fire standard implementation sits with the Project Board and Project Assurance Manager. Once available, the process for FS implementation will be actioned. All completed standards are agreed by SLT.</p> |
| 15 | <p>By 1 October 2023, the Home Office should work with the National Fire Chiefs Council and fire and rescue service employers to make sure there is a process to handle misconduct allegations against chief fire officers. The Home Office should immediately notify HMICFRS of any allegations and outcomes that it is aware of.</p> | Home Office | 1 Oct 23 | Not Owned by CDDFRS | CDDFRA and CDDFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation |
| 16 | <p>By 1 October 2023, the National Fire Chiefs Council should develop and manage a national barred list that holds details of staff who have</p> | NFCC | 1 Oct 23 | Not Owned by CDDFRS | CDDFRA and CDDFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation |

| | | | | | |
|----|---|-------------|-----------|---------------------|--|
| | been dismissed for gross misconduct (including staff who have already left services). It should ensure that this list is referred to in all appointment processes to prevent those who are barred from re-joining another service. After the College of Fire and Rescue has been established (see recommendation 25), it should take responsibility for managing the list | | | | |
| 17 | <p>With immediate effect, chief fire officers should notify HMICFRS of any allegations that have the potential to constitute staff gross misconduct that:</p> <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 <p>relate to assistant chief fire officers or those at equivalent or higher grades</p> | CDDFRS | Immediate | Complete | We will comply with this requirement with immediate effect in providing disclosures in line with the non-identifiable case histories provided previously to HMICFRS. We are seeking clarification from HMICFRS on any more detailed reporting it requires, to enable us to ensure that we are also compliant with our GDPR obligations |
| 18 | By 1 August 2023, chief fire officers should provide assurances to HMICFRS that all parties are supported in relation to ongoing investigations | CDDFRS | 1 Aug 23 | Ongoing | April 23 As outlined in recommendation 3, 4 and 5 |
| 19 | By 1 July 2023, the Home Office should examine whether any appeal processes for fire and rescue misconduct cases are appropriate. | Home Office | 1 Jul 23 | Not Owned by CDDFRS | CDDFRA and CDDFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation |
| | Leadership | | | | |
| 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. | CDDFRS | 1 Jul 23 | Ongoing | April 23 Current process for fire standard implementation sits with the Project Board and Project Assurance Manager. The Director of POD has been designated as the SPOC for both standards. All completed standards are agreed by SLT. |

| | | | | | |
|----|--|------------|----------|--------------------|--|
| 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. | CDDFRS | 1 Jun 23 | Complete | April 23 A 360 process is part of the current appraisal process for all staff including PO's. As part of wider SLT development / team building plans, a further 360 feedback process will be undertaken utilising the Johari Window tool and linked to i3 and supportive leadership. |
| 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. | CDDFRS | 1 Sep 23 | Complete | April 23 A 360 process is part of the current appraisal process for all staff including PO's. Procedure include the requirement for peer feedback |
| 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. | CDDFRS | 1 Jun 23 | Complete | April 23 The Service undertake a staff survey which focusses on values, culture, and behaviours. Call it out survey. HMICFRS staff survey Station visits / Manager 121's Station audits / Debriefs Staff networks Safe Call data Exit interview data. |
| 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. | CDDFRS | 1 Oct 23 | Complete | April 23 Station visits / Manager 121's Staff Surveys (include locality and line manager/colleague related questions) Watch focus groups. SLT action plans (improvement & strategy) – monitored via CFA |
| | Management and leadership training and development | | | | |
| 25 | By 1 January 2025, the Government should establish a College of Fire and Rescue, as proposed by the White Paper Reforming our Fire | Government | 1 Jan 25 | Not Owned by CDFRS | CDDFRA and CDDFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation |

| | | | | | |
|----|---|-------------|-----------|---------------------|--|
| | and Rescue Service. There should be no further delay to its implementation. | | | | |
| 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 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. | NFCC | 1 Oct 23 | Not Owned by CDFRS | CDDFRA and CDDFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this 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. | CDDFRS | 1 Jun 23 | Complete | April 23 A review of CDDFRS process was undertaken in 2022 and aligned to the NFCC toolkit. EqIA's are complete and actions are monitored through the ED&I working group. EqIA's have been complete for all Service premises to ensure inclusivity. |
| 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. | CDDFRS | 1 Jun 23 | Ongoing | April 23 Public sector equality duty Gender pay gap Home office annual returns HMICFRS PowerBi reports Recruitment monitoring |
| 29 | By 1 December 2023, the Home Office should publish greater detail on the protected characteristic data it collects about FRS staff, including joiners and leavers, by rank and role. | Home Office | 1 Dec 23 | Not owned by CDDFRS | CDDFRA and CDDFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation |
| 30 | By 30 December 2024, the Home Office should align the data it collects on protected characteristics with the Office for National | Home Office | 30 Dec 24 | Not owned by CDDFRS | CDDFRA and CDDFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation |

| | | | | | |
|----|---|-------------|-----------|---------------------|---|
| | Statistics harmonised standard and publish this data. | | | | |
| 31 | By 1 December 2024, the Home Office should collect and publish experimental statistics on public complaints and conduct matters in relation to FRS staff, similar to that which it currently publishes on police forces in England and Wales. | Home Office | 1 Dec 24 | Not owned by CDDFRS | CDDFRA and CDDFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation |
| | Improving Diversity | | | | |
| 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. | CDDFRS | 1 June 23 | Ongoing | April 23 This is addressed through the People Strategy, ED&I Strategy, Strategic Workforce Plan & Talent Management Strategy. Succession planning arrangements are in place which include Team plans. Direct entry opportunities will be considered at SM level once the current programme provides ROI information and deliverables. Direct entry at CFO level has been facilitated. |
| 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. | CDDFRS | 1 Aug 23 | Complete | April 23 Development plans are available and in place to align green book / non operational colleagues the same training opportunities as uniformed staff which is relevant to their role |
| | Core Code of Ethics | | | | |
| 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. | CDDFRS | Immediate | Complete | |

| | The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England | | | | |
|----|---|------------|------------------------|---------------------|---|
| 35 | By the end of this Parliament, the Government should consider the findings and recommendations in this report when refreshing the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England. | Government | End of this parliament | Not owned by CDDFRS | CDDFRA and CDDFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation |

Dashboard of Recommendations

| | |
|---------------------------------|----|
| Total Number of Recommendations | 35 |
|---------------------------------|----|

Owner Breakdown

| | |
|-------------------------------|----|
| CDDFRS | 19 |
| Fire Standards Board | 3 |
| Government | 2 |
| Home Office | 7 |
| National Employers, LGA, NFCC | 1 |
| Police | 1 |
| NFCC | 2 |

CDDFRS Progress

| | |
|-------------|----|
| Complete | 10 |
| Ongoing | 7 |
| Not Started | 2 |

Version Control

| Number | Date Created / Updated | Review Date (HRC) |
|--------|------------------------|-------------------|
| 01 | April 2023 | 16/05/2023 |
| | | |

