



6th July 2022

Dear Chief Fire Officers, Chairs of Fire and Rescue Authorities, and Partners,

Criminal Record Checks – Legislative Change

I am writing to you on the vital matter of improving criminal record checks on fire and rescue authority employees, to urge action in the interests of safeguarding our services and our communities.

Appropriate criminal records checks are crucial to allow our fire and rescue services to understand and mitigate risk, to protect colleagues and the public, and to support high standards of integrity.

For that reason, I am pleased to inform you that from today (6th July) all fire and rescue authority (FRA) employees are eligible for Standard Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. This is due to the inclusion of FRA employees in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (Exceptions) Order 1975. This new eligibility augments existing access to Basic DBS checks for all FRA employees and Enhanced DBS checks with a check of the relevant adults' or children's barred list for those employees who undertake certain activities.

I am also pleased that the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) has produced guidance on use of DBS checks in fire and rescue services and related matters. The guidance, available on the safeguarding pages of UKFRS.com, provides information regarding:

- DBS eligibility, drafted with the support of DBS, to assist in determining the level of DBS check that may be appropriate for individuals undertaking various roles;
- Guidance and a framework for conducting a risk assessment of an individual with information found on their DBS certificate; and
- Managing allegations guidance in relation to concerns of harm relating to FRA employees.

The guidance clearly indicates firefighters' eligibility for standard DBS criminal record checks or for enhanced DBS checks (with a check of the relevant barred list) if undertaking any other duties that would bring their role into regulated activity. This applies whether the firefighter is full time, apprentice, or on-call and applies whether someone is a new or existing employee. I expect services to make proper use of this eligibility.

From this guidance, the Safeguarding Fire Standard and the National Framework, the expectation on fire and rescue services is clear. You must have appropriate arrangements in place in order to comply with these expectations.

I strongly encourage you to engage with this guidance and the additional implementation support being provided by NFCC and DBS via a series of workshops, details of which will be communicated by NFCC shortly.

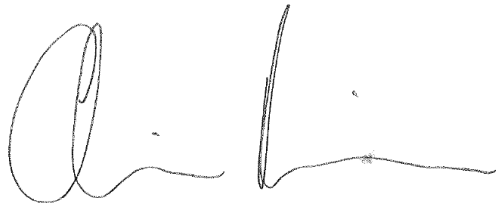
Further, the recent recommendations from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary & Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) relating to background checks reinforce the importance of having appropriate measures in place.

I am delighted that we are meeting an HMICFRS recommendation by creating new eligibility for Standard DBS Checks. I expect everyone in the fire sector to take similarly prompt action following the HMICFRS Culture and Values Spotlight report.

Another key HMICFRS recommendation was that appropriate DBS check requests were submitted for existing staff, new staff and volunteers. I would strongly encourage you to use the eligibility, guidance and workshops to support your work towards this recommendation and I understand that HMICFRS have already started monitoring progress against their recommendations.

We all want to see consistently high standards of integrity in our fire and rescue services. To that end, I would welcome your ongoing support in ensuring that all fire and rescue services are making proper use of criminal records checks.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Philp', written in a cursive style.

Rt Hon Chris Philp MP
Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire