

Meeting: Fire Services Management Committee

Date: 6 March 2023



Fire Service Culture

Purpose of report

For direction.

Summary

This report outlines a number of media reports highlighting issues with the culture within the fire service over the last few months. It talks about LGA work so far and proposals for future work.

Is this report confidential? No

Recommendations

That Members comment on the issues highlighted within the paper, including the proposals for further work in paragraph 35.

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Fire Service Culture



Introduction

1. There have been a number of recent media reports as well as inspection findings that have shone a light on the culture of the fire and rescue service, and in particular the actions of some employees within it. 'People' issues have been a priority for the Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC) for the last few years and this paper explores the issues and suggests a number of activities for the LGA to support our member authorities.

Background

2. London Fire Brigade, Dorset and Wiltshire FRS and South Wales FRS have all been the subject of recent media stories regarding their culture and the behaviour of some firefighters.
3. In [London's independent culture review](#), conducted by Nazir Afzal, it was concluded that the service was "institutionally racist and misogynist" due to the behaviour uncovered during the review. There were a range of other issues highlighted in the review, including the harassment and bullying suffered by some employees within watches, poor managerial and HR practices and a perceived gap between leadership and on the ground amongst others. There were 23 recommendations within the report and the Commissioner has fully accepted these. London has now entered HMICFRS's enhanced monitoring process called "Engage".
4. The [first media story on Dorset and Wiltshire](#) FRS outlined the poor behaviour of some employees including sexual harassment and sharing of inappropriate photos via WhatsApp groups. Following the media report the FRS is commissioning an independent investigation and providing all female staff with the opportunity to speak to an independent organisation. Following this story there was [a further media report](#) on the behaviour of a former Assistant Chief Fire Officer within the service, who was investigated internally and found to have committed gross misconduct but, given the length and complexities of the investigation against him, he was able to retire before he could be dismissed.
5. [Two South Wales FRS employees](#) have been found to have sexually harassed and abused women. The service will now be seeking an independent review and has had its [White Ribbon](#) accreditation suspended, pending a review.
6. There have been other media reports about the culture and behaviour within services including a recent File on 4 programme called "Firefighters on trial" as well as other stories from ITV.

HMICFRS

7. Other issues with culture, values and people have been flagged through the inspection process. Gloucestershire FRS has entered the HMICFRS Engage process. This was due to issues around its people pillar results. It was graded “Inadequate” and entered Engage due to difficulties with embedding its values and promoting a positive workplace culture as well as not improving understanding and awareness of the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and not removing barriers to embedding EDI in the service.
8. More recently in the third round of inspection North Yorkshire received an “inadequate” judgement under the people pillar. Several services have also received grades of “Requires Improvement” under the people pillar during Round 2 of inspection:
 - Avon
 - Buckinghamshire
 - Cornwall
 - Cumbria
 - Derbyshire
 - Devon and Somerset
 - East Sussex
 - Essex
 - Hampshire and the Isle of Wight
 - Hereford and Worcester
 - Lincolnshire
 - London
 - Norfolk
 - Northamptonshire
 - Northumberland
 - Staffordshire
 - Surrey
 - Warwickshire
 - West Sussex
9. **Appendix A** outlines the results under each question for the people pillar for the FRSs who received “Requires Improvement” judgements. There were also services that received “Good” overall for people but still scored “Requires Improvement” on one or more of the questions.

10. The inspectorate has now been asked to carry out a spotlight report on values and culture in the fire service. The report will comment on:
 - The values and culture;
 - Bullying, harassment and discrimination; and
 - Examples of promising and innovative practices we have established in respect of values and culture.
11. The spotlight report is expected to be published at the end of March. The inspectorate wrote to all Chief Fire Officers on 7 February to formally request that they share information on any allegations that call into question the culture and values of fire and rescue services, with a deadline of 14 February.
12. Andy Cooke, His Majesty's Chief Inspector, will be speaking at the LGA's Annual Fire Conference and has been asked to outline the findings from Round 2 of inspection and State of Fire with a particular focus on people.

LGA

13. The LGA is committed to ensuring that the sector has an inclusive and welcoming culture, underpinned by the Core Code of Ethics and associated standards, as outlined in Fit for the Future.
14. The LGA's policy work around people, including values and culture has mainly been focussed on the Diversity and Inclusion Member Champions Network. The Network is chaired by the Equalities Advocate for the Board, Cllr Jane Hugo from Lancashire.
15. The Network aims to provide training, case studies and opportunities to discuss issues around EDI within a safe space. We have commissioned external training providers for sessions around scrutiny and member's governance role, as well as sessions on allyship and scenario-based exercises. We have also held more informal sessions with case studies and speakers from FRAs and the inspectorate.
16. There are a number of FRAs who do not have representation on the Network. In some cases this is because previous representatives have moved on from the role, the membership of the group could therefore benefit from a refresh to ensure that we have representation from across the sector. The next Champions Network meetings are scheduled for 22 March and 9 June 2023. We have three meetings per political cycle.
17. We have also included EDI as a key part of the Leadership Essentials Programme, highlighting good practice and exploring Member's governance and leadership role in this area in particular.
18. In May 2021, working with the NFCC and the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, we also produced the Core Code of Ethics and associated guidance. The partnership continues its work to ensure the Core Code is adopted and, importantly, embedded within each FRS. A number of workshops have been held with FRS EDI leads to ensure learning is shared and support offered. A Workplace page has also been set up through the NFCC so sharing of learning can continue in between formal initiatives. A Code of Ethics Fire Standard to underpin the Core Code

has also been produced. The partnership will also be running a workshop at the LGA's Annual Fire Conference on embedding the Core Code.

19. We also have a clear sector-led improvement offer within this area, with the [Fire and rescue service equality framework](#) and peer challenge. As members will be aware from previous discussions, we do not receive any funding from the Home Office to undertake a specific programme of sector-led improvement activity for fire and rescue authorities. We have engaged with the Home Office on this at a high level and plan further engagement.

NFCC

20. Mark Hardingham has said that he is “appalled by the recent reports into behaviour and culture in some fire and rescue services”. He also wrote an article in the FIRE magazine in late 2022 setting out on behalf of Chief Fire Officers and NFCC members his views on an Inclusive Fire and Rescue Service culture www.fire-magazine.com/an-inclusive-fire-and-rescue-service-culture-nfcc-chair-mark-hardingham.
21. The NFCC will be holding a multi-stakeholder culture and inclusion conference on the 27 and 28 March Events (www.nationalfirechiefs.org.uk) with attendance from across every fire and rescue service and partners from both inside and outside of the fire and rescue sector, including the LGA. NFCC will use the event to further inform the action plan currently in place.
22. In recent years NFCC has worked with others to ensure a range of products are available for every fire and rescue service to use and continuously improve the inclusive culture of every workplace. These products have been derived from national standards, and in particular those national fire standards for the Core Code of Ethics from 2021/22, and Leadership x 2 issued in 2023.
23. NFCC has leadership programmes at both Executive and Supervisory level, that the LGA and Home Office have contributed to and has recently started the process to establish a Middle Managers programme. These programmes have equality and inclusion running through them as a consistent theme. Further NFCC products are available in the following areas – each of which support culture and inclusion:
 - Recruitment Hub
 - Talent Management Framework
 - Maturity Models
 - Equality of Access Tools
 - Core Code of Ethics (LGA, NFCC, APCC)
 - Model Policies
 - EDI Guidance
 - Coaching and Mentoring Toolkit
 - Strategic Masterclasses

- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion – Lunch and Learn CPD events
24. Alongside this work which was already underway, NFCC are building our plans for 2023/24 and this includes increasing our work into the following areas:
- Creating a new combined Culture, People and Leadership committee – led by CFO Rob McDougall, with CFO Wayne Bowcock and CFO Kathryn Billing leading for NFCC on Leadership and EDI respectively
 - Creating a 5 year People, Culture and Leadership workplan – this will include tangible products NFCC can produce alongside sharing good practice from FRS and HMICFRS inspections
 - Producing EDI Annual Report for publication this financial year
 - Facilitating Maturity Models and Core Code of Ethics workshops alongside the rest of the partnership (LGA, NFCC, APCC)Producing the NFCC, Firefighters Charity and Nottingham Trent University Health and Wellbeing Report – to be launched next month
 - Delivering more EDI Lunch and Learn events
 - Facilitating EqIA training to services
 - Appointing a new lead Culture Officer and an EDI Specialist to work in the NFCC to support the programme
25. The NFCC is committed to working alongside LGA and other partners to lead the culture change that is necessary across the fire and rescue service. As well as tackling damaging cultures, we intend to also build on the great work already underway across all FRS and in local communities.

National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services (NJC)

26. The kind of issues raised in the report were already of concern to the NJC. The NJC set up an independently chaired UK-wide Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG) undertaking a comprehensive piece of work in 2017. The IFSG engaged directly with fire and rescue services and their employees (through surveys, workshops and focus groups) to consider equality, diversity, cultural and behavioural issues with the purpose of developing improvement strategies which could be supported across the board and used at local level to deliver improvement. The group remains unique in the fire service in that it comprises National Employer, senior manager (NFCC) and employee representatives (FBU, FOA and FRSA).
27. As part of that work, it issued a number of [improvement strategies as well as guidance on issues such as the personal use of social media](#). The strategies received very wide support from FRSs who indicated in response the [actions each intended to take](#) and expected outcomes. The group was therefore disappointed to see HMICFRS identify the same issues and concerns sometime later as part of its inspection regime. An already planned [follow up](#) survey of FRSs along with further employee focus groups

and mixed workshops confirmed that while there had been some progress in utilising the improvement strategies FRAs and FRSs still had work to do.

28. The IFSG also worked with the Home Office in connection with a retained duty system recruitment campaign. Its most recent focus has been on seeking engagement with HMICFRS in order to inform next steps for the group.

Leadership and Governance role of members

29. It is clear that the issues around culture, speak to the wider leadership and governance role of members, including member's role in setting expectations, priorities, representing the community within their fire services and holding Chief Fire Officers to account for the delivery of services. Ensuring that services are fit for purpose in how staff are treated and the culture that they are working within is inclusive is therefore critical to member's role and the running of the service in general.
30. Members hold officers to account for the delivery of these services and officers provide assurance of what is being delivered through appropriate evidence. Equality, diversity and inclusion therefore can be understood as central within this context, with both chief fire officers and members playing a role in driving change forwards at a local level.

Implications for Wales

31. Fire and rescue related policy is a devolved matter and much of the Committee's work will focus on changes for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England, with the Welsh Local Government Association leading on lobbying for Welsh Fire and Rescue Authorities.

Financial Implications

32. We are currently finalising budgets for the next financial year therefore we can include considerations of further work within those discussions.

Equalities implications

33. The media reports and poor behaviour highlighted, show a number of troubling issues from an EDI perspective, where people within the workforce have been harassed, discriminated against, bullied or belittled on account of their protected characteristics. Equally there have been instances highlighted of inappropriate behaviour towards members of the public whilst conducting fire service business. Though this may be perpetrated by a small number of individuals the potential impact on the service is significant.
34. The next steps set out in this report aim to support fire and rescue authorities in their role.

Next steps

35. Members are asked to discuss the issues highlighted in the report and proposals for further work on this issue, including:

- A free, one-day conference for members looking at their governance and leadership role in EDI, alongside their employer role. The programme would be worked on jointly with the Workforce team and with input from the Equalities Advocate. It would be a mix between discussion and practical training sessions.
- Refresh and renew the membership and remit of the EDI Champions Network.
- Look at the wider programme of governance and leadership training for leaders in the service.
- Engage with the NFCC on the development of their action plan.
- Engage with the IFSG once its next steps are identified as well as on potentially reviewing its social media guidance.
- Prepare media lines to respond to any inquiries the LGA may receive around fire service culture.
- As relevant consider the employment law and related legal framework in which fire authorities act.
- Continue to engage with the Home Office on sector-led support and wider issues around culture.

Appendix A

FRA	People Pillar questions and grade			
	How well does the FRS promote its values and culture?	How well does the FRS get the right people with the right skills?	How well does the FRS ensure fairness and promote diversity?	How well does the FRS manage performance and develop leaders?
Avon	Good	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement
Buckinghamshire	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement
Cornwall	Good	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement
Cumbria	Requires Improvement	Inadequate	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement
Devon and Somerset	Requires Improvement	Good	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement
East Sussex	Requires Improvement	Good	Requires Improvement	Good
Essex	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement
Gloucestershire	Inadequate	Requires Improvement	Inadequate	Requires Improvement
Hampshire and the Isle of Wight	Requires Improvement	Good	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement
Hereford and Worcester	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement
Lincolnshire	Good	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement

London	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement
Norfolk	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement
North Yorkshire	Requires Improvement	Inadequate	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement
Northamptonshire	Requires Improvement	Good	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement
Northumberland	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement
Staffordshire	Requires Improvement	Good	Requires Improvement	Good
Surrey	Good	Good	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement
Warwickshire	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement
West Sussex	Requires Improvement	Good	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement