

To: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority

From: Head of Safeguarding – Donna Bentley

Presenting officer: Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) - Jon Anderson
Telephone: 07711 444201
jon.anderson@cambsfire.gov.uk

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Safeguarding Update

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the safeguarding arrangements within Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS). It reflects on the significant journey made in terms of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) safeguarding self-assessment findings and our response to legislative amendments to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions Order).
- 1.2 This report will provide further assurance relating to our commitment to the provisions of the Children Act 1989 and Care Act 2014, NFCC Safeguarding Standards (January 2022) and the relevant recommendations of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) spotlight report on culture in March 2023 (sixteen recommendations have defined safeguarding themes).

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Fire Authority is asked to note the contents of this report and in particular the progress to date and continued commitment to working towards a safeguarding culture and good practice throughout the organisation.

3. Risk Assessment

- 3.1 **Political** – the requirement to comply with the legal and moral responsibilities of a fire and rescue service under both the Children Act 1989 and Care Act 2014 are above any politics. All political parties within the Authority must continue to work together to ensure CFRS remains compliant whilst maintaining the highest of standards.
- 3.2 **Economic** – the cost of implementing the recommendations for example, Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks, has increased but is not prohibitive.

- 3.3 **Social** - good practice in safeguarding duties further enhances health and safety, helps us maintain a good culture and meet our vision and values for both colleagues and the communities we serve.
- 3.4 **Legal** - safeguarding duties are broad and included within a huge variety of government acts and legislation including but not limited to, those pertaining to charities, children and social work, counter terrorism and security, human rights, mental capacity, modern slavery, serious violence and the rehabilitation of offenders.

4. Equality Impact Assessment

- 4.1 CFRS has considered whether individuals with protected characteristics will be disadvantaged by the recommendations within the self-assessment mentioned at Paragraph 2.1.1 above. Due regard has also been given to whether there was an impact on people who identify as being part of each of the following protected groups as defined within the Equality Act 2010:

Race	N	Religion or belief	N
Sex	N	Gender reassignment	N
Age	N	Pregnancy & maternity	N
Disability	N	Marriage and Civil Partnership	N
Sexual orientation	N		

5. Background

- 5.1 More than ever, safeguarding within the fire and rescue sector has been a core focus area of modern day agendas across prevention, protection and response. As key members of 'Safeguarding Boards', we strive to provide assurance around safeguarding practices within our organisation and as a partner.
- 5.2 The NFCC has supported services over recent years and provided sector specific guidance and a self-assessment framework to audit and report against key duties and responsibilities; CFRS has been keen to ensure that such guidance is incorporated as 'business as usual' at the earliest opportunity.

6. Governance

- 6.1 Safeguarding is discussed within quarterly meetings attended by the Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Head of People and Head of Safeguarding. The purpose of these meetings is to review the options available that support the recommendations within the safeguarding self-assessment and to ensure efficient and effective practice.

7. Audit - NFCC Safeguarding Self-Assessment Update

- 7.1 To enable an adaptive approach the self-assessment toolkit is divided into nine separate categories and then further divided into subsections. When reviewed, a status is assigned allowing progress to be tracked:

Rating	Status	Comment
Red	High priority	Little evidence that this has been actioned
Amber	Actions in place	What they are, actions currently on-going to ensure completion
Green	Action is complete	

- 7.2 In February 2022, the first ever CFRS safeguarding self-assessment evidenced the following status in terms of the subsections;

Red	6
Amber	38
Green	17

- 7.3 These results led to the creation of a working group in order to ensure key deliverables were actioned in the most efficient and effective manner. A further review was completed by the Head of Safeguarding in January 2024 and the results can be seen in the table below:

Category	No. of subsections	Red	Amber	Green
1 Senior management commitment to the importance of safeguarding	8	0	0	8
2 Clear statement of Service responsibilities	9	0	2	7
3 There is a clear line of accountability within the Service for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and adults	5	0	4	1
4 Service development considers the need to safeguard and promote welfare of children and adults at risk	3	0	1	2
5 The Service has regular training, supervision and appraisal of staff with regard to safeguarding children and adults at risk	8	1	5	2
6 Safer Recruitment and Managing Allegations	11	0	1	10
7 There is effective inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and adults at risk.	7	0	2	5
8 Information Sharing	5	0	2	3
9 Working with children and adults at risk	6	1	3	2
Total	61	2	20	40

- 7.4 Over the last two years there have been significant improvements with the review evidencing substantial shifts from red to amber and amber to green. The audit has also evidenced a clear plan of what needs to be achieved in order to demonstrate continuous improvement. The establishment of the safeguarding quarterly meetings has created an opportunity for all

contributors to meet regularly to share progress on their areas of responsibility and for the Head of Safeguarding to offer advice and guidance.

- 7.5 In July 2023 there was a change in legislation to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) (England and Wales) Order 2023 enabling fire and rescue authority employers to require a minimum of a standard DBS check of all employees. The senior leadership team at CFRS embraced this change, demonstrating a commitment to safer recruitment practices and agreed to standard DBS checks (as a minimum) for all its employees.
- 7.6 Furthermore, CFRS has incorporated into everyday practice the numerous guidance documents made available to fire and rescue services from the NFCC in terms of good safeguarding practice for example, Managing Allegations, Positive Disclosure Risk Assessment Guidance and Joint Guidance on DBS Eligibility Checks.
- 7.7 Guidance and policies have also been produced and communicated to all colleagues. Thematic briefings covering a wide range of key safeguarding agendas have also been created.
- 7.8 A new e-learning sector-specific training package has been made available as mandatory training for all colleagues and volunteers. As the training is sector specific it enables a greater understanding and awareness.

8. Summary and Next Steps

- 8.1 There has been a proactive and significant response to the findings of the last audit and since the start of collaboration between CFRS and Essex County Fire and Rescue Service Safeguarding Teams. Internally the collaboration between the Safeguarding Team and the People Group has been integral in coordinating that progress and CFRS can now demonstrate good practice in many areas. In addition to the recommendations made within the self-assessment audit and when considering the ever-growing number of government policies and agendas that place statutory duties on our sector, it is anticipated that future HMICFRS inspections will have a strong focus on how the sector satisfies their safeguarding responsibilities. The Head of Safeguarding is confident that solid progress has been made and that future inspections will highlight good practice within CFRS.
- 8.2 When reflecting upon the significant number of legal and moral duties, it is recommended that the Service broadens its understanding of both counter terrorism and in particular the PREVENT Agenda, as well as statutory duties contained within the Serious Violence Duty. Training in these areas will remain the main area of concentration for the next 12 months and additional training and guidance will ensure learning of the key duties mentioned above. Over the past 12 months the Service has promoted guidance on a number of key themes, including but not limited to domestic abuse, hoarding and modern

day slavery. These key themes are imperative in evidencing the organisations broader understanding of the safeguarding agenda and is a reflection of effective practice in both Local Authority Audits and NFCC Professional Standards.

- 8.3 As we look ahead, data reporting is critical for the identification of intelligence-based risk and how best risk can be mitigated. Quarterly meetings for safeguarding are already in place. The benefits of interrogating the substantial information available to our organisation not only from the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub but other key stakeholders is imperative when considering future practice.
- 8.4 Continuation of promoting and effectively communicating our commitment to safeguarding across the whole organisation will ensure awareness is raised of both the legal and moral obligations we must satisfy to not only our partners but communities, staff, volunteers and those that govern us.

Source Documents

None