Agenda Item: 9

TO: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority

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HIGHLIGHT REPORT - CAMBRIDGESHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SURVEY 2024

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the Fire Authority with a highlight report of the Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS) employee engagement survey carried out during October 2024 along with next steps.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Authority is asked to;

2.1.1 review and comment on the results of the employee engagement survey, detailed in Paragraph 6,
2.1.2 review and comment on the Service's plan in terms of next steps, detailed in Paragraph 9,
2.1.3 agree to receive an update report on progress against the next steps, detailed in Paragraph 9, in six months time.

3. Risk Assessment

3.1 **Political** – maintaining positive employee engagement is an objective in our current Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) and is a reflection of the culture of our organisation. There is much comment about culture within fire and rescue services nationally and it is an area of focus for His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services.

3.2 **Economic** – although there is a cost associated with utilising an external supplier for our engagement survey, it provides an independent assessment and gives our employees confidence their responses will be anonymous. It also allows us to benchmark against other fire and rescue services and other industries.

3.3 **Social** – we want to be an inclusive employer of choice for people, where they can come into work and be themselves. Our survey allows us to seek views anonymously on how people feel about working here, what they find positive

(as it is important we understand this and continue doing this) and what they would change to further improve life at work. It is important that we acknowledge viewpoints and listen and make changes where we can to build trust.

4. Equality Impact Assessment

4.1 An equality impact assessment was carried out prior to the survey going out. The survey was simple to understand and laid out in a user-friendly way for mobile phones and other devices. We asked employees to provide information on protected characteristics so we can further analyse if any protected characteristic is feeling particularly positive or negative about each question.

5. Background

5.1 Every two years since 2017, CFRS has used an external supplier to carry out an employee engagement survey. Each year we compare results with the previous year's scores to track our progress. In 2022 we used a new supplier who work with other fire and rescue services, so we have been able to benchmark our scores against others in the sector. We also have access to all sector benchmarks.

5.2 The survey is heavily promoted to all colleagues in every role, multiple times throughout the six weeks it remains open. The external company emails those who have not responded with a weekly reminder.

5.3 The majority of survey questions remain constant so we can compare scores, however, we also add some additional questions relevant to our Service at the time. These cannot be benchmarked but help us evaluate specific work, confirm if an area needs improvement or dive deeper into an area to get a better understanding of how people feel.

5.4 The survey uses mainly multiple-choice questions however some free text responses are sought to help provide a deeper understanding. We have access to the (anonymised) comments to enable us to understand people's thoughts better and guide the next steps.

5.5 A representative of the external company presented the 2024 survey findings to the strategic leadership team (SLT) in December and they also presented to colleagues at the following 'Ask SLT' session. The presentation has also been made available to all colleagues.

6. Survey Findings

6.1 The survey had a response rate of 56% (352 out of 633 employees) which, although slightly down on last time, is currently considered a good response rate for an employee survey compared to other organisations.

6.2 Fifty-eight percent trust that survey results will be considered by SLT in future decision making; this is up 17 points from 2022, is 22 points above the fire

sector average and indicates that more colleagues trust SLT will listen and act.

6.3 We asked colleagues to describe the culture at CFRS. Most frequently used words were *welcoming, friendly, supportive, inclusive, positive, open, respectful,* and *professional*. Our values are welcoming, respectful, and professional and it was pleasing to see these reflected in how people describe our culture.

6.4 Our overall employee engagement score is 84% which is 7 points higher than 2022 and 2 points higher than the fire sector average.

6.5 Colleague experience has become more positive since 2022 in most areas with highest increases in leadership, enablement and engagement.

6.6 Seventy-five percent of colleagues believe that CFRS has a positive culture, which is a 7-point improvement from 2022.

6.7 The highest performing areas were;

- I care about the future of CFRS – 94% agreed or strongly agreed (positive),
- I know how to access support for mental health and wellbeing – 93% positive,
- My team works well together - 91% positive,
- I know where to go if I am not confident to deal with something myself around inappropriate behaviour – 89% positive.

6.8 The areas scoring highest compared to fire sector averages (points different in brackets) were;

- Generally, people work well together across all groups – 79% positive (+27),
- I trust that the results of this survey will be considered in future decision making – 58% (+22),
- I value the conversations I have with my line manager – 74% (+16),
- Everyone is welcome in the Service regardless of individual differences – 84% (+11),
- I can comfortably cope with my workload - 72% (+8).

6.9 When asked what the best thing is about working for CFRS, the most common key themes were around;

- people and teamwork,
- values and culture,
- work satisfaction.

6.10 Other key results about CFRS as an employer or how people feel about working at CFRS include;

Statement	% agree/strongly agree	+/- fire sector average	+/- all sectors average
I am proud to work for CFRS	88%	+2	+10
I care about the future of CFRS	94%	0	+6
I would recommend CFRS as a great place to work	78%	+7	+7
I would still like to be working at CFRS in two years' time	81%	+2	+9
I am motivated to give my best	83%	-	+4
I am satisfied with CFRS as an employer	82%	n/a	n/a

6.11 Wellbeing related questions scored positively;

- I feel supported with my physical and mental health at work – 75% agreed,
- I feel enabled to manage my wellbeing at work – 78% agreed,
- I can comfortably cope with my workload – 72% agreed,
- I am able to strike the right balance between my work and home life - 70% agreed,
- I know how to access support for mental health and wellbeing issues – 91% agreed.

6.12 Areas with lower satisfaction scores;

- Promotion processes are transparent – 32% agree, 38% neutral, 30% disagree,
- I have the opportunity to have my say about changes that will impact me before a decision is made – 40% agree, 28% neutral, 32% disagree. This was up 8 points from 2022 showing progress in this area is being made,
- I know how well CFRS is doing against its CRMP action plan – 46% agree, 28% neutral, 26% disagree (2 points down on 2022),
- The reasons for decisions that are made are explained openly – 53% agree, 18% neutral, 29% disagree (3 points down on 2022),
- I am confident to express my views about work related matters without fear of repercussions – 53% agree, 18% neutral, 29% disagree. An improvement of one point from 2022.

6.13 Colleagues were asked what one thing they would change to make the Service a better place to work. The free text comments were very varied, from points about specific processes or polices to more opportunities to mix with different groups/people. This is where further analysis is needed to pull out any themes with specific groups of employees.

6.14 Employees were asked if they had been on the receiving end of any behaviour amounting to misconduct in the past 12 months; 94% had not which is 20 points more positive than the all-sectors benchmark. Those that

responded they had were asked what the misconduct was, and the free text comments have been analysed to understand this further.

6.15 The following were the most improved areas from the 2022 survey;

- I feel secure in my job right now – 75% positive, +24 points from 2022,
- I value the one-to-one conversations I have with my line manager - 74% positive, +21 from 2022 (+16 on fire sector average),
- I know how the work I do contributes to the CRMP – 74% positive, +18,
- SLT acts with the best interests of the Service with the resources available – 62% positive, +18 from 2022,
- I trust that the results of this survey will be considered by SLT in future decision making – 58% positive, +17 from 2022.

6.16 Other areas of note;

- Eighty-eight percent of colleagues responded favourably to the question about their line manager treating them fairly and with respect with only 4% responding unfavourably. Although a high proportion responded positively, this was 2 points down on 2022,
- Seventy percent of employees agreed managers and leaders demonstrate the Service's values and behaviours. This is 14 points lower than 2022 and is an area for which we will conduct further analysis to see where in the Service agreement for this is less.

7. Key Highlights of our Response to the 2022 Employee Engagement Survey

7.1 Our survey results in 2022 were also largely positive. There were a few areas that stood out where a positive difference could be made. Two of these were frustrations with TRACS, our training recording system and TRiM, our process for managing colleague wellbeing particularly post a traumatic incident. Although these had been on the organisational radar as areas needing to improve, their priority was accelerated and a review was launched into both. Once reviewed, options were presented to SLT and recommendations were taken forward. A new trauma welfare support service went live in December 2024 and an updated TRACS system went live in January 2025.

7.2 Lower satisfaction with transparency of promotion processes was evident in the 2022 survey and since then we have introduced independent assessors to recruitment and promotion processes and improved the way we offer feedback.

7.3 As a result of the 2022 survey we were cognisant of the low levels of understanding how colleagues contribute to our (then) Integrated Risk Management Plan when we launched our new CRMP in 2024 and took steps to improve this, particularly with colleague groups showing the least understanding. This question saw a significant increase in the 2024 survey (Paragraph 6.15 above refers).

7.4 We held a women's development day in 2023 and used some of the findings from the 2022 survey as discussion topics to better understand the results for example, the results showed women were slightly less positive about speaking up to give their opinion so we explored the reasons for this. This helped shape the agenda and speakers for our development day in 2024.

7.5 We believe that the actions taken by SLT post the 2022 survey resulted in the pleasing increased score for the level of trust in SLT to listen and act on feedback from employee engagement surveys in the 2024 survey (Paragraphs 6.2 and 6.15 above refer).

8. Conclusions

8.1 The results of the 2024 employee engagement survey are extremely positive and demonstrate continual improvement in most topic areas. The Service compares favourably to the fire and rescue service benchmark in most areas and in terms of CFRS as an employer, scores well against the all-sector average.

8.2 The survey reveals some areas of lower satisfaction that we now need to fully understand and look to address.

8.3 The Service is also keen to understand why it is scoring well in some areas so it can continue to carry on doing what it is doing well, as this is equally as important as improving areas of lower satisfaction.

9. Next Steps

9.1 There is a lot of information to analyse in the results and free text comments. The Service will now;

- Take a deeper look at the results by employee group to see the areas specific to roles that could be improved,
- Take a deeper look at the results by employee group to see the areas specific to roles that are positive to understand what we need to keep doing to maintain a positive engagement score,
- Analyse the comments for all free text response questions, looking for themes to take forward to drive further improvement,
- Understand how the data can help current projects, for example, information about one-to-ones/appraisals, promotion process transparency, line manager training, reviews of processes,
- To use the data to help our recruitment messages, for example, how people feel about working for CFRS and our positive culture.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Source Documents	Location	Contact Officer
CFRS Employee Survey, Executive Highlights, People Insight. People Insight CFRS Survey Results Dashboard	Hinchingbrooke Cottage Brampton Road Huntingdon	Hayley Douglas Assistant Director Communication and Engagement 07747807433 hayley.douglas@cambsfire.gov.uk