

Agenda Item: 12

TO: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority

FROM: Head of People - Laura Hutchcraft

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UPDATE ON CULTURE RELATED WORK AT CAMBRIDGESHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE AND UPDATE ON STRUCTURE OF SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Fire Authority on the culture related work we have undertaken and to update on the structure of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 The Authority is asked to note the contents of this report and make comment as they deem appropriate.

3. Risk Assessment

- 3.1 **Political** – His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Standards of Behaviour: The Handling of Misconduct in Fire and Rescue Service’s report, published on 1 August 2024 follows the HMICFRS’s spotlight report on culture across the sector and other independent culture reviews.

- 3.1.1 Our 2023 HMICFRS inspection focused on culture and it is now mandated across the sector to disclose any cases related to culture that are current or within 12 months, directly to HMICFRS.

- 3.2 **Economic** – Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS) must ensure a positive workplace culture exists, to avoid investigation time (both internal and outsourced), high employee turnover and legal claims.

- 3.3 **Social** - by reviewing the report and implementing recommendations we can continue to demonstrate improvement towards our vision and values. We also align to our commitments in the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP)

2024/29 to improve our positive and inclusive culture making us an employer of choice.

3.4 **Legal** – compliance with our existing Code of Conduct, which was updated in October 2021 to reference the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Core Code of Ethics fire standard, outlines our culture in the expected behaviours for colleagues and is written into all contracts of employment.

3.4.1 The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from harassment or less favourable treatment in the workplace related to their protected characteristics. A strong culture of good conduct will ensure compliance with the law.

3.4.2 The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England requires that “fire and rescue authorities must give due regard to reports and recommendations made by HMICFRS and – if recommendations are made – prepare, update and regularly publish an action plan detailing how the recommendations are being actioned.” Therefore, there is a requirement to action these recommendations.

3.5 There is therefore significant political, social and legal risk in failing to demonstrate that we have duly considered these reports against our current practices.

4. **Background**

4.1 Ensuring a positive work culture has been a strategic focus in the Service for the last 10 years. In our current CRMP we have an organisational objective to maintain and improve our organisational culture. Through our review of risks and opportunities we have identified the following areas of strategic focus under ‘People’;

- maintain and improve our positive and inclusive organisational culture and employee engagement and make us an employer of choice. This includes looking at how we communicate and facilitating more opportunities for colleagues from across different areas of the Service to engage with each other.
- review how we manage, develop and diversify our people and our talent from within our Service, helping people to reach their full potential and supporting those who aspire to progress as leaders. This includes development pathways and programmes, talent management and succession planning.
- review our processes for recruitment and progression, including our community engagement activity, to ensure they are accessible to people from a range of backgrounds and that they enable us to improve diversity over time, to greater reflect the communities we serve.
- review our mechanisms for the management of safeguarding to protect our people and communities.

- review our processes and means for supporting the health and wellbeing of our people.

5. Culture Work

- 5.1 Culture continues to be heavily scrutinised at national level for fire and rescue services and we continue to work towards sustaining and improving our own organisational culture. This includes reinforcing our values through leadership behaviour and systems and proactively addressing where behaviours do not meet our values and expectations. Sustaining a strong, values-aligned culture is central to our work to attract and retain talent and our ability to mitigate reputational risk and deliver on our strategic objectives.
- 5.2 With engagement from employees, we have recently updated our three core values to **Welcoming, Respectful** and **Professional**. These align heavily to the [NFCC Core Code of Ethics](#) and our Code of Conduct for employees and Members respectively. We expect all colleagues and Fire Authority Members to consistently demonstrate these values in their behaviour to each other and to all members of the public.
- 5.3 We carry out an employee engagement survey every two years and ask questions that help us understand how our own employees perceive our culture and how they feel about working at CFRS. Seventy-five per cent of colleagues agreed CFRS has a positive culture, which was up 7 points from the previous survey, and the most repeated words to describe the culture at CFRS were welcoming, inclusive, friendly, supportive and positive. Eighty-four per cent of employees agreed everyone is welcome regardless of differences, which is 11 points higher than the fire and rescue service benchmark and 78% of respondents would recommend CFRS as a great place to work, 14 points up from the previous survey. Seven per cent of respondents had been on the receiving end of some form of misconduct by others in the past 12 months. Eighty-five per cent of managers agreed they felt comfortable having performance or behaviour conversations with their direct reports and 80% of employees feel able to raise at the time any inappropriate or offensive behaviour.
- 5.4 On 1 August 2024, HMIFRS published its report entitled Standards of Behaviour - The Handling of Misconduct in Fire and Rescue Services. The HMICFRS report followed a report in 2023 highlighting issues of unacceptable behaviour and culture. The 2024 report made 17 recommendations for fire and rescue services and a copy of our published action plan is available here; [HMICFRS Standards of Behaviour](#)
- 5.5 To summarise, we have completed 11 of the actions, have four in progress and for two of the actions we are awaiting further information and guidance nationally.

Outstanding Action	Update
Chief fire officers should make sure a programme of training is in place for all supervisors and managers on how to manage staff performance and welfare and how to raise an issue.	We are working on a training programme in conjunction with Learning and Organisational Development which will launch in 2026. All employees are aware of the People Team and stations have an assigned partner to talk through concerns.
Chief fire officers should introduce a case management system if they don't already have one. The case management system should allow data to be produced that will help them to better understand and oversee misconduct cases in their services.	We recently migrated our HR system to the cloud and are now exploring a case management system. We are mapping out the requirements before creation and implementation.
Chief fire officers should review the training their services provide for supervisors and managers who investigate misconduct issues at all levels.	We have scheduled ACAS training and will supplement this with bespoke misconduct training facilitated by the People Team. A member of the People Team supports all misconduct cases, so appropriate support is provided.
Fire and rescue authorities and chief fire officers should make sure all service managers and members of fire and rescue authorities who hear appeals receive appropriate training. Chief fire officers should make sure services have a consistent approach to hearing appeals.	Appeal training is scheduled In July for those who undertake appeals. A member of the People Team supports all appeals, so appropriate support is provided.

- 5.6 To provide assurance to the Fire Authority, on 6 May 2025, RSM (internal auditors) completed an audit which reviewed our misconduct processes and found reasonable assurance.
- 5.7 The audit found that the controls surrounding misconduct processes are well-designed including a suite of policies, procedures, guidance and templates in relation to misconduct processes in place and accessible to employees. They noted that CFRS has a case file closing review meeting to review recommendations and lessons learnt for formal cases. In addition, a case review and learning outcome tracker is maintained on SharePoint to monitor implementation of recommendations and lessons learnt actions as relevant. Investigations training with ACAS (external party) is in place for line managers and investigating managers. RSM confirmed that CFRS has established the Professional Standards Board (PSB) for the discussing, monitoring and overall oversight of misconduct cases. They also noted that an overview of the current cases by type and date period is reported to the SLT Planning, Performance and Review and Authority meetings as part of the Notes for People - SLT Quarterly reports.
- 5.8 The audit recommended eight management actions, six of low priority and two medium priority which are;

- **A review and update of misconduct related policies.** CFRS has policies and processes in place, to provide clear guidance, ensure consistency, and support fair and transparent decision-making across the Service. We recognise the importance of ensuring these policies are compliant with legislation and are reviewed regularly. The CFRS People Team maintain a policy pipeline, which ensures that policies are created systematically, comply with legislative updates, and remain current and effective over time. We recognise that some of our policies remain legally compliant, but outdated, and therefore we are working to update these as a priority. The Head of People, People Manager, Monitoring Officer and Legal advisor and the People Partner – Culture meet bi-weekly to update progress on policies.
- **Consideration for the implementation of a case management system.** The People Team recently completed a project to move our HR system to the cloud. Now this has been successfully completed, we are looking at the additional modules which can be facilitated on the platform and are currently in the requirements gathering stage.

5.9 An action plan has been created, with completion dates and action owners assigned. The action plan will be reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

6. Learning and Organisational Development

- 6.1 We have started a two-year project that seeks to progress the work we have already completed aimed at improving all offerings that support personal and career development. This work will also contribute to areas of focus identified by HMICFRS in recent reports. We want all colleagues to have valuable conversations about their development to enable them to fulfil their potential. Initially this work starts with redefining our personal development review (PDR) conversations and the process that support this. These should support individual development and meet the Services performance and succession planning needs. Training will also be delivered to service managers to support them in successfully facilitating these conversations for us. We are also looking at career pathways and promotion processes ensuring these are clear, transparent and consistently applied. Finally, we will ensure there is robust governance with oversight of our workforce planning and talent management pool. We will do this by producing a clear strategy and take a more integrated approach to our current people planning arrangements. This will ensure we are effectively able to meet the needs of our workforce plans and strategic objectives.
- 6.2 We use NFCC development programmes tailored to the needs of our developing first line and middle leaders. These are supported by our Learning and Organisational Development Team and senior leaders to bring diversity of thoughts and role model our commitment to development.
- 6.3 We have developed a “focused development pathway” which provides an alternative development option for promotion to the station commander role.

We are running the second iteration of that pathway this year showing our commitment both to leadership and development and to innovative solutions to improve promotional pathways.

7. Recruitment and Community Engagement

- 7.1 Attraction initiatives from recruitment and the communication and engagement team have seen a significant increase in the number of On-Call candidates compared to 2023 and 2024, which has helped build a solid candidate pipeline, however applicants in February and March were below previous years.
- 7.2 Increasing the diversity of our workforce continues to be a key priority for the Recruitment and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team. We are currently engaged with an external company to conduct some focus groups in diverse communities to gather opinions and attitudes about cultural perceptions with fire service recruitment in their local community. One focus group has taken place so far and further workshops are being planned. Once a final report is received, we will implement the learning and adapt our attraction strategy accordingly.
- 7.3 We have recently launched our wholetime recruitment campaign, recruiting for a holding list, due to our succession planning predictions of requiring more wholetime employees next year. Applications go live from 14 July 2025, and we are ensuring our recruitment campaign is accessible to people from a range of backgrounds. Equality impact assessments will be completed for the different stages of the wholetime recruitment process to ensure that we are removing potential barriers within it.
- 7.4 A risk assurance review is being undertaken in our recruitment team, to review current recruitment processes and the function to understand the positive practices and to also identify opportunities for improvement.

8. Safeguarding

- 8.1 Fire and rescue service's eligibility to request DBS checks changed in July 2023. Due to the inclusion of fire and rescue authority employees in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (Exceptions) Order 1975; eligibility for a minimum of Standard Level of DBS check is available for all who work or volunteer for fire and rescue authorities.
- 8.2 The People Team, Recruitment Team and Safeguarding Team have ensured that CFRS has met the legislation by completing the relevant DBS check on existing employees and prospective employees. We are currently at 99% compliance rate, which is overseen by the PSB. We have also created an action plan to ensure that we meet the guidance of renewing all employees DBS every three years.
- 8.3 We have in place a collaborative partnership with Essex Fire and Rescue Service who provide us with safeguarding and peer support. This arrangement brings many benefits including an independent safeguarding

audit which has just been completed against the safeguarding fire standard. This audit highlights our progress over the last two years, gives us an action plan for improvement and demonstrates our commitment to protecting the most vulnerable in our communities.

9. Health and Wellbeing

- 9.1 Implementation of a new Occupational Health (OH) system has made significant efficiency improvements for both OH colleagues and for managers in the wider service. It has also enabled more transparency with referrals and improved data governance.
- 9.2 The implementation of Trauma Welfare Support (TWS) to replace the previous Trauma Incident Management (TRiM) process has been well received by colleagues across the Service and is delivering improved support to operational colleagues post traumatic incidents.
- 9.3 The addition of a psychological wellbeing advisor to provide counselling services in-house has continued to improve mental health support. The services are now more easily available to colleagues, with additional specialist external counselling still being available when required, although reliance on this has been considerably reduced.
- 9.4 The Service has continued to provide training and advice to all colleagues on issues such as menopause, fitness and health related issues. These have been delivered as bespoke training sessions, personal interventions and at 'know your numbers' events. These sessions will continue as they have been well received by colleagues.

10. Governance

10.1 People Excellence

10.1.1 The People Excellence quarterly meeting is chaired by the Head of People and enables the monitoring of achievement against the excellence statements as detailed below and CRMP People Excellence objectives. This also provides quarterly exception reporting to the Directors via the SLT meetings.

10.1.2 The statements under People Excellence are;

- we have a culture that embodies our values and expected behaviours,
- we listen and engage with our people, communities and our partners to improve what we do,
- we develop our people and encourage them to reach their potential,
- we continually improve the service we deliver.

10.1.3 People Excellence attendees also review, analyse and monitor data and metrics to identify any trends or any proactive work which is required. The digital team are producing a culture dashboard to support CFRS with better oversight of the data and trends.

10.2 Professional Standards Board (PSB)

- 10.2.1 In September 2024, CFRS established a PSB. The purpose of the PSB is to oversee all investigations of concerns raised within CFRS or from an external source (including, but not limited to grievances, disciplinaries, complaints and whistleblowing concerns that are values, behaviour and culture related) in order to learn lessons and implement organisational change where required to meet the high expectations of our employees in terms of culture and values. A paper was taken to the Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 15 January 2025, which provides further details.
- 10.2.2 In our April PSB meeting, Councillor Simone Taylor attended on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. She reported that the meeting offered reassurance to the Service and Fire Authority that misconduct and professional standards are being taken seriously at CFRS and are receiving oversight at the appropriate level.
- 10.2.3 A report will be presented at the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting in July 2025 to outline key trends and insights and a new lead Member will be requested.

11. Structure Changes

- 11.1 The appointment of the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive Officer in July 2024, triggered a review of structures within the SLT. An interim structure was established to allow the new Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive Officer time to assess individual and collective accountabilities.
- 11.2 The initial immediate change to the structure was driven by his appointment as Head of Paid Service meant he could no longer continue as the Authority's Section 151 Officer/Chief Financial Officer. This change led to a wider review of resilience arrangements in statutory officer roles, with deputy Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officers being nominated and approved by the Fire Authority in December 2024. The appointment of Ursula Bird as the Authority's Section 151 Officer/Chief Financial Officer, led to a formal review of the Head of Finance role to ensure the responsibilities were properly integrated. This review led to a formal review of grade and alignment with the Service's Assistant Director salary structures (excluding the operational response elements).
- 11.3 In addition to these arrangements, the appointment of a new Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive Officer has led to several appointments needing to be conducted in order to complete the SLT structure; the agreed structure is shown in Appendix 1. It is formed of the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive Officer and Directors (Principal Officer team). They are advised and supported by the Assistant Directors. The Assistant Director of People is the one post that remains temporary following the departure of the previous postholder in September 2024. The recruitment for this position is on-going

and it is envisaged that it will be concluded by mid-July to complete the broader SLT structure.

- 11.4 In addition to the SLT, the Head of Learning and Organisational Development currently attends SLT meetings as the Service continues to focus on its cultural journey. The role is vital in shaping how we develop our future leaders, identifying talent and succession planning for the Service. This interaction with the SLT is seen as critical to ensure alignment.

12. Conclusion

- 12.1 To summarise, the Service is doing well against the recommendations from HMICFRS; HMICFRS has recognised our good practices and culture in our most recent inspection. Our latest Employee Engagement survey also recognises the culture we have, with 88% of employees noting a positive culture at CFRS. The additional work we have planned for the next year builds on this positivity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Source Documents	Location	Contact Officer
HMICFRS Standards of Behaviour: The Handling of Misconduct in Fire and Rescue Service's Report	HMICFRS Standards of Behaviour	Laura Hutchcraft Head of People laura.hutchcraft@cambsfire.gov.uk
NFCC Core Code of Ethics	NFCC Core Code of Ethics	
Fire Authority and Overview and Scrutiny Committee Reports and Minutes - various	Culture update paper - Overview & Scrutiny - Jan 2025	