



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

Meeting and date: Extraordinary Fire Authority, 28 April 2023

Report title: Values and Culture in fire and rescue services

Lead Member: Councillor Simon Rouse

Report sponsor: Jason Thelwell, Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive

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Action: Decision

Recommendations:

- 1) That the Fire Authority should accept the recommendations allocated to the Chief Fire Officer in full
 - 2) That the Service will fully engage and support the delivery of the remaining recommendations
 - 3) That the Fire Authority support a risk being escalated to the Corporate risk register – Poor Culture
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Executive summary:

On Thursday 30 March 2023 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) published 'Values and culture in fire and rescue services'. The report has 9 themes supported by 35 recommendations and all Fire and Rescue Services alongside, the government and national fire bodies are urged to implement them as a matter of urgency.

Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) and Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority (BMKFA) welcome the report and the recommendations within it.

BFRS has always taken the culture of our service extremely seriously. Our Values have been in place since 2011 and we want to make sure all our staff and the public we serve are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.

Of the 35 recommendations, 19 are owned the Chief Fire Officer. Work has already started on a number of these recommendations and progress can be found in Appendix 1. Following the feedback regarding the various streams of work and plans, including the previously presented Exploring our Culture paper, these recommendations will now feed into a larger people plan driven by the BFRS people strategy.

Financial implications: Any costs associated with this will come from established budgets, or where this is not possible growth bids will be submitted for work that is not covered. Any training required will be taken through the Training Strategy Group who review any training needs identified and prioritise these within the allocated budget.

Risk management: The risk of not accepting these recommendations and the actions associated with this has been added to the Human Resources Risk Register and, subject to recommendation 3, this this will be escalated to the Corporate Risk Register.

If the Service does not review the measures in place, employee wellbeing is impacted affecting recruitment, employee morale, retention, and future improvements to working practices.

Legal implications: Legal inputs are sought and provided as and when required in respect of all the strands within the recommendations.

Privacy and security implications: Previous employee relation cases have been reviewed, the details of these are limited to the Hearing Manager, investigator and the Employee Relations team. Any future cases will be dealt with sensitively and confidentially. Any learning from investigations, informal and formal management interventions and case hearings will be fed into procedures and guidance notes and communicated to all employees; Neither individual cases or employees will be identified.

Freedom of Information requests are processed adhering to confidentiality and data protection guidelines.

Duty to collaborate: South East Employers and the Addressing Inequalities Group made up of five Fire and Rescue Services were sent the Code of Conduct and Whistleblowing Procedures for feedback. Feedback was incorporated into the final documents. Each service's approach to the Culture actions undertaken are discussed at the six-weekly meetings, so that learning is shared.

Two members of the Service attended the National Fire Chiefs Council Culture event on 27 and 28 March, learns from the event have been brought back to the service and will be incorporated into our processes.

Health and safety implications: Employee Health and Wellbeing is a key area of the People Strategy. The Human Resources Team support managers and employees across the service – for example Employee Assistance Procedure, Welfare Officer, Occupational Health, Mental Wellbeing Support Officers, a range of procedures on absence management, code of conduct, whistleblowing, grievances, conduct and capability.

Environmental implications: There are no Environmental impacts.

HMIFRS Values and Culture Recommendation Dashboard

Total Number of Recommendations	35
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Owner Breakdown

BFRS	19
Fire Standards Board	3
Government	2
Home Office	7
National Employers, LGA, NFCC	1
NFCC	2
Police	1

BFRS Progress

Complete	2	11%
In Progress - On track	13	68%
Off Track	0	0%
Escalate	0	0%
Not started	4	21%

HMICFRS Values and Culture in Fire & Rescue Services

No.	Recommendation	Owner	Due Date	Status	April '23 Update
Raising concerns					
1	By 1 October 2023, chief fire officers should make sure their services provide a confidential way for staff to raise concerns and that staff are aware of whistleblowing processes.	BFRS	01-Oct-23	In Progress - On track	We have had a Whistleblowing line in place for a number of years, which is run by an external organisation. However, we recognise we need to do more to give staff the confidence to speak up. We are now working with several service providers to introduce a dedicated confidential reporting line. This will be supported by a strong marketing 'Speak up' campaign to highlight this to BFRS staff.
2	By 1 October 2023, National Employers, the Local Government Association and the National Fire Chiefs Council should review any current independent arrangements whereby staff can raise concerns outside their FRS. They should then ensure that all FRS staff have access to an independent reporting line that can be used as a confidential way to raise concerns outside their own FRS.	National Employers, LGA, NFCC	01-Oct-23	Not owned by BFRS	BMKFA and BFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation
3	By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should review the support available for those who have raised concerns and take any action needed to make sure these provisions are suitable.	BFRS	01-Jun-23	In Progress - On track	We have a range of support in place for those that raise concerns inc - Welfare Officer - Occupational Health - Allocating a point of contact that's not part of the investigation But we will continue to review what our staff have available to them and if it works for them and ensure our processes document the support available.
4	By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should assure themselves that updates on how concerns are being handled are shared with those who have raised them. The updates should be given in an accessible way that encourages trust and confidence in the service response. Consideration should be given to creating a professional standards function to handle conduct concerns in service (or from an external service) to have oversight of cases, to make sure they are conducted in a fair and transparent way and to act as a point of contact for all staff involved.	BFRS	01-Jun-23	Not started	
5	By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should make sure they provide accessible information for all staff and members of the public on how they can raise concerns and access confidential support (including through external agencies). Chief fire officers should also make sure accessible information is provided on how concerns and allegations will be investigated in a way that ensures confidentiality and is independent of the alleged perpetrator.	BFRS	01-Jun-23	In Progress - On track	We have a whistleblowing procedure in place and are working on a campaign to encourage staff to speak up. We will review our procedure to ensure they are written in an accessible way, easy for staff and public to understand. The public can raise concerns via a number of channels all documented on our website. We have a complaints procedure in place. Both compliments and complaints are part of our performance measures that are reported on quarterly. These actions will support recommendation 31

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Background checks					
6	By 1 January 2024, the Home Office, working with the Ministry of Justice, should make sure that the Government incorporates fire and rescue authority employees within the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 so that they are eligible for the appropriate DBS checks.	Home Office	01-Jan-24	Not owned by BFRS	BMKFA and BFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation
7	By 1 May 2024, the Home Office, working with the fire and rescue sector, should make sure that the Police Act 1997 (Criminal Records) Regulations 2002, or a similar appropriate legislatively enabled solution, makes detailed provisions for fire and rescue services.	Home Office	01-May-24	Not owned by BFRS	BMKFA and BFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation
8	By 1 December 2023, the Fire Standards Board, in liaison with the National Fire Chiefs Council, should review the existing relevant standard(s) and underpinning guidance. It should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clearly state the requirements for background checks undertaken by services; • clarify the minimum requirements (including levels of DBS checks) for all roles, particularly roles where staff have access to vulnerable members of the public; • define the standards required to embed a culture across fire and rescue services that empowers all members of staff and local communities to report concerns; and • be subject to review following any legislative change 	Fire Standards Board	01-Dec-23	Not owned by BFRS	BMKFA and BFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation
9	By 1 January 2024, chief fire officers should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • immediately review their current background checks arrangements, and make sure that suitable and sufficient background checks are in place to safeguard their staff and communities they serve; and • make sure that appropriate DBS check requests have been submitted for all existing, new staff, and volunteers, according to their roles as identified by the Fire Standards Board. 	BFRS	01-Jan-24	In Progress - On track	Since 2016 we have completed DBS checks on all relevant staff including all frontline staff. In 2019 we increased our vetting and moved to the annual 'Enhanced with barred list' DBS. We believe this is leading practice in the way Fire & Rescue Services should vet their staff, and have lobbied the Home Office to make it mandatory for Fire and Rescue services. We welcome the focus on this from HMICFRS. We also carry out other background and vetting checks including a. Right to work in the UK b. References Some roles require external agencies to carry out further security clearance checks. For example, NILO, Prevent panel, CTLP Liaison, National Security Vetting
10	By 1 September 2023, chief constables should make sure they are appropriately using their Common Law Police Disclosure powers in circumstances involving employees of fire and rescue services.	Police	01-Sep-23	Not owned by BFRS	BMKFA and BFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation

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Misconduct handling					
11	By 1 December 2023, the Fire Standards Board, in liaison with the National Fire Chiefs Council, should review the existing relevant standard(s) and supporting guidance to clearly state how services should handle staff disclosures, complaints and grievances	Fire Standards Board	01-Dec-23	Not owned by BFRS	BMKFA and BFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation
12	By 1 March 2024, chief fire officers should provide assurances to HMICFRS that they have implemented the standard on staff disclosure, complaint and grievance handling.	BFRS	01-Mar-24	Not started	
13	By 1 December 2023, the Fire Standards Board, in liaison with the National Fire Chiefs Council, should review the existing relevant standard(s) and supporting guidance to clearly state how services should handle misconduct and safeguarding-related allegations and outcomes. These should include requirements to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conduct and complete investigations, whether or not the staff member under investigation leaves; • consider whether the incident requires immediate dismissal; • provide training for staff who are carrying out investigations; and • ensure the diversity/neutrality of the investigation panel/person. 	Fire Standards Board	01-Dec-23	Not owned by BFRS	BMKFA and BFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation
14	By 1 March 2024, chief fire officers should provide assurances to HMICFRS that they have implemented the standard on misconduct allegations and outcomes handling.	BFRS	01-Mar-24	In Progress - On track	Awaiting standard to be released, but continue to provide investigation training to staff and have invested in Case management refresher training for 23/24
15	By 1 October 2023, the Home Office should work with the National Fire Chiefs Council and fire and rescue service employers to make sure there is a process to handle misconduct allegations against chief fire officers. The Home Office should immediately notify HMICFRS of any allegations and outcomes that it is aware of	Home Office	01-Oct-23	Not owned by BFRS	BMKFA and BFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation
16	By 1 October 2023, the National Fire Chiefs Council should develop and manage a national barred list that holds details of staff who have been dismissed for gross misconduct (including staff who have already left services). It should ensure that this list is referred to in all appointment processes to prevent those who are barred from rejoining another service. After the College of Fire and Rescue has been established (see recommendation 25), it should take responsibility for managing the list.	NFCC	01-Oct-23	Not owned by BFRS	BMKFA and BFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation
17	With immediate effect, chief fire officers should notify HMICFRS of any allegations that have the potential to constitute staff gross misconduct that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • involve allegations of a criminal nature that have the potential to affect public confidence in FRSS; • are of a serious nature; or • relate to assistant chief fire officers or those at equivalent or higher grades. 	BFRS	Immediate	In Progress - On track	We will comply with this requirement with immediate effect in providing disclosures in line with the non-identifiable case histories provided previously to HMICFRS. We are seeking clarification from HMICFRS on any more detailed reporting it requires, to enable us to ensure that we are also compliant with our GDPR obligations
18	By 1 August 2023, chief fire officers should provide assurances to HMICFRS that all parties are supported in relation to ongoing investigations.	BFRS	01-Aug-23	In Progress - On track	We have a range of support in place for those that raise concerns inc <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welfare Officer - Occupational Health - Allocating a point of contact that's not part of the investigation But we will continue to review what our staff have available to them and if it works for them and ensure our processes document the support available. Our processes will be shared with HMICFRS in our round 3 inspection

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No.	Recommendation	Owner	Due Date	Status	April '23 Update
19	By 1 July 2023, the Home Office should examine whether any appeal processes for fire and rescue misconduct cases are appropriate.	Home Office	01-Jul-23	Not owned by BFRS	BMKFA and BFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation
Leadership					
20	By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should have plans in place to ensure they meet the Fire Standards Board's leading the service standard and its leading and developing people standard.	BFRS	01-Jun-23	In Progress - On track	Gap analysis underway. We have utilised the standards to feed into our BFRS staff development pathway project
21	By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should make sure there is a full, 360-degree feedback process in place for all senior leaders and managers (assistant chief fire officer equivalent and above) in service.	BFRS	01-Jun-23	Not started	
22	By 1 September 2023, chief fire officers should make sure there is a full, 360-degree feedback process in place for all other leaders and managers in service. The process should include gathering feedback from a wide range of sources including colleagues and direct reports	BFRS	01-Sep-23	Not started	
23	By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should seek regular feedback from staff about values, culture, fairness and diversity, with due regard to the leading and developing people standard. They should show how they act on this feedback.	BFRS	01-Jun-23	In Progress - On track	We have completed Bi-Annual staff surveys since 2017 with response rates of over 65% allowing staff to raise their feedback on a broad range of topics anonymously. BMKFA provided funding for this survey to move to annually from 2023/24
24	By 1 October 2023, chief fire officers should put plans in place to monitor, including through the gathering and analysis of staff feedback, watch and team cultures and provide prompt remedial action for any issues they identify.	BFRS	01-Oct-23	In Progress - On track	This is linked to recommendation 23. Alongside moving to annual staff survey, the following measures form part of our Quarterly Performance reports presented to members: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - % Staff turnover - % Absence - Welfare and Support - Employee engagement - Grievance and disciplines processed - Employee Assistance Programme contact - Appraisal completion

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Management and leadership training and development					
25	By 1 January 2025, the Government should establish a College of Fire and Rescue, as proposed by the White Paper Reforming our Fire and Rescue Service. There should be no further delay to its implementation.	Government	01-Jan-25	Not owned by BFRS	BMKFA and BFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation
26	By 1 October 2023, as a precursor to the development of the College of Fire and Rescue, chief fire officers and the National Fire Chiefs Council should work with the Home Office to consider how they can improve the training and support they offer to staff in management and leadership development. This should include authority members in respect of their assurance leadership roles and should ensure that opportunities are offered fairly across all staff groups.	NFCC	01-Oct-23	Not owned by BFRS	BMKFA and BFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation
27	By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should make sure their equality impact assessments are fit for purpose and, as a minimum, meet the requirements of the National Fire Chiefs Council equality impact assessment toolkit.	BFRS	01-Jun-23	Complete	A thorough review of the existing Equality Impact Assessments took place in 2022 which led to the update of the template and supporting guidance. A e-learning package was created and face to face support available across the service. This remains a key focus when items are presented at our governance meetings.
28	By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should review how they gather and use equality and diversity data to improve their understanding of their staff demographics, including applying and meeting the requirements of the National Fire Chiefs Council equality, diversity and inclusion data toolkit.	BFRS	01-Jun-23	In Progress - On track	While we've always been able to capture equality and diversity data in our systems, we acknowledged that the level of data in our HR system was low. We are in the middle of a campaign to increase awareness of the importance of completing the information and encouraging our staff to update their protected characteristics. We report on our Workforce EDI data annually to the FA. This work will support recommendation 29
29	By 1 December 2023, the Home Office should publish greater detail on the protected characteristic data it collects about FRS staff, including joiners and leavers, by rank and role.	Home Office	01-Dec-23	Not owned by BFRS	BMKFA and BFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation
30	By 30 December 2024, the Home Office should align the data it collects on protected characteristics with the Office for National Statistics harmonised standard and publish this data.	Home Office	30-Dec-24	Not owned by BFRS	BMKFA and BFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation
31	By 1 December 2024, the Home Office should collect and publish experimental statistics on public complaints and conduct matters in relation to FRS staff, similar to that which it currently publishes on police forces in England and Wales.	Home Office	01-Dec-24	Not owned by BFRS	BMKFA and BFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation

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No.	Recommendation	Owner	Due Date	Status	April '23 Update
Improving diversity					
32	By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should, as a priority, specify in succession plans how they intend to improve diversity across all levels of the service. This should include offering increased direct-entry opportunities.	BFRS	01-Jun-23	In Progress - On track	At an SMT level, a succession plan option's paper is being produced for review and approval at the September 2023 Executive. The next level succession plan will also be presented at this Executive.
33	By 1 August 2023, chief fire officers should develop plans to promote progression paths for existing staff in non-operational roles and put plans in place to reduce any inequalities of opportunity	BFRS	01-Aug-23	In Progress - On track	We have developed a Leadership and Management development programme, based on the NFCC leadership framework, that has been delivered via face-to-face training to all managers across the service, Supervisory or above. The next phase of this is the BFRS Staff development pathway project that will cover all staff. In 20/21 we restructured SMT to meet the needs of the service and broaden the views at the table. The NFCC Executive Leadership Programme is open to all Senior managers, two SMT members have recently completed the programme and one has just started.
The Core Code of Ethics					
34	With immediate effect, chief fire officers should review their implementation of the Core Code of Ethics and make sure it is being applied across their services.	BFRS	Immediate	Complete	Our Values have been in place since 2011 and are embedded in our Service. The NFCC Core Code of Ethics was released in 2021 The final document complements and supports our own vision and values, which forms part of everything we do. In March 2023, we reviewed our Code of conduct and chose to add in the Code of Ethics alongside our values.
The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England					
35	By the end of this Parliament, the Government should consider the findings and recommendations in this report when refreshing the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England	Government	End of this parliament	Not owned by BFRS	BMKFA and BFRS will fully engage and support the delivery of this recommendation