

Status of Report: Public

Meeting: Combined Fire Authority

Date: 8 February 2023

Subject: Culture within the Fire and Rescue Service

Report by: The Chief Fire and Rescue Officer

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For: Information Only

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to highlight the recent independent review into the culture of London Fire Brigades and the local context within Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service.

Recommendation

2. It is recommended that the Combined Fire Authority notes the update provided.

Executive Summary

3. Sadly, in August 2020 a London Fire Brigade Firefighter took their own life. The firefighter's family believed that he had been bullied in the workplace due to his ethnicity.
4. London Fire Brigade commissioned an independent review into the culture of the Service, this was undertaken by Mr Nazir Afzal OBE and was published in November 2022. It found a deeply concerning culture and unacceptable events and behaviours.
5. Mr Nazir Afzal OBE believes that some of these behaviours will likely be present across the sector and not just within London.
6. Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service is in a very different place than London Fire Brigade, but officers appreciate that some elements will likely exist to varying degrees.
7. An independent cultural and engagement survey has been completed, the results of this will be cross mapped against London's report and action put in place to ensure that LFRS has a positive, healthy and inclusive culture.

Background

8. In 2017, and at the direction of the Home Secretary, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Constabularies role was expanded to encompass the inspection of Fire and Rescue Services. At this time the organisation became His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS).
9. This followed a long period of localism where there had been little or no formal inspections of Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) and certainly not to any form of national bench marking.
10. HMICFRS inspection methodology has 11 areas that are grouped into three pillars, these being Effectiveness, Efficiency and People. The "People" strand of this methodology includes elements relating to the culture of the FRS's, equality and inclusion and values of the Service.
11. HMICFRS undertook its first round of full inspections of all England FRS's in 2018/19. Its findings can be found in the "State of Fire 2019" report, but in short HMICFRS inspectors found the People pillar to be the weakest across the entire sector by some way.
12. There may be many reasons for these findings, although it is likely that this was exacerbated by many years of austerity and savings needing to be found that protected front line services.
13. Whilst the HMICFRS raised the issue from its findings, it is not the first time the Fire sector's culture and concerns have been raised. In 2002 Professor Sir George Bain published "The independent Review of the Fire Service" and in 2016 Adrian Thomas published "Conditions of Fire and Rescue Staff: independent review" – all of which raised concerns into the culture of FRS's.
14. Alongside this there has recently been some significant cases that question the Metropolitan Police Services culture and has resulted in a number of high profile criminal convictions, severely damaging the reputation, trust and confidence of the community in their public services.

London Fire Brigade

15. In August 2020 a London Fire Brigade (LFB) firefighter, Jaden Matthew Francois-Esprit, sadly took his own life just three weeks after his 21st Birthday. His family were concerned that Jaden had been bullied at work because of his race.
16. In 2019 LFB's inspection result had also identified that the culture was poor. *"An inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and*

Rescue Services (HMICFRS) in 2019 showed that some staff reported a “toxic” and “pack like” culture.”

17. It was with this backdrop that the LFB Commissioner (Chief Fire Officer) asked for an external independent review into LFB’s culture to take place. This commissioned Mr Nazir Afzal OBE to begin his independent review.
18. Prior to the publication of the independent review LFB was inspected by HMICFRS as per the planned schedule of regular inspections. The report, published in July 2022, found that *“HMICFRS acknowledges that, while progress has been made since their initial 2019 inspection, London Fire Brigade still needs to improve in looking after its people and that the Brigade’s values and behaviour are not displayed by all staff.”*
19. The inspection report graded LFB as “requiring improvement” in all eleven categories of inspection, including all of the “people” strand. Following this inspection LFB was moved into the HMICFRS - Engage process.
20. The Independent Culture Review of London Fire Brigade report was published in November 2022, the findings of this report are very significant and concerning. A link to the report is provided in the Background Papers section of this report.

Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service

21. It is important to recognise that Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service (LFRS) is not LFB. It has its own identity, values, behaviours and approach. Mr Nazir Afzal’s report was a deep dive into another organisation, not LFRS.
22. However, it would also be naïve not to take note of the report and some similarities that are, or are likely to be, evident within LFRS. It is still a very male dominated Service that is overwhelmingly “white” and operates in similar environments to LFB.
23. LFRS’s first inspection in 2019 identified that the “People” pillar “Required Improvement” and all of the sub sets beneath the pillar identified the same.
24. As a Service, LFRS has reflected heavily on this and set about an ambitious and assertive action plan to improve the Service and its culture. Whilst not a comprehensive list, below are the significant “people” areas it has introduced: -
 - a. Staff developed and introduced our own set of Values and Behaviours.
 - b. Introduced the Core Code of Ethics

- c. Staff engagement and culture survey 2020
 - d. Re-structured the Service to create specific groups for training and then Organisational Development. Giving clear importance to personal responsibility in behaviour and development of teams and individuals.
 - e. Significant financial investment in the structure introducing five new roles focused on continually delivering face to face contact and training.
 - f. Increased capacity into Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team to deliver face to face training on EDI, behaviours and promoting discussion and challenge. Delivered to all including the CFA.
 - g. Complete refresh of the recruitment, selection and promotion processes.
 - h. Positive action and support in the recruitment, selection and promotion processes.
 - i. Updated policies regarding bullying, harassment and discrimination.
 - j. Managed individuals robustly against those policies.
25. This action (and others) has seen LFRS move forward positively with HMICFRS finding in 2022 LFRS as “Good” in the people pillar and all of the sub sets.
26. This sets the Service apart from LFB’s position and puts it in a very different cultural place. Whilst this is positive, the culture within LFRS is not perfect, with some valid concerns and more work to do.
27. For example, the terminology “fireman” and “manning” is still very much evident across the Service. Whilst seemingly innocuous this outdated and sexist language could easily be replaced with Firefighter and crewing, yet the outdated terminology still exists. This will have an impact on existing employees and how the Service appears to potential new applicants.
28. This is important as LFRS remains still very male dominated and “white” in its workforce, something it is keen to improve but is making slow progress in, this could be one reason for that.
29. This will likely be the tip of an iceberg for other cultural norms or pockets of resistance to removing it. This is also evident in historic and/or current discipline cases that show unacceptable behaviours and attitudes do still exist, thankfully in very small numbers.

People Insight

30. In September 2022 LFRS commissioned an independent and new staff and culture survey. This was undertaken by People Insight, a specialist company working with a number of high performing FRS’s, regarding staff engagement and culture. This saw a 52% return rate from across the entire Service.

31. People Insight has a very sophisticated data analysis process that protects the confidentiality of all data but will also allow the Service to filter information depending on characteristics and tailor its approach moving forward to engage and work with certain groups.
32. The information was presented to the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer, senior leaders and the Fire Brigades Union on 24 January 2023. A feedback session will also be delivered to the CFA.
33. This will give the local baseline for LFRS culture that will be matched against the findings of LFB's report, and any gaps or similarities that are evident will then be added to most appropriate groups, teams or individuals plans for delivery and monitoring.
34. This local approach ensures LFRS takes the learning and feelings from staff, the local context and feelings balanced with the LFB learning.

Report Implications/Impact

35. Legal (including crime and disorder)

This paper has no direct legal implications. However and potential failings in this area may lead to litigation cases resulting in employment tribunals or other legal processes.

36. Financial (including value for money, benefits and efficiencies)

People insights culture and engagement survey has been funded within existing budgets and will save any data analysis required within the Service and also add the independent element.

37. Risk (including corporate and operational, health and safety and any impact on the continuity of service delivery)

Not applicable

38. Staff, Service Users and Stakeholders (including the Equality Impact Assessment)

The nature of this paper cuts across all staff of LFRS.

39. Environmental

There are no environmental risks associated.

40. Impact upon "Our Plan" Objectives

This subject directly links to all elements of Our Plan. To engage and protect our community we have to be well respected and able to work with all elements of the community. To do this we need engaged, positive and well trained staff that respect equality, diversity and inclusion, challenging any behaviours that fall short of that.

Background Papers

Independent Culture Review of London Fire Brigade (Nazir Afzal OBE)
[Independent Culture Review of London Fire Brigade \(london-fire.gov.uk\)](https://www.london-fire.gov.uk/independent-culture-review)

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