



# Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

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**Meeting and date:** Fire Authority, 14 June 2023

**Report title:** Exploring our Culture

**Lead Member:** Councillor Gary Hall, Lead Member - People, Equality and Diversity and Assurance

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

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**Action:** Noting

**Recommendations:** That the work carried out to date and the planned work in respect of Exploring our Culture be noted.

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## **Executive summary:**

Following the Independent Culture Review of London Fire Brigade Culture by Nazir Afzal OBE in November 2022 and subsequent news articles into allegations at South Wales and Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Services, the service has reviewed what is in place for employees and what actions need to be taken.

A report was presented to March Executive Committee which showed our work to date and planned. A presentation was given on the proposed “Speak Up” campaign. This report is an update on the work to date.

In March 2023 the HMICFRS published the “Values and culture in fire and rescue services” report. An Extraordinary Fire Authority meeting was held on 28 April 2023 where the HMICFRS recommendations were approved. Please see Appendix 4.

Our People Strategy comprises of key areas that support cultural changes which will help the Service to better deliver its vision and strategic priorities, while ensuring behaviours, values and standards are adhered to:

- 1) Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- 2) Employee Engagement
- 3) Organisational Development and Resourcing
- 4) Training, Learning and Development
- 5) Employee Health and Wellbeing

The objective is to ensure the Culture experienced by all Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service staff and the public they come in to contact with, is in line with Our Values/Code of Conduct, supported by:

- All employees are aware of the expected behaviours.
- Ensuring all employees are aware of the procedures, process and support in place for them and feel able to come forward with any discrimination or inappropriate behaviour concerns they have experienced or have witnessed.
- All employees are assured that they will be listened to, and action taken as a result. Allegations are dealt with robustly.

The following inputs have helped us Explore our Culture:

- Culture Survey results 2022
- Other Fire and Rescue Service reports
- Staff Group Feedback
- Individual Feedback
- Grievances and Disciplinarys
- Leadership Team Feedback

Actions have been captured and work started, these can be found in Appendix 1: Exploring our Culture - work to date and planned.

Our current area of focus is to ensure our staff know how to raise an issue including the Whistleblowing process.

We continue to engage with HMICFRS including providing them with our historic Grievance/disciplinary information and our work carried out on Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) (Appendix 2).

We plan to combine the action plans from the two reports and base them on the Draft NFCC Culture action plan. Updates on progress will be presented in due course.

### **Financial implications:**

Any costs associated with this will come from established budgets. Any continuous training will be taken through the Training Strategy Group who review any training needs identified and growth bids will be submitted for work that is not covered from existing budgets.

### **Risk management:**

The risk of not Exploring our Culture, the HMICFRS Values and culture report and the actions associated with this has been added to the Human Resources Risk Register and the Corporate risk register.

If the Service does not review the measures in place, employee wellbeing is impacted, tribunal claims could increase and the reputation of the service will be impacted, affecting recruitment, employee morale, retention and future improvements to working practices.

The following measures form part of our Quarterly Performance reports presented to members:

- Percentage of Staff turnover
- Percentage of Absence
- Welfare and Support
- Employee engagement
- Grievance and disciplines processed.
- Employee Assistance Programme contact.
- Appraisal completion

### **Legal implications:**

Legal inputs are sought and provided as and when required in respect of all the strands within the attached Exploring our Culture report.

### **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.

The HMICFRS letter on previous cases included case numbers, but no information that was identifiable.

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

### **Duty to collaborate:**

South East Employers were contacted to review the Code of Conduct and Whistleblowing Procedure, their feedback was incorporated. They agreed to support the Employee Relations team with any cases.

The Addressing Inequalities Group made up of five Fire and Rescue Services were sent the Code of Conduct and Whistleblowing Procedures for feedback. Each service's approach to the management of allegations and actions undertaken are discussed at the quarterly 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 shared, so they can be incorporated into our processes. The Draft NFCC Culture action plan is being reviewed to ensure all the areas are covered.

### **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 Champions, a range of procedures on attendance management, code of conduct, whistleblowing, grievances, conduct and capability.

**Environmental implications:**

There are no Environmental impacts.

**Equality, diversity, and inclusion implications:**

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Group meet every month, they discuss issues of concern with stakeholders from across the service. BFRS Culture is a standing agenda item.

The EDI group continue to work on the EDI objectives, the progress on these can be found in the People Strategy – year 2 update and in the EDI objectives 2020 – 2025 Year 3 update.

An equality impact assessment has been written and reviewed, please see Appendix 3.

**Consultation and communication:**

The Exploring our Culture report and work to date has been discussed with the following groups:

- Extraordinary Fire Authority Meeting, 28 April 2023
- Executive Committee, 22 March 2023
- Senior Management Team meetings in December 2022, January, February and March, April and May 2023
- Leadership Group meetings on 9 December 2022, 26 January and 10 March 2023
- Joint Consultation Forum 8 December, 1 March and 28 April 2023
- Equality Diversity and Inclusion Group, 6 December 2022, 10 January, 7 February, 7 March, 4 April, 2 May and 6 June 2023
- Meetings with employees about welfare at incidents, uniform concerns, facilities – 16 January, 2 March and 11 April 2023.
- Business Transformation Board – 4 May 2023
- Meetings with female Firefighters to address any concerns they may have.

The Whistleblowing procedure and contact information has been publicised.

**Background papers:**

Independent Culture Review of London Fire Brigade

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

Cultural Review – South Wales Fire and Rescue Service

[Cultural Review Appointment Panel - South Wales Fire and Rescue Service \(southwales-fire.gov.uk\)](https://www.southwales-fire.gov.uk/cultural-review-appointment-panel)

Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service  
[Dorset and Wiltshire Fire Service has 'taken steps to improve culture' - BBC News](#)

Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service People Strategy 2020-2025 – Year 2 update  
<https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2022/09/fa-item-14-121022.pdf/>

HMICFRS Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service report 2020/21  [Effectiveness, efficiency and people 2021/22 – BFRS - HMICFRS](#)

HMICFRS Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service: Cause of concern revisit letter  
[BFRS Cause of concern revisit letter](#)

HMICFRS Values and culture in fire and rescue services  
[Values and culture in fire and rescue services \(justiceinspectors.gov.uk\)](#)

HMICFRS Extraordinary Meeting report 28 April 2023  
[Agenda Document for Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority, 28/04/2023](#)

Performance Management – Q3 2022/23

[Executive Committee-22 March-2023 Performance-management-Q3-2022 2023](#)

Appendix	Title	Protective Marking
Appendix 1	Exploring our Culture – work to date and planned	
Appendix 2	DBS letter to HMICFRS	
Appendix 3	Equality Impact Assessment	
Appendix 4	HMICFRS Values and culture in fire and rescue services recommendations and update	