Culture Action Plan

for UK Fire and Rescue Services

July 2023

NFCC
National Fire
Chiefs Council

Foreword

From the NFCC Chair, Mark Hardingham

Our fire and rescue services serve and protect the public, and our people are at the heart of everything we do. Our Core Code of Ethics sets out our commitment to put our communities first with dignity and respect, equality, diversity and inclusion, integrity, and ethical leadership.

However, we recognise that there have been people at the heart of our services who have suffered misogyny, racism, and homophobia. We have rightly received criticism for not doing enough to tackle these abuses of power, nor have we worked effectively to ensure that a positive working culture is the reality for all those who serve. Systemic discrimination has had a negative impact on public trust and confidence.

Past and recent critical reviews and inspections into fire service culture have called for substantial culture change. We recognise that there have been initiatives and products aimed

at improving culture that have been implemented to varying levels of success across fire and rescue services. We also know that too often this has been uncoordinated, slow and sometimes ineffective. We must move forward at pace and work with renewed vigour to ensure all our fire and rescue services are open, inclusive and welcoming places to work.

To create, maintain and build on public trust, fire and rescue services must be inclusive, safe places to work; places where

people are valued and supported. People must be able to thrive in an environment free from bullying, harassment, discrimination, abuse, and harm.

Culture change comes when everyone has a voice, and that voice is heard. It is especially important to hear and listen to the voices of those who are under-represented and who are most impacted by the negative cultures present in our services. People need to feel safe, supported and welcomed in the workplace. They need to be confident that appropriate and proportionate action will be taken to address poor behaviour.

Reforming culture is a leadership responsibility, and every leader must take that responsibility for actively addressing poor behaviour and proactively creating an inclusive environment. Whilst responsibility lies primarily with Chief Fire Officers and the most senior leaders, every leader and every person in fire and rescue services has a role to play, supporting a professional, open and inclusive culture.

This Culture Plan is our commitment to work with fire and rescue services, Government and other fire partners to make improvements and establish an inclusive, safe culture. The plan will do this by continuing to support services in developing effective leadership and behaviours, embedding equality, diversity and inclusion, finding and nurturing diverse talent, and supporting the health and wellbeing of people in fire and rescue services.

> **"Improved outcomes have not yet been seen far or fast enough across every fire and rescue service."**

As NFCC we will hold ourselves to account for our performance and expect others to do the same. The plan will change and improve as we learn from great practice inside and outside fire and rescue services, from listening to the voices of staff and by considering new evidence, data and reports.

Whilst positive steps are being taken across fire and rescue services, the improved outcomes are not yet being seen far or fast enough. The absence of good quality, nationally consistent and comparable culture and inclusion data presents a real challenge to our progress. One of the key actions in the Plan seeks to address this gap, because we recognise that the lack

Foreword

From the NFCC Chair, Mark Hardingham

of data-based evidence makes it more difficult to pinpoint the critical issues and then determine the most effective actions and interventions.

Culture change will take time - this hasn't stopped us taking constructive steps forward, and a lot of good work is already underway and improving culture. We are committed to providing the long-term leadership, investment, and focus that the improvements will require. In services with great cultures, we will continue to work together and share what they are doing well. We are working locally, nationally, and internationally with partners inside and outside of fire and rescue services, and this learning will inform our plan.

Cultural education and development of leaders and staff is integral to the plan. The plan will only be effective if everyone working in and around fire and rescue services, especially those in positions of leadership and influence, begin by first examining themselves and their own organisations. As you engage with this plan, I encourage everyone to think purposefully about the active steps you can take to improve culture for the better.

I extend my thanks to all those who have contributed their wisdom, perspective, and expertise in shaping this plan. In delivering on this plan, we will provide a better fire and rescue service for the benefit of the people working within, and most importantly for the public.

Context

Following the NFCC's Culture and Inclusion Conference on 27 and 28 March 2023 and the Spotlight Report from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) 'Values and culture in fire and rescue services', released on 30 March 2023, the NFCC has developed a Culture Action Plan to support improvements in culture and inclusion within fire and rescue services.

NFCC consulted fire and rescue services and national fire service partners on the draft action plan throughout May and June 2023 and received extensive feedback, both written and through focus group discussions. This feedback is reflected in this plan.

This NFCC Culture Action Plan is our renewed call to action to improve culture and address discrimination, bullying and harassment across UK fire and rescue services. Working together we can and must change our culture for the better.

The ongoing involvement and engagement of partners is vital to ensure sustained progress towards our shared vision of a positive working culture which extends into the communities served by fire and rescue services. Working with partners, NFCC will continue to monitor and review progress against the plan, drawing on feedback and learning to ensure we deliver against our shared ambition.

This Action Plan sits within and complements the wider strategic framework in which fire and rescue services operate. This framework is summarised in the following sections.

Fire and Rescue

Leaders have responsibilities and accountabilities in relation to the culture of their service. Leaders must be supportive role models for positive and ethical behaviours, making sure that everyone who works for and on behalf of the service, understands their role and what is expected of them. Leaders must prioritise safeguarding to reduce the risk of abuse and harm in their community and service.

All fire and rescue service employees equally have a role to play in supporting the ongoing development of a positive safeguarding environment and culture in their service. The NFCC Culture Action Plan details the commitments of the NFCC to supporting continuous culture improvement in fire and rescue services. The Action Plan provides leaders in fire and rescue service with details of how the NFCC will support them to embed a positive organisational culture.

Fire and Rescue National Framework for England

The National Framework sets out the Government's priorities and objectives for fire and rescue authorities. The government has a duty under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 to produce the framework and keep it current. Fire and rescue authorities must have regard to the framework in carrying out their duties.

The current framework includes objectives related to people, cultural values, behaviours, equality, diversity, professionalism, leadership, skills and tackling harassment, bullying and discrimination.

Fit for the Future 2022 | NFCC CPO (ukfrs.com)

Fit for the Future is the NFCC, LGA and National Employers (England) collective vision for the fire and rescue service. The vision defines the new transformation opportunity for fire and rescue services alongside key areas for improvement in existing functions. Four of the twelve improvement objectives (5-8) relate directly to people, professionalism, culture, equality, diversity and inclusion.

5. Fire and rescue services refocus their investment in the selection, training and development of employees to maintain, support and improve their skills and knowledge throughout their careers.

6. Prospective employees are attracted to fire and rescue services as their employer of choice where inclusive recruitment practices and the available diverse roles and responsibilities help the service manage risk in the local community.

7. An inclusive culture is at the heart of every fire and rescue service. They are welcoming and supportive places to work, retaining the widest variety of people from all backgrounds throughout their careers.

8. Political leaders and managers work together to deliver strong inclusive leadership across all fire and rescue services. Common approaches and leadership frameworks will be developed that set out service values, expectations and behaviours which all can support and promote. This will be the basis on which fire and rescue services are led and all employees operate.

Fire Standards Board

The role of the Fire Standards Board is to oversee the identification, organisation, development and maintenance of professional Standards for fire and rescue services in England. Fire Standards are designed to support services in generating positive working environments that in turn deliver the best outcomes for the public.

There are several Standards which contribute to building positive cultures within services which include:

- Safeguarding Fire Standard
- Code of Ethics Fire Standard
- Leading The Service - Fire Standard
- Leading and Developing People - Fire Standard
- Communications and Engagement Fire Standard

Inclusive Fire Service Group

Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG) is independently chaired by Professor Lynette Harris. It is unique in the sector in that it includes employer, senior manager and employee voices at national level with representation from the National Joint Council, NFCC, the Fire Brigades Union, the Fire Officers Association, and the Fire and Rescue Services Association. The IFSG met recently and reaffirmed its commitment to its original terms of reference, alongside a renewed focus and determination to support and promote the development of positive culture and inclusive behaviours in the service.

The IFSG will continue to develop and provide advice and guidance, supporting the sector in navigating ideas and advice without further duplication; approach relevant organisations to work together and with the IFSG - to collaborate and drive faster delivery of improvements; evaluate whether change is genuinely being delivered.

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)

In the inspection of fire and rescue services in England, one of the three pillars focusses on how well the fire and rescue

service look after its people. This pillar focusses on how well the fire and rescue service promotes its values and culture, trains its employees and ensures that they have the necessary skills, ensures fairness and diversity for its workforce, and develops leaders.

In 2023 HMICFRS published a spotlight report focussed on the values and culture of fire and rescue services in England. The report drew from evidence collected through inspections since 2018. The report makes 35 recommendations with responsibility shared across all key the national functions and fire and rescue services.

NFCC Strategy 2023-26

The NFCC Member Strategy was reviewed in 2023 and is clear that a priority is addressing the need for cultural change across the UK fire and rescue service. One of our strategic objectives is to work with fire and rescue services, members, and partners across the wider sector to build a culture of equality, diversity, inclusion, respect, and integrity, building public confidence and trust and ensuring improved outcomes.

How we deliver on this strategy is set out in our NFCC Business Plan 2023-26. The Plan includes the objectives from this culture plan and how we provide resource and leadership for the NFCC Safeguarding Board.

NFCC Safeguarding Board

Safeguarding is a whole organisational duty and must be embedded within internal and external communities. Through the Safeguarding Board, NFCC are fully committed to the legal and moral duties that ensure efficient and effective safeguarding practice is reflected in the NFCC as well as in the culture of all fire and rescue services.

The NFCC Safeguarding Board enables fire and rescue services to meet their safeguarding duties by producing a range of associated guidance, risk assessments and training to enable fire and rescue services to work towards achieving the Safeguarding Fire Standard and support implementation of any legislative change.

Culture Action Plan Summary

Our plan at a glance

These pages illustrate a summary of the Culture Action Plan and the relationship between the vision statement, overarching outcomes, intermediate outcomes and NFCC outputs. A more detailed deliverable table can be found in the additional documents.

Vision Statement

Fire and rescue services are inclusive and safe places to work where all staff are valued, supported and able to thrive in an environment free from bullying, harassment, discrimination, abuse, and harm. Fire and rescue services deliver services that are inclusive, safe, and professional and inspire public confidence and trust.

Overarching Outcomes

Improved public trust and confidence

Improved trust and confidence of staff

More diverse workforce that is inclusive of underrepresented groups, and people of diverse backgrounds and experiences.

Intermediate outcomes

- Improved understanding across FRSs of inclusive safeguarding culture, with all staff supported and equipped to deliver.

- FRS use evidence to identify gaps, areas for improvement and good practice.

- FRS recognise and celebrate good practice.

- Sector-wide collaboration and engagement to deliver step change in culture.

- Effective safeguarding practices, encompassing both internal and external approaches.

- Staff that encounter negative behaviour are enabled and equipped to raise concerns and challenge in a supportive environment.

- Senior Leaders nurture a positive culture, promoting practices that enable early intervention to address poor behaviour.

- Independent, trusted processes in place for staff to report inappropriate behaviour, with all staff supported.

- National consistency in how investigations and hearings are conducted, incorporating good practice.

- Proportionate, prompt and fair action is taken when addressing inappropriate or abusive behaviours.

Overarching Outcomes

Improved public trust and confidence

Improved trust and confidence of staff

More diverse workforce that is inclusive of underrepresented groups, and people of diverse backgrounds and experiences.

Key Deliverables

Embedding Fire Standards: Setting out what good looks like across fire and rescue services; driving forward continuous improvement across all areas

Core Code of Ethics: Adoption, implementation and embedding support across fire and rescue services

Safeguarding: Development and promotion of guidance, tools, and training

NFCC Organisational Culture Statement: Publication of statement that outlines the culture we want at NFCC and a zero-tolerance approach to how inappropriate language and behaviour will be addressed

Independent reporting lines: Support and guidance to fire and rescue services to ensure independent lines in place across services

HMICFRS Spotlight Report Response: NFCC to respond to the recommendations in the Spotlight Report into Culture and Values in the Fire and Rescue Service

Support HMICFRS: Support the HMICFRS thematic inspection into misconduct in Fire and Rescue Services and respond to the recommendations when published.

Professional Leadership Development: Development programmes linked to professional accreditation, including Supervisory Leadership Development programme, Middle Leadership Development Programme and Executive Leadership Programme

Online interactive career pathway: Creation of tool that will enable prospective and serving fire and rescue staff at all levels identify routes of progression and professional development

Educational and Behavioural Programmes: NFCC to support fire and rescue services with sharing examples of good practice toolkits to support leaders and staff to become more active bystanders and to respond appropriately when they see inappropriate behaviour. We will provide educational tools and programmes to support employees and leaders to fully appreciate and understand issues of culture and inclusion.

Establish support to the College of Fire: NFCC to support the development of a College of Fire as part of the Government's reform programme for Fire and Resuce Services

Culture and EDI Data: Working with partners and through the Data Management Framework, we will support the development of nationally consistent culture and EDI data sets to enable benchmarking and the sharing of good practice and support improvement

National Employee survey: We will work with partners and fire and rescue services to develop a National Fire and Rescue Culture Survey that will further enhance data sets and provide assured evidence of improvement and capture issues. This will inform the ongoing development of the NFCC Culture and EDI work.

Culture Performance Dashboard: Development of an open-source cultural dashboard methodology that fire and rescue services can use to benchmark their cultural performance.

Positive Practice Portal: Identify, share and promote positive practice and innovation across FRS, to support continuous improvement and help keep communities safe

Direct Entry Scheme: Provide new routes to entry that can play a valuable part in diversifying leadership in fire and rescue services

NFCC Implementation Support: Supporting fire and rescue services in achieving the Fire Standards and utilising tools and products and deliver improvements

Organisational Learning: Embedding a learning culture supported through national Organisational Learning arrangements helping us move away from blame cultures and taking all opportunities to learn and improve what we do

Academic Research: Utilise the newly formed NFCC Academic Collaboration, Evaluation and Research Group (ACER) to undertake a literature review to help inform culture reform within fire and rescue services research.

Health and Wellbeing Framework: Develop and support delivery of framework of tools and guidance that address the recommendations highlighted in the 2023 NFCC Health and Wellbeing report.

Coaching and Mentoring: Roll out of a range of national external tools and guidance to support the adoption and enhancement of Coaching and Mentoring within fire and rescue services

NFCC Products and Services: Working with services to provide the support, guidance, tools, training and development programmes to help them achieve national standards and deliver the best services possible to the public and its people

High level measures of success

We are working with FRSs and partners in the development of success measures, which we will publish progress against. Draft high-level measures include:

1. Improvements in HMICFRS inspection judgements for FRSs in relation to values and culture, including progress against the recommendations in the HMICFRS Spotlight report

2. Improvement in FRS workforce diversity in relation to recruitment, retention and progression

3. Consistent service reporting and benchmarking of cultural performance enabled through sharing of good practice and cross sector support including identification and sharing of exemplar cultural dashboards

4. All fire and rescue services have independent confidential reporting lines

5. Increased take-up of NFCC leadership development, products and support in relation to culture, safeguarding and inclusion

6. Completion of NFCC Safeguarding self-assessment and any local authority audits, enabling an adaptable and improved approach to safeguarding practice

Key Deliverables

NFCC has delivered many tools and guidance over the last five years through its People and Leadership programmes. Details of our products can be found in the supporting document NFCC People, Culture, Leadership Products. We have worked with subject matter experts in fire and rescue services and the wider sector and experts external to the sector including academics and commissioned consultants to shape and deliver these products.

We also have several products in development and are currently scoping others.

For a detailed breakdown of deliverables aligned to SMART (Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Relevant, and Timely) measures of success and timescales for delivery, please see the supporting document Detailed Deliverable Table.

Consultation

In developing this Action Plan, we have consulted extensively with fire and rescue services and wider partners. For a detailed outline of consultation approach and feedback, please see the supporting document You said, we did.

The consultation has drawn out key themes that will inform our work going forward.

Partnerships

We will only be able to deliver the products, programmes, and guidance that can promote an inclusive culture by working together in partnership. NFCC is committed to working with all our partners including staff representative bodies, unions, networking groups, employers, Westminster government, devolved administrations, charitable partners, and wider stakeholders. We are committed to working through existing partnership forums to help drive forward culture change including through the Inclusive Fire Service Group and the Fit for the Future strategic partnership.

We will continue to work closely with fire and rescue service partners throughout, including Women in the Fire Service, the Asian Fire Service Association, The Firefighters Charity, and more widely.

We are committed to learning from the work of wider sectors, sharing good practice and learning with them to inform our approach and products moving forward, including national and international partners.

Governance

External Challenge and Support:

NFCC will also seek independent scrutiny and expert advice from a newly formed Independent Challenge and Support panel that has been established to support the work of this plan. The panel is chaired by Anthea Sully, CEO of White Ribbon (White Ribbon is the UK's leading charity engaging men and boys to end violence against women and girls), with other experienced and expert panel members.

Internal governance:

The NFCC People, Culture and Leadership Co-ordinating Committee will lead our work around culture and inclusion, supported by the NFCC Safeguarding Board and NFCC Organisational Learning.

The NFCC Council will review progress against the action plan and the NFCC Board of Trustees will provide strategic oversight and accountability.

Progress reports will be published on our website to ensure open and transparent reporting against action plan commitments.

A full breakdown of the NFCCs internal Governance structure and how the Culture Action Plan fits within it can be found in the Governance supporting document.

External governance:

NFCC will work closely with the Fire Standards Board, HMICFRS, Home Office, Local Government Association (LGA), National Employers, devolved administrations, and wider partners in ensuring that progress is made against the action plan. We will ensure our work is aligned to the work of the Inclusive Fire Service Group and will report on progress at regular intervals.

The NFCC has no authority to insist that fire and rescue services carry out specific actions. However, the adoption of NFCC tools and guidance is often noted by HMICFRS as being evidence of the implementation of positive practice.

Conclusion

This Culture Action Plan lays out our commitment to supporting fire and rescue services as they work to create positive cultures free from bullying, harassment, discrimination, abuse and harm.

We recognise that we have a responsibility to address the ways that societal inequality and forms of oppression show up in Fire and Rescue Services.

We have brought together the suite of NFCC products that support services in embedding inclusive cultures and are working with fire and rescue services and partners to share and develop new products to support improvement.

We won't stop there - change and growth are not instant, and we are embarking on a journey that we know will require sustained focus, collaboration, investment, and review.

The supporting documents give more information, and we will be continuing to engage with a wide range of stakeholders to learn how we can best support culture transformation across the Fire and Rescue Service.

Launch links:

NFCC website
https://www.nationalfirechiefs.org.uk/

UKFRS website
https://ukfrs.com/

Press Release
https://www.nationalfirechiefs.org.uk/News

Supporting Documents:

- NFCC Organisational Culture Statement

- Culture Action Plan Summary

- Glossary of Terms

- Detailed Deliverable Table

- Consultation – "You said, we did"

- Previous Culture Report Information

- NFCC Governance