



**DORSET & WILTSHIRE  
FIRE AND RESCUE  
AUTHORITY**

Item 23/51

MEETING	Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority
DATE OF MEETING	12 December 2023
SUBJECT OF THE REPORT	Independent Review report and management response
STATUS OF REPORT	For open publication
PURPOSE OF REPORT	To note and approve
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<p>In February 2023, following allegations of inappropriate behaviour in the media, the Chief Fire Officer commissioned an independent review of our workplace culture. The Independent Review report was subsequently published on 17 October 2023, along with the Service’s response in the form of an open letter to the lead of the Independent Review Team and a management response to each of the recommendations.</p> <p>All of these documents have been widely promulgated to key stakeholders and the community and are available on the Service’s website.</p> <p>Alongside the independent review report, and the on-going programme of work, there are a number of other national drivers for cultural change that also need to be considered. To ensure that this important area of work is driven forward in an open and transparent way a single culture action plan has been developed.</p> <p>This paper is concerned with the resultant action plan, delivery, and oversight arrangements.</p>

RISK ASSESSMENT	<p>Failure to continuously promote and develop organisational culture may result in the organisation not achieving its vision and service priorities.</p> <p>In addition, there could be direct impacts on equality, diversity and inclusion improvements not being realised, which will in turn result in further impacts on recruitment and retention, staff morale and wellbeing. This will have detrimental impacts for all those involved in the Service and may cause governance and reputation damage for the Authority.</p>
COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT	<p>If our communities are not assured that the Service is working hard on its cultural development, there will be an impact on the high level of public trust that the Service is held in.</p> <p>This will have an impact on community engagement and positive action initiatives, which will impact on the Service achieving a more diverse workforce.</p>
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT	None for the purposes of this paper.
BUDGET IMPLICATIONS	None for the purposes of this paper.
RECOMMENDATIONS	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Welcome and endorse the Independent Review report and management response, the initiatives set out in this paper including those in Appendix A (Culture Action Plan).</li> <li>2. Approve the proposed Member oversight arrangements for delivery of the Culture Action Plan.</li> </ol>
BACKGROUND PAPERS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Independent Review into Workplace Culture at Dorset &amp; Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service: Full Report. September 2023</li> <li>2. Dorset &amp; Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service's Response to the Independent Review's Recommendations. October 2023</li> <li>3. Open letter from Chief Fire Officer Ben Ansell to Alex Johnson QFSM. October 2023</li> </ol>

	<p>All documents are available on the Service’s website. <a href="https://www.dwfire.org.uk/about-us/your-fire-and-rescue-service/independent-review/">https://www.dwfire.org.uk/about-us/your-fire-and-rescue-service/independent-review/</a></p> <p>4. Culture Action Plan for UK Fire and Rescue Services. National Fire Chiefs Council. July 2023 <a href="https://nfcc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Culture-Action-Plan_FINAL.pdf">https://nfcc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Culture-Action-Plan_FINAL.pdf</a></p> <p>5. A spotlight review of the values and culture in fire and rescue services. His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire &amp; Rescue Services. March 2023 <a href="https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectores.gov.uk/publication-html/values-and-culture-in-fire-and-rescue-services/">https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectores.gov.uk/publication-html/values-and-culture-in-fire-and-rescue-services/</a></p> <p>6. White Ribbon charity. <a href="https://www.whiteribbon.org.uk/">https://www.whiteribbon.org.uk/</a></p>
APPENDICES	Appendix A – Culture Action Plan. December 2023
REPORT ORIGINATOR AND CONTACT	<p>Ben Ansell, Chief Fire Officer <a href="mailto:ben.ansell@dwfire.org.uk">ben.ansell@dwfire.org.uk</a> Tel no: 01722 691000</p>

## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 In February 2023, following allegations of inappropriate behaviour in the media, the Chief Fire Officer commissioned an independent review of our workplace culture. The review report was published on 17 October 2023, along with the Service's response in the form of an open letter to the lead of the Independent Review Team and a management response to each of the recommendations.
- 1.2 Alongside the Independent Review report, and the on-going programme of work, there are several other national drivers for cultural change that also need to be considered. To ensure that this important area of work is driven forward in an open and transparent way a culture action plan has been developed.
- 1.3 This paper is concerned with the resultant culture action plan, attached at Appendix A, as well as setting out the proposed oversight arrangements.

## **2 Chief Fire Officer's personal statement**

- 2.1 I am incredibly grateful to those who came forward to share their experiences with Alex Johnson's review team. This showed the desire and commitment of our staff to further strengthen our culture so that every individual feels respected, valued, and safe in their workplace. The independent insight has been an important exercise in identifying key issues and recommendations to help me further strengthen our culture.
- 2.2 The review team identified some concerning experiences within their report, and I am truly sorry that these have occurred. I personally found some of the experiences of our staff were uncomfortable for me to read and I know it will also be concerning for our staff. I very much hope that the majority of staff do not recognise these experiences within their workplace, but it will inevitably resonate for some.
- 2.3 Although we have much in place, I can see that we have not always got things right and this must and will change. There is no place for inappropriate behaviour in our organisation and I am fully committed to driving our culture forward positively.
- 2.4 The report has been a difficult read, but a necessary one, that is valuable for us. Whilst we know that the challenges, we face are common to many organisations, I welcome the report, in its entirety, and I fully accept all of the recommendations. There is much in place already to address these challenges, but there is certainly more to do. I am determined that we will respond to the Independent Review report and work with our staff, Elected Members, and other stakeholders, to emerge as a more healthy, positive, and inclusive fire and rescue service.

### 3 Independent Review report

- 3.1 As Members will recall, the Independent Review found a number of cases of poor and unacceptable behaviour stating that the Service *'has a minority of people who are damaging the reputation of the hard-working, decent people who want to create an inclusive workplace and make a positive difference to their communities. It also has some people who stand by, knowing and observing poor behaviour yet not protecting those who are the victims of such behaviour'*.
- 3.2 The report sets out 28 recommendations for the Service to consider. The recommendations were grouped into themes aligned with the terms of reference. The themes are:
- Workplace culture
  - Robustness of key procedures and practices
  - Women's experiences in the workplace
  - Barriers that prevent the reporting of issues
  - Robustness of former disciplinary action

### 4 Management response

- 4.1 The Service produced a comprehensive management response against each of the recommendations outlining what arrangements or initiatives were currently in place (or underway), along with the key improvements it would seek to achieve. It is important that the Service's approach to cultural development builds upon the current arrangements already in place and those under development. Failure to do this may lead to duplication, confusion, and an inefficient use of resources.
- 4.2 Officers have drawn together the work already underway, or in development alongside the recommendations of the independent review team into a single action plan. This action plan has also considered the National Fire Chiefs Council's (NFCC) Culture Action Plan published in July 2023 and has also taken account of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) review of the values and culture in fire and rescue services, commonly referred to as the Spotlight report which was published in March 2023 and reported to Members at their June meeting.
- 4.3 To date the following actions have been taken:
- Introduced the independent and anonymous reporting line through Crimestoppers (FRS Speak Up).
  - Launched a culture dashboard providing information about the composition of our workforce as well as information regarding the reasons for and outcomes from discipline/bullying and harassment investigations, to increase transparency and build confidence in raising concerns.

- Communicated expectations around use of WC facilities and monitoring arrangements in workplaces.
- Introduced structural changes within Learning and Development and HR to strengthen management arrangements and oversight. This includes the addition of a Watch Manager role to ensure continued delivery of our 'Not of my Watch' awareness training. The postholder also acts as a key stakeholder to organisational projects, such as operational welfare facilities, ensuring that the views of operational staff who are under-represented in the organisation are fully considered and accommodated.
- Developed and delivered personal safety workshops as part of our Safe To programme of work. This workshop provides advice and guidance to staff who may be lone workers to ensure that are safe when they carry out their role. This initiative, which is also a collaboration with our police colleagues, enables our staff to be well informed and has far-reaching benefits that include the ability to support other colleagues as well as friends and family.
- Implemented changes to Disclosure and Barring Services checks for new starters. This has followed a change in legislation whereby Fire and Rescue Authorities are now listed in Schedule 1 Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions). The amendments means that FRSs will now be able to perform a minimum of standard checks for all staff, volunteers and representatives. Standard checks include notification of spent convictions so our staff and communities can be assured of the calibre of our staff.
- Ensured the Culture Development Committee has a broad representation across the Service. Membership of the committee now includes staff network leads, trade union representatives as well as individuals from our leadership consultancy group and representatives who took part in the internal culture review focus groups. Drawing staff from across the Service enables a diversity of thinking to enhance our cultural development.
- Commenced a programme of staff engagement following the publication of the Independent Review report, through Q&A sessions with all staff, Leaders Forum discussions and the Culture Development Committee to ensure a collective commitment to change across all parts of our Service.

## 5 Culture action plan

- 5.1 The Service has accepted all the recommendations and is committed to delivering them in a timely and collaborative manner.
- 5.2 Whilst the past few months have proved to be a very difficult time for the Service and importantly our staff, the recommendations will help us on our cultural change journey and achieve the cultural vision as set out in out in the 2023 NFCC Cultural Statement *'everyone deserves to work in safe environments that are free from bullying, harassment and discrimination, abuse and harm, where they feel supported, welcome and able to thrive'*.

5.3 The culture action plan is set out against the following themes:

- Building trust and confidence
- Strengthening support, welfare, and facilities
- Clear cultural expectations for all staff
- Strengthening leadership and engagement in workplaces
- Strengthening key procedures and practices

## 6 Staff engagement

6.1 It is vital that staff are engaged and consulted on our culture action plan. To ensure the voices of our staff continue to be heard we used our November Culture Development Committee and November Bitesize Leader sessions to discuss key elements of the action plan. The intention is that through our staff engagement channels we will receive additional suggestions that our staff feel that the Service could take to improve our culture. This approach will ensure our action plan is augmented and owned across the Service.

## 7 Oversight arrangements

### Officers

7.1 From an Officer perspective, the action plan will be overseen by the Culture Development Committee that meet on a quarterly basis and is chaired by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer. This committee comprises of a senior representative from all departments, the staff network leads and all the representative bodies. It also has open seats available to any member of staff.

7.2 To further strengthen the committee, the Chief Fire Officer has approached the White Ribbon charity to request that they act as an independent member. This charity is recognised as a leading light in helping organisations prevent harmful behaviours and attitudes towards women. The charity also offers an accreditation that seeks to help organisations to:

- Make a difference in communities to end violence against women.
- Improve organisational culture, safety, and morale.
- Increase the knowledge and skills of staff to address violence against women.
- Improve the experience of customers and stakeholders.
- Become an employer of choice.
- Help to demonstrate that organisations are meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010.

7.3 As part of this independent role, it is anticipated that the charity will provide:

- Quarterly assurance of progress against the action plan for the first year and six-monthly thereafter. This will include independent validation of the achievement of key milestones and deliverables.
- Guidance and advice on positive initiatives and tools to improve the workplace experiences of all staff, but in particular for females.
- Support and assurance that our procedures are inclusive and provide sufficient information to enable staff to raise concerns.

## Members

7.4 It is important that Members have confidence that the action plan is being delivered and that the culture is being further strengthened. Following consultation with the Chair, it is suggested that:

- Both the Chair and Vice Chair of the Authority, and the Chair of the Finance and Audit Committee, along with the Member EDI lead, meet with senior officers and the independent committee member, both regularly and prior to the Finance and Audit Committee to scrutinise the progress being made.
- A quarterly highlight report is presented to the Finance and Audit Committee to provide further assurance against the progress of the culture action plan.
- Progress of the culture action plan becomes a key feature of the six-monthly and annual performance presentation provided to the Authority by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer.

7.5 Together these monitoring arrangements provide a detailed and strategic oversight of the progress being made. They also benefit from an independent perspective from a well-respected charity specifically focused on improving the opportunities and welfare of female members of staff.

## 8 Summary

8.1 The Independent Review report set out 28 recommendations to strengthen the culture of the Service. These improvements, together with existing actions and initiatives have formed a single culture action plan. It is proposed that Officer delivery arrangements are overseen by enhanced Member scrutiny and reporting.