



SENSE CHECK REVIEW OF DORSET AND WILTSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE'S PROGRESS AGAINST THE CULTURE ACTION PLAN

Final Report

21st NOVEMBER 2025

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Terms of Reference

1. Context and Background

In March 2023, Practice 2 Progress (P2P) were commissioned by the then Chief Fire Officer to undertake an Independent Review of the workplace culture at Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service (DWFRS). The review was commissioned in response to serious concerns raised through ITN media coverage.

The independent review report was published in October 2023 and identified several cultural and behavioural challenges that required urgent attention. From these recommendations DWFRS developed and committed to a Culture Action Plan, aimed at addressing the issues identified, improving organisational culture, and fostering a more inclusive, respectful, and accountable working environment.

The timescales within the plan were ambitious to ensure the organisation was responsive, staff were supported, and swift changes were made. The timescales included 'quick wins' to be delivered by April 2024, longer term changes by April 2025 with a focus on embedding and continuous improvement by April 2026.

As DWFRS advanced towards April 2026, this sense check review has been commissioned by the Chair of the Finance & Audit Committee to independently assess positive progress made by DWFRS in delivering the Culture Action Plan and to provide constructive feedback to inform ongoing improvements.

2. Purpose of the Review

The purpose of this audit is to:

- Independently assess the extent of positive progress to date made by DWFRS against its Culture Action Plan since the 2023 Independent Review.
- Sense check the implementation and embedding of key cultural change initiatives.
- Identify good practice, strengths, and areas of visible impact.
- Highlight any gaps or risks to enable DWFRS to set in place focussed recovery actions to assist full delivery and completion of the culture action plan.
- Provide constructive observations to support DWFRS in sustaining cultural transformation.

3. Scope of the Audit

The review will focus on the following key areas:

3.1. Progress Against the Culture Action Plan

- Review of actions to assess if these are completed or outstanding.
- Assessment of how completed actions are translating into visible cultural change.
- Evaluation of progress tracking, reporting mechanisms, assurance and ownership.

3.2. Leadership and Governance

- Role of the strategic leadership team (SLT) in driving and modelling cultural change.
- Evidence of commitment at all organisational levels.
- Oversight arrangements and accountability structures.

3.3. Staff Experience and Perceptions

- The reflections of staff network leads on cultural change since the 2023 review.
- The views of senior leaders on cultural change since the 2023 review.
- Perceptions of safety, inclusion, and fairness.
- Confidence levels in the mechanisms in place to raise concerns.
- Evaluation of the initiatives/products introduced to build staff trust and confidence

3.4. Embedding and Sustainability

- Integration of cultural improvements into procedures, practices and processes.
- Training, development, and communications linked to cultural improvement.
- Indicators of sustainable change rather than compliance-based responses.

3.5. Communication and Engagement

- Internal communications regarding the Culture Action Plan and progress.
- Opportunities for staff engagement and feedback.
- Visibility of changes and leadership narrative across the organisation.

4. Methodology

The review against the original recommendations and the resulting culture action plan will adopt a mixed-method approach, including:

- Review of key documentation and communications (e.g., Culture Action Plan, Culture Assurance Framework, relevant procedures, management reporting processes, internal comms).
- Semi-structured interviews via Teams with key stakeholders (e.g., SLT, AM/HoD, HR Managers, L&OD Managers, staff network leads).
- Desktop analysis of staff survey and workforce data.

5. Introduction

In October 2025, P2P was commissioned to undertake a 'sense check' review of the work Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service had undertaken since their independent review in 2023. Key members from the original review team carried out a range of interviews with senior leaders, staff associations and network leads. This was to enable a wide cross section of the organisation to provide feedback on the perceived progress the organisation had made since the review.

This report will set out the following:

- Progress so far – what actions have been completed or are underway, and whether these are starting to make a genuine and visible difference
- Leadership and governance – how leaders at all levels are helping drive and model change
- Staff experience and perception – understand how staff feel about safety, inclusion, fairness, and confidence in raising concerns
- Embedding change – whether improvements are becoming part of everyday ways of working, training and communication
- Communication and engagement – how well staff are being kept informed and involved in the journey
- A detailed summary of progress against the Culture Action Plan with examples of positive change and impact (Appendix 1)
- Commentary and assessment against each of the recommendations outlined in the original review (Appendix 1)
- Areas for further focus or improvement

6. Progress against the Culture Action Plan

The independent review carried out in 2023 made 28 recommendations for the service, all of which were agreed and have been incorporated into the Culture Action Plan, monitored by the Culture Development Committee.

Of the 28 recommendations, our independent ‘sense check’ considers that **22** have been met, five have been partially met, with just one recommendation we consider not to have been met. A detailed review of each recommendation, documents reviewed and our full assessment as to whether it has been met is in Appendix 1.

Area	Recommendation	Met/Not
Workplace Culture	16	Met
	23	Met
	28	Met
Robustness of Key Procedures and Practices	6	Met
	7	Met
	8	Met
	10	Met
	11	Met
	13	Met
	14	Met
	15	Met
Women’s Experiences in the Workplace	1	Partially Met
	2	Not Met
	3	Partially Met
	4	Met
	17	Partially Met
	18	Met
	19	Met
	20	Met
	21	Met
	22	Met
	24	Met
Barriers that Prevent the Reporting of Issues	5	Met
	25	Met
	26	Partially Met
	27	Partially Met
Robustness of Former Disciplinary Action	9	Met
	12	Met
TOTAL	28	

DWFRS is to be commended for the volume and extent of their work in driving the cultural change, and for committing both to delivering against the recommendations

set out in our review and reporting regularly on progress. There is clear ownership for each recommendation and shared ownership for the delivery of the plan.

Our findings suggest that there are some more challenging issues that are taking more time to tackle, such as female representation in the workforce, and some behavioural issues. Despite this, the SLT is aware of these issues and has a plan in place to ensure the recommendations are delivered in full. In addition, our interviews demonstrate that people are noticing a positive difference in terms of changed behaviour and culture.

7. Leadership and Governance

Since the appointment of Andy Cole as Chief Fire Officer in January 2025, Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service has made excellent progress on its cultural journey. There is evidence of focus and impetus regarding the change agenda and substantial efforts being made across the organisation to drive a new culture through improved behaviours and standards.

Ownership of culture change has been cascaded throughout the organisation, driven from the top and shared with other leaders and key stakeholders. The service's determination to tackle the issues highlighted in our report is evident from the extent and speed with which the programme of activity has been undertaken.

Each member of the SLT has made a significant contribution to leading the changes, each charged with their own agenda and objectives, and whom all speak passionately about the transformation for which they have been responsible. These agendas range from estates development to financial management and structural change and each member of the SLT has a clear sense of how all this ties together as part of the overall organisational strategy.

The HR team, under the leadership of the Director of People Services, has been responsible for leading the way in terms of change. It is important to note the extent of the work undertaken by Jenny Long and her team to provide a sustainable framework of programmes, new policies and procedures and implementing a new HR structure to underpin the changes. Whilst there is still some work to do, and capacity remains stretched, we should not underestimate the effort made by this team.

The Chief Fire Officer has taken considerable strides to empower and develop his strategic leadership team. The support for him is unanimous amongst those interviewed and his leadership actions since his appointment have been wholeheartedly commended. The appointment of new assistant chief officers through a transparent selection process has been widely applauded by both colleagues and staff network leads and has set the tone for future promotions processes. His approach to creating a flatter, more collegiate management structure is a positive move and one which could be cascaded beyond the strategic leadership team to the next level. This

could help with the greater engagement of middle managers and give them more ownership in how the service is led.

Governance is provided by the Fire Authority's Finance and Audit Committee, who receive a six-monthly update on progress against the Culture Action Plan. The Culture Development Committee is co-chaired by the CFO and Sunita Gamblin QPM, a former Deputy Chief Constable, who brings an honest, external perspective, and who isn't afraid of frank, constructive conversations.

8. Staff experience and perception

There is good evidence of engagement with an increasing number of staff networks who feel involved in policy development and organisational decision making. They cite excellent relationships and demonstrable support from their SLT 'Champions'. These networks describe their memberships as growing and as their relevance continues, they should expect greater numbers joining and contributing. Each of network leads interviewed expressed their commitment to being part of the change process and were able to identify key activities that they were engaging on to support the organisation. There is a strong sense of ownership from the staff networks to get involved in policy development and organisational decision making. Despite some of the networks being small, they believe they have excellent support from the SLT. Some expressed a concern about capacity, and we understand that informal 'facilities' time is being explored by the service, which we commend.

All but one of the SLT had been with the organisation prior to our independent review in 2023. They have demonstrated tremendous resilience as individuals and together as a team. There is a strong sense of shared ownership for the challenges they have faced and for what lies ahead. Each of the SLT expressed their desire to make the organisation a better place to work and to develop their people.

The staff survey results show an organisation that is growing in confidence. People are more likely to speak up if they witness something they don't feel is right and many of those we interviewed talked about the service being a 'safer psychological space' than previously. The example of chief officer promotions reflects a more transparent and inclusive service and the investment of unions and staff networks in policy development is testament to a desire to be a learning environment.

The 'Connect' intranet is an excellent means of providing staff with access to a wide range of resources. It is easy to navigate and there are many helpful products to support staff and managers. A dynamic Culture Dashboard providing data and insights is available to all staff to enable them to monitor organisational performance.

There remain some challenges in the service. It is recognised that despite regular communications from the strategic leadership team, there is a persistent failure to adhere to the policy of male and female only shower and lavatory facilities. There were

several examples of men using female facilities which women describe as demeaning and disrespectful. A recent communication by the CFO made it clear that any further disregard for this policy would result in disciplinary action. This behaviour has the potential to undermine the impressive work being undertaken in the service. We recognise that currently only 6% of the staff are women and that this means there is a disproportionately high number of men need access to shower and changing facilities, particularly during high operational demand. Whilst good work is ongoing in relation to the estate, this will take time. A pragmatic solution could be sought to ameliorate some of the tension from this persistent issue.

Another challenge is at operational middle management level. There appears to be a level of disengagement within this group of managers who are an important and influential group whose behaviour and standards set the tone for the watch and their station. More work could be done to engage this group of managers and ensure that they feel included in decision making and policy development. Investing in a comprehensive development programme with coaching and mentoring, alongside more structured leadership training, would be key to this critical group of managers.

9. Embedding and Sustainability

There is good evidence of how cultural improvements are being embedded into policies, procedures and practices. The Code of Ethics is linked to key organisational documents and to Role Guides for staff. The new Dignity and Respect Framework provides an umbrella under which sit updated policies and procedures. A significant amount of work has been undertaken by the HR and EDI teams to develop programmes and interventions to support the culture change, with strong and consistent messaging.

The staff survey, carried out in January/February of this year, and published in the summer of 2025, shows a generally well-engaged organisation with 80% of responses saying they felt involved, motivated and committed to the service. Of those who responded, 98% said that it was their responsibility to follow the Code of Ethics at work, and 77% people said they felt confident to speak up if they witnessed inappropriate behaviour.

The role the Culture Development Committee plays is key to ensuring long-term sustainable change. The Culture Dashboard and other regular reporting mechanisms indicate an improving picture.

DWFRS should be commended for their ambition to embark upon such a programme of cultural change and their commitment to delivering tangible results. It was evident from our interviews that this is a very different organisation to the one we independently reviewed two years ago. The next stage of the journey should be the embedding of the new culture within the service. A schematic that illustrates how all

aspects of the Code of Ethics fit together has been developed by the organisation and should be widely disseminated.

An organisation embeds cultural change by aligning its values, behaviours and systems to a clear vision of the desired culture. DWFRS has clearly achieved this and has gone some distance to reinforcing these consistently over time. Visible and sustained leadership commitment is evident with senior leaders modelling the new behaviours and integrating them into day-to-day decisions and communications. Policies and procedures have been aligned to integrate the desired values and behaviours, and open dialogue has helped build understanding and ownership.

Ultimately, cultural change becomes embedded when the new ways of working are not only practised but are felt as the natural and expected way of doing business. Perhaps the organisation could consider a shift in language from 'culture' towards framing culture as part of long-term organisational resilience and strengthening organisational maturity. DWFRS has a proud legacy and wants to create conditions for sustainable success.

10. Communication and engagement

Feedback from the interviews provides evidence of a generally engaged workforce. The staff survey results show increased levels of engagement and understanding of the values of the organisation. A high level of survey participation indicates a workforce that is connected to the organisation. Regular progress reporting is disseminated to the workforce through the staff intranet 'Connect' and there are 'open chairs' provided at Fire Authority organisational meetings, including Strategic Leadership Team and Culture Development Committee meetings. Independent scrutiny through the Fire Authority's Finance and Audit Committee and the independent co-chair of the Culture Development Committee is excellent provides an additional layer of assurance.

The co-chairs of the Culture Development Committee promote, champion and encourage employee voices, allies, union reps, staff networks and members of the service to be both represented and engaged in healthy tension and constructive comments. They take care to ensure every possible opportunity is taken to increase active participation.

The Culture Development Committee's tracker demonstrates that staff voices are heard and acted upon to drive change. For example, the last Culture Development Committee had a whole fire station team attend part of the meeting, which demonstrates the level of commitment.

There is a completely anonymous survey completed at the end of each CDC meeting to further encourage voices in the service by asking them to share their views about what needs to change to make the service a better place to work. This feedback is the first thing that is discussed at the next CDC, so the co-chairs are constantly setting the

right climate for challenges to be encouraged and welcomed. By way of example, feedback from the last CDC was as follows:

93% felt the co-chairs were prioritising the right topics

100% felt their input was valued

100% recognised progress with clearly defined next steps

11. Embedding Sustainable Organisational Practices

Since 2023, the organisation has undergone a substantial period of transformation. This progress has been underpinned by a shared commitment from senior leaders and partners, enabling sweeping improvements in how the organisation operates and how it delivers for its people and communities. The next phase focuses on consolidating these gains and embedding sustainable practices that strengthen resilience, sharpen performance and support a modern, inclusive workforce.

A key priority is equipping managers with the capability and confidence to lead effectively in a more agile environment. A structured coaching and mentoring offer will help managers develop stronger decision making, support their teams more consistently and model the behaviours that sustain high performance.

Addressing the barriers that affect the recruitment and progression of women remains central to building a fair and representative workforce. Targeted actions to remove systemic obstacles, review recruitment pathways and enhance support mechanisms will ensure great equity and broaden the organisation's talent pipeline.

Alongside this, pragmatic solutions are required to resolve long-standing estate challenges. By taking a practical, future-focused approach to the condition and functionality of the estate, the organisation can create workplaces that are safe, efficient and aligned with modern service needs.

Finally, continued implementation of a flatter organisational structure will reinforce accountability, shorten decision making routes and empower staff at all levels. This structural shift supports a more responsive operational model and helps embed the organisations progress into everyday practice.

Collectively, these priorities move the organisation beyond one off change programmes and towards a sustainable, long term operating environment – one that enables people to thrive, strengthens organisational maturity and delivers consistently high-quality outcomes.

APPENDIX 2 - INTERVIEWS

Interviews were conducted during October 2025 via Teams by the P2P Review Team, comprising Kevin Purcell, Alex Johnson, Dee Collins and Jude Helliker, all of whom were involved in the Independent Review in 2023. Interviewees were selected by DWFRS as a small cross-section of people across the service. These included senior leaders, union representatives and staff network leads:

Name	Role	Interviewer
Andy Cole	CFO – SLT	Dee
Darren Langdown	ACFO Response	Alex
Jenny Long	ACO People Services	Jude
Ryan Maslan	DACO Financial Services	Jude
Jill McCrae	ACO Service Support	Jude
Dave Waters	ACFO Safety & Compliance	Alex
Vikki Shearing	ACO Corporate Services	Dee
Ant Bholah	AM – Ops Training	Alex
Jason Moncrieff	AM – Service Improvement	Alex
Marc House	AM – Prevention & Protection	Alex
Fiona Kiernan Tatem	Head of ICT	Jude
Ian Hopkins	Head of Assets	Alex
Emily Cheeseman	Head of Communications and Engagement	Alex
Sadie Price	Head of People Operations	Jude
Christine Sharma	EDI Manager Women’s Support Network Lead	Jude
Fliss Williams	Leadership & Cultural Development Manager	Alex
Jo Gaskill	Ops Women Network Lead	Jude
CJ Raines	FirePride Network Lead	Jude
Sam Pyne	Men’s Network Lead	Jude
Aisha Jabin	Minority Ethnic Network Lead	Jude
Brad Stevens	Neurodiversity Network Lead	Jude
Wayne Jones	Fire & Rescue Service Association	Kevin
Andy Corben/Leah Smith	FBU	Dee
Andy Fowler	Unison	Dee

APPENDIX 3 - INDEPENDENT REVIEW TEAM (IRT) PROFILES

Dee Collins CBE QPM BSC Jt.Hons

Dee is a former chief police officer with 32 years of experience in public safety and law enforcement service delivery. She has been an executive leader for over 12 years and has an extensive record of strategic leadership and operational policing within four police forces. Dee retired as the Chief Constable of West Yorkshire Police in 2019, where she successfully led nine thousand officers, staff and volunteers through authentic and people-focused leadership. She was the President of the British Association of Women in Policing between 2014 and 2019.

Dee is a visible, confident leader who can forge strong partnerships and trusted working relationships. She has an authentic passion for people, developing individuals and teams with a focus on inclusion and valuing difference.

Alex Johnson QFSM, MBA

Alex spent 30 years in the fire service, retiring as the Chief Fire Officer/CEO of South Yorkshire FRS in January 2020. She has extensive executive-level leadership and strategic managerial experience within the fire and rescue sector. Alex was the lead for the Local Government peer assessment of Jersey FRS and HMI Scotland for the inspection of Northern Ireland FRS.

Having been a leading role and force with Women in the Fire Service (WFS), Alex specialises in coaching those from underrepresented groups, embracing the value their diversity brings to an organisation. She has an inclusive and collaborative approach to leadership and cultural change.

Alex specialises in creating and delivering training to change behaviours and promote inclusive work environments.

Jude Helliker MA, FCIPD

Jude is a strategic leader in human resources and organisational development, with over 15 years at executive director level and an extensive background in the public and private sectors. Jude has worked across the UK and internationally, most latterly as Director of People & Development at Police Scotland, the second largest police service in the UK with more than 23,000 employees.

Jude is committed to challenging barriers and designing transformative interventions to ensure employers are inclusive. She has managed significant employee relations negotiations with various trades unions and staff associations and delivered major change programmes. She believes that focusing on people's wellbeing can positively impact organisational performance and culture and has experience designing and delivering organisation-wide wellbeing programmes.

Jude has significant experience in equality, diversity & inclusion, talent management,

mentoring, leadership development and executive team building over various organisations.