



Our Culture Journey Strategic Highlight Report

STRATEGIC SPONSOR	CFO Andy Cole/ACO Jenny Long
PERIOD COVERED	March 2026 – September 2026

OVERALL PROJECT STATUS	On Track
SUMMARY	The independent review into workplace culture was published in October 2023, alongside the management response to its recommendations. In response, the Service developed a Culture Action Plan to address the review findings and relevant national recommendations, including those arising from the Values and Behaviours in Fire and Rescue report and the thematic review of handling misconduct. The plan set ambitious delivery timescales from 2023 to April 2026, reflecting the importance of this work and the Service's commitment to sustained improvement. Following the HMICFRS inspection in 2024, the Service received a cause of concern in relation to 'promoting the right values and culture'. The Service has since prioritised delivery of the associated actions alongside the wider Culture Action Plan recommendations, ensuring improvement activity is coordinated and subject to appropriate oversight. Good progress has been made in strengthening workplace culture. This was externally validated through two reviews conducted during September and October 2025: an audit by SWAP, the Service's internal auditors, and a sense-check review by P2P, the organisation that carried out the independent review. In November 2025 HMICFRS also undertook a revisit to assess progress against the cause of concern and closed three of the five areas, providing positive assurance on the direction of travel. An in-depth progress report was presented to the Fire Authority in February 2026. 26-12-Culture-Progress.pdf. The report concluded that the Culture Delivery Plan had established critical foundations for a safer and more inclusive workplace. It also recognised that, although progress is evident across a number of themes, sustained leadership, communication and focus will be essential to fully realise the long-term cultural transformation described in the NFCC framework and the Service's own cultural vision statement. Members were advised that the next culture

	improvement plan would embed and strengthen existing work, incorporate outstanding actions and audit recommendations, and introduce a broader suite of metrics to monitor progress, evaluate impact and provide ongoing assurance. Our Plan to Build a Better Workplace (OPBBW) deliberately moves away from using 'culture' in its title. This reflects the principle that culture is not the responsibility of a single function or department; it is demonstrated through how people show up at work, how decisions are made, and how services are delivered. The title signals the Service's organisational maturity and reinforces that workplace culture is integral to operational excellence, organisational credibility and the experience of both staff and communities. In developing OPBBW, the Service engaged extensively with staff and stakeholders. This included action owners, Directors, staff networks and the Culture Development Committee, followed by an organisation-wide call to action through FireWire inviting feedback on the proposed actions and identifying any gaps. <i>A copy of the plan is attached</i> Following this engagement, the final plan was completed in August 2026. It covers the period 2026–2028 and is intended to provide a clear transition from a discrete culture programme into the Service's established business planning, performance and assurance arrangements.
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GOVERNANCE		A Culture Steering Group is in place to oversee delivery of the actions within the plan. Membership includes individuals with responsibility for leading and delivering specific actions, enabling clear accountability and coordinated progress reporting. The Culture Development Committee is co-chaired by the CFO and Independent Adviser Sunita Gamblin QPM. The Committee brings together staff from across the organisation, trade union representatives and staff network leads. Open seats are actively encouraged so that any member of staff can observe or participate, helping to ensure staff voice continues to inform the Service's approach.
PROGRESS		Progress against OPBBW will be monitored through regular highlight reports, which will be available to all staff via the Our Culture SharePoint site. Progress will also be reported to Members through the Service's established performance reporting arrangements, providing visibility of delivery, impact and any emerging risks.
COMMUNICATION		A communications strategy is in place, with regular updates shared through Weekly Updates and FireWire. The co-chairs of the Culture Development Committee also provide updates after each quarterly meeting, supporting transparency, engagement and continued visibility of progress.

RISKS		- Following the HMICFRS inspection outcome, a strategic risk relating to Service culture has been added to ensure ongoing visibility, scrutiny and mitigation at the appropriate level. - Delivery of the CFO-delegated elements of the Modernisation Programme may create organisational and cultural pressure. This is being actively managed to minimise adverse impacts and to align change activity with positive cultural development.
ISSUES TO RAISE		The HMICFRS inspection commenced in August. The outcome will provide a clearer assessment of progress against the remaining two areas within the cause of concern, as well as the culture-related Areas for Improvement.

NEXT STEPS	Continue to deliver the agreed actions set out within OPBBW, with clear ownership, milestones and oversight. Assess progress through the agreed assurance arrangements, including delivery metrics, audit recommendations and impact measures. Maintain regular communication with staff and Members on progress, outcomes and the continuing workplace culture journey.
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