



INDEPENDENT REVIEW INTO THE WORKPLACE CULTURE OF DORSET & WILTSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

MARCH – SEPTEMBER 2023

1. FOREWORD FROM ALEX JOHNSON QFSM

Between March and September 2023, I led a team that undertook an independent review of the culture of the Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service (DWFRS). The team comprised eight former senior leaders from both the fire and police services across the UK, all with significant experience and a passion for promoting inclusion for all within organisations.

The team engaged with around 200 employees and ex-employees of the Service, and we were all impressed with the consummate professionalism each of these individuals demonstrated.

Initial indications were that between 20 and 30 people would contact us. The Service should be proud of enabling and empowering so many people to come forward. 200 people engaged with the team, and this is a significant return for this type of review.

It is clear to me that everyone that engaged with this review takes immense pride in working for the Fire & Rescue Service and each has a true desire to help in formulating our recommendations to assist the Service moving forward.

I acknowledge that senior managers and leaders across the Service have already taken action to make cultural changes in the Service. However, my team has identified some serious and concerning issues that we highlight in this report.

All those who participated have been assured of anonymity, however given the small number of women employed by the Service, the content of this report could, if allowed, cause issues for women. The Service should take steps to ensure the safety and welfare of the women and men who have spoken out during this independent review, all of whom were proud to work for DWFRS. Their primary focus in speaking out is to improve the working conditions and culture of DWFRS for all employees.

I would like to pay tribute to the brave women and men who have shared their 'lived experiences' with us, both the positive and the negative. I recognise that many of these stories have been painful and emotional and have taken great courage to share. I have been encouraged to hear from many male allies, who have spoken up on behalf of women; your voice is essential on the journey to improve the culture within DWFRS and to create an inclusive working environment for all.

It has been a privilege to lead this independent review on behalf of the Chief Fire Officer. I am grateful to the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) for being so accommodating of their own time, providing the team with extensive information and being available for interview themselves. I would also like to thank the HR team for providing access to hundreds of documents which has assisted us in preparing this final report.

This report identifies several areas that need action to improve the work-life experience of both women and men in the Service. The 2023 NFCC Cultural Statement ⁽¹⁾ states:

'Everyone deserves to work in safe environments that are free from bullying, harassment & discrimination, abuse & harm, where they feel supported, welcome and able to thrive'.

I believe that DWFRS have the skills and ambition to build on both internal and public confidence and to truly create an inclusive environment where people can come to work and be their true selves.

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2. INTRODUCTION AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

In February 2023, Alan Baldwin Services Ltd. (ABS) was commissioned by the Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service to conduct an independent review of the workplace culture of the organisation.

The terms of reference for this review, set by the Service, and agreed by the Fire and Rescue Authority, were to:

- Provide all current staff, with a particular focus on female operational and female corporate employees, with an independent and confidential opportunity to share their experiences of working in the Service.
- Provide an independent and confidential opportunity for former staff members, with a particular focus on female ex-employees, to share their experiences of working in the Service since its inception on 1st April 2016.
- Consider the impact of team-based customs and traditions in respect of social media use in the workplace.
- Consider the impact of individual or group behaviour in respect of social media use in the workplace.
- Test the robustness and methodology of the on-going internal culture review being undertaken by the Service following the publication of the Independent Culture Review of London Fire Brigade in November 2022.
- Comment upon the existing programme of work undertaken to ensure positive workplace cultures.
- Independently assess the effectiveness of current procedures and practices relevant to workplace culture, comparing them to legal requirements and best practice and make recommendations for improvement. This will include:

Discipline
Grievance
Bullying and Harassment
Whistleblowing
Exit interviews

- Propose national/sector-wide recommendations that will support broader cultural change.
- Review the extent or otherwise of different experiences of staff with protected characteristics arising from these key procedures and their practices.
- Review and make recommendations about the robustness of former disciplinary management action taken by the Service when it has investigated allegations of wrongdoing.
- Determine what barriers may prevent the reporting of issues and make recommendations as to how these can be addressed.

- Determine the success, or otherwise, of communicating and implementing organisational learning.
- Assess the training and support that has been and is in place to enable managers to resolve workplace behavioural issues in a timely and professional way.
- Validate the extent to which the Service currently communicates the outcomes of disciplinary procedures and make recommendations to promote increased transparency whilst maintaining compliance with employment law and legal requirements overseen by the Information Commissioners Office.
- Validate the resultant action plan and recommendations arising from both the Service's on-going culture review and that of this commissioned independent review.

The scope of the review will include:

- All staff, with a particular focus on female operational and female corporate members of staff.
- Former employees, with a particular focus on female members of operational and corporate staff who were employed by the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service after 1 April 2016 when it was created.

For legal reasons, the review will not involve:

- Any matters that are currently subject to a live investigation.
- Any matters that are the subject of a past or current police investigation.
- If any evidence of possible criminal offences emerges during the review, this will be referred to the police.

The independent review team (IRT) will provide a report with recommendations setting out their findings with regards to:

- Further strengthening the workplace culture to help ensure it aligns with the Service's Code of Ethics.
- The robustness of key procedures and practices.
- The barriers to inhibit the reporting of inappropriate behaviours.
- The sharing of lessons learnt and improvements being made.
- Increasing the transparency of disciplinary action whilst maintaining compliance with employment law and legal requirements overseen by the Information Commissioners Office.
- Propose national/sector-wide recommendations that will support broader cultural change.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed for this work was a triangulated soft-systems research approach, coined by Checkland and Scholes⁽²⁾ to provide an evidence-based report to key stakeholders as per the terms of reference and to include relevant recommendations for the next steps.

This work was completed in three phases:

Phase One:

- Initial meetings conducted with key stakeholders to contextualise the issues and to define the problem;
- Terms of reference for the review agreed with key stakeholders.

Phase Two:

- To invite all staff and ex-employees from DWFRS to speak with the independent review team and share their experiences of working for the organisation;
- To carry out a range of confidential interviews with those willing to speak to the review team;
- To carry out a review of the DWFRS HR policies and procedures to ensure that they are fit for purpose;
- To analyse the application of said policies and procedures to assess consistency of approach and compliance with legal requirements;
- To review workforce diversity data;
- To cross-reference against the recent review into the London Fire Brigade and the HMICFRS Spotlight Report;
- To conduct regular progress updates to the stakeholders.

Phase Three:

- To collate and analyse the qualitative data received from the interviews, identifying key themes and areas for further investigation;
- To conduct final analysis of the research;
- To identify best practice from other fire services;
- To complete the final report and recommendations and present them to key stakeholders.

4. BACKGROUND

Workforce Diversity

The Fire Service in the UK has historically been a male-dominated profession with limited diversity. In recent years, there has been a push to improve workforce diversity, thereby creating more inclusive workplaces in recent years.

The Local Government Association publication 'Fire Vision 2024'⁽³⁾ has set out the following ambitions:

- by 2024/5, 30 per cent of new firefighter recruits nationally should be female; this represents a step change for the fire and rescue service and will require a cultural transformation, which we are determined to achieve
- in each fire and rescue service, both frontline staff and staff as a whole should reflect the ethnic diversity of the community they serve
- the diversity of senior managers mirrors these developments
- the gender and ethnic balance in the workforce should not be eroded by poor retention (i.e., those staff five years in will not be less diverse than the cohort was when recruited)
- staff at all levels and local communities have confidence in the political and operational leadership of their service.

The UK Government's annual fire and rescue workforce and pensions statistics ⁽⁴⁾: England, reports on workforce trends and workforce diversity. The most recent published report is April 2021 to March 2022, highlighting as of 31 March 2022:

- 8.2 per cent (2,862) of firefighters employed by Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRA) were women compared with 7.5 per cent (2,644) in the previous year and 5.2 per cent (1,833) five years ago.
- 5.0 per cent (1,582) of firefighters employed by FRAs who stated their ethnicity were from an ethnic minority, compared with 4.7 per cent (1,517) in the previous year and 3.9 per cent (1,255) five years ago.
- The average age of firefighters employed by FRAs was 41, compared with 41 in the previous year and 42 five years ago.
- Of those who stated their sexual orientation, 3.9 per cent (872) of firefighters employed by FRAs were lesbian/gay or bisexual, compared with 3.4 per cent (750) in the previous year and 2.6 per cent (451) five years ago.
- Women accounted for 18.6 per cent of all staff employed by FRAs as of 31 March 2022. This is slightly higher than in previous years (17.9 per cent in 2021, 15.1 per cent five years ago and 14.5 per cent ten years ago).
- The number and proportion of women firefighters has slowly increased from 2002 (the first year for which comparable data are available) from 1.7 per cent (753) of all firefighters to 8.2 per cent (2,862) in 2022.

It is important to note that these statistics only include wholetime staff and do not include on-call or volunteer firefighters. DWFRS is predominantly an on-call FRS.

One of the key challenges to improving diversity in the fire service is recruitment. There is a need to attract a more diverse pool of applicants, which may require targeted outreach to traditionally underrepresented communities. This can include working with community organisations, schools, and colleges to promote careers in the fire service and providing information on the qualifications and requirements for the job.

Another critical step is to address barriers to entry that may prevent underrepresented groups from applying. This can include providing support and guidance for applicants throughout the recruitment process and reviewing recruitment criteria to ensure it is fair and inclusive.

Once diverse candidates have been recruited, providing them with the support and training they need to succeed in the fire service is essential. This can include mentoring programmes, cultural awareness training, and opportunities for professional development.

Ultimately, achieving workforce diversity requires a long-term commitment from fire services to address the factors contributing to underrepresentation and to create a culture that values and supports diversity. This includes ongoing efforts to promote diversity and inclusion at all levels of the organisation, from recruitment and training to leadership and decision-making. Female firefighters have been in the fire service since the early 1980s, which is 43 years ago. Sadly, Government and independent reports are still highlighting the same inequalities experienced by minority groups four decades on.

Firefighting and Gender

The 1999 Thematic Review by Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate ⁽⁵⁾ identified significant deficiencies in how Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) were tackling the key issues of equality, diversity and fairness. The report made 38 recommendations aimed at improving policies, practices and performance to affect and effecting cultural change. Challenging targets were set for recruiting, progressing and retaining women and black and minority ethnic staff. To date, the targets set for 2009 have still not been reached.

At various Fire Brigades Union (FBU) conferences, the issue of sexual harassment, discrimination and inclusion have been raised at different times, with the FBU raising resolutions and seeking a cohesive strategy to support women ⁽⁶⁾

During the 'Round 2, Tranche 2' 2021/22 inspections, HMICFRS sought to establish if fire services were starting to integrate the code of ethics into their values and other policies. The summary findings 'found numerous examples of bullying, harassment and discrimination, including staff behaving poorly towards each other in inappropriate and unacceptable ways. In some fire services we found evidence of racism, sexism and homophobia, and a culture where staff, including managers, didn't always feel confident to challenge poor behaviour. ⁽⁷⁾

In 2022, the HMICFRS State of Fire Report ⁽⁸⁾ made a similar statement: 'Most services should do more to improve equality, diversity and inclusion. Some services haven't taken enough meaningful steps to promote and improve equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). Although many services have a comprehensive EDI plan, they often don't lead to tangible changes in the diversity of their staff. And in many services, staff understanding of EDI is still 'poor'.

The most recent HMICFRS publication (2023) is the Spotlight report – Values & Culture in Fire & Rescue Services ⁽⁹⁾: 'Unacceptable behaviours sadly exist throughout society, and no workforce is completely immune to bullying, harassment and discrimination. But in those organisations with a responsibility to keep the public safe, and where public trust and confidence are so important, it is right that higher standards are demanded. There is no place in FRS for any person who is unfit to fulfil a role that protects the public. Not only do communities need to be able to trust FRS staff, but in highly pressured scenarios and in a working environment where colleagues spend so much time together, staff need to be able to trust and depend on one another for their own safety'.

Misogyny and Sexism in Fire Services

Misogyny in the UK fire services has been a longstanding issue that has gained increasing attention in recent years. There have been numerous reports of women firefighters experiencing sexism, harassment, and discrimination in the workplace. Societal expectations have changed in recent years where women, and indeed, wider society, no longer tolerates inappropriate behaviours.

One of the main challenges facing women firefighters is the need for more representation in the profession. According to the latest Home Office statistics ⁽¹⁰⁾, only 8.2% of firefighters in England are women. This can result in a culture that is hostile to women and perpetuates gender stereotypes. By comparison, the Police Service in the UK reports 33.5% female representation for the same period.

Women firefighters have reported facing a range of discriminatory behaviours, including being excluded from training opportunities, being given menial tasks, and being subject to verbal and physical harassment. There have also been reports of women firefighters being sexually assaulted and/or raped by their colleagues.

In response to these issues, some fire services have taken steps to address misogyny and promote gender equality. This includes developing policies and procedures to address harassment and discrimination, providing training on diversity and inclusion, and improving recruitment efforts to attract more women to the profession.

However, much work must be done to develop a fire service free from misogyny and discrimination. This requires a long-term commitment from fire services to address the underlying factors contributing to these issues and to develop a culture that values and supports diversity and equality. Women firefighters must be able to work in a safe, respectful, and supportive environment and have the same opportunities for training, career progression, and professional development as their male colleagues.

Review into the London Fire Brigade

Following concerns about bullying and harassment within the London Fire Brigade ⁽¹¹⁾ Nazir Afzal, the former chief prosecutor of Northwest Crown Prosecution Service, England, conducted a review of its culture.

The review found significant issues with bullying and harassment within the London Fire Brigade, with some staff reporting experiencing abusive behaviour, discrimination, and a lack of support from management. The review also identified a lack of diversity and inclusion within the organisation, with women and people from ethnic minority backgrounds underrepresented in leadership positions.

To address these issues, the review made several recommendations, including:

- Developing a new code of ethics and behaviour that sets clear expectations for staff conduct.
- Providing training on diversity and inclusion to all staff, with a focus on developing a more inclusive culture. Establishing a diversity and inclusion steering group to oversee the implementation of the recommendations.
- Introducing measures to improve staff support and well-being, including establishing a confidential support line for staff experiencing bullying or harassment.

The review also highlighted the need for a culture change within the London Fire Brigade, focusing more on accountability, transparency, and respect for staff. In addition, it called for a renewed commitment to diversity and inclusion, with clear targets and measures to track progress.

Since the review was published, the London Fire Brigade has taken steps to address the issues identified. This includes establishing a new code of ethics and behaviour, introducing new training programmes on diversity and inclusion and launching a confidential support line for staff experiencing bullying or harassment. However, there is still much work to be done to create a fire service that is free from bullying and harassment and genuinely representative of the diverse communities it serves.

5. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service

Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service is a combined fire and rescue service that serves the two counties of Dorset and Wiltshire in Southwest England. The Service was created on the 1st of April 2016 following a merger between Dorset Fire and Rescue Service and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Dorset Fire and Rescue Service was established in 1948 and covered the county of Dorset, including the towns of Poole and Weymouth. The Bournemouth Fire Brigade was incorporated into Dorset in 1974 due to local authority boundary changes. The Service employed staff working across 26 fire stations, responding to around 7,000 incidents each year.

Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service was established in 1948 and covered the county of Wiltshire, including the city of Salisbury and the town of Swindon. The Service employed staff working across 24 fire stations, responding to around 5,000 incidents each year.

The merger of these two Services was to gain greater efficiency and effectiveness of the Dorset and Wiltshire fire and rescue services, and to improve the quality of service provision. Today, Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service covers an area of over 3,500 square miles and employs around 1,200 staff, who work across 50 fire stations, responding to approximately 14,000 incidents each year.

In recent years, several high-profile allegations of sexism and misogyny within fire services in England have led to calls for cultural change within these organisations. Following media reports into such allegations in Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service, the Chief Fire Officer commissioned this independent review.

Workforce diversity at DWFRS

DWFRS is an establishment made up of 1,344 staff, ⁽¹²⁾ comprised of wholtime firefighters, on-call firefighters, fire control and corporate staff. Some staff hold dual roles as some corporate and wholtime staff are also on the on-call cadre.

For the 2021-22 reporting year, the gender split at DWFRS was 80.65% male, 18.98% female, and 0.37% prefer not to say.

6.77% of wholtime firefighters are female, 4.92% of on-call firefighters are female, 80.65% of fire control and 53.03% of corporate staff are female. The number of female wholtime and on-call firefighters in DWFRS is lower in comparison to the national picture.

The DWFRS gender split of job applicants for wholetime and on-call is 95.6% male to 4.4% female for wholetime and 84.5% male and 14.6% female for on-call. This illustrates a potential lack of attraction for women to become firefighters. DWFRS acknowledges this in its annual equality report and has created development initiatives to encourage more female staff to progress within the Service. This is supported through the operational Women's Network and a buddying scheme. A positive action campaign is employed to attract more women to become firefighters.

Early indications for 2022-23 show that whilst DWFRS has successfully recruited some new firefighters (mainly on-call), some female firefighters have retired in the last year. Consequently, the number of female firefighters has remained static. The Service is to be commended for its efforts in recruiting more women into operational roles. In terms of progression, a number of female staff have been promoted in the last year, so DWFRS is predicting a slightly improved position picture. The numbers remain small, but the review team is encouraged by the upward trend.

Several women reported they felt there were operational barriers to prevent their promotion and progression. Interviewees described issues such as a lack of flexible shift patterns, difficulty getting childcare to meet working arrangements and an expectation of working long hours with excessive workloads. Women also described a reluctance to put themselves forward for promotion because they didn't want to be seen as the 'token' female and were concerned about the lack of support and development they would receive.

Recommendation 1 – DWFRS should further develop its range of positive action initiatives to encourage greater levels of recruitment and promotion of all under-represented groups, particularly women. Examples of positive action initiatives include: targeted attraction and recruitment campaigns; targeted career development initiatives including mentoring, shadowing, coaching and bespoke training; identifying positive role models from black and ethnic minority and female staff; ensuring all recruitment and promotion adverts include a positive action or welcome statement; ensuring all selection panels are diverse; consider anonymising application forms and carry out EQIAs on all promotion and selection processes to ensure they do not inadvertently impact those with protected characteristics.

Recommendation 2 - Establish goals to significantly increase female representation at both the wholetime and on-call firefighter level while ensuring the selection procedures are fair and transparent.

It is concerning that a lack of operational women in senior positions is compounding this perception. There is currently only one operational firefighter female role model above Watch Manager level. The Service has not been a corporate member of the Women in the Fire Service UK for a number of years.

It is also clear that insufficient numbers of women are applying to join the Service.

Recommendation 3 – Identify barriers to women and other underrepresented groups from being attracted to joining and being successful in the selection process to become a firefighter. Any identified barriers should be removed from the process whilst ensuring no dilution of the robustness of the selection criteria.

Recommendation 4 – DWFRS should renew their corporate Women in the Fire Service membership and avail itself of the many opportunities for female progression. (At time of writing we are pleased to note that they have recently renewed their membership.) DWFRS should also consider supporting attendance at the FBU women's school and any other staff association training.

Staff Sentiment

In February 2023, the IRT invited all current DWFRS employees and ex-employees to have a confidential interview. All interviews have been confidentially conducted by independent review team members, none of whom have any connection with DWFRS. The interview notes have been kept securely, and no access has been available to staff from DWFRS. Interviews commenced in March and concluded in June 2023.

The interviewers used a template to provide standardisation for analysis. Each interview was examined through open questioning, allowing all those interviewed to share their personal experiences, both positive and negative.

Some people asked if they could submit written responses to the independent review. This was for various reasons, including lack of availability, geographical location or unwillingness to be interviewed in person. These written responses have been included in our analysis.

There were 159 Individual interviewee and email responses – 17 of whom were ex-employees (4 emails, 13 interviews). The IRT held interviews with 124 people, with some requesting follow-up interviews. In addition, focus groups took place with staff networks, including the Women's Support Network and the Ops Women's Network. This represents around 12-13% of the workforce, which equates to 35.2% of the entire female workforce and 7% male. To protect the anonymity of those interviewed, it has not been possible to report at sub-division level due to the small number of women in some areas of the Service.

Response numbers by gender and method of response	Email	Interview	Total
Female	23	69	92
Male	12	55	67
Total	35	124	159

A further ten members of staff who did *not* have their own interviews joined one of the group sessions and are included in the headcount of those with whom the review team engaged. These staff attended the Women's Support Network and the Ops Network meetings. In addition, several watches were spoken to, but those attendees were not individually 'registered'. Therefore, approximately 200 people were engaged throughout the review. Only those people who had an individual interview have been included in the headcount. All views, however, have been captured and form part of this summary.

45% of the responses were from corporate staff, 37% of responses were from wholetime firefighters, and 18% of respondents were on-call firefighters.

Approximate percentage of workforce interviewed (ex-employees are excluded from these totals);

Proportion of workforce engaged with	Corporate	On-Call FF	Wholetime FF	Total
Female	28%	48%	76%	35.2%
Male	11%	3%	10%	6.5%
Total	21%	5%	14%	12.2%

Duplicate names were removed from the count. If staff have more than one role (corporate and on-call), their details were recorded within the on-call role group.). A maximum sample size is usually 10% of the population, as long as this does not exceed 1,000⁽¹³⁾.

Leadership

Since the review of the London Fire Brigade, the DWFRS Chief Fire Officer and his SLT, as well as commissioning this independent cultural review, have completed an internal culture review of the organisational culture in the Service. This culminated in the *Internal Culture Review Report* ⁽¹⁴⁾.

The internal culture review of workplace culture comprised three stages:

1. A gap analysis/self-assessment against the key themes of the LFB report
2. An internal staff culture survey
3. Staff focus groups and 1:1 meetings

As part of the independent review team's investigation, each interviewee was asked about their engagement with the staff survey, which had a 38% response rate.

70% of interviewees who answered the question: 'Have you completed the DWFRS internal cultural review questionnaire?' indicated that they had: 68% of females and 73% of male respondents. This percentage fell to just over half of the total spoken to. There was cynicism around how the survey was written and how individuals felt they could have been identified even though it was promoted as anonymous; some interviewees stated they had tempered their survey responses as a result.

Completed the DWFRS internal cultural review questionnaire	No	Yes	Total Answered	Total Interviewed	% of those interviewed	% of those who answered
Female	17	36	53	69	52%	68%
Male	11	29	40	55	53%	73%
Total	28	65	93	124	52%	70%

The IRT have been provided with the final internal culture review report and it is encouraging to note many of the findings in this report resonate with the internal culture review team's conclusions. The recommendations from the IRT should be read in conjunction with the recommendations of the internal culture review and a collective single action plan be produced.

30% of staff interviewed indicated a lack of trust in the SLT, 25% of females and 36% of male respondents.

Lack of trust in the SLT	Corporate	On-Call FF	Wholetime FF	Total
Female	24%	36%	19%	25%
Male	19%	53%	34%	36%
Grand Total	23%	46%	29%	30%

The SLT have made efforts to improve their reputation. They have completed 'colour works assessments,' carried out engagement sessions and adopted reverse mentoring sessions. However, there is still a lack of trust in their appetite to receive feedback positively. Many people we interviewed 'referred to the SLT engagement sessions as 'enforced attendance'. There was feedback about members of SLT 'shutting down' challenging or negative comments. The review team sought access to video recordings of some engagement sessions. These initiatives are very worthwhile and should be encouraged; however, upon

review of the recordings, it is evident that the SLT should try to encourage greater levels of 'speaking truth to power'.

Likewise, reverse mentoring is an excellent initiative for hearing contra-views and opinions from under-represented groups. The approach taken in DWFRS is that of a discussion forum for the SLT to receive feedback from colleagues. For this to work as effectively as possible, the SLT must be open and willing to receive and act upon the feedback. SLT confirmed that approximately twenty reverse mentoring sessions took place, and feedback was generally positive. However, two of those interviewed did not feel they had a positive experience. Some individuals may be less inclined to share their views in larger sessions. We would actively encourage DWFRS to continue with this programme and to consider expanding it into one-to-one reverse mentoring relationships between senior leaders and employees from under-represented groups.

Recommendation 5 – Continue an ongoing and regular engagement programme to provide visibility of and accessibility to the SLT. The Service needs to articulate properly the responsibility of each leader for visibility. This will include all leadership grades that have responsibility for staff at numerous locations.

Another issue raised by a number of those interviewed at both operational and corporate level related to the recent HMICFRS inspection. Criticism was made of the SLT being 'more concerned about HMICFRS results' than implementing policies that improve the working environment.

Other comments from those interviewed relate to a perception of nepotism or favouritism by senior managers, particularly regarding promotion or progression. SLT's response to this was that senior leaders remove themselves from promotion processes to ensure that they do not show favouritism to some candidates. For every promotion and selection process, including the opportunity to carry out temporary duties, the organisation would go some way to quelling concerns if they ensured good communication and robust and transparent processes, which are vital to gaining staff trust and confidence. Transparency around redeployment issues is also crucial and should be afforded the same communication and robustness of process.

The SLT has engaged in a programme to get out to meet watches and sections at fire stations, and this should be encouraged, as there is a perception that the visibility of senior managers is poor. The review team recognises that work pressure, geography and resourcing make this increasingly difficult, however, it is important to ensure that teams feel that SLT is supporting them.

Robustness of key DWFRS HR Policies and Procedures

As per the terms of reference for the review, an independent assessment has been undertaken of the effectiveness of current procedures and practices relevant to workplace culture, comparing them to legal requirements and best practice, and making recommendations for improvement. These include the following:

- Discipline
- Grievance
- Bullying and harassment
- Whistleblowing
- Exit interviews

Whilst the Service policies generally comply with ACAS and employment legislation, DWFRS discipline procedure includes a ‘modified’ process that is not in line with ACAS guidance.

Moreover, the review team's research shows the lack of a governance and assurance framework to ensure the effective implementation of the above policies. The structure, workload and resourcing levels of the HR function appear to be insufficient to deal with the volume of cases, and the lack of central oversight creates inconsistencies in both process and outcome. The quality of investigations varies, and the lack of training and oversight of investigating officers is compounding this problem. The recommendations in this area are significant; consequently, the review team wishes to assure DWFRS that this does not solely reflect the HR function. These recommendations are designed to provide a governance and assurance framework to assist the organisation and the HR department in driving its cultural change programme forward.

Discipline

The Discipline procedure and its associated procedures are comprehensive. The current version in place is version 13, dated the 28th of February 2022. Its next review date was the 1st of April 2023, and the review team can confirm that the review has taken place. A scheme of delegation is included in the processes, which is also being updated and simplified to reflect changes in organisational structure. The suite of procedures includes guidance for investigating officers, rules of conduct, disciplinary outcomes, the hearing itself and procedures on the appeals process.

Since 2016 (when the two Services combined), there have been 128 recorded disciplinary cases, four of which have resulted in dismissal from the Service. A form of written warning is a common sanction, ranging from three months to 18 months on file. Of these cases, 55 relate to some form of inappropriate conduct or behaviour. Whilst 13 of these cases have some form of formal sanction ranging from a three-month written warning to dismissal (in two cases), 32 have resulted in local management action (HR043), where disciplinary action was not progressed at all, or are recorded as N/A.

Interviewees were asked: ‘Are you aware of any situations where concerns have been raised that you feel should have been investigated but have not been investigated?’

Are you aware of any situations where concerns have been raised that you feel should have been investigated but have not been investigated?	Yes	Total (Answered the Question)	% Yes
Female	14	48	29.2%
Male	14	40	35.0%
Total	28	88	31.8%

88 of those interviewed answered this question, with 28 stating ‘Yes’; they are aware of situations where concerns have been raised but have not been investigated.

The Service also has a ‘Managing Performance’ procedure designed to deal with inadequate performance or unacceptable behaviour. The procedure outlines a broad range of examples of inadequate performance and unacceptable behaviour, including a failure to comply with the Code of Ethics framework. The procedure explicitly cites examples of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Dignity and Respect. The procedure allows for the sanction of HR043 – Performance Improvement Plan to tackle inadequate performance, minor misconduct or unacceptable behaviour. In our review, we have found several instances where the HR043

has been deployed as a means of dealing with unacceptable behaviour relating to EDI matters. It is important that organisations have such policies to deal with lower levels of capability and performance. However, the reviewers have found there is no central recording of HR043 performance improvement plans as they are primarily managed locally by line managers. Therefore, an employee might be subject to a number of HR043s for EDI matters without a potential pattern being identified.

Recommendation 6 – The review team recommends a further review of the existing suite of procedures pertaining to conduct, performance and capability to ensure that they meet the needs of a modern workforce. This should include accurate and central recording to enable the Service to identify trends and take appropriate action, as required. This would also ensure a consistent approach to discipline. This should include:

- a) Accurate and central recording to enable the Service to identify trends and take appropriate action, as required including central recording and monitoring of HR043 performance improvement plans.***
- b) A review of the modified procedure and overall review of the discipline procedure to ensure a consistent approach to discipline sanctions.***

The IRT understands the requirement for a statutory modified procedure under employment legislation and ACAS guidance, however, this differs from the approach taken by DWFRS. The DWFRS modified procedure allows someone facing disciplinary action to seek, for example, consideration of disciplinary sanction without the need to go to a disciplinary hearing. Of the 128 disciplinary cases since 2016, 13 sanctions have been agreed under the modified procedure. In such cases there is no right of appeal. From its analysis, the review team considers there is a lack of consistency in the application of the modified procedure.

Recommendation 7 - The review team also recommends the introduction of a new 'Dignity at Work' framework to deal specifically with unacceptable behaviour relating to bullying and harassment or EDI issues. This would allow greater clarity and fit with the Service's desire for a 'zero-tolerance' approach to dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

Recommendation 8 - Implement a new EDI policy statement that includes the NFCC position published in July 2023 on embedding EDI in the workplace.

Transparency of the outcomes of disciplinary procedures is key to internal staff confidence in the process. Therefore, the review team asked the following question:

'Are you aware of DWFRS communicating the outcomes of disciplinary procedures?'. Only 13% of those who answered indicated that they were aware of DWFRS communicating outcomes.

Whilst the IRT recognises the importance of data protection and GDPR responsibilities, victims and the wider Service do not see the outcomes of discipline investigations. This has resulted in victims not feeling they have closure or vindication. It also results in distrust of the discipline/grievance process and has restricted the Service's ability to learn and prevent similar occurrences. The Service does provide some high-level statistics for these areas, but they are not easily accessed.

Recommendation 9 – The review team strongly encourages DWFRS to find an appropriate way to provide greater levels of transparency regarding the outcome of processes. This will help to provide 'closure' and support for all victims. This is a matter for DWFRS to continue to raise at a national level with the Home Office, HMICFRS and the NFCC.

Recommendation 10 - The Service should strengthen their reporting to the Fire and Rescue Authority of the number and type of discipline/grievances and the type of sanctions delivered on a quarterly basis. There needs to be sufficient detail to ensure Members are reassured any inappropriate behaviours are being dealt with robustly and trends recognised.

Recommendation 11 - It is equally important to provide relevant training for all managers who are required to carry out investigations (formal and informal), to give them the confidence and support to deal with what are often challenging disciplinary and grievance matters. All supervisors from Crew Manager upwards need to be able to act confidently to resolve or escalate issues at the earliest opportunity. This should ensure victims and perpetrators are dealt with appropriately. This training should be delivered in conjunction with an increased understanding of EDI to ensure they recognise inequality. This should ensure that all managers are accountable for delivering outcomes in line with policy, and in accordance with prescribed timescales. A consistent approach to investigating grievances and other complaints should be undertaken, with trained investigating officers and strong HR support.

Recommendation 12 - Provide regular updates to those involved in HR-related investigations to ensure transparency and to help build trust and confidence.

Recommendation 13 – DWFRS should consider establishing a central group whose role is to assess and monitor all disciplinary, grievance and bullying/harassment cases. The group’s role would be to assess risk, ensure the correct procedure is being applied, appoint investigating officers, provide HR guidance and support, ensure consistency of procedure and monitor progress. DWFRS should ensure that all grievances and other complaints are recorded centrally and monitored for repeat offenders, victims and trends. The HR department will need to be appropriately resourced to deliver this recommendation.

Grievance

The grievance procedure currently in place at DWFRS is version 9, dated the 24th of May 2022, and was due for review on the 1st of July 2023. It is written in accordance with the ACAS code of practice on disciplinary and grievance procedures. It is important to note that whilst the procedure states that the grievance must be submitted on the ‘notification of grievance form,’ the inclusion of wording that states that a grievance is a ‘written notification of dissatisfaction’ and may be submitted by other means, such as, verbally to a line manager or HR representative, would be of value.

Since 2016 there have been 24 formal recorded grievances, 18 of which relate to the application of HR policies and procedures. Whilst many of these date back to issues regarding DWFRS combination and the related voluntary redundancy process, which is not untypical in extensive organisational restructuring programmes, some relate to perceived unfairness in the application of selection and promotion processes.

According to recent HMICFRS data, DWFRS have one of the lowest recorded grievances. Whilst this could be perceived as positive, it may also reflect a lack of trust in the grievance procedure and the fact that all complaints are not recognised or recorded as grievances.

More than half (53%) of those spoken to by the IRT were dissatisfied with elements of HR processes. Concerns were raised about inconsistencies in the application of investigations, outcomes and HR advice. Reference was made to the time taken for completing investigations and hearings. The length of time varied greatly from case to case, and the

inconsistency of recording made it difficult for the review team to analyse. It is essential that those conducting investigations of this nature are appropriately trained and supported to do so confidently. It is evident from the many interviews and cases reviewed that there is a lack of trust in HR processes and HR advice. It appears that many cases have not been investigated properly, and victims have not always been protected and supported. There are also examples of persistent offenders not being identified or dealt with due to lack of oversight, which has led to repeat offending and further victims. This applies to both investigations of a more formal nature and to the grievance procedure.

Bullying and Harassment

Bullying and harassment in the workplace can significantly impact an employee's well-being, job satisfaction, and performance. It is the employer's responsibility to ensure that employees can work in a safe and respectful environment, free from bullying and harassment.

Bullying and harassment can take many forms, including:

- Verbal abuse, including shouting or belittling comments
- Physical abuse, including pushing and hitting
- Exclusion and isolation of people
- Victimisation
- Written abuse, including offensive emails or letters and use of social media
- Sexual harassment, including unwanted physical contact or comments of a sexual nature
- Discrimination based on any of the protected characteristics as defined under the Equality Act 2010 ⁽¹⁵⁾

The Service has a Bullying and Harassment procedure, version 8 of which was issued on the 23rd of February 2022 and was due for review on the 1st of April 2023. The IRT understand that this review is awaiting the outcome of this report. The current policy and procedure contain good practice regarding what one should expect to see in such a procedure.

Reporting bullying and harassment in the workplace is an important step in addressing and preventing these types of behaviours. Employees who experience bullying and harassment should feel empowered to report these incidents to their employer or HR representative.

There are several reasons why people may not report bullying and harassment in the workplace. These can include fear of reprisal from the perpetrator or other colleagues, or that they will be victimised or lose their job if they speak out. Some employees may lack trust in their organisation or HR department to handle their complaint fairly and impartially. They may have had negative experiences in the past or may not believe that the employer takes complaints of bullying and harassment seriously. Some employees may feel embarrassed or ashamed to admit that they have been a victim of bullying or harassment. This may particularly apply to those who have been victims of sexual harassment who feel they could be perceived as weak.

In some organisations, employees may believe that reporting bullying and harassment will not lead to any meaningful action being taken. They may feel that the employer is not equipped to deal with the issue, or that the perpetrator will not be held accountable. However, this area is notoriously challenging for employers in terms of investigation. Bullying and harassment often involve subtle or indirect behaviours that can be difficult to prove.

There may be a lack of physical evidence, and witnesses may be reluctant to come forward, or may have different versions of events, or examples where some people 'close ranks'. Employees may also be reluctant to report bullying and harassment if they are concerned about their confidentiality being breached. There is often a perception of subjectivity between the views of the victim, perpetrator and even the investigator about what constitutes bullying and harassment. In some cases, the perpetrator may hold a position of power over the victim, making it difficult for the victim to speak out or for the investigation to be carried out objectively and fairly.

In some workplaces, bullying and harassment may be seen as a normal part of the culture (e.g., 'banter'), making it less likely for victims to speak out. Employees may feel they are expected to tolerate certain behaviours or be ostracised if they complain. Throughout our interviews, we heard examples from individuals who said they complied with some unacceptable behaviours because of an overwhelming desire to 'fit in' and be accepted.

Since 2016, there have been 35 complaints made using this procedure, 28 of which have been about males. Further analysis shows evidence of counter-complaints between the 'victim' and 'perpetrator' are common.

During our initial interviews with members of SLT, the expression 'victim-led approach' to dealing with complaints was used. Upon further examination, we understand this to mean that it is up to the victim to determine whether and how their complaint should be pursued. Victim-led investigation is an approach to criminal investigations that prioritises the needs and wishes of the victim over those of law enforcement. In a victim-led investigation, the victim is given greater control over the investigation process and is involved in decision making regarding the investigation. This approach recognises that victims often feel powerless and traumatised by the experience and seeks to give them a greater sense of control and increase their sense of empowerment.

HR policies and processes

There was distrust in how the Service, at all levels, deals with unacceptable behaviours. A belief that perpetrators are not dealt with robustly and, in some cases, multiple complaints about individuals who are not dealt with or removed from managerial responsibilities but maintain the same grade. During the review, the term 'victim-led' came up in conversations with both men and women.

Victims do not always have the expertise to make informed decisions about the investigation and may feel pressurised into doing so. We are clear that when complaints are brought to the attention of senior managers, it is the organisation's responsibility to consider carefully those complaints and undertake appropriate investigations. It is especially important that where serious concerns are reported by a junior member of staff about a supervisor or senior member of staff, that it is immediately recognised as significant due to the imbalance of power. In the majority of public services, such a person should be seen as a victim, more likely to have been coerced, not complicit in the activity. It is vital that disciplinary activity and if the behaviour is of a criminal nature, a referral to police, occurs immediately, with the victim being treated as a whistle-blower.

To safeguard all staff members, the Service should ensure that it has an appropriate policy for when staff members report what amounts to serious criminal offences perpetrated in the workplace. This policy should include how they will treat potential victims and any referrals to the local police service. The wishes of the victim should always be paramount, however, the policy must recognise that to protect victims and other members of staff there will be, on rare occasions, the need to report serious criminality. The Service should seek advice from the

police, albeit without the victim's details. This will ensure victims can be best supported and signposted, so they have the confidence to progress a complaint.

The Service must recognise that when incidents occur involving a disproportionate balance of power, victims will often be as concerned about what happens to their employment and reputation as they are about what has happened to them. Line managers and, most importantly, HR professionals, must understand that inappropriate language or a perceived lack of belief in the victim's account will likely result in victims not pursuing their complaint.

22% of people interviewed expressed the view that the 'victim-led' approach was inconsistent and confusing. Specifically, victims say they were not given options, support, or guidance to make an informed decision. Some victims felt their position would be threatened and chose not to pursue complaints. Victims talked about feeling persecuted, invalidated and concerned that the situation would worsen if they complained.

The interview template included a section on culture, diversity and inclusivity. Interviewers asked a series of questions in respect of EDI matters. The collective answers were assessed to be positive, neutral or negative in their views of EDI in DWFRS.

Responses around culture, diversity and inclusivity	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total Responses	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Female	12	20	20	52	23%	38%	38%
Male	16	10	12	38	42%	26%	32%
Total	28	30	32	90	31%	33%	36%

On a scale of 1-10 (one = not at all, 10 = very confident), interviewees were asked: 'How comfortable and confident do you feel line managers are in challenging unacceptable behaviour?' Around half of those who answered the question had a confidence 'above 5' that line managers are comfortable and confident in challenging unacceptable behaviour.

How comfortable and confident do you feel line managers are in challenging unacceptable behaviour? (scale 0-10)	Total Answers	<5	5	>5
Female	56	27%	20%	54%
Male	39	33%	21%	46%
Total	95	29%	20%	51%

When asked 'How comfortable and confident would you be to report issues affecting you?' (scale 0-10), 35% of respondents indicated 5 or less in terms of how comfortable and confident they would be to report issues, with male respondents having less confidence (indicated 5 or less), 45%, compared to 28% of female respondents.

How comfortable and confident would you be to report issues affecting you? Scale (0-10)	Total Answers	<5	5	>5
Female	58	26%	2%	72%
Male	42	26%	19%	55%
Total	100	26%	9%	65%

Responses from those who did not feel confident to report issues included not having confidence in the process or that it would depend on which manager dealt with the complaint as to how well it would be resolved.

46 people indicated they had used one or more of the DWFRS practices or procedures on discipline; grievance; bullying and harassment; whistleblowing; and exit interviews, and their confidence was lower than those who had not – 48% indicated 5 or less compared to 29% who had not used any of these procedures. Interviewees stated that they didn't feel a positive conclusion would be reached or felt that making complaints would be career-limiting or worsen their situation.

Recommendation 14 - Review the current HR provision to ensure there is sufficient capacity to support and develop line managers in managing people. This should include effective HR oversight of all its suite of policies and procedures and central recording and monitoring. The current HR Business Partner model with appropriately qualified and/or experienced professionals is perceived to be best practice and should be enhanced where possible.

Whistleblowing

The Service's current Whistleblowing (WB) procedure was reviewed in 2021 and is due for review in February 2024. Since 2019, six complaints have been made under the Service's Whistleblowing procedure. These include two in 2019-20, one in 2020-21, two complaints in 2021-22 and one complaint in 2022/23, which was made through the Service's Internal Auditors.

The WB policy should be seen as confidential and independent. However, feedback from interviewees signified a perception that a member of SLT monitors complaints and therefore there is limited trust and confidence in the process. The IRT can confirm that the Service is not given any personal data of anyone using the WB procedure, unless the caller specifically states the wish for the matter to be raised on their behalf. The Service is in the process of procuring a Crimestoppers-led, FRS independent report line to report WB complaints. This should provide a greater level of reassurance, and the review team commends the Service for this approach.

Exit Interviews

DWFRS has an existing procedure for dealing with retirement, resignation and exit interviews. This includes an exit interview report form for completion by the leaver. Completing the exit interview is not mandatory, but it is advised as good practice. The procedure asks for the form to be sent to the leaver's line manager. Research suggests that good practice is to remove the immediate line manager from the process to allow for greater openness. This can be particularly useful if there have been relationship difficulties between the individual and their line manager. It is often useful for the HR Business Partner to be involved in managing exit interviews. In some cases, individuals may not wish to share their reasons for leaving. Therefore, being able to do so in complete confidence is more likely to allow the organisation to learn from the lived experience of individuals.

All the ex-employees interviewed were asked if they had been offered an exit interview. Nine of the 13 interviewees answered this question, of which four said 'Yes' (44%) and five said 'No' (56%).

DWFRS does not always appear to identify trends in staff retention/turnover, which could include consideration of whether the candidates were appropriate to be recruited or whether there was a lack of support for firefighters, regardless of how they identify.

The turnover data provided by DWFRS has been reviewed and acknowledge that turnover currently sits at 12.01%, which is higher than the national average of 9%⁽¹⁶⁾. Attrition is

higher amongst on-call firefighters due to greater fluctuations in this population. DWFRS has expressed challenges in recruiting and retaining some on-call firefighters owing to the nature of the role. Again, upon review of the UK Government’s report (previously mentioned), this is fairly typical across the rest of the FRSs. That said, the DWFRS workforce is relatively stable, which is a positive indicator.

The IRT recognise that DWFRS rely heavily on on-call staff for its operational response. There is a perception that action against on-call staff is less likely due to the possibility of more people leaving the Service and reducing appliance availability. It is also recognised that providing training to on-call staff in the limited time available is also a challenge. However, this should not be a reason to ignore inappropriate behaviours. Investing in additional training for on-call units and supervisory officers should improve retention and diversity over the long term.

Recommendation 15 - Amend the current exit interview process, strengthening it to enable the organisation to learn from the employee experiences, and improve policies and systems accordingly. This should include;

- a) Allowing the leaver to consider whom it may be appropriate to share their experiences and reasons for leaving with.**
- b) Consistently and confidentially recording all exit interviews centrally.**
- c) Adopting a suite of indicators that identify workforce turnover, with a particular focus on those with protected characteristics.**

The Service has indicated that a new exit policy will be in place by the 1st of September 2023.

Women’s experiences in the workplace

In accordance with the terms of reference (ToR), the IRT provided all current and former staff (post 1st April 2016) with an independent and confidential opportunity to share their experiences of working in the Service, with a particular focus on female operational and female corporate employees.

Of the 25 wholetime female firefighters, 17 were spoken to individually or submitted an email with their views, which equates to approximately 68% of the total staff in this category. An additional two females were at group sessions and did not have an individual interview, meaning around 76% of the wholetime female firefighter workforce engaged with the review team.

At the outset, it is important to say that most of those interviewed expressed an overwhelming sense of pride in DWFRS. The sense of public sector duty and commitment to serving the public was evident. There were several examples of those who had overcome significant adversity to join the Service, and their sense of achievement in becoming a firefighter was incredibly powerful. This was particularly evident from some of the women we spoke to.

Although not an interview question, being proud to serve was *explicitly* mentioned by 38% of all those spoken to. The percentage was lower among firefighters;

Felt pride	Corporate	On-Call FF	Wholetime FF	Total
Female	47%	45%	24%	40%
Male	50%	7%	31%	34%
Total	47%	35%	29%	38%

A high proportion of the operational women were interviewed or took part in group discussions. Many are on supportive watches, but their wider experience is often challenging. Women spoke of feeling safe on their watch, but they would worry about moving to other watches. The Service has one female operational firefighters at a senior rank (above Watch Manager). Many of the operational female firefighters do not feel they can influence decision makers. There were comments about battling for policies to be handled effectively and consistently.

From the many women (and men) the IRT spoke to, a regular theme was the inconsistency of facilities, equipment and policies across the organisation. It is important to note that there were some positive experiences, generally due to progressive and supportive line managers, for which the Service should take note. The IRT sought to understand the lived experiences of women in the workplace.

Sadly, many cases of inappropriate conduct and behaviours were described to the review team. There remains an underlying culture of misogyny and sexism in DWFRS, coupled with a lack of understanding of every individual's equality, diversity and inclusion duties. The workplace culture described by some to the IRT was one of 'banter' and 'canteen culture'. The IRT heard some deeply troubling stories from both men and women about how women had been subject to significant trauma at the hands of male colleagues. The culture appears to prevent others from challenging for fear of repercussion and isolation.

The IRT has deliberately not gone into significant detail regarding some of the worst cases it has heard. This is to protect the courageous people who have shared their stories in confidence.

Recommendation 16 - There is an urgent need for the Service to categorically set out the expected standards of behaviour and how failure to comply will be dealt with robustly. This should be clearly aligned with the Code of Ethics. It is imperative that each member of staff across the organisation understands their own personal responsibility for compliance with these standards and for managers at all levels to challenge inappropriate behaviours consistently.

Facilities across stations vary greatly, often dependent on the age of the buildings and the availability of funding to make improvements. The review team notes that retrospective modification of buildings and facilities can be a challenge; however, one of the barriers to being inclusive as an employer will be access for all. The Service needs to understand that the opportunity to increase its workforce's diversity will depend on getting the basics right. This should include women-only facilities and facilities for those from different cultures and backgrounds.

The team was concerned to hear many examples of male colleagues using female toilets and leaving them in disgusting conditions for women on fire stations. The IRT notes that all workplaces now have adequate sanitary provisions for women,

Recommendation 17 – The Service should immediately issue communication regarding the appropriate use of WC facilities.

Recommendation 18 – The Service should continue, making it a priority, its full survey of its buildings and facilities and prioritise improvements.

The provision of welfare facilities at operational incidents is inconsistent. As a result of a staff suggestion from a female firefighter, operational women were issued with 'She-wees' for use

at incidents. There was a directive about flexi duty officers taking operational staff to toilet facilities, but this doesn't appear to have either been communicated well or consistently implemented. It also relies on the woman approaching the officer and requesting this facility. The IRT has confirmed that the concept was not discussed with the Women's Network, who would not have favoured such an approach.

In response, the SLT has shown the IRT that they have welfare facilities available to crews, and incident commanders can request these to attend any incident. Additionally, incident commanders are urged to consider welfare provision at large scale or protracted incidents. Over the last 12 months, there is confirmation that the provision was utilised at 76 incidents; it may be higher than this number. The SLT recognise that despite their work to date, the welfare resources could be further improved, and a review incorporating staff groups is taking place with a view to updating the welfare provisions.

Recommendation 19 – The Service should take immediate steps to ensure a consistent approach to welfare and WC facilities at operational incidents. This should include regular audits to ensure the request and use of such facilities.

The personal protection equipment is seen as very good.

Women's uniform was often viewed as uncomfortable. Comments were made regarding t-shirts, and some women stated they bought their own t-shirts to overcome this.

The IRT recognises that the uniforms are consistent with other fire and rescue service provisions.

Due to the current uniform contract being due for renewal, the SLT lead for this area has set up a focus group of four women and five men to help advise on the balance between what is fit for purpose whilst acknowledging that cost will always be a factor.

Given that this is in place, the IRT consider that no recommendation is required.

A sense of belonging and the ability to come to work as their authentic selves differed across the women spoken to. Many are reluctant to seek promotion or move stations if they are on a watch/unit where they currently feel safe and supported. Some women appear to have normalised some of the banter/behaviours they (and male colleagues) experience.

The desire to be accepted by some women has resulted in 'fitting in' to the extent they consider themselves a 'fireman', openly disagreeing with what they class 'positive discrimination' by encouraging people from underrepresented groups to consider the fire service as a career. Some women we spoke to said they didn't want to feel 'different' - some said they'd prefer to wear a male uniform to not draw attention to themselves.

Given that women have been in the UK Fire Service since the early 1980s, this is a very outdated viewpoint. Some women seem grateful and accepting if they have had merely a *neutral* experience.

The majority of women were passionate about being respected for being competent firefighters. They do not want to see selection tests lowered to increase the number of women or other underrepresented groups accepted into the Service. They want fair and realistic tests and capability procedures for all.

The women with the most positive experiences referenced supportive and empathetic managers. This is very encouraging; however, it should be the norm. The high level of temporary promotions in the Service is making visible and supportive leadership challenging.

A common theme from the interviews was the perception that senior managers were aware of the behaviour of specific individuals, but no one did anything about it, and, in some cases, interviewees spoke about perpetrators being protected. There was a perception of a 'boys club' culture, with Freemasons being suggested as the reason for some cases not being progressed through the disciplinary process. Another example some interviewees gave was that of a widely known 'Golf Range Breakfast Club', some of whom held management positions. The review team has been made aware that whilst invitations may have been open to others, the perception was that women were not welcome. The review team brought this matter to the attention of the Service at the time and can confirm this matter was dealt with immediately.

A third of those the IRT engaged with perceived negative behaviour towards women, which rose to 45% of the females spoken to. Even individuals who wanted to be interviewed to express and share their positive experiences of the Service described behaviours the review team felt were examples of inappropriate and unacceptable behaviour, which appeared to be 'normalised', accepted behaviours, thus perpetuating an underlying culture of sexism and misogyny. The sense of 'fitting in' was described by one woman interviewed who said she was a 'fireman' and did not want to be treated differently because she was a woman.

Other common examples of inappropriate behaviour and conduct include:

- Gaslighting
- Coercive/controlling behaviours towards female staff
- Operational barriers making progression less attractive, especially for women
- Perceived lack of fairness and transparency in recruitment and redeployment processes
- Extensive examples of sexist and misogynist behaviour on fire stations
 - Women ignored by colleagues at fire stations
 - Use of female toilets
 - WhatsApp groups excluding individuals
 - Sexual harassment and inappropriate touching
 - Lack of awareness or understanding of the menopause/maternity

Whether reality or perception, there is a belief that some people gain favour or promotion if they are part of cliques.

A quarter of those staff spoken to by the IRT mentioned 'bullying': 22% of females and 28% of males. The instances were higher amongst wholetime firefighters (29%), with 38% of female firefighters mentioning bullying, compared to 23% of male firefighters.

The term 'gaslighting' came up in interviews, particularly to describe coercive, controlling behaviour by men against female colleagues. There were some particularly serious and concerning examples, some of which had been reported and others not. Gaslighting often involves the abuser denying their own behaviour or actions, insisting that events that occurred did not happen, or otherwise manipulating the victim's perception of reality.

This can make the victim feel confused, anxious, and unsure of themselves, making them more vulnerable to further abuse. Gaslighting is often used as a tactic in abusive relationships, but it can also be used in other contexts, such as in politics or in the workplace. It is a serious form of emotional and psychological abuse that can have long-lasting effects on the victim's health and well-being. Our interviews with some victims of this type of behaviour were particularly distressing.

Often, these behaviours were witnessed by others and have gone unchallenged, even by line managers. At times, this is done with a wider audience, leaving the individual feeling unsupported and isolated. Victim-blaming was a recurring theme throughout our interviews, such as women being blamed for causing inappropriate conduct or behaviour by wearing certain clothing. The greatest influence on the organisation's culture will be achieved when everyone takes responsibility in 'calling out' unacceptable behaviour, especially at watch/unit level.

The Service is currently supporting a Crew Manager to deliver a training initiative called 'Not on my watch'. This appears to be well received at watch level; however, the aims, objectives and learning outcomes do not seem to have been defined by the SLT.

When asked if there had been occasions when you have felt uncomfortable about the behaviours of colleagues directed towards you or other colleagues, two-thirds of the females who answered this question replied 'Yes', and a similar proportion of males, at 63%.

Felt uncomfortable about behaviour, by gender	No	Yes	Total	% Yes
Female	19	37	56	66.1%
Male	15	26	41	63.4%
Total	34	63	97	64.9%

Recommendation 20 – The current initiative, 'Not on My Watch', run by a female Crew Manager, is an example of best practice around bystander challenge. The Service is encouraged to actively support the profile of this initiative and consider rolling it out across the organisation. It is also recommended that the programme should be externally validated and evaluated to test its effectiveness.

Maternity leave and menopause

Women-in-service who had taken maternity leave have experienced varying levels of treatment. This was often dependent on the managers involved. For operational firefighters, the experiences were at best neutral with a lack of understanding and empathy, or negative. It was recognised, however, that this was dependent on the experience and awareness of individual line managers and their supervisors. There was a positive experience which highlighted the empathy and understanding of the individual supervisor, who whilst not at the outset understanding the policy immediately took time to read, understand and support the firefighter concerned. This left the member of staff feeling very supported.

It is recognised that the SLT have sponsored events regarding the menopause. The delivery of these has attracted both positive and negative comments.

DWFRS consider they have worked hard on their policies supporting maternity leave and the return to work. Their recent internal report acknowledges that this is an important issue and that they should continue doing all they can in this area.

The menopause will affect women firefighters, wives, daughters and other family members of male firefighters. Whilst the Service attempted to engage with the workforce on this matter, there is a growing concern amongst women in the Service that the impacts some women experience approaching and during menopause are not being given sufficient consideration and have sometimes been ridiculed.

Attraction campaigns are encouraging; however, issues such as confidence in dealing with maternity leave and menopause could impact retention.

It is recognised that the best attraction campaign to encourage the whole community to consider firefighting as a potential career, would be when the current firefighters are reporting to friends and family a very positive experience with no concerns about the way they are treated in the workplace. The IRT consider that there is some way to go to reach this outcome.

Recommendation 21 - The Service should continue to consider the impact of its maternity and menopause procedures and processes and ensure that they are as inclusive and supportive as possible. The most vital element of this recommendation is for policies and procedures in this area being understood, fully supported and applied consistently and empathetically by all line managers.

Recommendation 22 – Dealing with pregnancy, maternity leave and menopause should be key features in the new EDI training programme.

Social media

There were some examples of inappropriate use of social media in the workplace. The Service has taken some complaints very seriously, and some have been reported to the police, who have found no criminal offences. Examples ranged from the sharing of sexist and misogynist jokes to allegations of pornographic images being shared between colleagues. Mention was made of the use of social media sites (e.g., dating websites and 'Only Fans') with members allegedly easily identifiable as firefighters. The Service is working through investigations on some such cases and has recently revised its social media policy accordingly. The IRT recognise that on social media platforms the accepted standards are continually changing. People, in their private life, may choose to join or follow social media platforms. It must be clear that there is a separation between DWFRS employees' right to a private life and zero tolerance of staff bringing DWFRS into disrepute by representing themselves in a compromising manner, as a member of DWFRS staff, on such platforms. This includes inappropriate and unprofessional images of themselves in uniform, on vehicles or in premises belonging to DWFRS. It is vital that every member of staff is updated on this position and that the appropriate use of social media should be included in staff induction.

Recommendation 23 – The proposed Dignity at Work framework policy should include a clear position on social media and its acceptable use. The organisation should also make it clear that unacceptable use of social media will result in disciplinary action.

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion and Training

Like many organisations, due to financial challenges, training investment has inevitably reduced, particularly leadership development. There is also a greater reliance on e-learning to disseminate information to the workforce, especially in regular training activities, such as health and safety refreshers, EDI, etc. Whilst this is to be commended, around 12% of those we interviewed stated they felt e-learning was not as effective as in-person training as they perceive it is harder to ensure that the messages being delivered within the training are being properly embedded. This is especially true in developing leadership and people skills, such as handling difficult conversations and equality, diversity and inclusion, where delegates can be provided a space to ask questions and challenge concepts in a safe training environment.

EDI Training is generally completed online. It was referred to as a 'tick box' exercise, which doesn't change behaviours and would benefit from face-to-face input. It is recognised that previously, a senior female firefighter was tasked to deliver EDI awareness sessions. No data is available to support how many people attended these sessions, although the organisation considers that most firefighters would have received this awareness training.

The IRT are clear some staff do not feel confident to challenge inappropriate behaviours, and the numerous temporary promotions and frequent rotation of managers compound this. This is preventing visible leadership or the ability to hold anyone to account. There are still some interactive/experiential training programmes relating to EDI, which have been initiated by individuals in the Service and perhaps should be supported more.

Due to the very small number of people interviewed from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, the report will not include the quotes as they could easily identify people. However, a number of people from both white British and other ethnicities commented on inappropriate comments relating to people's ethnicity.

Recommendation 24 – The Service should implement formal mandatory face-to-face training on EDI to show the SLT's commitment to changing the culture and ensure that it aligns to the Service's Code of Ethics. This training should be to all members of the Service, training records should be completed to show training completion. The training should be rank and role specific and include challenging inappropriate behaviours, understanding positive action and dealing with specific issues, such as neurodiversity, menopause, racial and cultural awareness and sexism and misogyny. This training must also incorporate key elements, such as victim-blaming, bystanding and tackling difficult conversations.

Regarding training, a concern raised was a perceived lack of training for those handling disciplinary and grievance investigations. There were several examples of individuals subject to an investigation, or those having conducted the same, who felt that the process was unduly complex, elongated and extremely challenging.

Whilst this is not unique to DWFRS, a clear training need is identified in this area. DWFRS has a relatively high number of temporary postings. Many middle managers stated they had not received training and did not feel confident carrying out investigations.

Station managers are responsible for multiple stations, both on-call and wholetime. Combined with operational duties, projects and daily administration, they expressed difficulty providing visible leadership.

It is acknowledged that a leadership training programme was in place before Covid-19 restrictions disrupted its delivery. The IRT has received commentary that shows that whilst there are pockets of strong leadership at a local level, many feel that from frontline leadership onwards, there is not a clear focus on good leadership, more on managing processes.

Recommendation 25 - Whilst it is inevitable that there will be temporary promotions, on each occasion the incoming manager should be fully briefed and have continual mentoring in their role. The Service should review the number of temporary promotions to provide stability and ensure visible leadership across stations. This may mean that if someone is given a temporary promotion after due process, they are not swapped for another temporary promotion.

Recommendation 26 – Develop a coaching programme to support senior leaders and managers of the Service in generating cultural change, in line with many modern, progressive organisations.

Recommendation 27 – Strengthen leadership development, with a particular focus on supervisory and middle managers. The organisation should, through training records, know who has received appropriate by rank and role, leadership training. This will not be functional training on the technicalities of rank and role such as equipment use or incident command. There is a need for high-quality leadership training with the golden thread of equality, diversity and inclusion running through it.

Recommendation 28 – The Service should establish an independent review/advisory board to assist in the monitoring and implementation of the internal action plan and the recommendations emanating from this independent review. Chaired/Co-chaired by an independent person, this will enhance visibility and generate accountability for the Service. Inclusion of diversity staff associations and other stakeholders would be beneficial.

6. CONCLUSION

The existence, creation or implementation of policy alone will not change culture.

People's behaviours change culture, and everyone must take responsibility for challenging inappropriate behaviour, especially on behalf of those who may feel they do not have a voice.

DWFRS 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. It is vital that everyone in the organisation understands their personal responsibility for standing up and challenging poor and inappropriate behaviour. The adage 'what you permit, you promote' should be understood by all.

Poor culture can severely affect individuals' health, safety and welfare and cause reputational damage to teams and the organisation. Only when the majority stand up to the minority of people who feel it is acceptable to bully, harass and persecute, will the culture change.

The challenges faced by DWFRS are similar to those in many other organisations. There is a clear spotlight being shone on the collective behaviour of public servants. Employees should behave professionally to ensure public confidence, to support their colleagues and to show what they stand for to the communities they are a part of and serve. As public servants, firefighters are in a position of trust and have even greater responsibility.

The IRT acknowledges that it is difficult to quantify the exact number of people who do not display the positive behaviours expected of a public servant. It is now time for those who are committed to serving the public ethically and with dignity and humility, to use their voice and challenge the people who have sought to damage the reputation of their Service.

DWFRS has shown its commitment to creating a more diverse and inclusive workplace by commissioning this review and has already implemented strategies and initiatives to drive positive cultural change. We understand the findings in this report will be hard to accept for many hard-working and committed members of DWFRS. This shows the pride in the organisation and the commitment of the many. The IRT also commend the DWFRS SLT for their willingness to commission this report and for providing their staff with the opportunity to have a voice in shaping a more inclusive environment.

The Strategic Leadership Team and all staff must commit to delivering our recommendations and those of their internal culture review. Creating a time-bounded, easily understood action plan that seeks immediate embedded change with equality, diversity and inclusion as a golden thread running through all existing and new policies.

The Strategic Leadership Team have given a strong commitment to making changes. Their staff, local community, HMICFRS, National Employers, Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority and the NFCC are all key stakeholders in the fire and rescue service. It is right that they demand an inclusive fire and rescue service.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations have been grouped into themes per the agreed terms of reference. While numbered, they are NOT in order of priority. The IRT consider the prioritisation of recommendations sits with DWFRS Strategic Leadership Team, who will consider these priorities in line with the HMICFRS spotlight report.

Workplace culture

The ToR sought to identify how DWFRS could strengthen workplace culture to help ensure that it aligns with the Service's Code of Ethics. The review team acknowledges the considerable efforts already underway in the Service with its internal cultural review. It is encouraged to note that many of the recommendations set out in this report are mirrored in the interim report by the Service. This section includes reference to the use of social media, as set out in the ToR.

Recommendation 16 - There is an urgent need for the Service to categorically set out the expected standards of behaviour and how failure to comply will be dealt with robustly. This should be clearly aligned with the Code of Ethics. It is imperative that each member of staff across the organisation understands their own personal responsibility for compliance with these standards and for managers at all levels to challenge inappropriate behaviours consistently.

Recommendation 23 – The proposed Dignity at Work framework policy should include a clear position on social media and its acceptable use. The organisation should also make it clear that unacceptable use of social media will result in disciplinary action.

Recommendation 28 – The Service should establish an independent review/advisory board to assist in the monitoring and implementation of the internal action plan and the recommendations emanating from this independent review. Chaired/Co-chaired by an independent person, this will enhance visibility and generate accountability for the Service. Inclusion of diversity staff associations and other stakeholders would be beneficial.

Robustness of key procedures and practices

The IRT conducted a comprehensive review of the key HR policies and procedures, as set out in the ToR. In the main, these policies and procedures align with ACAS guidance. However, it is evident that these procedures' application, governance, and monitoring are not consistent nor centrally controlled. Several of the review team's recommendations relate to this area.

Recommendation 6 – The review team recommends a further review of the existing suite of procedures pertaining to conduct, performance and capability to ensure that they meet the needs of a modern workforce. This should include accurate and central recording to enable the Service to identify trends and take appropriate action, as required. This would also ensure a consistent approach to discipline. This should include:

- a) Accurate and central recording to enable the Service to identify trends and take appropriate action, as required including central recording and monitoring of HR043 performance improvement plans.***
- b) A review of the modified procedure and overall review of the discipline procedure to ensure a consistent approach to discipline sanctions.***

Recommendation 7 - The review team also recommends the introduction of a new 'Dignity at Work' framework to deal specifically with unacceptable behaviour relating to bullying and harassment or EDI issues. This would allow greater clarity and fit with the Service's desire for a 'zero-tolerance' approach to dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

Recommendation 8 - Implement a new EDI policy statement that includes the NFCC position published in July 2023 on embedding EDI in the workplace.

Recommendation 10 - The Service should strengthen their reporting to the Fire and Rescue Authority of the number and type of discipline/grievances and the type of sanctions delivered on a quarterly basis. There needs to be sufficient detail to ensure Members are reassured any inappropriate behaviours are being dealt with robustly and trends recognised.

Recommendation 11 - It is equally important to provide relevant training for all managers who are required to carry out investigations (formal and informal), to give them the confidence and support to deal with what are often challenging disciplinary and grievance matters. All supervisors from Crew Manager upwards need to be able to act confidently to resolve or escalate issues at the earliest opportunity. This should ensure victims and perpetrators are dealt with appropriately. This training should be delivered in conjunction with an increased understanding of EDI to ensure they recognise inequality. This should ensure that all managers are accountable for delivering outcomes in line with policy, and in accordance with prescribed timescales. A consistent approach to investigating grievances and other complaints should be undertaken, with trained investigating officers and strong HR support.

Recommendation 13 – DWFRS should consider establishing a central group whose role is to assess and monitor all disciplinary, grievance and bullying/harassment cases. The group's role would be to assess risk, ensure the correct procedure is being applied, appoint investigating officers, provide HR guidance and support, ensure consistency of procedure and monitor progress. DWFRS should ensure that all grievances and other complaints are recorded centrally and monitored for repeat offenders, victims and trends. The HR department will need to be appropriately resourced to deliver this recommendation.

Recommendation 14 - Review the current HR provision to ensure there is sufficient capacity to support and develop line managers in managing people. This should include effective HR oversight of all its suite of policies and procedures and central recording and monitoring. The current HR Business Partner model with appropriately qualified and/or experienced professionals is perceived to be best practice and should be enhanced where possible.

Recommendation 15 - Amend the current exit interview process, strengthening it to enable the organisation to learn from the employee experiences, and improve policies and systems accordingly. This should include;

- a) Allowing the leaver to consider whom it may be appropriate to share their experiences and reasons for leaving with.**
- b) Consistently and confidentially recording all exit interviews centrally.**
- c) Adopting a suite of indicators that identify workforce turnover, with a particular focus on those with protected characteristics.**

Women's experiences in the workplace

The ToR set out the Service's expectations that the review team would seek first-hand, lived experiences from members of staff (and former staff). The review team has spoken to a cross-section of people from all parts of the organisation, encompassing all protected characteristics. In particular, the Service was clear that it wanted to hear the voices of women in the Service, recognising that women are significantly under-represented in their organisation. The review team has identified a number of recommendations in respect of the different experiences of staff with protected characteristics. It has also included some recommendations that may have wider national or sectoral implications, particularly regarding increasing the numbers of women in operational roles and their progression.

As outlined in the DWFRS annual equality report 2021-22, the Service has embarked on several initiatives to help under-represented groups, particularly women. The review team is encouraged by many of these initiatives, which include partnerships with other fire and police services locally. The Service has also implemented a new '13-week return to plan' to support operational women returning to work from maternity leave with their fitness. These and other initiatives are to be applauded, and the review team would encourage the Service to invest resources into ensuring their long-term success.

Recommendation 1 – DWFRS should further develop its range of positive action initiatives to encourage greater levels of recruitment and promotion of all under-represented groups, particularly women. Examples of positive action initiatives include: targeted attraction and recruitment campaigns; targeted career development initiatives including mentoring, shadowing, coaching and bespoke training; identifying positive role models from black and ethnic minority and female staff; ensuring all recruitment and promotion adverts include a positive action or welcome statement; ensuring all selection panels are diverse; consider anonymising application forms and carry out EQIAs on all promotion and selection processes to ensure they do not inadvertently impact those with protected characteristics.

Recommendation 2 - Establish goals to significantly increase female representation at both the wholetime and on-call firefighter level while ensuring the selection procedures are fair and transparent.

Recommendation 3 – Identify barriers to women and other underrepresented groups from being attracted to joining and being successful in the selection process to become a firefighter. Any identified barriers should be removed from the process whilst ensuring no dilution of the robustness of the selection criteria.

Recommendation 4 – DWFRS should renew their corporate Women in the Fire Service membership and avail itself of the many opportunities for female progression. (At time of writing we are pleased to note that they have recently renewed their membership.) DWFRS should also consider supporting attendance at the FBU women's school and any other staff association training.

Recommendation 17 – The Service should immediately issue communication regarding the appropriate use of WC facilities.

Recommendation 18 – The Service should continue, making it a priority, its full survey of its buildings and facilities and prioritise improvements.

Recommendation 19 – The Service should take immediate steps to ensure a consistent approach to welfare and WC facilities at operational incidents. This should include regular audits to ensure the request and use of such facilities.

Recommendation 20 – The current initiative, ‘Not on My Watch’, run by a female Crew Manager, is an example of best practice around bystander challenge. The Service is encouraged to actively support the profile of this initiative and consider rolling it out across the organisation. It is also recommended that the programme should be externally validated and evaluated to test its effectiveness.

Recommendation 21 - The Service should continue to consider the impact of its maternity and menopause procedures and processes and ensure that they are as inclusive and supportive as possible. The most vital element of this recommendation is for policies and procedures in this area being understood, fully supported and applied consistently and empathetically by all line managers.

Recommendation 22 – Dealing with pregnancy, maternity leave and menopause should be key features in the new EDI training programme.

Recommendation 24 – The Service should implement formal mandatory face-to-face training on EDI to show the SLT’s commitment to changing the culture and ensure that it aligns to the Service’s Code of Ethics. This training should be to all members of the Service, training records should be completed to show training completion. The training should be rank and role specific and include challenging inappropriate behaviours, understanding positive action and dealing with specific issues, such as neurodiversity, menopause, racial and cultural awareness and sexism and misogyny. This training must also incorporate key elements, such as victim-blaming, bystanding and tackling difficult conversations.

Barriers that prevent the reporting of issues

The ToR sought to determine what barriers may prevent the reporting of issues and make recommendations as to how these can be addressed. From its extensive research, the review team considers one of the key barriers is a lack of openness and transparency and, specifically, for some, a lack of trust and confidence in the SLT. Several of those interviewed spoke of a perception that the SLT did not want to hear ‘bad news’. It is evident that the SLT has identified this as a deficit and has taken steps to improve accessibility and visibility. To help the SLT, the review team would make the following recommendations:

Recommendation 5 – Continue an ongoing and regular engagement programme to provide visibility of and accessibility to the SLT. The Service needs to articulate properly the responsibility of each leader for visibility. This will include all leadership grades that have responsibility for staff at numerous locations.

Recommendation 25 - Whilst it is inevitable that there will be temporary promotions, on each occasion the incoming manager should be fully briefed and have continual mentoring in their role. The Service should review the number of temporary promotions to provide stability and ensure visible leadership across stations. This may mean that if someone is given a temporary promotion after due process, they are not swapped for another temporary promotion.

Recommendation 26 – Develop a coaching programme to support senior leaders and managers of the Service in generating cultural change, in line with many modern, progressive organisations.

Recommendation 27 – Strengthen leadership development, with a particular focus on supervisory and middle managers. The organisation should, through training records, know who has received appropriate by rank and role, leadership training. This will not be functional training on the technicalities of rank and role such as equipment use or incident command. There is a need for high-quality leadership training with the golden thread of equality, diversity and inclusion running through it.

Robustness of former disciplinary action

The review team reviewed several disciplinary cases (again, in accordance with the ToR) to provide recommendations on the robustness of former disciplinary action taken by the Service when it has investigated allegations of wrongdoing. Barriers that inhibit the reporting of inappropriate behaviours were also explored through the review. As detailed in the section on HR policies and procedures, the review team found a great deal of inconsistency regarding the reporting and investigation of inappropriate conduct. As outlined earlier in this report, the review team considers there is a lack of governance and assurance in the management of conduct in the Service and makes the following recommendations in this regard:

Recommendation 9 – The review team strongly encourages DWFRS to find an appropriate way to provide greater levels of transparency regarding the outcome of processes. This will help to provide ‘closure’ and support for all victims. This is a matter for DWFRS to continue to raise at a national level with the Home Office, HMICFRS and the NFCC.

Recommendation 12 - Provide regular updates to those involved in HR-related investigations to ensure transparency and to help build trust and confidence.

8. COMMENTS BY STAFF

Detailed below are some comments that reflect the key themes drawn out in the report.

'I want more females to come and join the Service and I can see changes starting to happen – I am hopeful for the future.'

'There have been many issues and the way the Service has dealt with it has been atrocious and people don't report as nothing will happen or they will be persecuted for it (there were several who agreed with this). Not dealt with seriously and the victims have been persecuted and the culprits have been protected.'

'I raised an issue about someone's behaviour with my manager and HR and they want me to tell them what to do a "victim led approach." That's a big responsibility when you are perhaps one of two women at station and don't know what the options are. It's not our job to give them solutions, we don't get to discuss options. It wasn't dealt with properly at the time and now I find myself in a difficult position. Too often you have to be the one trying to get something done. If people are not challenged then the behaviour will continue and perhaps to others.'

'The onus seems to be on me to give them permission to deal with his inappropriate behaviour.....no one has explained the options or advised what could be done.' *'The stories on the news rang true (I probably can work out who the victims are)'*

'Policies and procedures are used as battering rams.'

'My watch is great but there are watches I really don't want to work with. I feel so strongly about this I don't work overtime in case I have to work on a different watch. I don't want to work with some men who I regard as being difficult.'

'I know of one person who won't come forward and speak to you and she has had a dreadful time and it has been her experience that has made me realise not everyone is having a good time.'

'Facilities on station vary massively, some shared dormitories with curtains, and depends on the age of the buildings. Some on-call stations don't have dedicated female/male toilet/shower. There are occasions of men using and leaving ladies loos in an unacceptable state in some stations. The women feel that it is down to them to challenge rather than feeling supported by their managers. Some of the men don't want the women seeing them get changed either.'

'One station put a sign up saying "all genders" on the ladies' loo; inappropriately taking the mickey which isn't right.'

*'In **** Station, yesterday a man had used the ladies loo and left it in a disgusting state. Men just don't respect our desire for some private space.'*

'We have a welfare vehicle that occasionally turns up depending on the size of incident and it is based on the south coast. Don't know what the deployment criteria is for this unit.'

'The issue was raised the lack of facilities at a scene a couple of years ago and then we all got issued with a she-wee. One female said hers has disappeared. One woman explained trying to use it at an incident and just how difficult and impractical it was - it's not a substitute for proper facilities. What do you do with a used contaminated she-wee?'

'Women tend to try and resolve options when they are at incidents. There is a policy about being able to go to the toilet with dignity that is being developed and a flexi member of the team should be able to take you from the scene to somewhere to be able to use a toilet etc. This doesn't seem to be getting communicated out. A she-wee doesn't facilitate the need to change sanitary products.'

'There are some watches that women wouldn't go to; if a woman finds a good watch and station manager then that's where they tend to stay and don't go for promotion.'

'I've been lucky and all my experience has been positive and having a good manager makes the difference – empathy and a willingness to help all fire fighters. Having the right people in the management roles who show good behaviours and have appropriate behaviours, who know how to interpret policies etc.'

'No one will say anyone has had a bad experience, and I know it's hard to speak up, I haven't had the best time.'

'Some people have had horrendous things happen to them. But a lot of people have had a neutral experience which in my opinion it is still a positive.'

'Being a friendly girl is interpreted as you wanting attention and perhaps more than just friends.'

'My integration back into work was really stressful which felt like a real battle to come back to work'

'My return to work after maternity was very stressful - I even spoke to my HR BP about it and she didn't seem to know the policy – she seemed very vague'

'I was made to feel really bad about what hours I was working, and I already felt unvalued which added to my stress levels. I felt that I was put into that segregated group of 'problem people'

'The girl at another station who didn't have the same challenge was on a great watch where she had forged strong bonds. The want to take care of her there. Whereas in my case my manager hadn't even met me.'

'I left a WhatsApp group because I wasn't comfortable with what was being said.'

'I don't think the managers I deal with on a daily basis embrace diversity'

'EDI (Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion) Training? Yes, they do it, but they don't take it in – but yes, they get training, but there is something lacking – it needs to be face to face'

'Temporary promotions cause problems – crews expect you to be gone in six months so why bother changing'

'EDI is tick box approach rather than a genuine desire to improve inclusivity, especially with neuro-diversity matters. Little practical local support received'

'I have had to put up with numerous discriminatory remarks about my ethnicity.'

'No one has stood up on my behalf.'

'Women are always expected to take notes in meetings, whatever their level in the organisation.'

'The way in which people are given jobs isn't fair, some senior leaders were just given jobs without any interview. Others get jobs to keep them quiet because they've been harassed or bullied.'

'Terminology – emails addressed to gents or fellows.'

'Use of fireman and manpower'

*'(a colleague) was offered money to stir (a female colleagues)..... 'tea with his ****'*

'What you don't challenge you condone... and maybe I'm guilty of that as a man.'

'Old boys' network: Perception that there was a clique of those that were the in-crowd and would get opportunities / promoted. If you were liked, you would get on, but if you challenged then you would not get on.'

'We don't have any senior female officers in the Service and now there is a gaping hole. We don't have a senior woman who can do stuff for us. Recent example of interpreting maternity leave that should be straight forward and we ended up having to go to the regional rep to get something done.'

'Internal survey - Identifiable from answers so impacts on psychological safety. I wasn't dishonest, but neutral on some things e.g., performance matters.'

'I still am a big believer in the Service, but do I think it's broken? We've really lost our way.'

'The current women's fit uniform is uncomfortable, and the proposed review appears to have been scrapped. To be fair the men's shirts are equally not great. The new issue T-shirts are so thin you can see bras through them and don't have the logo on them. (There was a big range of what people had been issued re T-shirts and they are unisex).'

'I just wanted to be treated like a man. I'm a fireman, I wanted men's clothes. I didn't go for promotion because I didn't want anyone to think I'd got it because I am a woman.'

'People feel they have to become resilient and immune to the sexist and racist comments and HR don't always respond to complaints.'

'The organisation doesn't deal with inappropriate behaviour'

If a girl finds the right watch then they fit in and they are comfortable and that's why they don't want to move or go forward for promotion.'

'The bullying/ sexism. They are more concerned with keeping the on-call on the run than dealing with everything'

9. INDEPENDENT REVIEW TEAM (IRT) PROFILES

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.

Becci Bryant QFSM

Becci's fire service career spanned 29 years, including being appointed Staffordshire's Chief Fire Officer in April 2016. Her responsibilities included countywide Local Resilience Forum responsibilities as Chair and Vice-Chair, NFCC Project Executive for the Leadership project, providing strategic oversight for developing the Code of Ethics, Coaching/Mentoring portal and Direct Entry Programme.

Becci is an associate with Practice to Progress and an Associate Professor at Warwick Business School, delivering strategic leadership development within the public sector. She also holds an associate role with the Birmingham Leadership Institute (BLI), providing leadership development within various Public Health and Further Education bodies. Becci is the Chair of Honorary Fellows for the BLI, working in an advisory capacity.

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.

Suzette Davenport QPM MBA

Suzette served as a police officer for 31 years across five different forces. She retired as Chief Constable of Gloucestershire Constabulary in 2017, where she led the chief officer team and Office for the Police & Crime Commissioner to set its organisational vision, mission, values, and culture and its strategic development.

She has worked in senior executive roles, as well as others, including lead for Roads Policing in the National Police Council and as a representative of the UK on the European Police Traffic Network (TISPOL), and she is qualified as a Chartered Director of the Institute of Directors.

She was a director of the Gloucestershire Football Association between 2017 and 2022, chairing their Inclusion Advisory Group.

Suzette's work is driven by her passion to support and improve the representation of individuals and groups from minority backgrounds. This has influenced her work both in and out of policing.

Sarah Warnes MA

Sarah is a retired Assistant Chief Fire Officer. In WMFS, she led the development of the Core Code of Ethics on behalf of the NFCC in partnership with the LGA and PFCC. Sarah's previous responsibilities included area commander responsible for people support services, leading employee relations, human resources, resourcing to include recruitment and workforce planning, occupational health and administration. She was influential in the regional exchange, working with the neighbouring services to work more closely together.

Sarah started her career in 1994 with Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service, where she served for 10 years before moving to the West Midlands in 2004. Sarah served in various roles across WMFS, including community fire safety and service delivery as a station and operations commander and has worked with teams and external partners in Birmingham Wolverhampton and Sandwell. In 2014, Sarah completed an MA in managing and leading people.

Sally Bourner

Sally served as a police officer with West Midlands Police for 30 years, retiring in 2020. Throughout her service, she worked in operational policing roles in various regional areas. As a senior and visible operational leader, Sally initially led the development of a Blueprint (2014-15), which provided the foundations for developing over 40 projects, many of which were inter-connected. Sally was then the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) for five key projects.

Sally played a critical senior leadership role as a Chief Superintendent in a ground-breaking multi-million-pound partnership between West Midlands Police and Accenture to transform policing. The wide-ranging WMP2020 programme brought people and technology together to change culture, behaviour and mindset.

Sally was actively involved with the West Midlands Association of Women in Policing and LGBT Network and was an accredited assessor with the College of Policing for Fast Track and Direct Entry schemes for over 10 years.

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