



**DORSET & WILTSHIRE
FIRE AND RESCUE**

Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service
Five Rivers Health & Wellbeing Centre,
Hulse Road, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP1 3NR

Direct line: (01722) 691000

Email: ben.ansell@dwfire.org.uk

Website: dwfire.org.uk

Our ref: BA/SS

Date: 13 October 2023

Alex Johnson QFSM

Dear Alex

Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service Independent Review

As you know, I commissioned this Independent Review into the workplace culture of our organisation after a number of serious allegations of inappropriate behaviour were reported in the media.

I am incredibly grateful to those who came forward to share their experiences with your review team. This shows the desire and commitment of our staff to further strengthen our culture so that every individual feels respected, valued, and safe in their workplace. I would also like to personally thank you and your team for your work in holding a mirror up to our organisation. Your independent insight has been an important exercise in identifying key issues and recommendations to help me further strengthen our culture.

You have identified some concerning experiences within your report, and I am truly sorry that these have occurred. I personally found some of the experiences of our staff were uncomfortable for me to read and I know it will also be concerning for our staff. I very much hope that the majority of staff do not recognise these experiences within their workplace, but it will inevitably resonate for some.

Although we have much in place, I can see that we have not always got things right and this must and will change. There is no place for inappropriate behaviour in our organisation and I am fully committed to driving our culture forward positively.

We have carefully reflected upon and reviewed the report, and we welcome the recommendations made by your team. I am pleased to say that there are a number of arrangements in place and actions already underway, and we must now ensure that these are fully embedded. These include:

- Introducing a confidential reporting line.
- Developing a culture dashboard.
- Establishing a revised Culture Development Committee.
- Increasing our investment in leadership development.
- Amending our approach to employment checks in line with changes to legislation.

Chief Fire Officer Ben Ansell QFSM FIFireE

- Investing in resources for discipline and grievance case management.
- Developing a zero-tolerance statement in response to the National Fire Chiefs Council's Organisational Culture Statement.
- Reviewing our existing performance management procedures, to ensure swift and more robust and consistent action is taken to deal with inappropriate behaviours.
- Developing a Dignity at Work framework.
- Reviewing the use of female facilities at workplaces.
- Setting in place a suite of enhanced support mechanisms for staff.

We will use the recommendations of the report as the foundation for formulating a single Culture Action Plan. Our progress will be overseen by elected Members and it will involve an independent person as you have recommended.

Some of your recommendations rely on national changes to be implemented and some of these have already been addressed through the Inspectorate's national 'spotlight' report. As you have concluded, "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 that "the challenges faced by DWFRS are similar to those in many other organisations". Whilst there are a great deal of positives across fire and rescue services, I fully support and encourage the continuation of this national focus, to help us further improve our Service, and to improve cultures within the fire and rescue service sector more generally, where this is needed.

As we all know, cultural change does not occur overnight, and it can be a challenging journey. Staff have spoken, we are listening, and by working together we will emerge from this review as a more healthy, positive, and inclusive organisation.

Yours sincerely



Ben Ansell QFSM
Chief Fire Officer

Chief Fire Officer Ben Ansell QFSM FIFireE