

INDEPENDENT CULTURE REVIEW OF LONDON FIRE BRIGADE 2022



REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

For Information

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members of the Independent Culture Review of London Fire Brigade November 2022 report attached at Appendix 1.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Members note:
- the contents of the Independent Culture Review of London Fire Brigade November 2022 Report attached at Appendix 1
 - the Chief Fire Officer will review the London Fire Brigade Report and its recommendations in detail and look to implement improvements to the local arrangements, where appropriate.
 - further reports will be provided as necessary

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The independent culture review of the London Fire Brigade (LFB) was established by the London Fire Commissioner in response to the tragic death of firefighter Jaden Matthew Francois-Esprit, who took his own life in August 2020. His family were concerned that he had been bullied because of his race. Yet while Jaden's death is the catalyst for the review, it should not be seen in isolation. Cultural problems have long dogged LFB.
- 3.2 Firefighter Francois-Esprit's death came after a period of sustained criticism and accusations that the Brigade has a problem with racism and struggles with a culture of bullying and discrimination. An inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) in 2019 showed that some staff reported a "toxic" and "pack like" culture.
- 3.3 In 2020 a culture audit carried out by Engage for LFB revealed that the majority of those interviewed found the culture to be controlling and wanted to see a shift towards a working environment that was more collaborative, open, and inclusive.

- 3.4 The most recent HMICFRS report from July 2022 acknowledges that, while progress has been made since their initial 2019 inspection, LFB still needs to improve in looking after its people and that the Brigade's values and behaviour are not displayed by all staff.
- 3.5 The independent culture review was established to assess the existing culture of the LFB and consider the extent to which the Brigade and its employees have created a culture free from discrimination, unfairness and inequality. The review will seek to identify areas for improvement and areas of strength, publishing a report and making recommendations for improvement where appropriate.

4. INDEPENDENT CULTURE REVIEW OF LONDON FIRE BRIGADE 2022

- 4.1 To achieve the purpose as set out in paragraph 3.5 above, the independent review team established the following terms of reference:
- consider the impact of policies, processes, systems and ways of working on people and culture
 - Consider the way in which policies, processes and systems are applied and interpreted by staff and how that impacts on people and culture
 - Consider the behaviours and decisions of leaders at all levels and the impact they have on people and culture
 - Consider the impact of individual or group behaviour on people and culture
 - Consider the impact of team-based customs and traditions within the Brigade on people and culture
 - Consider the impact of barriers to progression, real and perceived, on people and culture
 - Consider the difference in experiences of staff, based on, but not limited to their:
 - age
 - disability and neurodiversity
 - gender reassignment
 - marriage and civil partnership
 - pregnancy and maternity
 - race
 - religion or belief
 - sex
 - sexual orientation
 - other forms of difference, including occupational group and rank

Headlines from the Report

- 4.2 The independent culture review report of LFB (attached as Appendix 1) paints a picture of poor behaviour and painful experiences over many years in LFB. It highlights that women, Black, Asian and minority ethnic, LGBTQ+ and neurodiverse staff experience poor treatment and do less well in their careers with us. Issues were also identified with leadership, and with staff fearing to speak out about abuse. Additionally, the report includes examples of behaviour towards members of the public which are completely unacceptable.

Report Recommendations

- 4.3 The Report's recommendations are attached as Appendix 2.

5. LFB IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

- 5.1 Following the publication of the Independent Culture Review report, LFB are taking immediate steps to end discrimination, harassment and bullying at LFB including:
- taking a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination, harassment and bullying. Anyone accused of this behaviour will be immediately suspended and dismissed if the accusation is upheld.
 - introducing a new external complaints investigation service so that staff can feel safe to speak up and cases will be handled objectively and confidentially
 - reviewing all people-related processes to eliminate discrimination, including involving independent people to make immediate improvements where practical.
 - making it much easier and quicker for staff to access help and support. LFB staff provide an essential emergency response service and are frequently exposed to traumatic incidents, which requires improved support.
 - making a permanent shift in the approach to leadership. It is the responsibility of our leaders to set and uphold high standards, so those leaders who do not value transparency, accountability and fairness will no longer have a place in the Brigade. LFB also expect their leaders to own their past mistakes.
 - accelerating work to pilot body worn cameras for staff to ensure respect is shown to the public at all times
 - encouraging members of the public to report any poor behaviour. Complaints about staff will be investigated by LFB's Independent Complaints Service creating an independent audit committee to measure progress

6. NEXT STEPS

- 6.1 The Independent Culture Review of London Fire Brigade contains disturbing and difficult information.
- 6.2 Going forward the Brigade, as a committed 'learning organisation', will need to take the time to consider the report in full, but clearly the findings are wholly unacceptable of an inclusive, modern, blue light emergency service.
- 6.3 The Authority and the Brigade have a well-defined and unequivocal stance on equality, diversity and inclusion – making it clear that there is no place for harassment, bullying or discrimination in Cleveland Fire Brigade or indeed the wider fire and rescue service. We have clear policies in place on bullying, harassment and discrimination and regularly work with staff networks and representative bodies to improve these. We also have a well-established Values and Behaviour Framework which incorporates the national Core Code of Ethics that clearly sets out the staff behaviours which we expect all our people to follow.
- 6.4 But, as a learning organisation driven to continually improve, we must never be complacent. That's why we will be reviewing the report and its recommendations in detail and look to implement improvements, where appropriate.

- 6.5 We aspire to be a great place to work where everyone can be themselves and will be using the findings of this report to further support our work towards this.

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