



**East Sussex**  
Fire & Rescue Service

# Values and Culture Spotlight Report

Published August 2024

**[www.esfrs.org](http://www.esfrs.org)**

# Background

In March 2023 HMICFRS published its [Values and Culture Spotlight Report \(Justice Inspectorates website\)](#). The report focuses on the values and culture in all 44 fire and rescue services in England, based on existing evidence from the round two inspections which took place in 2021 and 2022.

Inspectors researched and analysed evidence on the following themes:

- values and culture, including bullying, harassment and discrimination
- training and skills
- fairness and diversity
- leadership

It made 35 recommendations. 19 relate directly to actions to be carried out by fire and rescue services. (The others are actions for the Home Office, the National Fire Chief Councils and other national bodies.)

This report highlights the action taken within East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service (ESFRS) in response to the HMICFRS spotlight recommendations up to the last submission date in March 2024.

We will continue to provide updates on our ongoing working in this area.

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The updates are correct as of the date they are listed.

## March 2023 – 2 recommendations

### Recommendation 17

### Raising concerns

With immediate effect, Chief Fire Officers should notify HMICFRS of any allegations that have the potential to constitute staff gross misconduct which:

- involve allegations of a criminal nature that have the potential to affect public confidence in Fire and Rescue Services;
- are of a serious nature; or
- relate to Assistant Chief Fire Officers or those at equivalent or higher grades.

### Our response

We have no such allegations to report currently. We are aware that NFCC raised concerns about this in relation to disclosures and employment law.

### Recommendation 34

With immediate effect, Chief Fire Officers should review their implementation of the Core Code of Ethics (CCoE) <https://www.firestandards.org/standards/approved/code-of-ethics-fsc-eth01/> and make sure it is being applied across their services.

### Our response

The CCoE was adopted at a public meeting by the Fire Authority in September 2022. It has also been included in a revision of the service conduct policy, written into recruitment, training, promotion and other policies. Discussions about it feature in workplace visits to engage with staff and it has been added to our intranet page and our Leadership and Behavioural Framework. We will continue to monitor behaviour and any complaints received with full cognisance of the CCoE.

[National Standards | East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service \(esfrs.org\)](https://www.firestandards.org/standards/approved/code-of-ethics-fsc-eth01/)

## June 2023 – 9 recommendations

### Recommendation 3

### Raising concerns

By 1 June 2023, Chief Fire Officers should review the support available for those who have raised concerns and take any action needed to make sure these provisions are suitable.

### Our response

We offer an Employee Assist Programme (EAP) provided as a confidential helpline by an independent organisation. We also have a comprehensive Wellbeing hub available on our intranet. We have appointed Wellbeing Champions, but also appoint Welfare Officers where required. We have a refreshed Whistle blowing policy with an option for independent reporting to a third party if required. We have implemented an independent reporting line (Say-So).

### Recommendation 4

### Raising concerns

By 1 June 2023, Chief Fire Officers should assure themselves that updates on how concerns are being handled are shared with those who have raised them. The updates should be given in an accessible way that encourages trust and confidence in the service response. Consideration should be given to creating a professional standards function to handle conduct concerns in service (or from an external service) to have oversight of cases, to make sure they are conducted in a fair and transparent way and to act as a point of contact for all staff involved.

### Our response

HR now record updates in their case management tracker and we have established a Senior Responsible Officer role (SIRO). SIRO is a function carried out by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer to improve consistency of investigations and monitor communications and case management.

## Intranet page

The screenshot shows the 'Health, Fitness and Wellbeing' intranet page. The header is green with a logo on the left and the title 'Health, Fitness and Wellbeing' in white. Below the header is a navigation bar with 'Edit', 'Following', and 'Site access' links. The main content area has a green background with white text. It includes a 'New' button, 'Page details', and 'Analytics' links. The main text states: 'Taking a proactive approach to both our physical and mental wellbeing is the responsibility of us all. Our mission is to empower ESFRS staff to maintain their Health, Fitness and Wellbeing. This site is all about helping you maintain and improve your wellbeing and providing information on some of the support available to you.' There is a 'Back to the main intranet' button. On the right, there is a 'Crisis? Need help now?' section with a red 'HELP' button. Below this, there are three sections: 'benendenhealth' (teaming up with healthcare provider), 'Wellbeing Calendar' (2024/2025), and 'Wellness CPD Videos' (Find out more).



## Recommendation 5

## Raising concerns

By 1 June 2023, Chief Fire Officers should make sure they provide accessible information for all staff and members of the public on how they can raise concerns and access confidential support (including through external agencies). Chief Fire Officers should also make sure accessible information is provided on how concerns and allegations will be investigated in a way that ensures confidentiality and is independent of the alleged perpetrator.

## Our response

We publish detailed information for our staff on the service intranet page. Our team of HR advisors also provide support and guidance. We have recently reviewed our Conduct Policy and produced a summary guide to which policy to refer to and we continue to promote the availability of the resources outlined in response to Recommendation 2.

In addition, we have recently improved transparency by producing generalised and anonymised information about the number and type of internal cases we are managing. We have a clear complaints and enquiries process published on our website and a booklet available in various languages.

We also have a dedicated email and phone number to the service Complaints Officer which sets out the Stage 3 process for independent appeal to the Local Government Ombudsman.

## Intranet page



### Key policies at a glance

Following feedback about how we can help increase understanding of our approach to tackling behaviour which falls below our expectations, we want to highlight some key policies and procedures.

You may be worried about raising such a concern and may think it is best not to say anything, or keep it to yourself, perhaps feeling it's none of your business or that it is only a suspicion. You may feel you would be disloyal to your colleagues, manager or to the organisation if you raised it. You may decide to say something but find that you have spoken to the wrong person, you may have raised it before and nothing was done or you may have raised it using the wrong path and are not sure what to do next.

Our policies are designed to reassure you that it is safe and acceptable to speak up and raise any workplace concerns you may have and that you are showing loyalty and commitment to the Service by raising concerns. It allows us to address the concerns and prevent them from happening again.

We hope this information is of help. We would also like to remind you of the support available through our [Wellbeing hub](#).

#### Recommendation 20

#### Leadership

By 1 June 2023, Chief Fire Officers should have plans in place to ensure they meet the Fire Standards Board's Leading the Service standard and its Leading and Developing People standard.

#### Our response

We have facilitated staff attendance at the Co-Lab sessions, and we are working with neighbouring services to assess any gaps and to ensure good practice is followed. We were an early adopter of the NFCC Direct Entry programme, engaged in the NFCC Supervisory Leadership Development Programme (SDLP) and will engage with the Middle Managers Leadership Development Programme (MMLDP) when it is launched.

#### Recommendation 21

#### Leadership

By 1 June 2023, Chief Fire Officers should make sure there is a full, 360-degree feedback process in place for all senior leaders and managers (Assistant Chief Fire Officer equivalent and above) in service.

#### Our response

We adopted this practice in 2017/18 and it is enabled through Brighton and Hove City Council. We suspended it in 2019 due to Covid and it has been re-instated.

#### Recommendation 23

#### Leadership

By 1 June 2023, Chief Fire Officers should seek regular feedback from staff about values, culture, fairness and diversity, with due regard to the Leading and Developing People standard. They should show how they act on this feedback.

#### Our response

There are multiple forums, channels and mechanisms in existence to do this throughout the service, such as our documented 1-2-1 process and rolling reviews, (appraisals) through exit interviews, case management feedback, staff network groups, SLT workplace visits, Employee surveys and Managers Forums.

We have further introduced Listening Lunches this year, available to all staff to directly engage with the CFO and Senior Leadership Team and offer thoughts and suggestions. We have developed and published an Employee Engagement Plan which enhances communications about the various channels. We have an EDI Board and an Assurance, Performance and Governance Group (APGG) which are both overseen by the DCFO, the Service Director with accountability for People Services, Performance and Planning and Improvement.

## Recommendation 27

## Fairness & Diversity

By 1 June 2023, Chief Fire Officers should make sure their Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) are fit for purpose and, as a minimum, meet the requirements of the National Fire Chiefs Council Equality Impact Assessment toolkit.

### Our response

An improved EIA process was implemented in November 2021 and has been assisted by employees attending EIA workshops run by the NFCC. The latest HMI-CFRS report said 'The service introduced a new Equality Impact Assessment process in November 2021, which is effective.

The service uses the NFCC's EIA template, which it has modified slightly to meet its needs. There was good evidence found of changes and adjustment being made following the impact assessments. Staff commented during the inspection that this is no longer a "tick box" exercise.

The NFCC have indicated that more EIA workshops will be run so the service will need to consider the cost once details are released.

## Recommendation 28

By 1 June 2023, Chief Fire Officers should review how they gather and use equality and diversity data to improve their understanding of their staff demographics, including applying and meeting the requirements of the National Fire Chiefs Council Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Data toolkit.

### Our response

We invested in an additional module (self-serve) to our core HR data base (FireWatch) to allow staff access to update their own personal data and preferences to ensure it is more current and accurate and to make the process for updating of personal details less cumbersome for HR. There remains some reluctance for staff to provide personal sensitive data and they mainly state they wish for it to remain private. We also gather data through surveys and utilise it for EIA, recruitment campaigns, statutory reports, performance reports to the Fire Authority and in responding to Freedom of Information (FOI) and other enquiries. We are mindful and careful to protect confidentiality and also comply with GDPR.

## Recommendation 32

By 1 June 2023, Chief Fire Officers should, as a priority, specify in succession plans how they intend to improve diversity across all levels of the service. This should include offering increased direct-entry opportunities.

## Our response

We have a strong record in this area. Not only has the service had a significant number of transfer requests from women, but also has seen improvements in the numbers of applications through dedicated positive action work through school recruitment, cadets, pre-recruitment workshops for women and LGBTi people and a significant factor is that ESFRS is the only FRS in the UK with a 50% gender split in the SLT.

Several of our SLT are also involved in leading and developing this work through Women in the Fire Service (WFS), NFCC Leadership Board, Neurodiversity networks, the Direct Entry Programme etc. We also have an appointed Lead Member on the Fire Authority to enhance Political Leadership of this area. In terms of Direct Entry, East Sussex already has two senior leaders who came through this route, and we are one of the 7 FRS who are early adopters of the NFCC programme and helping to shape it.

[Careers | East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service \(esfrs.org\)](https://www.esfrs.org/careers)

The screenshot shows the careers page of the East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service. The background features a collage of firefighters in action. The main heading reads: "Every role in East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service exists to help make communities safer." Below this, the text states: "We have a wide range of roles within the Service - from firefighters, crew and watch managers to finance, HR, and procurement experts." It continues: "All of our staff are passionate about serving our communities and, ultimately, helping create safer people and safer places. If you are also passionate about making East Sussex and Brighton and Hove a safer place to live, work and visit, consider joining our family by taking a closer look at our current vacancies." At the bottom, there are three orange buttons: "Join us as an On-call Firefighter", "Check out current vacancies", and "Subscribe to our newsletter". On the right side, there is a section for a careers booklet, featuring a photo of two firefighters in front of a fire engine. The text says: "CAREERS IN EAST SUSSEX FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE". Below this is a download button: "Download our careers booklet" and the file size "PDF, 2.75 MB".



## August 2023 – 2 recommendations

### Recommendation 18

### Handling concerns

By 1 August 2023, Chief Fire Officers should provide assurances to HMICFRS that all parties are supported in relation to ongoing investigations.

### Our response

The below is a non-exhaustive list of what ESFRS offer/do in order to support all individuals through an investigation:

- EAP (Employee Assistance Program)
- Wellbeing Hub
- Wellbeing Champions
- Employee Networks
- Mental Health First Aiders
- Welfare Officers assigned to any party involved in investigation if required
- Human Resources (HR) advisor
- Creating further support to develop Managers in handling investigations
- Regular complex cases management meetings to discuss in detail
- Lessons learned tracker to ensure continued development when handling investigations
- Whistleblowing policy
- An independent and confidential reporting line – Say-So.

### Recommendation 33

By 1 August 2023, Chief Fire Officers should develop plans to promote progression paths for existing staff in non-operational roles and put plans in place to reduce any inequalities of opportunity.

### Our response

As a small service we have small directorate structures for developmental opportunities so these need to be created horizontally and diagonally. The below is not an exhaustive list but shows some of the ways in which ESFRS consider progression paths:

- People strategy commits to leadership development and diversity
- Restructures in departments have increased the range of Job Family roles available i.e. Business Partner model
- Operational and Support staff apprenticeships
- Secondment opportunities advertised and encouraged
- To ensure resilience and to provide greater business continuity, support staff employees are included in opportunities/courses i.e. Emergency Management Team (EMT), Multi Agency Gold Incident Command (MAGIC) courses.

## September 2023 – 1 recommendation

### Recommendation 22

### Leadership

By 1 September 2023, Chief Fire Officers should make sure there is a full, 360-degree feedback process in place for all other leaders and managers in service. The process should include gathering feedback from a wide range of sources including colleagues and direct reports.

### Our response

Annual 360 feedback are in place for 3 Principal Officers, and reported to Fire Authority Members, arranged through Brighton and Hove City Council. We are now exploring options to extend this across service leaders.

## October 2023 – 3 recommendations

### Recommendation 1

### Raising concerns

By 1 October 2023, Chief Fire Officers should make sure their services provide a confidential way for staff to raise concerns and that staff are aware of whistleblowing processes.

### Our response

Our employees regularly use the HR team to raise confidential issues and this option will remain in place. We also already have a whistleblowing process in place, and this has recently been refreshed. Say-So have been engaged as our confidential reporting line, and the support has been launched.

### Recommendation 24

### Leadership

By 1 October 2023, Chief Fire Officers should put plans in place to monitor, including through the gathering and analysis of staff feedback, watch and team cultures and provide prompt remedial action for any issues they identify.

### Our response

Below set out the methods we use most commonly in the service to achieve the requirements of this recommendation:

- Engagement plan takes a lot of this data into account and seeks to evaluate this as it moves through
- SLT visits which include recording of visits and main action points
- Listening Lunches started this year
- HR devolvment work to upskill managers
- HR library for tools
- Lessons learned tracker/complex case management
- Introduction of external investigators and SIRO
- Say-So reporting
- Utilisation of Rolling Reviews
- Employee networks and the EDI Group.

By 1 October 2023, as a precursor to the development of the College of Fire and Rescue, Chief Fire Officers and the National Fire Chiefs Council should work with the Home Office to consider how they can improve the training and support they offer to staff in management and leadership development. This should include Fire Authority members in respect of their assurance leadership roles and should ensure that opportunities are offered fairly across all staff groups.

### Our response

Below is a list of the key initiatives we adopt as a service in order to support Leadership roles.

#### **National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) suite:**

- The Executive Leadership programme (ELP) is the executive programme and we have had many ESFRS senior managers attend that
- NFCC Supervisory Leadership Development Programme (SLDP). ESFRS have 16 people with licences currently
- ESFRS is an early adopter of the NFCC Direct Entry programme
- NFCC Lunch and Learn sessions attended as appropriate.

#### **Employees:**

- Local internal leadership and development training included in development pathways, LBF etc – in person and elearn
- Apprenticeships utilised to develop employees e.g. project management
- External qualifications supported for key lead roles, line space

#### **Authority members:**

Members of the Fire Authority receive some core training from constituent bodies (County Council and City Council and LGA). When Councillors join the Fire Authority we arrange a series of induction sessions, covering the Fire Authority purpose, commitments, values and vision and their individual roles and responsibilities, with a focus on behaviours including the Members Code of Conduct – particularly the Nolan Principles and Member/Employee Relations

We also provide in-house training including Safeguarding Essentials, Fire Finance, and Appraisal training for the FA Chair and Vice-Chair. We run six Member Seminars each year which include training and discussion forums on key topics, and these provide a safe, less formal space for Members and officers to engage on key issues including Service Culture.

Every Member is issued a Member Development Handbook (updated annually) which signposts them to a range of training provided by organisations including the Local Government Association (LGA) (e-Learning and Workbooks) and South East Employers. Each week an LGA e-learning course is promoted to the Members with the intention being that it is chosen to be relevant to key national focus, local events, or upcoming decisions – recent courses shared include 'Stress Management & Personal Resilience', 'Community Engagement & Leadership' and 'Model Councillor Code of Conduct'.

## January 2024 – 1 recommendation

### Recommendation 9

### Handling concerns

By 1 January 2024, Chief Fire Officers should:

- immediately review their current background checks arrangements, and make sure that suitable and sufficient background checks are in place to safeguard their staff and communities they serve; and
- make sure that appropriate DBS check requests have been submitted for all existing, new staff, and volunteers, according to their roles as identified by the Fire Standards Board.

### Our response

We have introduced DBS checks for all staff. Those staff working in particularly sensitive roles, or at our Joint Police and Fire HQ, have enhanced DBS checks.

## March 2024 – 2 recommendations

### Recommendation 12

### Handling concerns

By 1 March 2024, Chief Fire Officers should provide assurances to HMICFRS that they have implemented the standard on staff disclosure, complaint and grievance handling.

### Our response

The service has up-to-date policies capturing the processes for each of these areas. Including a new policy outlining the requirements for background checks. The introduction of the e-recruitment platform in 2022 creates visibility on employability checks through recruitment processes.

The Complaints team work closely with other Stakeholders in the service to effectively manage issues and where necessary collaborate with the HR team if further action or learnings are to be taken.

The service's rolling review process offers flexibility to meet with individuals when required and provides a number of templates and tools to support varied and meaningful conversations. The service has a large and varied choice of options for employees to provide feedback and share views. All the options have the process of response included. New mechanisms like Listening Lunches allow for instant response and transparency. The introduction of our independent reporting line offers a new anonymous option and allows for reporting which is handled by our current procedures.

### Recommendation 14

### Handling concerns

By 1 March 2024, Chief Fire Officers should provide assurances to HMICFRS that they have implemented the standard on misconduct allegations and outcomes handling.

### Our response

The service has up-to-date policies capturing the processes for each of these areas. A new role of Senior Responsible Officer has been introduced to ensure consistent and accurate application of the policies including any outcomes.

To assist in monitoring a new tracker has been set up to improve reporting ability and potential insights to drive improvements and appropriate management.