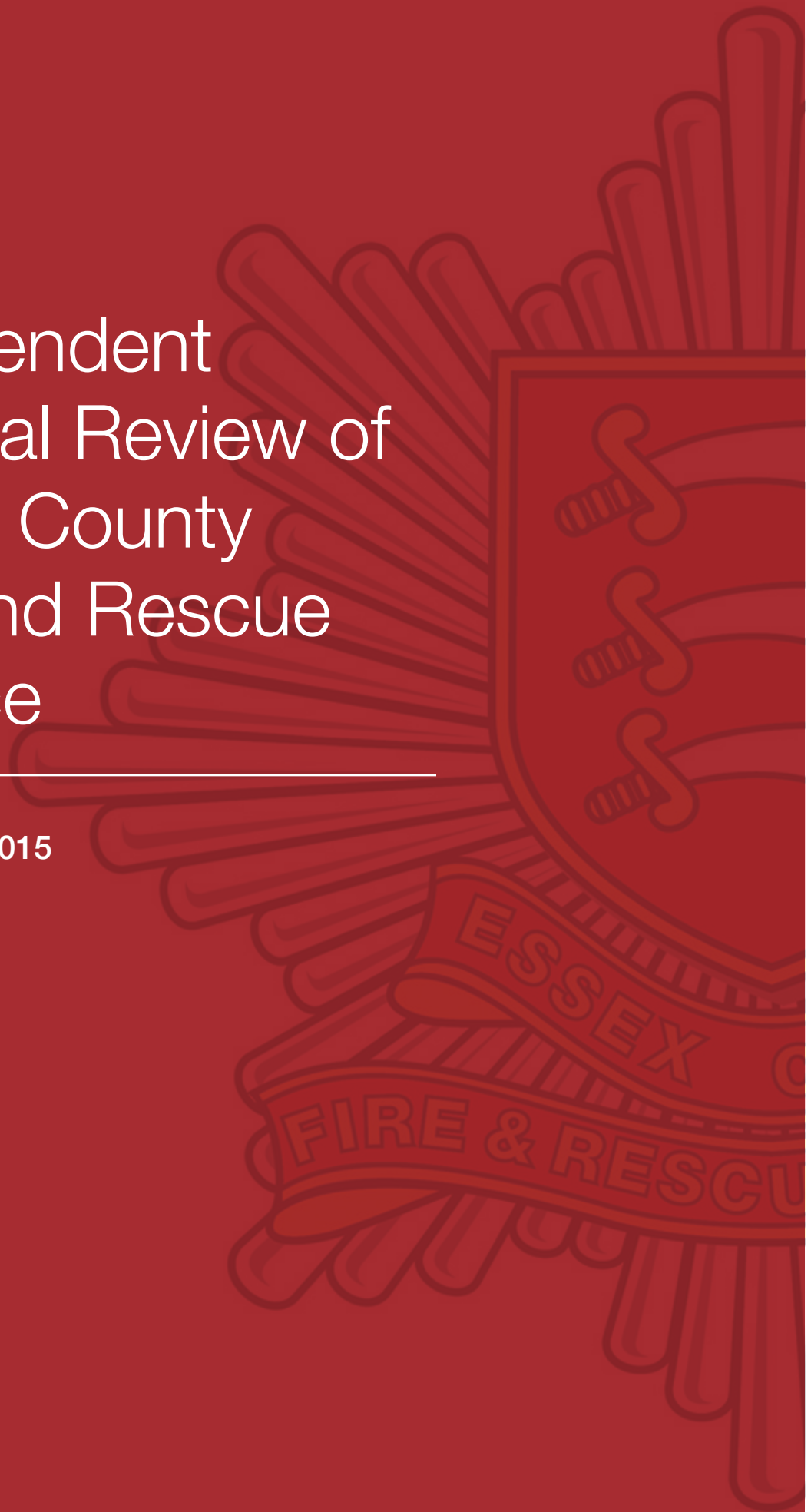# Independent Cultural Review of Essex County Fire and Rescue Service

September 2015

Contents

Background to the Review

1. Essex County Fire and Rescue Service (ECFRS) has been beset by a number of serious incidents including the suicides of two serving firefighters, allegations of bullying and intimidation, and ongoing and protracted industrial disputes.

2. The cumulative effect of all these issues, and the long-term absence of the Chief Fire Officer, has contributed to paralysis of the service and made it more challenging for ECFRS to make the necessary organisational changes to become a fire service fit for the twenty-first century.

3. Essex Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) decided to take decisive action and approached Irene Lucas CBE, an experienced reviewer, former local authority chief executive and Director General – and Acting Permanent Secretary – at the Department for Communities and Local Government, to carry out a formal inquiry into the causes of incidents that may have contributed to the above.

4. The invitation to carry out such an inquiry was declined on the grounds that this may cut across due legal processes already in train, and may not have been the most appropriate way for ECFRS to address their current challenges.

5. A Review of the Culture of ECFRS was proposed instead. This would explore the historical and current culture within the service, providing a report outlining a range of practical recommendations. This suggestion was accepted by the FRA members who commissioned a wide-ranging review, including the FRA itself, to look at how the culture of the Fire and Rescue Service in Essex is having a detrimental impact on the organisation, its employees and the communities it serves. The report would recommend practical steps to be taken to move the organisation towards one that is fit for purpose to deal with the challenges it faces.

Aims and Terms of Reference

6. To address the long standing challenges within Essex Fire and Rescue Service to ensure that it is in the best possible position to deliver for the communities of Essex in the future.

7. To undertake an independent root and branch review of the organisation relating to its culture and relationships and the impact they have on the successful operation of the service.

Methodology

8. The review methodology was based on best practice from reviews of other public sector services and organisations with similar employee numbers and problems

9. The review included:

    *   Desktop research and generation of key lines of enquiry for the review
    *   Review of 213 documents
    *   49 Individual meetings with trade unions, employees, and members of the FRA
    *   A survey of ECFRS staff to ensure everyone in the service had a voice with 459 respondents

- 14 visits and workshops with groups of staff in fire stations
- 3 Interviews with officers of similar Fire and Rescue Services
- 1033 email communications including confidential evidence submissions to the Review

10. This approach has been used to gather evidence to populate the report that will be presented to the FRA, staff and others on 2nd of September 2015.

11. In addition a Review Panel incorporating *trades union colleagues, non-union staff representatives, management and members of the FRA was created to act as a sounding board for the Review, challenging the methodology and being informed of the progress of the Review.

12. The Review Panel (Appendix 2) has not contributed to the findings of this report

13. The report is structured as follows:

- Executive Summary
- Introduction to Essex County Fire and Rescue Service
- Why culture is important
- The vision, values, strategies and plans of ECFRS
- Governance and leadership: how well led is this organisation?
- Relationships, roles and responsibilities
- Valuing people and challenging poor performance and behaviour
- Learning, development and promotion
- Communication and engagement
- Summary of all recommendations
- Conclusion
- Appendices

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*The FBU, which had been a respected contributor and member of the Panel from the outset in March 2015, withdrew its support in June as a result of an alleged statement made by senior management suggesting that the motivation behind the review was to remove the power of the trades unions.

Executive summary and key recommendations

Executive Summary

14.   Culturally, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service is a failing organisation. From its leadership to the frontline, the service is in urgent need of a radical overhaul to ensure that it is held to account, and becomes more adaptable to the needs of the twenty-first century, and ensures the safety and wellbeing of its employees.

15.   The organisational culture in ECFRS is toxic. There is dangerous and pervasive bullying and intimidation and this may place employees and the communities that they serve at risk.

16.   Even in more senior, corporate positions aggressive and inappropriate behaviour is commonplace, but it is worse in some fire stations. Rotation between watches and stations is very low to almost non-existent and this lack of movement has allowed a minority of malignant and vexatious long-serving individuals to dominate their watches, with negative consequences.

17.   In the course of gathering evidence for this review it was often said that 'what goes on on station, stays on station', and that the 'Old Hands' within the service exert a deeply malign influence over anyone who attempts to challenge existing attitudes. Indeed, the cliquishness of the watch culture exacerbates these challenges, where loyalty is to the 'watch' first, then the station second, with the service as a whole (and any strategic goals it may have) a distant third.

18.   There is an appetite for change across the board; firefighters are tired of industrial action and loss of earnings, the lack of trust means that they feel at an impasse, but are fearful of recrimination and ostracisation and lack of support and therefore will not speak out. Talented middle and front line managers feel that they are caught between trying to cope with the torrent of policies, procedures and processes whilst 'trying to keep the troops happy'.

19.   There is no sense of one team united behind a common goal. There is a 'them and us' sub-culture of distrust at so many different levels – between management and staff, management and trades unions (and between different trades unions) and a divide between full time and on call firefighters and uniformed and non-uniformed colleagues.

20.   Nationally, fire and rescue services are in a paradigm shift as they move from a traditional emergency response service to a balance of more preventative work, and the greater use of part-time, on-call firefighters. This has major staffing implications, and when the stakes are so high it is perhaps unsurprising that many staff, and their trades unions' representatives, are concerned, as they perceive that their profession and way of life is under threat. Unfounded as this position is, this has meant that any attempt at workforce transformation has been constantly undermined at every level by officers themselves, and not just the trades unions.

21.   But transformation is still essential and needs the support of the whole organisation if it is to succeed.

22.   It is clear that despite the challenges in the service, ECFRS is fortunate that many of its staff remain

proud to work here and are totally dedicated to keeping the residents of Essex safe. 'We are a collection of people who really care about what we do' was a typical remark encountered in the course of this Cultural Review; 'We have a brand that is built on strength, honour, trust and heroes. If we are not careful we will lose all that has been earned by generations of firefighters'. This is a precious inheritance that must not be squandered.

Key Recommendations

23.   Whilst there are detailed recommendations at the end of this report the following summary of interventions and actions will begin to make the changes necessary:

- An external Expert Advisory Panel with a range of skills and backgrounds, and accountable to the FRA, should be appointed as soon as possible to provide strategic advice to the organisation for the next 24 months. The Panel will comprise senior people, experienced in addressing challenging organisations who will provide strategic advice to the FRA and senior officers on the leadership and change now needed.

- Working with the FRA and colleagues at every level in ECFRS, in conjunction with the external Expert Advisory Panel, needs to develop a concise narrative for change that is well understood and supported at every level of the organisation, respecting the roles of fire fighters, those in prevention work and other colleagues.

- The governance of the service needs to be strengthened with greater clarity and visibility given to the role of the FRA who need to focus on the strategic challenges facing the service, with more scrutiny support for elected members.

- The continued absence of the Chief Fire Officer needs to be resolved urgently.

- More needs to be done to recruit leaders from non-fire service backgrounds, bringing fresh perspectives and learning from the wider public sector and beyond.

- All disciplinary action should be independently led by a sub-group of the Expert Panel and subject to statutory constraints over the next 24 months, and all intimidatory behaviour against individuals, equipment or property need to be considered by the Expert Panel working with representatives of Essex Police who will advise on criminal proceedings. The sub-group will have a specific role in ensuring elected members are aware of matters without cutting across the existing process. This approach to take effect in respect of all new cases.

- Whistleblowing arrangements need to be clarified and simplified and overseen in confidence by a sub-group of the Expert Panel .

- Introduce a rapid mediation service as has been adopted by Staffordshire CFRS.

- Create more opportunities to recognise outstanding performance across the organisation on a regular and consistent basis.

- Make promotion to managerial positions more transparent and based on human relations expertise as well as firefighting specialisms. Involve the Expert Panel in overseeing all appointments for the next 24 months.

- Review existing management and delivery mechanisms to provide implementation ability with clear oversight of progress in implementing and, most importantly, embedding change

- Extend the suite of managerial skills required from operational to more inclusive leadership training, ensuring that the training is offered to those showing talent, potential and who have a desire to progress. Promotion should only be open to those who have completed and successfully graduated from the programme and demonstrated leadership and coaching skills.

- Ensure an independent, rigorous review in six months' time to check on progress.

Introduction to Essex County Fire and Rescue Service (ECFRS)

Key facts

24.   Essex County Fire and Rescue Service (ECFRS) is one of the largest fire services in the country, covering an area of 366,980 hectares and a population of over 1.7 million people.

25.   The service attends thousands of emergency incidents per year, mostly fires and traffic collisions, but also lift releases, effecting entry into buildings, flooding incidents and animal rescues as well as false alarms and malicious hoax calls.

26.   ECFRS employs 1,540 staff including 756 'whole time' firefighters, 486 'retained' (on call) firefighters, 36 control operators and 262 support staff. Around three quarters of ECFRS's staff are employed primarily to deliver response services with 112 employees specifically engaged to undertake prevention and protection work installing smoke alarms and providing fire safety advice to homes and businesses across the county, as well as road and vehicle safety initiatives to keep people safe on Essex's roads.

27.

ECFRS employees at 31 March 2015

- 262 support staff
- 36 control staff
- 756 whole time firefighters
- 486 retained firefighters
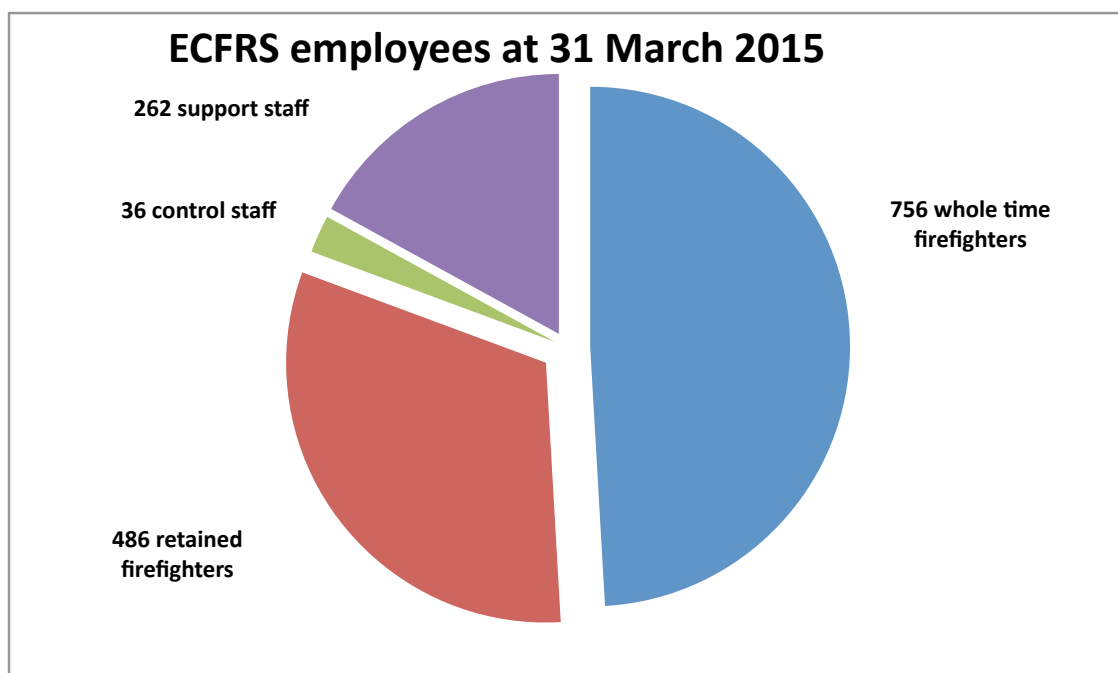
28.   There are 50 fire stations in Essex, twelve of which are staffed by full-time firefighters (and located in the densely populated areas of the county), 34 are staffed by on-call or retained firefighters who respond to a pager when an incident occurs and four are day-crewed with retained cover at night. There is also one Urban Search and Rescue Station, the specialist resource which is day crewed. The Service currently provides 74 frontline fire appliances to provide its response service across the County with between 55 and 70 of these available at any time.

The changing roles of fire and rescue services

29.   ECFRS has seen a steady and repeated fall in incidents over the last nine years, mirroring trends throughout the country. It is widely accepted that as well as fire services' excellent response to incidents, tougher building standards, better furniture design and the uptake of alarms (all measures supported by firefighters' campaigns) have all made major contributions to improved fire safety.[1]

30.   These trends are reflected in Essex where demand for ECFRS services has changed dramatically over the last fifteen years. Between 2004 and 2014 the numbers of incidents attended by ECFRS dropped by 50 per cent, and in 2013/14, ECFRS was called to just under 14,000 incidents (the equivalent of 38 per day compared with a little over 28,000 or 77 per day in 2004).   Around 40 per cent of these incidents are false alarms and many others require no action. This means that fire stations are only needed on average for 23 incidents each day, and whole-time pumping appliances do not attend any incidents at all on 40 per cent of shifts.
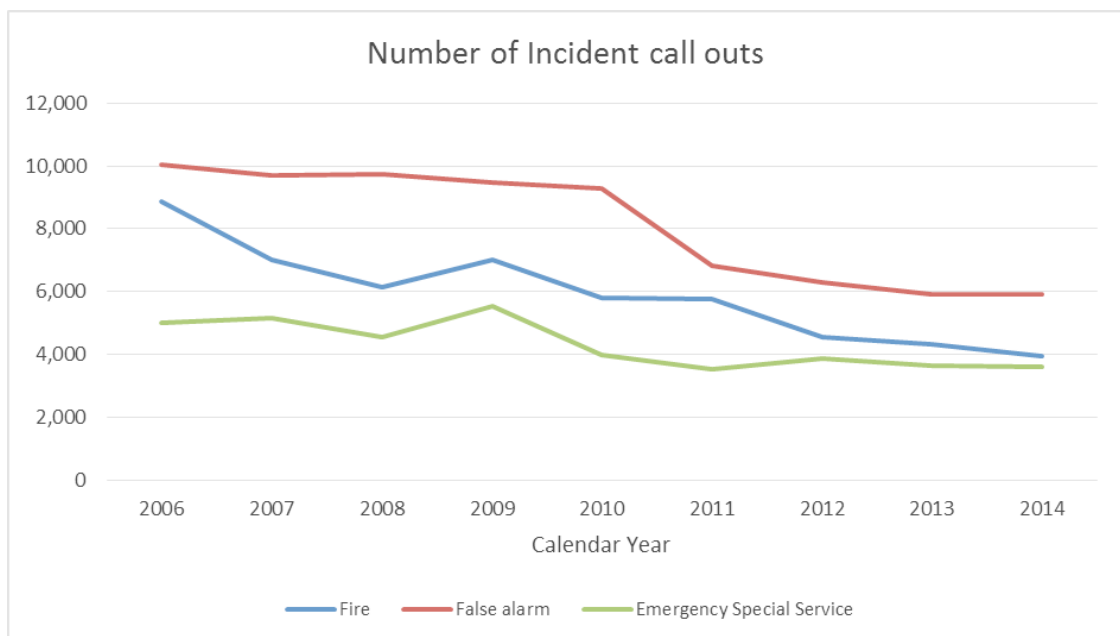
31.   This marked reduction in demand (with the number of fires reducing by 36 per cent and false alarms by 38 per cent) has vindicated ECFRS's recent focus on prevention, but the service is now finding it challenging to meet the increased demand for prevention and protection services as significant resources and staff are still weighted heavily towards response activity. However there is evidence that support costs have also increased significantly and any organisational review to make ECFRS fit for purpose must include a critical look at management hierarchies and other increasing costs.

32.   ECFRS has not yet seen a significant reduction in resources to mirror the decrease in demand for its response services, and so has not yet been compelled to remodel how it crews its appliances, or deploys its response services more flexibly to adapt to the increasing need for more preventative working (not least as the local elderly population is expected to grow by 28 per cent by 2033 – the highest risk group for fire incidents).

33.   Sir Ken Knight's 2013 review[2] highlighted how the huge reduction in fires and other emergency incidents have provided the opportunity for fire and rescue services to change their operational

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[1] RUSI Analysis, 7 Jun 2013 by Luke Gribbon, Research Analyst

[2] Facing The Future: findings from the review of efficiencies and operations in fire and rescue authorities in England (Sir Ken Knight, 2013).

models to become more efficient. Sir Ken argued that in transforming themselves from 'organisations that dealt with fire response to organisations also covering preventative and wider rescue work they have made great progress in reducing incidents. They now need to transform themselves again to reflect the completely different era of risk and demand.'

34.   Yet despite the undoubted room for efficiency and reconfiguration, the report found that fire and rescue services have remained focused on 'avoiding any redundancies, station closures or reductions in fire appliances (inputs), sometimes seemingly ahead of focus on reducing fires and incidents and improving services to the public (outcomes)'. This is true in Essex. However the focus on looking only at revisions to operational structures misses the considerable opportunity for more flexibility and efficiency, in ECFRS's hierarchical and antiquated rank model.

35.   The impulse to protect front-line services is understandable and in part necessary. Despite the rhetoric of some senior officers there will always be a need for firefighters (although this is not automatically the same as protecting jobs as they stand) and in Essex that fact has not been adequately reflected in the narrative about the future of the service which has demotivated firefighters and brought greater uncertainty.

36.   With modern fire prevention and protection work becoming so effective, reducing the need for the traditional 'blue light' response services, it is clear that ECFRS needs to do more to embrace change in order to become fit for purpose in the twenty-first century. The rhetoric however needs to emphasise protecting the imortant emergency response service to safeguard the communities of Essex. The two are not mutually exclusive, as appears to be the narrative in current strategies and plans.

37.   Going back to basics around whole organisation collaboration, with everyone contributing to how this might be best achieved, including the review of the hierarchical management structure, is at the heart of this Review, but at present the culture of the organisation is holding this back.

Why Culture is Important

38.   It is well understood that organisational culture is critically important both to achieving the aims of an organisation and the well-being of staff. Culture encompasses everything from an organisation's customary language, behaviours and attitudes to hierarchy, to the forms of dress, ceremonies and rituals.[3] These all help to define an organisation's beliefs, values and assumptions and can be best understood as 'the way we do things around here', forming the context within which people judge the appropriateness of their behaviour.[4]

39.   Questions of culture are important because they affect the performance of organisations – not just in innovative private sector businesses like Google and Facebook who invest heavily in creating a positive and productive employee culture, but for public services too, where the evidence shows that effective organisational culture helps to manage change and deliver significant public service improvement.[5] Furthermore, an organisation's culture 'encapsulates what it has been good at and what has worked in the past, and can often be accepted without question by long-serving members'.[6]

40.   If culture is to change then senior leadership is absolutely critical, in terms of both modelling behaviour and giving permissions to subordinate staff to innovate and appropriately challenge poor performance – including that of management. A significant function of leaders is to create and manage culture and successful leaders create an environment where positive teamwork, contribution and behaviours are valued and negative culture and behaviour is challenged.

41.   'One of the most interesting aspects of culture as a concept is that it helps to reveal phenomena that are below the surface, powerful in their impact but invisible and to a large degree unconscious'. It can be argued that that 'culture is to a group what personality or character is to an individual' and that just as these attributes guide and constrain personal behaviour, so does organisational culture guide and constrain the behaviour of members of a group through the norms they hold.[7]

42.   This Review has endeavoured to address what is called the 'cultural iceberg'[8] that comprises the visible and invisible levels of corporate culture - from observable symbols, such as dress, ceremonies, physical settings and behaviours, to the 'invisible level' that comprises the underlying values, behaviours, assumptions and beliefs of an organisation. Therefore, the findings of this Cultural Review will attempt to surface the underlying beliefs and values of the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service, and their role in creating an organisational culture that urgently needs to change.

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[3] Pettigrew, A. (1979) 'On studying organizational cultures', Administrative Science Quarterly, 24: 570-81; Hofstede, G. (1990). Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind. New York: McGraw- Hill.

[4] Facing Davies H Nutley S Mannion R (2000) Organisational culture and quality of health care. Quality in Health Care, 9: 111 –119

[5] Boyne, G.A. (2003a) 'Sources of Public Service Improvement: A Critical Review and Research Agenda' Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory 13, 767- 94.

[6] Boyle Richard Orla O'Donnell (2008) 'Understanding and Managing Organisational Culture' [Online]. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration

[7] Schein, E.H. (2004). Organizational Culture and Leadership (3rd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

[8] Boyle and O'Donnell (2008)

The vision, values, strategies and plans of ECFRS

43.   A service's vision and values should provide the framework through which an organisation engages with employees, the public, stakeholders – all of its audiences - and ultimately influences and shapes its culture.

44.   It is important to recognise that the purpose of the organisation and the underlying beliefs, attitudes and behaviours behind its values aren't just written words; they need to be consistently communicated internally to ensure they are understood by everyone within the organisation. Values are hard to teach, unlike skills and techniques, and if they are not shared and lived by the people within an organisation, there can be conflict and disconnect. Therefore, this review has explored firstly whether the vision and values of EFRA and ECFRS are widely known and lived, and secondly if their strategies and plans have been created through proper consultation, and whether they too are widely understood and deliver on the vision in accordance with the values.

Vision

45.   The Vision has been refreshed and summarised in the Service Strategy 2014/15 – 2018/19 as 'Where do we want to be'.

•   Essex is safer, we have reduced the risk to life, property and the environment in our communities and the need for our emergency response service.

•   We will have maintained our ability to respond to all foreseeable risks in an efficient and effective way. We have an engaged and satisfied workforce who are highly skilled and well led.

46.   In general this vision is widely understood, and it is clear from visiting the stations that there have been efforts to communicate this to staff, and this was confirmed by the results of an independently commissioned Cultural Review Survey[9] which found that over two thirds of 459 respondents have a good understanding of the vision for the service

Values

47.   The Corporate Plan sets out the values of the organisation:

Our values provide the foundation for all that we are planning to achieve in the future. These values illustrate what we expect from our staff and what the community of Essex can expect of us. These values have become embedded over several years and will remain at the heart of our Workforce Transformation Programme.

Respect
We treat everyone with consideration and value their contribution. We practise and promote honesty, integrity and mutual trust. We treat everyone fairly and value their differences. We recognise that we have both rights and responsibilities in the way we work together.

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[9]   Essex County Fire & Rescue Service Cultural Review Survey, Verbatim Comments

Accountability
We believe that we are all accountable for our own actions and behaviours.

Openness
We are clear and transparent in our actions and behaviours. We are honest. We share experiences, thoughts, ideas and knowledge. We consider new ideas without prejudice.

Involvement
We create an environment that encourages participation by everyone.

48.   Although these values are known and understood, this review found little evidence that they are lived within the organisation.

49.   There are examples of good practice such as being flexible around work life balance – with those interviewed saying that they had received a sympathetic hearing to request for time off for personal reasons. There was also evidence of changing work patterns to accommodate caring responsibilities.

50.   The Cultural Review Survey found that 81 per cent of respondents understood the values of the service - yet only 30 per cent believe the service lives up to these values.   One member of SMB admitted that he doesn't know 'anyone outside senior management who would own the values'. A workshop of Trades Union members said that what promotion of values there is just a 'just a paper exercise', and a focus group of retained colleagues was particularly scathing: 'no one follows them or abides by them, respect doesn't exist'. 'Training covers the practical hands-on stuff, nothing about values'. Yet although this group also observed that 'morale is low' they also believed that the culture of ECFRS could become more productive if it had values that were followed.

51.   'People are not aligned to the core values, they have no connection with them – they are just words' one frontline member of staff commented, 'people don't see them as something to aspire to.' A member of the FRA agreed 'change is difficult. People joined to fight fires [but now] they are knocking on house doors re safety and they don't like it. We need to fit the people to the vision and the strategy or people close down quite quickly'. Other telling responses from the Cultural Review Survey included 'The organisational culture is more aligned with the 1970s than the 2000s' and 'The man smiling next to you having a cup of tea with his many stars and stripes on his epaulettes is the man who facilitated bullying 20 years ago on station.'

52.   On living the values some staff remarked that 'the culture within the organisation is one where people think it is acceptable not to carry out an action, activity or task that they do not personally support', and the Service would benefit from educating employees on respect and what this means. Another senior officer admits that on culture and values ECFRS are 'behind the pace' with 'no focus on the wellbeing of staff'.

53.   Some positive steps have been highlighted, with more staff 'widening their understanding of acceptable behaviours. Because of the background of some of them they were anaesthetised to what should be the right way, but are now better at respecting people'. This has been helped by members of SMB 'seeing the value of this work more than others', particularly those who have worked elsewhere.

54.   The staff survey is starting to pay off too, and SMB are now bought in to employee engagement and are moving to a 'You said/We did' follow up. ECFRS have appointed an employee engagement manager who is starting in September 2015.

55. The Competency Framework now gives clear guidance regarding the expectations of behaviours in the service. The document is clear and, if embedded, would bring greater clarity to a subject that some in the service still find inscrutable because of their history.

56. Yet the lack of action by senior management in the face of ECFRS's 'poisonous and ongoing watch culture' in some stations is a source of concern. For despite conceding that frontline staff 'get such a pounding it is really difficult to be the person you want them to be. They get worn down by it; it's a victim-centred culture. Lots of persecution as a result'. On being challenged on why steps had not been taken earlier, a Senior Manager's response was ECFRS 'culture was the last of the things we needed to do as we'd sorted IT, equipment - things that needed to be fixed first.' This was a breathtakingly misjudged position for an organisation with such a troubled history.

57. There is evidence that there have been attempts to improve the understanding of the importance of living the values. HR advise that the Managing Today Leading Tomorrow training programme, which offered 2,000 training places and was delivered to 400 Supervisory Managers and 150 Middle Managers, was partially designed to do this. But it is clear that ECFRS now needs a comprehensive strategy to develop a set of values for the organisation that command the support of members, management, emergency response and all other staff.

58. More importantly, they need to live them.

Strategies and Plans

59. The overarching strategy for each Fire & Rescue Authority is an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) that identifies and assesses all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks that could affect its community. This is a technical document that describes protection, prevention and emergency response arrangements. Under the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, IRMPs must be consulted on with a wide range of stakeholders, including FRA members, staff and public.

60. ECFRS have incorporated their IRMP into 'Transformation 2020' a strategy designed to deliver 'a future that is service led, community focused, values driven and financially sustainable'. However, this document is focused largely on the service's future financial sustainability and contains little on how the values of ECFRS need to change, other than an oblique reference at the end of the document 'Does the option directly tackle or create an opportunity to tackle the cultural challenges facing the Service?' - in the section on how feedback will be assessed.[10] The response from the FBU (August 2015) to the Essex IRMP consultation contains a number of criticisms of the statistics used in the IRMP 2015-2020, but does not offer any support to the changes needed or contribute other ideas to tackle the challenges.

61. This review found that whilst there was understanding of the vision and the values of the organisation there was no belief in either and the behaviours of the organisation did not model the values. There was poor awareness of the strategic plans and a sense that the document was unimportant to the majority of the workforce.

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[10] ECFRS Integrated Risk Management Plan Consultation Document 2015–2020, p30.

Governance and Leadership: How well led is this organisation?

62.   The expectations placed on fire authorities are set out in the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England (updated 2014). In demonstrating their accountability to communities for the service they provide, fire and rescue authorities need to:

- **be transparent and accountable to their communities for their decisions and actions, and to provide the opportunity for communities to help to plan their local service through effective consultation and involvement**

- **have scrutiny arrangements in place that reflect the high standard communities expect for an important public safety service**

- **provide assurance to their communities and to Government, on financial, governance and operational matters and on national resilience capability.**

63.   Members of the FRA are empowered to provide a 'level of scrutiny their communities expect' holding their Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive to account for the delivery of the fire and rescue service, whilst ensuring that their own decisions are open to scrutiny. Therefore the role of elected members on the FRA is critical, not least in holding their fire and rescue services accountable for their actions and their performance.

Governance

Essex Fire and Rescue Authority

64.   Essex Fire and Rescue Authority provides the non-executive governance of ECFRS. It was formed on April 1, 1998 by virtue of the Local Government Act 1992. Essex Fire and Rescue Service is directly responsible to the FRA, whose 25 members are elected members nominated by the three constituent councils in Essex: twenty members are nominated by Essex County Council, three by Southend Borough Council and two by Thurrock Borough Council.

65.   At its Annual Meeting the Authority elects a Chairman and appoints a Vice-Chairman. The Chairman is Councillor Anthony Hedley and the Vice-Chairman is Councillor Ann Holland. Meetings of the Authority and its committees are open to the press and public, although they can be excluded if confidential information is likely to be discussed.

66.   The governance of Fire Authorities was addressed in some detail by the Knight Review which observed that local elected member scrutiny varies considerably in fire and rescue authorities across England, and that although fire officers need to be robustly held to account, 'the evidence that this is happening was patchy.'   The report made a range of practical suggestions that ECFRS need to consider including:

- **Authority members need greater support and knowledge to provide the strong leadership necessary to drive efficiency.**

- **Elected Members must ensure that local people understand their service and encourage an informed debate about change.**

- **Greater sector leadership is needed to drive through a culture of learning from good practice and challenging services to rise to the level of the best.**

- **Ensure a clear understanding that the authority is accountable for a quality, value for money, appropriate fire and rescue service for their area and that the fire and rescue service is a body they commission to help them discharge that duty.**

67.   Essex's 2013 Peer Challenge Report was clear on the important strategic role that elected members need to play. 'Increasing downward pressures on budgets will require cohesive strategic support from elected members', they concluded, adding that:

The Service should consider how to develop Members' awareness of the strategic challenges and risks facing the authority in the medium to long term. The constraints imposed by Members on the development of efficiency options will need to be re-visited.

There is a need for Members to take more ownership of the Authority's direction, particularly in these financially challenging times when difficult decisions needs to be made.[11]

68.   'We are bombarded by officers; [we] get papers to read which are difficult to understand what they are trying to achieve.' recalled one member. In a four-hour induction session he was told 'all is well as we have plenty of money. We were not told anything about historic issues, money issues, and personnel issues on our induction'.

69.   There were concerns raised by firefighters and trades union colleagues that there was not a regular forum where members of the Authority could hear the voice of the workforce directly. They were described as 'remote' and 'receive a particular view from the management that they just accept'.

70.   Another member commented that the FRA is 'very agenda driven, it's not very strategic. I have just once asked for something to be put on the agenda. We didn't discuss any cultural issues so what is on the agenda doesn't reflect culture'. One councillor on the FRA summed up the frustration of members:

'We [members] need to be able to understand options, not just be told these are the only options when there could be others. Reports from Senior Management are at a level and in a language that doesn't always explain that other options could exist so there is limited opportunity to challenge from a position of not knowing enough. Challenge is the best way to proceed but that is taken as personal criticism [by senior officers] which is not the right way to respond.'

71.   In the course of this review some concerns were expressed about the Chair and Members becoming involved in operational issues. It is important that Members are aware of the distinction between the executive and their non-executive role.

72.   From studying the papers of the FRA, it is clear that there has been an historic imbalance between time spent on operational, financial and risk matters, with little time spent by FRA members on scrutinising the culture of the organisation, despite long-standing industrial action and significant disciplinary and grievance problems.

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[11] Essex County Fire and Rescue Service Fire Peer Challenge Report, May 2013

73.   There is some encouraging evidence that members have started to address the service's strategic priorities. One elected member reflected that at that the most recent FRA meeting 'there were some new members trying to hold the service to account for outcomes'.

74.   The on-going, long-standing absence of the Chief Fire Officer opened up a deficit at the heart of the organisation that has allowed the service to stagnate. The time taken to deal with this issue has negatively impacted the trust in both the non-executive and executive leadership of the Authority to the extent that at a recent FRA meeting it was recognised that 'satisfaction with leadership of the service' is a major concern'.[12] This led to members deciding that a plan should be developed to 'undertake some work on this' but with no clear detail on what this would entail. This was in June 2015 and this lack of action (although perhaps understandable in view of the prospect of the Chief Fire Officer returning) is continuing. The challenge now is that although it's clear that the authority wants to address the issues facing it - and particularly the frequency of strike action – as one interviewee put it 'they're not sure what they want to do about it.'

75.   There is a clear appetite for change. Members do understand the scale of the challenge – as one put it 'other counties don't seem to have the problems that we have, and this type of difficulty is what was normal say 25 years ago, but not now' – the urgent task facing the authority now is to ensure that they deliver the leadership the service needs and deserves.

Leadership

What a good senior executive team should do

76.   It is vitally important that senior leadership is visible, lives the values and models the behaviours of the service to engage their workforce and gain their trust. In Essex the Senior Team comprises seven officers including operational, technical, finance, legal, safer and resilient communities and human resources (HR) and is known as the Senior Management Board (SMB) (See Appendix 1).

77.   The absence of a Chief Fire Officer, with significant change management skills, has contributed to a paralysis in the organisation and a split of loyalties. This has impacted the workforce who feel uninformed and uncertain about future leadership and their own futures as a result. There is an urgent need for clarity about the position and further and better communication between senior leaders and the whole workforce.

78.   Many interviewees believe that Parade News was useful in this respect but all those interviewed across the organisation were concerned at the chasm that has been created between senior management, headquarters and the rest of the organisation.

79.   Interviews demonstrated that the senior executive management are not well regarded and are seen to be actively protecting the status quo in relation to the tolerance of the bad behaviours that have taken place in recent years. For example 54 per cent of respondents to the Cultural Review Survey said that they have witnessed or experienced 'unacceptable or intimidating behaviour while working for the service' (44 per cent of which happened within the last twelve months) with over 50 per cent feeling unable to speak out openly about their concerns.

80.   There is an overwhelming lack of trust in the senior leadership of the organisation. Whilst it is quite common to have criticism of leadership these results are damning:

•   36% believe that senior management do not give clear guidance to the organisation
•   31% believe that senior management act to ensure fair play in the workplace

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[12] Essex Fire Authority meeting 10th June 2015

- 38% believe that the senior management have the skills and capability to manage
- 20% believe that they are well led.

81.   Senior management seems powerless in the face of long-serving managers who 'work the system and keep a lid on things at the station' and a system of patronage that seems impossible to take on. As one firefighter put it: "it's not what you know but who you know."

82.   Their sponsorship of others in promotion creates a lack of transparency and a perpetuation of the current style of management. Continuing with the status quo will not move the service forward into the 21st century and is perceived as rewarding the negative influence and bad behaviour of some managers.

83   One member of SMB even admits that 'Resilience people have a genuine fear" and has spoken frankly of the 'horror stories' they have uncovered, and 'the lack of understanding that this behaviour is intolerable'. There are reported incidents of burning and destroying property, sugar in the tanks of fire appliances, glue in the locks and car tyres slashed and paintwork scratched (in addition to current court cases) means that information has now been given to the Police and enquiries are underway. Yet there is evidence that those staff who had been dismissed or disciplined previously as a result of such incidents were re-instated, which many staff took to mean that 'you can do what you want in a trade dispute'. A more consistent application of the zero tolerance policy introduced in 2012 would remedy this.

84.   An SDB member commented that 'management want to be seen as open and transparent but they are not seen like that', in fact 'SMB and SDB are seen as having nothing to do but make life difficult for those on station [so] why change anything? Some managers behave as organisational terrorists'.   Across the organisation there is concern that SMB 'promote people with poor previous behaviours … people in this organisation are caught but not prosecuted. It's not too difficult. But if people then just say, oh its banter, that's harder for us to stop'.

85.   Views about the visibility of the senior leadership are variable. Ad hoc visits to stations to 'listen to table-talk gripes' are not purposeful or productive, and can be seen to undermine middle managers 'who need to be given the voice to own the directions cascading down.' Similarly, the composition and format of SDB is not helping to unite the organisation, or provide a clear steer on what its priorities and operating culture should be. SDB comprises seventeen members of staff and has been variously described as 'unwieldy', 'too subservient', and 'disconnected', with no chance to form relationships as it only comes together once a month. The comments of one female member of staff are a typical observation of ECFRS culture: 'professional judgment is taken away to some extent by the military style procedures. Culture needs to be challenged [but] style is banging the table, by male participants in meetings, in small pockets.'

86.   There is a high degree of silo working within SDB. Evidence shows that each member sees their primary aim as ensuring the success of their own section. There is little concept of working as one team, focused on delivering the aims of the organisation collectively. Meetings are held and then SDB members return to their own section – often with their own view of what should be done rather than following the agreed line.

87.   **Leadership is clearly important in determining the effectiveness of culture change. The leaders of organisations should be champions of understanding and managing the culture of the workforce and of challenging 'subcultures' that hold the organisation back, rewarding those that espouse positive values and attitudes. This is an area that the member and officer leadership of ECFRS have failed to address.**

Barriers to change in middle and front line management

88.   Members of the SDB team do not translate the service's strategic objectives effectively and one senior manager regularly voices his opinion that 'this latest initiative is a waste of space and I'm not doing it – so I don't want anybody complaining that they are not getting an appraisal'. Indeed, the senior team are regularly briefed against by some in SDB who feel that they are never involved in decision-making, and grudgingly implement change 'against their better judgement'. As a consequence, SMB feel undermined by SDB who present their decisions as ill-judged 'dictats' to their frontline teams. One firefighter commented that middle managers 'see their job as protecting their group against the organisation. So they are a barrier to change, rather than an advocate. They never express the positive reason as to a change. Some managers are beyond change.' Another officer added that 'ADOs – station managers – are the biggest failing. To get an easy life they take the majority view … they just see themselves as protecting the station.'

89.   Loyalties are to their historical cadre and contacts, not to the aims or the objectives of the organisation. Divisional Officers and Assistant Divisional Officers see the echelons above them as being out of touch and see themselves as delivering the Service. There are cliques of groups of managers that have come from the same station or watch and 'brush under the carpet' any wrongdoing, even when there is clear and compelling evidence there is a lack of appetite to 'rock the boat'. The inadequate and inappropriate relationships between this layer and the layer below – the station and watch managers and the layer below that – are a major factor in the challenges facing the service. The bad behaviour on some watches is tolerated and when something serious occurs it is either overplayed by immediate escalation to disciplinary procedure – or underplayed and accepted as 'laddish' or 'banter'.

90.   It is clear that the organisation needs to urgently refresh its strategy and values to move forward yet it is obvious that what plans and procedures have been put in place are not properly embedded and are only there to satisfy external scrutiny. These plans are superficial and the reporting on them disingenuous. For example, on appraisals 'many of the documents are 'pre-populated' for groups of staff - as long as the forms were submitted no one would look at the quality of them – they were just interested in getting them done'.

91.   ECFRS staff seem to have little confidence in HR. One colleague remarked 'that HR is all big stick, not trying to get to the root cause of something that is wrong'. A Unison member commented that 'HR is an island' seemingly remote from the concerns of frontline workers. This is exacerbated by the 'uniformed' culture of ECFRS, where non-uniformed staff are regularly left out of important meetings and communications. Even attempts to try and improve the culture of the organisation have been clumsy and ineffective. One Unison member recalled 'going to a meeting room where a video was shown about having respect and respecting others; the video showed someone who didn't listen and talked over others – and funnily enough, there was someone in the room who was doing just that'.

92.   This weakness in both leadership and HR support has meant that ECFRS have missed many important opportunities to improve the effectiveness of the service. One member of SMB recognised that 'there is massive under-utilisation of whole time, and massive under-utilisation of retained', which seems to be the ultimate concern of Fire unions, concerned to protect existing staffing arrangements despite the huge drop in incidents.

93.   One critical issue is the anachronistic attachment to firefighting command and control management, even in non-operational areas. These have been adapted and modernised in most other fire services but Essex retains a rank-based hierarchy and pay framework which creates an unhelpful

and unnecessarily hierarchical bureaucracy. A key finding of Sir Ken Knight's review was that too many authorities have not reformed their senior management structures. In particular, the flexible duty system –which provides management and command capability at incidents by senior uniformed officers – has not changed enough to reflect the significant fall in incident rates. This is true in Essex, where traditional command and control management for incidents 'on the fire ground' is only required for less than 10% of the time. Yet having senior officers on rotas 100 per cent of the time leads to substantial number of days off during the working week, reducing the time otherwise available for managerial duties. The Knight Review pointed out that there is major scope for efficiencies in sharing senior operational command rotas between services, reducing the number of senior management roles that need to be operational.

94.   'We are the only Fire Service that hasn't gone from rank to role', observed one officer. This was attributed to both the complex impact this would have on pay, but also 'because the current regime preferred the old structure as it protected the status of the most senior officers'.

95.   The hierarchy that exists in ECFRS is unnecessarily bureaucratic and divisive. There is clearly a need to maintain a command and control management style in situations of crisis on the fire ground, and the firefighters and operational staff in ECFRS do this effectively. There are also other occasions where, as a uniform service it is appropriate to wear uniform. It is not however necessary that this hierarchy is carried through to headquarters, creating a difference between uniformed and non-uniformed employees, or used as a style of management at other times.

96.   Similarly, the local FBU are wedded to the 'Grey Book' that has a role map based on operational competencies, rather than behavioural descriptors. This means that training for managers is still based on a technical competency framework only that restricts the promotion of talented managers who model the right behaviours. This is not the case in comparable authorities such as Kent or Staffordshire.

97.   One senior FBU representative commented that despite the changes expected in the Thomas Review (of operational Terms and Conditions)[13] and Carr Review (of the law governing industrial disputes)[14], 'we want to be sure that the Grey Book conditions are not eroded', and, revealingly, that any competency framework that deviates from this would be unacceptable as it has been based on a 'paradigm from the industry they [HR] come from' and not applicable to the fire service. One senior manager said that this impasse has made ECFRS 'a laughing stock'.

98.   There is clear evidence that despite a reduction in the workforce there has been a significant increase in cost in property and support services costs. Whilst there have been understandable increases in fire prevention activity, IT transformation projects and a transfer of 10 staff from the County Council in Emergency Planning, this does not explain the significant additional cost at the centre. It is vital from the position of fairness that in seeking to realise economies within the service that this applies to all staff not just the emergency response workforce. One exceptional area of increased cost has been in the HR department where staff costs have risen from £613k to £1.15m, an increase of 87% since 2009. Whilst a significant number of HR initiatives, processes and procedures have been developed which may have required additional resource there is no evidence that these have been effective in brokering better relationships or improving the culture of the service.

99.   **The skills and needed techniques to transform the culture in ECFRS are not apparent in the senior management of the service. It is unlikely that the situation will improve with simply tweaking existing processes and procedures. The Authority needs to take some profound and urgent steps to strengthen the executive leadership.**

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[13] Independent review of terms and conditions for operational staff in the fire and rescue service (presentation - not yet published)

[14] The Carr Report: The Report of the Independent Review of the Law Governing Industrial Disputes. A Report from Bruce Carr QC to Government, October 2014

Relationships roles and responsibilities

100. Relationships in ECFRS are dysfunctional

101. In view of the long-standing history of difficult relationships in Essex (depending who was interviewed this has lasted 27 years, 15 years or 6 years) the situation has deteriorated to a default position that the behaviours of the 'other side' will be so predictable that 'failure to agree' is seen as an acceptable excuse for not working hard at resolving issues in a different way.

102. A firefighter observed that 'hard-core trouble makers are now officers, promoted to station officer and they give us the biggest problem'. Indeed, the experience of his colleague (who received what he saw as unconvincing feedback from HR on why he was passed over for promotion to leading firefighter) seems typical: '[ECFRS] don't appoint managers, we just appoint people who have been there the longest. No one challenges as it would ruin their chances of being made whole time if they ever wanted it … I think I didn't get through because I am retained. The one who got the job didn't even fill in an application form'.

103. A good deal of this is down to organisational culture. Despite changes to fire and rescue services across the country ECFRS have remained stuck in a macho barrack-room culture more redolent of the 1970s than a modern public service. This has contributed to a bullying and intimidating atmosphere that continues to make life unpleasant for a significant number of its staff. The perception of one senior member of the 2013 Peer Review team was that it was very traditional, very hierarchical … a place where the leadership and workforce were in confrontation about everything', and where the leadership team had been 'brought up on the idea that those that whack people the hardest, get promoted'.

104. Correspondingly, a traditional focus on the high visibility 'response' function of the service continues to hold the service back from the emerging role of a modern fire and rescue service, a point made strongly in the 2013 Peer Challenge Report which observed the 'perception amongst some staff that response is the Service priority' and that 'a more appropriate balance between prevention, protection and response activities would benefit the Service.'[15] A feeling of 'us and them' is commonplace within the service, with divisions between watches, layers of management and management and firefighters. The Cultural Review Survey revealed that the three most popular words used to describe the behaviours of ECFRS were Professional, Inconsistent and Unfair, with the divide between uniformed and non-uniformed staff consistently highlighted as a major fault line within the service.

105. Similarly, those female members of staff interviewed were quick to describe 'an in-bred, jobs for the boys culture' with 'strikes, and fear, hatred, certain things carried on until "you couldn't do that now under Equality [laws]' which urgently needs to change, if only to bring ECFRS up to date with other parts of the public sector.

106. Retained firefighters also suspect that some in management may be deliberately falsifying their availability. 'They talk of us being off the run [unavailable] during the day, but we are not unless we are not [allocated work]', 'we've never been off the run in all these years, now, off the run, so no money [and] managers are ensuring this'. Claims were made by senior officers that Basildon was always 'off the run', whereas the retained fire officers we spoke to declared that they were available 97% of the time.

107. One senior member of the HR team explained to us that 'Retained' can't be recruited into whole

time as this would create budget pressures, so they can only go into retained vacancies. Yet this commitment to no compulsory redundancies and no station closures has been in her words 'unhelpful to cultural change' as in practice it means giving precedence to whole time firefighters and no opportunities to 'bring forward retained' as per the Knight review. One retained officer summed this up by commenting that 'Ken Knight said make more use of retained but they won't as they don't want the hassle'. The impact of this frustration on morale has been considerable. One retained officer stated simply that 'we're sick and tired of banging our heads against a wall', others added that they have 'never felt less needed or rewarded; first time ever I felt like leaving' and that they 'feel abused because of the commitment I and my family give every time I go out.'

Industrial Relations

108. Out of a total workforce of 1590 there are 1242 uniformed firefighters including on-call. There are over 1,000 in a union, including over 850 in the FBU. This has given the union significant power and influence over the culture and attitudes within ECFRS. As one member of staff put it "you have to join the union before you are shown where the toilet is. You mustn't say anything that challenges the unions."

109. The history of poor industrial relations and a poor culture are long standing. Some interviewed said that the situation has existed for more than 20 years but has worsened in some respects more recently. The Fire & Rescue Act 2004 gave the Government the power to instruct Fire Authorities to make their own vehicles available for future industrial action. The Green Goddesses have been sold off, mostly to developing countries. This has created an additional dynamic between firefighters and resilience workers from the same workforce who work during strikes and this has damaged the relationship between firefighters, resilience workers and management.

110. Some emergency response staff are known to hold decades old grudges about previous strikes. This is perpetuated by the watch culture where vociferous union members hold sway 'around the mess table', and, as the members of a workshop pointed out 'if one of us leaves the union, they would be sat on their own, no one will talk to them, just make their life a misery' and that 'the militant FBU culture has always been Essex and Merseyside, and FBU laugh about Essex and say they like to keep it that way'. This is not actually true in that Merseyside took decisive action more than 10 years ago and have made significant strides with improved industrial relations to achieve agreed changes.

111. Some of the examples of grievance and dicipline cases are telling. From the almost comic - where a grievance was taken out on the grounds that removing a snooker table had such an impact on [the person's] family life as he now had to go to a snooker club to play, or when a FBU member wrote a letter (the contents of which were a disciplinary offence) so the FBU instructed all 40 men on the station to write the same letter so they all had to be disciplined – to more disturbing examples of alleged bullying by trade union members, including damage and vandalism to cars and property belonging to FRA members and senior officers, and bricks through the windows of those who leave the FBU.

112. There was some evidence from the interviews and in the workshops that the extremely physical hard-line initiations have stopped. Previously physical aggression towards new recruits being 'beasted' – 'tied up and put in a pit – with water up to your nose' and being pulled across carpets until you had carpet burns on your face' – and physical humiliation of being made to stand naked while genitalia is measured etc. no longer happens, although equally unacceptable behaviour continues with mistakes, or perceived mistakes, being punished by physical intimidation such as

repeated slapping on the head by watch members. However, there have been continued instances of damage to and sullying of personal property, the abusive use of the word 'Scab' and even criminal activity such as blocking fire appliances, obstructing the Police and causing damage to the Authority's and personal property. Yet as part of dispute settlements there have been regular 'amnesty' agreements whereby the Authority has agreed either not to take disciplinary action or to exonerate those already subject to disciplinary sanctions. A more positive and consistent application of the zero tolerance policy introduced in 2012 would remedy this.

113. More importantly there was overwhelming evidence of serious psychological intimidation of those who had fallen out of favour with the trades unions or were not welcome on the watch. This includes repeated sexual innuendoes about the victim, being ostracised, not being able to use the mess room, finding their food had been spat in - or worse and other degrading behaviours.

114. The majority of FBU members are not supportive of these behaviours, or industrial action that creates additional tensions and loss of salary. In fact, this diminishing dominance of the trades union view has meant that some FBU colleagues in certain stations have become ventriloquists for an increasingly reluctant group of firefighters, who find the culture distasteful but fear being vilified and persecuted if they speak out. They are fearful of the recriminations and expect no support from HR or the management. Long-serving firefighters who are passionate about the service are speaking about leaving because they feel that the conditioned behaviours imposed by the trades unions, and the distance and lack of support of management, do not sit comfortably with them.

115. There is a belief that any escalation to try and remedy the situation, such as whistle blowing, is likely to be heard by a manager who's likely to be a member of a trade union and 'doesn't want to rock the boat'. 'It ends up with the whistle blower being penalised and no-one is prepared to risk that'.

116. Relationships between trade unions are problematic too. The representatives of the smaller Fire Officers Association noted how differently their FOA colleagues are treated in London and Staffordshire. The hostility they faced when they challenged FBU members on the fire risk posed by storing things for a private business being run from the station caused them major problems. FOA members claims that theirs is not a 'table-thumping' union, yet the FBU 'refuse to sit round the table with them and take the view of why do we need two trade unions? The FBU don't want us to exist'.

117. The position is untenable for both the trades unions and management. It is clear that the numbers and support of union members in ECFRS will continue to erode unless its officials have a clear claim as to whether they truly represent the views of their members. If they do not then the present incumbents will find themselves overseeing the decay and demise of vital trades union involvement in contributing to a way forward that removes unnecessary dilemmas of loyalty and support for their trade union among many of their current membership. Consideration should be given to a more progressive model of advocacy, in an environment where they are more respected and are able to truly provide a voice for their members, thereby becoming more relevant for the firefighters they represent.

118. Trades union colleagues will only take this step forward if there is clear evidence that the authority and management are authentically interested in providing a level playing field for real contribution and negotiation about the future of the authority, including revisions to managerial structures.

119. **There are too many barriers between groups of staff in Essex. Radical action is necessary to ensure that unacceptable and out-dated practices will no longer be tolerated.**

Valuing people and challenging poor performance and behaviours

120.   Ensuring that the organisation is focussed on valuing their people and challenging poor performance appropriately is crucial to the culture.   Appreciation produces higher levels of enthusiasm and satisfaction, resulting in a more positive working environment and motivated staff. Valued workers work harder and this leads to better results. Studies show that organisations that place a premium on thanking and recognising their employees outperform other organisations by 14% with respect to employee engagement, and productivity.   Recognising the contribution of everyone in the organisation is one of the foundations of a successful culture. The findings of the Cultural Review Survey reveal that only 31 per cent of respondents felt valued by the service and just 23 per cent think that the service acts in a reasonable and equal manner with all employees.

121.   Recognition of staff is not part of any strategic approach to valuing people in ECFRS. Previously award ceremonies were held at least once a year until 2007 but because of industrial action this was stopped. In Staffordshire CFRS, for example, the headquarters and staff restaurant have pictures of employees from their most recent awards ceremony. The service works hard to ensure that 'back room' staff, and the work that they do, is showcased and recognised as much as firefighters and those working in the community. In both public and service communications the Chief Fire Officer makes positive statements about the staff in almost every interview viewed. He is visibly proud of his people and sees recognition of their work as a key part of his.

122.   A regular criticism is that senior managers do not value the role of firefighters or consistently speak highly or proudly of the service. One example given was of a senior officer giving a PowerPoint presentation to colleagues showing a fire engine and crew. His comment was 'if that is what you think is the future of this service then you are wrong'. A more sophisticated dialogue about describing firefighting, prevention initiatives and community work as all being important in the future of ECFRS would not have been as widely reported across the service or had such a debilitating and demoralising effect on the workforce.

123.   Speaking to firefighters on the stations they are absolutely committed to fighting fires and keeping their communities safe. Their public service ethos and willingness to put themselves in harm's way to safeguard others is what most joined for and is the reason why they are held in such esteem by the public and command such respect. Diminishing this laudable dedication is naïve, demotivating and counter-productive.

124.   There is some good staff recognition practice in pockets. Some managers send a 'well done' email if a member of staff has not had any absence in the previous year. Those on the frontline have noticed the difference in emphasis. 'You appreciate the occasional pat on the head', observed a member of the resilience team, 'but there is more emphasis on what you do wrong'. One colleague recalled a 'Christmas card with thank you on it one year', as well as the star from her line manager that she has 'kept on her whiteboard for years'

125.   One officer however claimed that colleagues were so disenfranchised by the culture of the organisation that of the 30 staff who were up for their long-service medal 'only five would go and collect the medal as generally people feel the service doesn't treat them well'. All those in the Retained workshop said they are never thanked, and others added that they 'don't get any appreciation from [senior management] except when in resilience'

126.   Firefighters do appreciate praise for their work. One SMB member recalled inviting two firefighters onto the stage at an award ceremony, (before these events were stopped) who were moved to tears by being acknowledged for 'delivering for the community'.

127.   Some retained officers claim that after twenty years' service they were not awarded the standard Queen's Medal, in comparison to their whole-time counterparts, and that after a major house fire at Harlow the key role of a retained crew was not acknowledged in the debrief which has caused resentment. Another SMB member added that capacity within the service to do reward and recognition properly has simply been 'squeezed out by competing priorities'. 'It's the naughty child who gets the most attention.'

128.   Even additional commitment is not always recognised. One member of the retained team was annoyed that 'there must be six of us who do far more hours on call than contracted, machines would be off the run if we didn't … but we are used to being taken for granted … people don't see how much effort it's taking to keep things going'. What is more the opportunities for firefighters at all levels to 'act up' and demonstrate their potential is severely limited, not least for retained firefighters whose frustration in the focus groups was palpable. 'We dress properly and look and act the part', argued one retained fire officer [but] 'there are no opportunities for retained', 'it's dead men's boots' added another. This has meant that the management core of the organisation have little understanding of the retained workforce and often little respect for what they can contribute.

Valuing Equality and Diversity

129.   ECFRS needs to do more to ensure its workforce reflects the diversity of the communities of Essex and that the needs of minorities who work for the service need to be addressed strategically.

130.   For example as of 2013, BAME employees accounted for only 0.5 per cent of the workforce (the average for similar fire and rescue services to Essex is 3.7 per cent)[16], whilst the BAME population of Essex as a whole is 8.6 per cent.[17] The Cultural Review survey revealed some of the challenges faced by the female and BAME staff of ECFRS. Seven per cent of respondents stated that they had witnessed sexual harassment (with seven per cent preferring not to say) and of these 30 per cent stated that it happened in the last twelve months, and nine per cent within two years. Nine per cent of respondents had witnessed sexual discrimination, and seven per cent had seen some form of racial discrimination – 46 per cent of whom stating that it happened with the last twelve months with a further 14% within the last 2 years indicating that this is still an issue.

131.   At least one member of the FRA had observed this as a concern, and that one report he had seen had claimed 'that there were no diversity or equality issues' in the service, and that they had raised it as an issue 'as we're still recruiting as we did 40 years ago.' A 'cultural audit' was carried out in 2003 and there is evidence that in the late 90s and early 2000s there were a number of diversity groups who worked with officers on policy and procedures, regular meetings were held and the subject of diversity was taken seriously. However, feedback from colleagues suggests that not enough is being done to address prejudice within the service.

132.   Comments from the Cultural Review survey endorse this view: 'the number of ethnic minority groups, LGBT employees and those with disabilities and women in senior management positions' could be vastly improved if we had maintained the focus we used to have', and that 'just about every 'ism' is present: sexism, racism, ageism', another added that 'senior Management and HR involvement in assisting with LGBT issues is virtually non-existent.' Those interviewed said that despite several requests of HR to reinstate a forum this had not yet happened.

133. Insensitivity to culture and gender manifests itself in a number of ways. One member of staff observed 'look at the cultural make-up of the Service. It is all of a kind. I find the nationalistic display of flags on room doors etc. threatening'; another pointed out that Kelvedon Park 'lacks automatic doors in certain areas, to allow people with mobility problems to travel around the building independently - equal access to all?' There were also a number of complaints from female staff about the absence of suitable changing and toilet facilities for women or well-fitting and smart uniforms. The initial clothing issue forms were marked up in male only sizing (i.e.: collar size for shirts, no female sizing options). 'This creates a dignity at work issue' commented one female officer 'and sends a clear message to prospective employees that women are tolerated and not welcome on stations.'

134. One female member of staff added that too many officers and firefighters 'believe that women should not be firefighters. Their only argument is that women are not as strong and the aging process acts differently on their bodies. Even when faced with the reality of a female firefighter performing perfectly well in the role right next to them they are not convinced.'

Listening to staff

135. The introduction of the Make Some Noise survey, produced by People Insight for ECFRS, is a significant step in the right direction, and the emerging analysis of its results and the recommended next steps provide the service with an excellent route map forward. In this survey of over 700 staff the significant benefits of staff engagement were made clear, as were the stark challenges faced by the service in addressing the deep-seated discontent within the service.

136. The most positive responses from staff concerned their care for the organisation, their goal clarity, and the knowledge and skills they are equipped with to do a traditional firefighter's job. The pride in being part of a respected service and serving the community is a touchstone for most firefighters as was being part of a close-knit team that makes a difference. Yet the most negative responses reflected what we discovered in the focus groups: that the culture and values of ECFRS, as well as management's approach to reward and recognition, employee involvement and change management needs to improve significantly. In particular:

- **Collaboration - better working relationships between departments (e.g. uniformed vs non-uniformed), unified organisation, remove silo working**

- **Senior management visibility – more contact with employees and verbal communication from leaders**

- **Development – easier access to training and development opportunities, clearer career paths, fairer internal promotion processes**

- **Change management – reduce the amount of change going on at once, consider employee input, change of direction to be clear**

- **Living the values – ensure core values are adhered from top to bottom, leading by example, being more open and honest**

- **Clear organisational structure – integrate some departments rather than have so many, review current hierarchical management structure.**

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[16] www.essex-fire.gov.uk/_img/pics/pdf_1374154454.pdf

[17] www.ebemrc.org.uk/about/essex-county-and-the-bem-comunity states that BAME population of Essex is 8.6% (accessed on 21 August 2015)

137.   The report from People Insight strongly recommended that work is done to address the gap between staff and senior management through 'increased visibility, consultation and communication, not forgetting to lead by the ECFRS core values', whilst 'consulting staff appropriately during periods of change, demonstrating a willingness to listen and act accordingly to allay fears.' This is sound advice and underlines the importance of reviewing the organisation's values going forward so that performance and commitment is recognized more explicitly, whilst giving staff more opportunities to feedback on what works and what doesn't work.

138.   Whilst an action plan has been put in place to address the findings this area needs more focus and attention. If staff could feel a difference as a result of their voice being heard this would send a positive signal of change.

Challenging poor performance and behaviours

139.   The approach to discipline in ECFRS is antiquated, bureaucratic and has contributed to the paralysis within the organisation.   Managers are not trained to deal appropriately with underperformance or breaches of discipline and formal grievance procedures are the default position for even the most minor disagreement. (In addition to those suspended as a result of the pending court case and current Industrial Tribunal claimants, there are 'approximately 2 grievances a week – about a 100 a year' according to one senior officer).

140.   Guidance from HR that every conversation between managers and their staff is logged on Form FB163 is supposed to provide a record of conversations relating to positive or negative behaviour. It is however generally used as a record of transgression and it is placed on the file. There is clear evidence that there have been vexatious grievances and inappropriately heavy-handed and often inconsistent escalation of issues.

141.   All this is time consuming and costly to the organisation, but the main issue here is the overwhelming reliance on policy, process and procedure - with no focus on real mediation or conflict resolution.

142.   Disciplinary issues take too long to bring to resolution, which causes significant distress to those involved in the process and prolonged disciplinary matters often result in anxiety and depression for those involved. In the first five months of 2015, six cases took in excess of four month periods to resolution.

143.   At the behest of the Director of Finance a report was presented to the FRA in June 2015. The report showed that 3,190 days have been lost due to suspension since 2011. The cost to the authority for cost of salaries, on-costs and replacement was identified as £822,399.

144.   No cost was identified for those involved in investigations or any professional costs or legal advice. This is estimated to be significant – but this cost was not established as part of this Review.

145.   The causes of the suspensions reflect the nature of the problematic culture within the organisation and include:

•   Abusive behaviour towards other employees
•   Abusive behaviour and insubordination
•   Mismanagement
•   Insubordination and breach of trust

146.   Lack of consistency is one of the biggest issues. For example, absence management is dealt with how each station officer thinks fit. 'Our station managers adopt different approaches to absence management and or the recording of it', commented one officer. This means that senior managers remain unaware of the level of sickness in the organisation, and the main causes of it. One sickness policy seen (dated January 2015) has still not gone to the managers and supervisors.   Similarly, on appraisals, staff said on a number of occasions that some line managers think they are a 'load of nonsense', this means that managers don't appraise staff properly and so staff don't feel valued. Policies and strategies do have their place, but if they are not consistently applied, no one knows where they stand and can often feel unfairly treated. Sickness absence was formerly administered through the disciplinary process but will in future by administered by the Attendance Management Policy.

147.   The introduction of appraisals into the service is a significant step forward and it is acknowledged that this has not been an easy process. However the focus on the number of appraisals completed over the training of appraisers and appraisees and analysis of quality needs revisiting. If embedded properly the process could have a dramatic effect on the culture of the organisation in the longer term.

148.   Inconsistency in dealing with the disciplinary process is alleged to be unfair with those who are perceived to be protected by the organisation being given a 'slap on the wrist' and 'those on a similar misdemeanour being escalated to level 3', depending upon which officer you get doing the discipline. (There is also a perception that there is a difference in treatment between FBU and other members – with a harder line being taken against those in the union.) This is reflected in the Cultural Review Survey where only 22 per cent think that the service recognises and rewards good performance. Just 20 per cent believe that performance evaluation is fair and 40 per cent do not feel that the disciplinary process is used appropriately in all situations.

149.   Positively, 49 per cent say they receive regular feedback on their performance and 58 per cent feel that their manager recognises exceptional performance. How people are valued in an organisation depends upon what the organisation values. In ECFRS these remain traditional operational firefighting tasks (despite the fact that the number of roles directly relating to firefighting is diminishing) to the exclusion of broader managerial skills including basic human relations competencies.

150.   As one officer put it 'promotion is about operational abilities. Command and control exercises and technical improvement. Very little about management skill.' A point echoed by a SMB member who argued that there needs to be a change of emphasis onto people management at stations rather than who had the cleanest appliances.' Equally, examples of misconduct and poor behaviours are not consistently and fairly challenged. Members of the HR team have pointed out that despite an official 'zero tolerance policy' to all acts of misconduct during industrial action, misconduct has included alleged unlawful picketing, bullying and harassment in the form of intimidation, threats and the use of inappropriate language.

Use of Mediation

151.   'Mediation is a process of conflict resolution whereby a neutral third party is invited to intervene into a workplace situation to assist with the constructive resolution of that conflict'. This is how Staffordshire CFRS describe how the use of mediation has resulted in significant benefits to the Service in both staff wellbeing and financial savings.

152.   In healthy organisations disputes can be resolved with discussion with the other party. In ECFRS

the ability to deal with conflict resolution is very weak and is hindered by a policy, process and procedural approach as opposed to a human one. Staffordshire CFRS uses mediation effectively by training its own staff on the National Certificate of Workplace Mediation. This means that issues can be resolved 'prioritising the people and working relationships over the processes. Confidentiality is kept between the mediators and the parties involved so no reports to managers after the event and no reports on personnel files.

153. **In view of the personal cost to individuals and the on-going focus on pressure of funding in the organisation it is imperative that urgent and serious intervention in the disciplinary processes in ECFRS takes place.**

154. **Accountability mechanisms need to be strengthened and more needs to be done to recognise the diverse needs of the workforce in the first instance by reinstating regular meetings.**

Learning and development and promotion

155.   It is essential for any successful organisation that wishes to value their staff and challenge poor performance to identify their learning and development needs.

156.   Operational training is very well developed in Essex, but other training opportunities in ECFRS are limited and *ad hoc*, with a narrow focus on technical competencies instead of human relations skills and leadership development. For emergency response staff, observed one firefighter 'all training is generic, fitness and technical' and even for managers they have very limited leadership training, which has meant that the service now has too many people 'leading who can't take charge'.

157.   Attempts to introduce modern training programmes have been undermined by the attitudes of attendees as one HR manager recalled of the Managing Today, Leading Tomorrow (MTLT) programme 'the lead trainer did not expect the behaviour of some of our staff. He's worked with over a 100 organisations and this is the worst behaviour he has ever known. Questions on the day included 'how would you feel if a member of your family died today [in a fire] because I am on this course?'

158.   A typical attitude among emergency response staff is 'I'm here to fight fires, I don't need to know all that', and HR professionals in ECFRS concede that in relation to Managing Today, Leading Tomorrow 'we hadn't thought enough about the challenges of changing the organisation'; another attendee added that 'people with quite a lot of experience were taught as though they were juniors. There were external facilitators and they didn't respect anyone's experience and qualifications.'

159.   'What a waste of two days', recalled one middle manager', '[they had] no way of measuring what they have achieved. It was planned so senior management were enabled to say – you've had this training'. Another added that the problem with the programme was that 'it doesn't flow out of appraisal. I can't recall the last time I had any training. I can recall when last assessed – annually on competencies. We are now a testing organisation rather than a nurturing organisation.'

160.   As 550 staff were placed on the MTLT programme it's clear that this resource was not targeted at the right people, or used as a tool to improve the performance of and culture within the organisation. In an organisation of 1540 it is highly unlikely that 550 staff have the potential or desire to progress to a position of leadership. The sheer number attending reflects on the hierarchical managerial structure where the current span of control is 1 manager to 1.75 employees. This is a low span of control and suggests a top-heavy management structure requiring review.

161.   The *ad hoc* training and development arrangements reflect ECFRS's unsystematic approach to staff appraisals and how they are used to identify candidates for promotion. In a workshop with Unison members, staff pointed that they had 'never had an appraisal in 10 years. I didn't know we did appraisal. Now it's Achievement First so I filled it in but no follow up and nothing's been done. And there is nothing for you in the future; it's dead men's shoes, so what's the point – is the general feeling.' Another added that 'it's all subjective and depends on your line manager.' Similarly a member of the retained team noted that 'We all have appraisals but they are a waste of time as we don't have a future, and some of the resilience workers we interviewed added that 'appraisals are generic, pre-populated on the Internet. You receive a thought-jogger with generic bullet points on it. You just put the same thing, year after year. No training on appraisals was given to me'.

162.   Encouragingly, ECFRS introduced its first mandatory Performance Appraisal process, Achievement First in March 2014, with the setting of planned achievements and development goals. Previously,

there was an optional appraisal process that had a different form or approach for each rank or staff group. Traditionally, appraisals only tended to be carried out where the staff member had identified a desire for promotion and was focussed on technical competencies. The new appraisal process assesses the behaviours and attitudes staff are expected to display when carrying out operational tasks so that:

'all employees give and receive regular feedback on their performance and have clearly defined objectives. The appraisal process will enable the Service to reward good performance, identify training needs, and support career progression and identify talent.'

163. However, this element has been introduced on a voluntary basis as the Fire Brigades Union maintain an objection against staff being appraised against competencies. 'We continue to work with the FBU to find a resolution before 2016 when we plan to make assessment against competencies a mandatory element of the process'. A senior member of the HR team explained that appraisals were brought in to standardise practice, with 87% completed. 'But', she argues 'the challenge comes back as to why firefighters need an appraisal and that the Grey Book covers competencies. FBU takes the position that there is no right to appraise firefighters and won't accept objectives outside the national framework'.

164. Therefore the opportunity for a systematic system of a well-embedded and high-quality staff appraisal to identify future managers, refocus the organisation on strategic priorities and address low morale continues to be missed.

165. Frontline staff have noticed this and observed to us that 'the manner in which people have been promoted has changed almost year by year over the last 10 years, not necessarily for the better'. A female member of staff added that 'there is no transparency, with a different rule for support staff from the uniformed staff when it comes to promotion e.g. only a firefighter could work up to CFO, their career path is set out. Other jobs are kept well under the table. It's who you know, not what you know.' Staff also noted that job opportunities are not communicated properly and that 'the decision is made before you apply, you know who will get it before it's advertised'.

166. Promotion processes have become less clear than previously. Claims that there have been changes in the promotion criteria and selection process 'just about every month' were common. Examples were given of the current Acting CFO explaining the process to be interrupted by a colleague and told 'it changed this morning'.

167. There is a common feeling that the promotions are based on 'long-term personal relationships – I know men who thoroughly deserve to be promoted but they won't be because they have spoken out about something or their face doesn't fit'.

168. The emphasis needs to change from a focus on technical competencies only to more inclusive leadership training, and that training programmes are used more explicitly to reward and encourage those showing leadership potential who have a desire to participate.

169. **There needs to be trust in the promotion process that there is fairness and consistency. There needs to be adherence to a transparent structure that is widely understood and engenders belief in the probity of the process**

Communication and engagement

170.   Many of the challenges faced by the service could be effectively addressed if there were clear and consistent communications from the ECFRS senior team and regular engagement with frontline staff.

171.   "I don't hear about SMB decisions generally", observed one firefighter, whose views were typical of many of his colleagues. 'Sometimes people stop by and say 'have you heard this' and you think you should have. On the grapevine and someone tells us something important', adding 'No I don't trust the leadership … we get a lot of 'for these four walls only'. One resilience officer commented 'even station commanders don't know what's going on. You feel you're kept in the dark about how decisions are made and why. No one tells us what's going on behind the scenes.'

172.   A great deal of staff engagement is still done remotely and staff have noticed that 'we don't get visits from senior management unless we ask'. Some claimed to us that 'Group Commanders are very good friends of militant stations', whilst members of the retained workforce pointed out that they are largely invisible to senior management because of their shift patterns. 'Whole time switch off their phones and go home. We don't as we are on call. We drill after hours, and we never see anyone as it's out of their management hours'.

173.   Some attempts by senior management to engage with staff have been undermined by the middle managers. A programme of station visits that involved all of SMB to gain staff feedback and improve two-way communication was abandoned due to accusations that they were undermining managers so now they cascade information through team briefs and the service intranet. This has led to a belief that the senior management are remote and out of touch.

174.   Yet the use of electronic communications has its limits. Some staff commented that they heard about this cultural review first via email but many complain that they only get limited time to check emails, of which there already too many.   The Cultural Review Survey findings showed that around half of staff say they receive regular updates through team briefings, and only 40 per cent think communication is improving in the service, just 43 per cent are satisfied with the amount of internal communications, and 23 per cent are not satisfied. Only 35 per cent value Parade News (28 per cent don't value it and 37 per cent are uncertain about its value) and some staff pointed out that now it's on email many staff don't read it any more. 'We get things that aren't relevant and it's not realistic to sift through' commented one firefighter. 'Everyone is fed up and losing interest as they are off the run. So if you send an email, as we are in limbo, we don't read them.'

175.   There have been recent attempts by the service's interim leadership to become more visible. Under the previous regime there was, one manager remarked, 'a fear culture' where on staff awareness days they would be 'told what's new and up-coming [but] if people asked questions, he shot them down in front of the group.' The acting Chief Fire Officer has been praised for his openness and willingness to be challenged in group meetings, but even then some staff have pointed that 'SMB are almost scripted in their answers' and that speaking frankly in these settings can have repercussions on stations. No wonder some staff noted that as long as the culture in the organisation remains the same 'our engagement is valueless'.

176.   The 2013 Peer Challenge Report concluded that communications in ECFRS are 'top down and transactional', and reflects 'a traditional command and control management style.' They concluded that a more open, transparent and inclusive approach to leadership and management is needed,

and that the benefits of early engagement with staff in relation to major change projects need to be recognised. As ECFRS enters a crucial period of change, they argued that a comprehensive communications strategy reflective of the cultural aspirations is likely to facilitate continued improvement in the relationship between the workforce, SMB and the Authority. The defined benefits of the major change projects need a clear communication strategy in order to convince all key stakeholders of their value.[18]

177. **Additional external support is needed to improve the reach and consistency of strategic communications and how it is used to drive forward change in Essex.**

Conclusion

178.   The culture of Essex County Fire and Rescue Service has been variously described as corrosive and toxic and its relationships dysfunctional. On balance there is the prospect, if there is no significant intervention, that the culture in ECFRS creates a danger to individuals, equipment and property. This may in turn put the communities of Essex at risk.

179.   The overall trajectory in relation to intimidation, bullying and harassment is moving in the right direction from a physical point of view but it is evident that it pervades the culture in ECFRS from the bottom to the top of the organisation and many are still fearful of falling foul of either the senior managers or the trades union.

180.   The passionate, determined people that I had the privilege to meet on fire stations, in support services and in some managerial positions are willing and eager to move on from an environment that only a very small, malignant minority want to continue.

181.   There is however a significant degree of cynicism as to whether or not the Fire and Rescue Authority will embrace the recommendations and start to make the change that is so badly needed.

[18] Essex County Fire and Rescue Service Fire Peer Challenge Report, May 2013

Summary of Recommendations

R1.   An external Expert Advisory Panel with a range of skills and backgrounds, and accountable to the FRA, should be appointed as soon as possible to provide strategic advice to the organisation for the next 24 months. The Panel will comprise senior people, experienced in addressing challenging organisations who will provide strategic advice to the FRA and senior officers on the leadership and change now needed

Vision, Values, Strategies and Plans

R2.   A cross section of staff should be involved and engaged in the development of the vision, values, strategies and plans to bring a whole organisation perspective to the processes and to engender a sense of ownership

R3.   Ensure that all staff understand their role in delivering the strategy by making the strategy simpler with a concise summary that can be prominently displayed

Governance and Leadership

R4.   Ensure that the position in relation to the Chief Fire Officer is clarified as quickly as possible

R5.   The role of the elected members on the FRA must be more widely understood and more visible to staff, stakeholders and the public through publication of summary updates on the intranet and in Parade News

R6.   FRA meetings need to be focused on strategic solutions to ECFRS's most pressing challenges

R7.   Ensure that FRA reports address a wider range of cultural and industrial relations subjects and not just operational, financial and risk issues

R8.   Ensure that there are planned meetings with representatives of the FRA to meet around key issues with representatives of the workforce and trades union colleagues

R9.   More work should be done to ensure the accuracy of reports that are presented to the FRA with the service's Performance Manager signing off all reports containing data to the FRA in future

R10.   A review of the framework of how the FRA operates should be commissioned to ensure effective governance and accountability of ECFRS

R11.   An external organisational development expert on the Panel, with support from all trades unions and staff representatives, needs to lead a review of the organisation's hierarchical structure to remove management layers, redesignate roles away from rank and improve spans of control from the current 1.7 FTEs per manager

R12.   Identify agents for change across the service, trades unions and staff representatives and begin to jointly develop proposals relating to the Programme 2020 vision

Relationships, roles and responsibilities

R13.   The mixed crewing model that has now been implemented in Essex at Great Dunmow, with the station staffed by both whole time and retained – this needs to be adopted across the county, sensitively and with the involvement of all trades unions

R14.   Make it clear at every level that everyone is personally responsible for removing barriers between whole time and retained

R15.   Do more to recruit leaders from other sectors, bringing fresh perspectives and learning from the wider public sector and beyond

R16.   Reserve the wearing of rank markings for operational staff, fire control incidents, public events, partnership meetings and ceremonial occasions only. Either adopt civilian attire in head office or, learning from Staffordshire FRS, introduce a new 'team strip' that is worn by both firefighters and support staff

R17.   The Expert Panel to invite a representative of the Essex Police to advise on the seriousness of any reported behaviours

R18.   Refer any intimidatory behaviour against individuals, equipment or property for immediate consideration by the Expert Panel who will consider criminal proceedings

Valuing People and Challenging Poor Performance and Behaviour

R19.   To address the perceived inconsistency and unfairness all disciplinary action should be overseen by a sub group of the expert panel (subject to statutory constraints) over the next 24 months. Any intimidatory behaviour against individuals, equipment or property needs to be considered by the Expert Panel taking advice from representatives of Essex Police. The sub-group will have a specific role in ensuring elected members are aware of matters without cutting across the existing process. This approach to take effect in respect of all new cases

R20.   Create a clearing house for dealing with the unnecessary number of vexatious and low grade grievances that are submitted

R21.   Clarify and simplify arrangements for whistleblowing and the escalation of incidents of this nature directly to the independent Expert Panel

R22.   Consider the use of a rapid mediation service as has been adopted by Staffordshire CFRS

R23.   Create more opportunities to recognise outstanding performance and actively promote nominations for an annual awards ceremony

R24.   Consult with BAME, LGBT, female and disabled colleagues regarding the reforming of appropriate groups to look at the ways in which the service could proactively progress the issues raised and proactively use the different perspective that diversity can bring to the organisation

Learning, development and promotion

R25.   Revise future training programmes to ensure that they are focused, and are limited to those showing talent, potential and have a desire to progress. It should focus on a smaller number of future leaders

R26.   Promotion should only be open to those who have completed and successfully graduated from the programme

R27.   Change the emphasis from operational to more inclusive leadership training, learning from Kent CFRS that has introduced Level 5 coaching qualifications, including back-office staff, to improve the management skills of middle managers

R28.   Make promotion to managerial positions more transparent and involve the Expert Panel in overseeing all appointments for the next 24 months

R29.   Ensure that leadership and coaching skills and qualifications are considered as much as technical competencies in all appraisals

R30.   Set clear and consistent expectations that annual appraisals need to be completed by all managers across the service and introduce an audit to ensure that the quality of the appraisal meetings and paperwork is actually delivering a satisfying process which will take the service forward

R31.   Review of existing management and delivery mechanisms to provide implementation ability with clear oversight of progress in implementing change and most importantly, embedding change

Communication and engagement recommendations

R32.   Engage the Communications team at Essex County Council to improve the range and credibility of the information communicated to stakeholders, and establish a staff reference group to better understand what messages are important to the service as a whole

R33.   Ensure that the agendas and papers of every meeting of the FRA and SMB are posted on the intranet so staff can see what is being discussed. A summary of decisions should be published after each meeting

R34.   Develop a style guide for corporate communications to ensure consistency and protocols for sign off by at least one member of SMB and bring in some measurement to evaluate positive and negative coverage of the service

Final Recommendation

R35.   After six months carry out a short independent review on progress

Appendix 1

Membership of Senior Management Board

- Chief Fire Officer (who is also the Chief Executive)

- Deputy Chief Fire Officer - Service Support, responsible for Democratic Services, Fleet Services, Legal Support, Property Services, Technical Services, Water Supplies, IT, Technical Communications, Challenge and Innovation, Corporate Communications, Media and Marketing.

- Finance Director and Treasurer - responsible for Finance, Insurance, Purchasing and Supplies.

- Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development - responsible for Human Resources and Organisational Development, including implementing the Work Force Transformation Project

- Assistant Chief Fire Officer - Operations - responsible for Area Commands including fire stations and associated areas.

- Assistant Chief Fire Officer - Safer and Resilient Communities - responsible for Safer and Resilient Communities

- Service Solicitor – who is the Head of Law & Corporate Administration

Appendix 2

Strategic Delivery Board

- Programme Manager
- Senior Divisional Officer - West Area Commander
- Risk & Business Continuity Manager
- Divisional Officer - Health & Safety Manager
- Senior Divisional Officer Head of Quality & Improvement
- Deputy Finance Director
- Divisional Officer Operations
- ICT Manager
- Interim Head of HR & OD
- Property Services Manager
- Senior Divisional Officer, Safer Communities
- Deputy Director HR & OD
- Senior Divisional Officer East Area Commander
- Divisional Officer Emergency Planning
- Fleet Engineering Manager
- Head of Service (Emergency Planning)
- Performance Improvement Manager

Appendix 3

Membership of Review Panel

- Four Fire and Rescue Authority Members
- Deputy Chief Fire Officer /Acting Chief Fire Officer
- Retained firefighter and Secretary to the Retained Firefighters Union, Essex branch
- Operations and Risk Data Information Officer
- Community Development and Safeguarding Manager
- *Firefighter and Assistant Secretary to the FBU, Essex branch
- Assistant Divisional Officer and internal Fire Officers Association representative
- Local Unison representative (external)

*FBU colleagues withdrew their support for the review in June 2015

Bibliography

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Audit Commission 2008	Rising to the challenge: Improving Fire Service Efficiency
Bain G et al 2002	The Future of the Fire Service: Reducing Risk, Saving Lives,: The independent review of the fire service
FBU 2007	All Equal, All Different v4
Carr B. 2014	The Carr Review: The report of the independent review of the law governing industrial disputes
ORS (for the Chief Fire Officers Association) 2008	Equality and Diversity Survey: graphical report of survey findings
Kent FRS 2014	Kent FRS Safety Plan 2014
Knight K 2013	Facing the Future: Findings from the review of efficiencies and operations in fire and rescue authorities in England
Baigent 2009	Fitting-In, Work in Progress on Culture
Baignet D and Rolph C. (2004?)	Fitting-In: A cultural audit of recruitment, training and integration in the fire services
Bowles DJ et al 2012	Investigation into Management Culture in NHS Lothian
CIPD and PPMA 2012	Leading Culture Change: employee engagement and workforce transformation
FBU site	Three issues of Firefighter 2015
House of Commons records 2006	Memorandum by the Fire Service Research & Training Unit at Anglia Ruskin University Cambridge (Fire & Rescue Cultures)
LGA (Baigent & O'Connor) 2011	Fire and Rescue Services: going the extra mile
Johnson G 2001	Mapping and re-mapping organisational culture: a local government example
ORS 2005	Scottish Fire and Rescue Service: Cultural audit survey
ORS 2009	Cultural Audit Survey 2008: Final report for Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service
Silvia and Simona 2013	Research Methods Used in Analysing Organisational Culture

Baigent, O'Connor, Smitherman 2010	Perceptions: what is believed to be true can become true in its consequence A snapshot cultural Audit of South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service
Baigent et al 2003	Sunrise: A new dawn in training: training today's firefighters as the emergency workers for tomorrow
YouTube www.youtube.com/watch?v=GvvTxkHHPJs	Ann Millington CFO Kent Fire & Rescue: Culture and Leadership dimensions of valuing female talent

EFRS documents reviewed

2003	EFRS Cultural Audit	
June 2005	Disciplinary procedure	
11 Sept 2006	Management Team Meeting	To consider the approach moving from Rank to Role – initial thinking
ECFRS	Equality Scheme 2006-9	
EMA Solutions Feb 2008	Equality Standard Review 2008	EFA/044/09
SMB 29 January 2008	Audit Recommendations – Report on progress against action plan	
SMB 29 January 2008	Related Action plan with progress commentary	Training DVD
April 2008	Lease Car Scheme: assessment of options against the lease car scheme previously proposed	
April 2008	Minutes of SMB re comparison of lease car scheme	
Feb 2008	Review of the light vehicle provision for staff conditioned to grey and green book contracts	EFA/082/13
Feb 2008	SMB Minutes re light vehicle provision as above	Appendix to 4 Sept 2013 report
Nov 2008	Minutes of SMB incl car scheme	
	Staffordshire FRS Principal Officers Car scheme	EFA/044/13
SMB Nov 2008	Revisions to the EFRS lease car scheme	EFA/044/09
Policy & Strategy Cttee 22 June 2011	Strategic Review of HR & Training – findings from the external review of HR & Training – leads to Workforce Transformation Programme	EFA/061/11

2011	Strategic Workforce Development Review; final report	
2011	Appendices to the report	Includes significant stats
Policy & Strategy Cttee 22 June 2011	Workforce Transformation Programme	EFA/062/11
Policy & Strategy Cttee 20 June 2012	Industrial Dispute	EFA/076/12 Partial performance Access Zero tolerance and no amnesty
Policy & Strategy Cttee 20 June 2012	Minutes of meeting	As above Includes reference to industrial action
Nov 2012	Report to Audit, Governance & Review Working Group on PO provided car scheme: needs and comparison of costs	EFA/221/12
Dec 2012	Report to Fire Authority on PO provided car scheme	EFA/233/12
15 Jan 2013	SMB Board meeting HR & OD Position and Strategy - to align to workforce transformation programme	
April 2013	Letters re Whistleblowing Complaint	
Ken Knight 2013	Charts with authority detail from Ken Knight report	
Fire Authority 2013	Response to the Knight Report- Facing the Future	EFA/081/13
Fire Authority 2013	Appendix with detail re Knight Report – Facing the future	EFA/081/13
Feb 2013	PO provided car scheme: the recommendation from the Working Group	EFA/024/13
Grievance, Discipline & Remuneration of Principal Officers Group	CIPFA Stats relating to Fire Authorities	
LGA 2013	ECFRS Fire Peer Challenge Report	
Audit Governance and Review Committee	Sickness Absence Analysis Report Sickness absence data 2012, 2013	EFA/117/13
February 2014	Achievement First Appraisal Policy	Principles, roles etc
2014	Achievement First eLearning PowerPoint	50 minutes of modules

Fire Authority 12 Feb 2014	Workforce Report HR casework Jan 13 – Dec 13	EFA/011/14
Cleveland Fire Brigade March 2014	Performance Improvement Family Group 4	Comparisons with family group 4
Audit Governance & Review Committee 23 April 2014	Organisational Performance Report April 13 – Feb 14	EFA/028/14
	Performance Summary Feb 14	As above
Fire Authority 16 April 2014	Performance for April 2013 to January 2014 and Target Setting for 2014/15 to 2018/19	EFA/022/14
	Service Strategy Poster 2015/15 – 2018/19	As Above
	Summary of Performance January 2014	As above
Fire Authority 16 April 2014	Performance April 2013 to Jan 2014 and Target Setting for 2014/15 to 2018/19	EFA/022/14
May 2014	MTLT Communications Plan	Key messages and timing
	Customer and Services Workstream report – Managers Feedback on HR	
	MTLT Leadership Module 1	
	MTLT Leading Change Module 2	
	MTLT Managing Performance Module 3	
	MTLT High Performing Teams Module 4	
	MTLT Influence, Interaction and Team Working Module 5	
	MTLT Organisational Strategy and Decision Making Module 6	
	MTLT Developing Self and Others Module 7	
	MTLT Diversity and Integrity Module 8	
May 2014	SDB Terms of Reference	
Fire Authority 10 June 2014	Sickness Management Action Plan	EFA/035/14
	Chart of sickness in depts./cost centres to March 2015	

14 July 2014	SMB re abatement of pension on re-employment and continuing secondary employment	
Audit Governance & Review Committee 16 July 2014	Organisational Performance Report June 13 – May 14	EFA/054/14
	Organisational Performance against objectives	As above
Aug 2014	SMB Terms of Reference	
September 2014	SDB TOR for Absence Management Working Group	A sub-group of SDB
25 Sept 2014	Achievement First - Completion rates - Spreadsheet of completion rates by week and by East, West, Corporate	Excel sheets
	Achievement First- SMART Planned Achievements	Explanations and examples
	Achievement First – completing the form, end of year review	Nutshell
	Achievement First – completing the form, mid-year review	Nutshell
	Achievement First – completing the form, setting planned achievements and development goals	Nutshell
	Achievement First – service goals and measures	Nutshell
	Achievement First – appraisal calendar	Monthly actions
	Competency Framework	
Audit, Governance & Review	Organisational Performance Report	
Committee 8 Oct 2014	Sept 13 – Aug 14	
	Chart of Performance 2013-14 2	
ECFRS Press release 23 Oct 2014	Cost Saving ECFRS Scheme wins government funding	To establish insurance consortium. Also refers to a procurement consortium, successful bid led by Kent
Policy & Strategy Cttee 5 Nov 2014	Draft Minutes – includes Workforce Transformation, and partial payment	Confidential part 2 item
Press release Nov 2014	Fire Authority Commissions Independent Inquiry	Note that TOR later amended
Fire Authority 3 Nov 2014	Reputational issues: Actions to address challenges	Part 2 item confidential EFA/096/14

2014	Strategic Assessment of Risk 2014	
Press release 13 Jan 2015	Resilience Crews Will Provide Cover for Entire FBU Strike	
	Chart of Performance 2013-14	
Cleveland Fire Brigade	National Fire and Rescue Service- Occupational Health Performance Report April- December 2014	
Audit Governance & Review Committee 21 Jan 2015	Organisational Performance Report Nov 13 – Oct 14	
Jan 2015	Attendance Management Policy – proposed updated	
Jan 2015	Grievance and Dignity at Work – employee guidance- draft	
Jan 2015	Grievance Policy Tracker –draft	
January 2015	Attendance Management Policy- proposed update	Approaches to absence management
Jan 2015	Survey Data tables shown by Role	
Jan 2015	Survey Data tables by Flexi Working Arrangement	
Jan 2015	Survey Data tables by Function	
Jan 2015	Survey Data tables by Gender	
Jan 2015	Survey Data tables by Length of Service	
Jan 2015	Survey Data tables by Place of Work	
Jan 2015	Survey Data tables by Role Category	
Jan 2015	Survey Data tables by Support Staff by Gender	
Jan 2015	Survey Data tables Support Staff by role	
Jan 2015	Survey Data tables Uniformed Staff by Gender	
Jan 2015	Survey Data tables Uniformed Staff by role category	
Jan 2015	Survey Data tables by Workforce category	
Jan 2015	Survey Themed comments the Best Thing	

Jan 2015	Survey Themed comments Things to Change	
Jan 2015	Comparison on engagement and survey return with five other FRS	
Jan 2015	Workforce Equalities Summary Data	
February 2015 HR	People Policies Brochure – things you should bear in mind in periods of industrial action	
February 2015	Achievement First Overview	Annual process explanation
Fire Authority 11 Feb 2015	Workforce Report 2014 HR casework Jan 14- Dec 14	EFA/019/15 Statistics of various actions and stages
2015	Achievement First and ideas for development goals	
	Achievement First: planned achievements and development goals for 2014-15	For different roles and levels of seniority
	Achievement First 2014-15 end-of-year review	
	Achievement First 2015-16 Planned achievements, competencies, and development goals 2015-16	
	Achievement First Employees Checklist	Prep for each stage
	Achievement First Managers' Checklist	Prep for each stage
	Achievement First – Employee's Thought Jogger	Covers Review and Plan
	Achievement First – Manager's Thought Jogger	Covers Review and Plan
	Achievement First – End-of-Year Sign-off process	Flowchart
6 March 2015	Parade News 77	
18 March 2015	Signed Project Brief RDS project-final	Includes OBC for the Retained Duty System Development project
March 2015	Integrated Risk Management Plan and Consultation document 2015-20	
March 2015	JNCC minutes significantly re ASW	
	Independent Enquiry Preliminary Report Accounting for injury pension payments	EFA/080/14

March 2015	Safer and Resilient Communities- discussion document	
2 April 2015	Parade News 78	
April 2015	Grievance Procedure Flow Chart – draft	
April 2015	Grievance Manager's Toolkit – checklist guidance and templates	
Fire Authority 15 April 2015	Programme 2020: a plan to meet future strategic challenges and provide VFN	EFA/033/15
Fire Authority 15 April 2015	2020 : the context for change Includes incident trends	Summary of programme rationale
Fire Authority 15 April 2015	Employee Engagement survey update: process for the survey and action planning to respond to the survey findings	EFA/000/15
Fire Authority 15 April 2015	Make Some Noise, We're Listening -Employee Survey: feedback and planning April 2015	Presentation from consultants of findings
Fire Authority 15 April 2015	Results of the Employee Engagement Survey Dec 2013	Summary findings and commentary
Fire Authority 15 April 2015	Employee Engagement Strategy Action Plan	
April 2015	Grievance Policy and Procedure – draft	
April 2015	Grievance Procedure	
20 April 2015	Minutes of meeting 20 April FBU and EFRS – Failure to Agree re ASW	
	Appendix B – prearranged Failure to Agree – extracts re Grey Book	
23 April 2015	Press statement from the Chairman	
30 April 2015	Parade News 79	
	MTLT Feedback Tells Us	
	Slides from Executive Coaching Workshop MTLT : from negativity to positivity	
	Key Messages: engagement planning MTLT	
	RDS Action plan	

	Sickness Management Action Plan	
April 2015	Competency Framework Final	
April 2014, review April 2015	Learning and Development Policy	
13 April 2015	PID for RDS project	
Fire Authority 15 April 2015	Employee Engagement survey update: process for the survey and action planning to respond to the survey findings	EFA/000/15
Fire Authority 15 April 2015	Make Some Noise, We're Listening -Employee Survey: feedback and planning April 2015	Presentation from consultants of findings
Fire Authority 15 April 2015	Results of the Employee Engagement Survey Dec 2013	Summary findings and commentary
Fire Authority 15 April 2015	Employee Engagement Strategy Action Plan	
compilation May 2015	Calendar year and fiscal year stats re incidents, false alarms, fires	
May 2015	Age profile breakdown of workforce	
	Brochure of workplace options	Employee assistance programme
2015	Confidential Employment Tribunal findings	Confidential
May 2015	Succession Pool – DO advert	
	Divisional Officer Pen Picture	
	Succession Pool Guide	
	Candidate Guide to Selection Interviewing and Additional Selection Tests	
	Succession Pools Policy	
18 May 2015	Letter to FBU: Failure to agree re additional shift working	
May 2015	Extract from draft IRMP re engines availability v use	
Fire Authority 10 June 2015	Employee Absenteeism and summary of financial burden	Part 2 item confidential EFA/049/15/2
Fire Authority 10 June 2015	Employee Absenteeism: Issues of financial burden re suspensions	EFA/049/15

June 2015	Draft SDB Terms Of Reference – revised	
Confidential	17 documents/emails relating to the investigation of the death of Joe Keighley, firefighter	Confidential
Review period	Fortnightly extracts from the Facebook page: Stop Fire Cuts, Defend Essex Firefighters	
Review period extracted	Council Tax Band D 2008- 2016	
	BR2 Forms 2004-8	Expansion re CT requirements
	Restatement of accounts 2013-14	Adjustment for pension injury payments
	CIPFA Stats 2003-15	Annual returns for each year
	Retained Pay 2002- 2015	
	Whole time overtime paid 2002-2009	
	Fixed assets 2002- 2015	
	Auditors report to Essex Fire Authority on its best value performance plan y/e 31 March 2007	EFA/008/07
	Demand and Availability spreadsheet 2010- 2015	
	Sickness data 2004 -2015	
SMB June 15	Implementing Service Performance and Change Management	
June 2015	Numbers of employees, membership of unions, 2005-2015	
June 2015	Pay for employee groups with numbers 2009-2015	
	Pay Policy Statement 2014-2015	EFA/021/14
Fire Authority 10 June 2015	Trade Union Facility Time 2014-15 Report (DCLG Transparency Code) and JNCC arrangements- Includes pay bill consequences	EFA/048/15
July 2015	Employee Engagement Action Plan with highlighted actions	
July 2015	Make Some Noise: Managers Briefing Pack	
July 2015	Week by Week Make Some Noise Action Plan	

July 2015	Make Some Noise – Action & Delivery Groups TOR	
July 2015	Interim Employee Engagement Strategy	
	Sickness Absence 2012-13 East, West, Corporate	
	Sickness Absence 2013-14 East, West Corporate	
July 2015	Transfer Policy	
	Transfer Policy FAQs	
July	MTLT Evaluation Report	
August 2015	Statistics on discipline and grievance 2011-2015	
FBU August 2015	Essex IRMP 2015-2020 Statistical Response	
August 2015	Workforce Transformation Benefits Realisation Plan (updated)	