

PROGRESS REPORT 2 – EXPERT ADVISORY PANEL

This is the second progress report of the Expert Advisory Panel appointed to support the change process arising from the Independent Cultural Review (Sept 2015) and reflects the “look forward” of the first report.

An informal briefing was held on 1st December which provided the opportunity for Members of the Fire Authority to meet me and receive a presentation on the work of the Panel to date. This report, therefore, builds on that briefing to ensure matters that should be in the public domain are made available.

As before, activities and/or actions are presented in a bullet point format.

KEY ACTIVITIES:

- The Panel has now been established for two months - though it has consisted of just two members for most of this period.
- At the last PO HR Committee two additional members of the Panel were agreed - people with a strong industrial relations background and expertise – and the appointment of these individuals has been reported to the full Fire Authority on 2nd December.
- The Expert Advisory Panel met for the first time as a complete group on 27th November and, on the same day, met members of the Service Management team as well as members of the PO HR Committee.
- Support for the Panel and PO HR Committee has also been agreed.
- An initial - and comprehensive - action plan has been drafted, as directed by the Fire Authority in accepting the Review recommendations, and this has been considered in detail at a joint workshop between myself and members of the Strategic Management team.
- That version will now be circulated to the wider EAP before coming to the Authority Workshop later this month, and then on to a full Fire Authority meeting for ratification and, ultimately, publication as the Authority’s response to the Independent Review of Culture.
- Background work on the role, governance and reassurance approach of the EAP has also been developed and agreed in outline, and this is on today’s agenda for the PO HR Committee for final agreement and endorsement.

- The diagram below illustrates the proposal which - in simple terms - encompasses members of the Panel attending the Authority's 2020 Programme Board. But then, the same group sitting in External Advisory Panel mode to ensure the necessary drive and progress for the specific Independent Review work and its associated action plan.



- In this way the Panel gets to contribute to the whole of the Service and the Authority's agenda, but without cutting across political or professional management. But, at the same time, provide the necessary focus on culture change.
- The 2020 Programme Board has already established monthly meetings and the Panel will fold its work into this approach (on the basis that it is agreed by the PO HR Committee).
- It is also intended that there will be bi-monthly, informal meetings between the EAP and the PO HR Committee Culture sub-group on the same day. The purpose of these is not to cut across proper governance which will continue. Rather, it is to provide a vehicle for free flowing and open discussion on progress and discuss any issues arising with a view to anticipating and avoiding any potential problems in a proactive way.
- A discipline, grievance and whistle blowing "subgroup" of the EAP has also now been established in accordance with the Lucas Report recommendations.
- The first phase of its activity will involve working with staff representatives to clear outstanding issues and to create a new baseline from which to progress a better approach.
- Time has been set aside for this in December and it is hoped to have this complete by Christmas (though dependent upon the volume it may just tip over in the New Year).

- The ongoing approach to regular oversight of these dimensions of culture, foreseen in this facet of the Lucas Report, has also been agreed (see comments on governance).
- So this sub group of the EAP will also meet monthly (following the 2020 Programme Board and EAP meetings) and it should be stressed that this is an oversight group, and does not affect any statutory or Service management arrangements.
- The first phase of the Management Review should be complete in outline approach - and shared for early consideration of Members - also by Christmas.
- As before, I should identify that there is wide recognition and acknowledgement that the conclusion of the Management Review is likely to result in a flatter structure and so, understandably, Officers have some nervousness about this. It's important therefore to get agreement and certainty as soon as possible and equally to agree and then enact any changes that arise from the Review.

CONCLUSION

For the vast majority of the organisation, it may not be readily apparent that a lot of background work has been proceeding in recent weeks, but it is nevertheless important to get the right structures and arrangements in place that will enable more rapid progress after Christmas. Even then, because culture change is intangible in the short term, there may still be a sense of frustration for some time yet.

Nevertheless I feel a lot happier that those proper governance and sustainable management arrangements are now being put into place.

Notwithstanding the continued potential for frustration and long term change, there is other work that will feel very impactful and is about to emerge in the short term – the Management Review, the Discipline/ Grievance work etc. – and there has been a lot of good work done around the Independent Review Action Plan and the key activities necessary to make progress.

There has also been a lot of work done to establish a meaningful reassurance framework as well as a realistic exit strategy for the Expert Advisory Panel, and these are laid out for agreement on this agenda.

Could I take the opportunity to thank Officers and Members who have been very supportive and very engaged in working with the EAP on this important programme of change?

STEVE McGUIRK CBE, DL

CHAIR, INDEPENDENT EXPERT ADVISORY PANEL