



Essex County Council

Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel: Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee

14:00	Wednesday, 20 September 2023	Committee Room 1 County Hall, Chelmsford, CM1 1QH
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For information about the meeting please ask for:

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6	Date of next meeting To agree a date for the next meeting of the Sub-Committee	

7 Urgent Business

To consider any matter which in the opinion of the Chairman should be considered in public by reason of special circumstances (to be specified) as a matter of urgency.

Exempt Items

(During consideration of these items the meeting is not likely to be open to the press and public)

The following items of business have not been published on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information falling within Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. Members are asked to consider whether or not the press and public should be excluded during the consideration of these items. If so it will be necessary for the meeting to pass a formal resolution:

That the press and public are excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the remaining items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information falling within Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, the specific paragraph(s) of Schedule 12A engaged being set out in the report or appendix relating to that item of business.

8 Urgent Exempt Business

To consider in private any other matter which in the opinion of the Chairman should be considered by reason of special circumstances (to be specified) as a matter of urgency.

Agenda item 1

Committee: Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel: Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee

Enquiries to: Sophie Campion, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

Recommendations:

To note

1. Membership as shown below and as agreed at the Annual Meeting of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel held on 15 June 2023.
2. Apologies and substitutions
3. Declarations of interest to be made by Members in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct

Membership (Quorum: 3)

John Gili-Ross
Councillor Gary Collins
Councillor Mike Garnett
Sheila Murphy

Representing

Independent Member (Chairman)
Thurrock Council
Harlow District Council
Independent Member

Minutes of the meeting of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel: Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee, held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, on Tuesday, 21 March 2023 at 12:30.

Present

John Gili-Ross
Cllr Lynda McWilliams
Cllr Ian Shead

Representing

Co-opted Independent Member (Chairman)
Tendring District Council
Southend-on-Sea City Council

Also in attendance

Colette Black
Sophie Campion
Cllr Gary Collins
Roger Hirst
Darren Horsman

Director of People Services, ECFRS
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Panel Member attending as an observer
Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Strategic Head of Policy and Public Engagement,
Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
for Essex (OPFCC)
Democratic Services Manager

1. Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

1. The membership of the Sub-Committee was noted.
2. An apology was received from Cllr D Dadds.
3. Councillor Lynda McWilliams declared a Code Interest as her son was currently a serving police officer and her granddaughter was currently a serving special constable. Councillor McWilliams participated fully in the meeting.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Essex County Fire and Rescue Service People Strategy Update

The Sub-Committee received report EISC/01/23 from Roger Hirst, Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, which provided a snapshot of progress against the delivery of the People Strategy 2020-2024 and the six pillars which enabled delivery of the strategy.

The Commissioner introduced the report and explained that the aim of the Strategy was to embed a good culture in the Service. Feedback from staff was welcomed through the staff survey. The report set out the evidence and progress against each of the six pillars of change. The Commissioner advised that the survey showed an improvement in the staff's positive responses but this wasn't yet at the level the Service wanted it to be.

The Commissioner drew the Sub-Committee's attention to the achievement of the Bronze standard for inclusive employers and explained that the service was now working towards Silver. He also drew attention to the investment in people such as leadership development and coaching support.

In response to questions from Members the following points were made:

- There had been 657 responses out of 1394 staff which represented 47% of the workforce. This was reported to be at a comparable level to other Fire and Rescue services. The survey was only one aspect of gaining feedback from staff, every watch and department was engaged with to seek views.
- The mean gender pay gap had been reduced to 1% in 2022 which was reported to be extremely low in comparison to other organisations. In terms of people being paid the same for doing the same job there was no disparity in pay. There were now more women in higher and mid level paid jobs within the Service and this was achieved through encouraging a wide range of applications. However it could not be planned, there were no quotas and no positive discrimination so it would vary.
- It was confirmed that firefighters were included in interview panels which helped to ensure that the panels were more diverse. The staff network groups were instrumental in helping to ensure that there was diversity across the interview panels and assessors. Particular identified barriers to recruitment, including those that were male focussed, had also been removed through positive action but all firefighters had the same fitness standard.
- It was confirmed that where behavioural issues were identified, there were corrective actions and sanctions if required, through the discipline and grievance process, policies and employment law.
- It was clarified that the aim of encouraging diversity in recruitment was not about excluding any staff currently employed within the service. The importance of being inclusive to all was acknowledged.
- It was suggested that visits to the Fire and Rescue Service by the Panel in future could be beneficial.

The Sub-Committee gave feedback on the format and content of the report and recommended that consideration be given to the following in future reports:

- To include the actual survey response numbers in future.
- To provide some clarity to the figures by using forms of data other than percentages.
- The inclusion of an executive summary.
- The accessibility and readability of graphs.

RESOLVED:

That members of the Sub-Committee noted the report.

4. Date of Next Meeting

The date and time of the next meeting was to be arranged for a date after the Annual Panel meeting had taken place.

It was noted that a report on the HMICFRS inspection into vetting at Essex Police, that had initially been scheduled for the current meeting, would be rescheduled to a future meeting as the inspection report was not yet able to be shared.

5. Urgent Business

There was no urgent business. The meeting closed at 1.44pm.

Report title: HMICFRS Reports into the Effectiveness of Vetting and Counter-Corruption Arrangements	
Report to: Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel – Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee	
Report author: Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner	
Date: 20 September 2023	For: Noting
Enquiries to: Pippa Brent-Isherwood (Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer) pippa.brent-isherwood@essex.police.uk	
County Divisions affected: All Essex	

1. Purpose of Report

In November 2022, His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspected the effectiveness of Essex Police’s vetting, IT monitoring and counter-corruption arrangements. The inspectorate published its findings on 16 June 2023. The purpose of this report is to brief members of the Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee on those findings.

The report also updates members of the sub-committee on the force’s progress in implementing the 43 national recommendations and areas for improvement (AFIs) identified within HMICFRS’s national thematic inspection of vetting, misconduct, and misogyny in the police service, which were reported to the sub-committee in November 2022.

2. Recommendations

The Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee is invited to note the contents of the report, identifying any areas that require further clarification or comment.

3. Context / Summary

National Context

A report to the Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee on 24 November 2022 provided an initial commentary of the position in Essex in relation to the issues identified by HMICFRS nationally in relation to vetting, misconduct and misogyny, along with the next steps in terms of responding to the findings locally. The progress report attached at Appendix 1 updates the sub-committee on the progress made by Essex Police

against the recommendations and areas for improvement identified and demonstrates that the force is in a strong position against these.

In addition to progressing these actions, members of the sub-committee will be aware that forces across England and Wales have been completing a “Historical Data Wash” in response to the national requirement to search every police officer, member of staff (including those employed by the PFCC) and volunteer against the Police National Database by the end of September 2023. Essex Police had approximately 7,000 people subject to this search, so established a dedicated team to manage this process through a risk-based approach. The force has now completed 85% of the checks required and, thus far, only one member of staff has been found to have intelligence recorded against them that they failed to disclose when they were vetted.

Local Context

The full report arising from HMICFRS’s inspection of Essex Police’s vetting, IT monitoring and counter-corruption arrangements is attached for Panel members’ information at Appendix 2. Overall, His Majesty’s Inspectors found that the national report was not reflective of Essex Police, and that the force is “Good” at vetting, IT monitoring and counter-corruption work, with a very low appetite for risk. Key points from each section of the report are highlighted below.

Vetting

Inspectors found that the Force Vetting Unit (FVU) and HR department are effective at predicting future vetting demand and that workloads within the FVU are manageable.

Essex Police informed inspectors that, at the time of the inspection, there were 22 police officers and 11 police staff in post without the correct level of vetting for their role. Some of these were individuals whose vetting had expired. Others were in posts which had recently been made designated posts, which require a higher level of vetting than the postholder was previously subject to. The inspectorate was satisfied that the force had “a good awareness of these cases” and that, in these cases, access to more sensitive data is restricted until the necessary clearance is obtained.

In addition, seven out of 1,018 non-police personnel (contractors, volunteers and people who work in organisations that share police premises) were not vetted, however the force had risk assessed them and none had access to sensitive data. Overall, inspectors were satisfied that Essex Police has a good process to maintain accurate non-police personnel (NPPV) records.

Some police roles have access to more sensitive information and require a higher level of vetting known as Management Vetting (MV). At the time of the inspection, Essex Police had 667 such posts. All the required minimum checks were completed in all the MV cases Inspectors reviewed. Of this cadre, Inspectors found that there were 12 people who did not have current Management Vetting. As indicated above, seven of these were in posts that were newly designated as requiring MV, whilst the other five cases were all attributable to absence and had been risk assessed.

The College of Policing’s Authorised Professional Practice (APP) on vetting permits forces to accept vetting clearance from another force if it is less than a year old,

however Essex Police has chosen to vet all transferees along with those who have left the service and applied to re-join. As part of this process, the FVU requests the individual's complaint and conduct history, as well as any intelligence held by the Counter-Corruption Unit (CCU) from all forces in which they have previously served.

The volume of notifications received by the FVU suggests that the workforce has a good understanding of the requirement to report any relevant changes of personal circumstances, which allows the FVU to conduct the necessary enquiries to identify risks and any impacts on the individual's vetting status. Essex Police also regularly uses risk mitigation measures to support its vetting decisions, such as restrictions on where people can be posted, monitoring social media activity and use of the force's IT systems, and reviewing applicants' management of their finances.

The force maintains records of the results of all vetting applications from people who declare a protected characteristic, and analysis of all vetting applicants between January and June 2022 revealed no disproportionality in vetting refusals for people in this cadre. In addition, the force assists applicants from ethnic minority groups by assigning a member of staff to support them through the vetting process.

As part of the inspection, a vetting specialist from another force reviewed 40 clearance decisions from the preceding three years relating to police officers and staff who had previously committed criminal offences or who the force had other concerns about (including transferees). The specialist agreed with all the force's decisions.

IT Monitoring

Essex Police proactively checks activity on mobile phones to help identify potential misconduct including improper contact with vulnerable victims or organised crime groups. The force also actively monitors people who intelligence suggests pose a higher risk of sexual misconduct or corruption. Encrypted apps are not permitted on force devices, and no new IT systems can be introduced to the force without the prior approval of the Counter-Corruption Unit (CCU), which ensures they contain suitable functionality designed to prevent and detect misuse.

Officers and staff spoken to by inspectors demonstrated awareness of the force's expectations of them with regard to IT (including social media) usage. However, the inspectorate urged the force to review staffing levels in its CCU to ensure these are sufficient to meet the demand for monitoring.

Counter-Corruption Arrangements

Inspectors found that Essex Police correctly categorises intelligence in line with the counter-corruption APP. They also found that the force has a counter-corruption control strategy based on the 4P (pursue, prepare, protect and prevent) approach which clearly sets out the priorities identified in its counter-corruption strategic threat assessment (STA). Each of the corruption threats identified in the STA and control strategy are considered in detail in the force's implementation plan. Each task has a designated person responsible as well as clear timescales for completion. In addition, inspectors found that Essex Police's counter-corruption policies were comprehensive and reflective of guidance contained within the counter-corruption (prevention) APP.

Inspectors reviewed 60 corruption intelligence files and found two cases in which the force chose not to act, which they considered may have resulted in missed opportunities to develop the intelligence further and mitigate corruption risks. In the other 58 cases, inspectors concluded that the CCU responded effectively, using a variety of techniques to carry out investigations that were well supervised. Inspectors also found two cases of proactive intelligence collection using the force's IT monitoring system.

At the time of the inspection, the CCU was a small team consisting of experienced detectives and a crime analyst who are experienced in covert law enforcement. When required, the force can also access resources for covert investigations through the regional organised crime unit (ROCU) or National Crime Agency (NCA). Inspectors recognised that the force was increasing the resources it has to carry out prevention and engagement work to support vulnerable people, and that it had secured funding for an additional intelligence researcher dedicated to routine and IT monitoring, but also highlighted that, until these new resources were in post, the existing specialist CCU resources would not be able to focus sufficiently on corruption investigations, which was a risk to the force. It consequently raised an area for improvement (AFI) that "The force should improve how it collects, assesses, develops, and investigates counter-corruption intelligence by ensuring that its counter-corruption unit has sufficient resources and suitably trained staff to meet demand and allow for proactive intelligence collection." The additional resources that were planned at the time of the inspection have now been recruited.

Inspectors found that the force manages processes relating to notifiable associations or business interests, gifts and hospitality effectively. It also recognises abuse of position for a sexual purpose (AoPSP) as serious corruption, and consistently refers such cases to the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC). Where the risk is assessed as low and the intelligence cannot be developed, good use is made of early interventions through risk management meetings. Mandatory training is provided to the wider workforce as well as specifically to line managers, supported by poster campaigns, intranet articles and the publication of the outcomes of gross misconduct hearings. Consequently, there is good knowledge of AoPSP across the workforce.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Update Report on Recommendations and AFIs for Chief Constables in the HMICFRS report '[An inspection of vetting, misconduct and misogyny in the police](#)'

Appendix 2 – A report into the effectiveness of vetting and counter-corruption arrangements in Essex Police (HMICFRS, June 2023)

Appendix 1

Update Report on Recommendations and AFIs for Chief Constables in the HMICFRS report 'An inspection of vetting, misconduct and misogyny in the police'

RAG ratings					
RED	Recommendation / AFI will not be, or is unlikely to be, implemented in full by its deadline				
AMBER	Recommendation / AFI will be, or is likely to be, implemented in full by its deadline				
GREEN	Recommendation / AFI has already been implemented in full				
RAG Rating (please mark with an X):					
RED		AMBER		GREEN	x
Recommendation 2					
<p>By 30 April 2023, chief constables should establish and begin operation of a process to identify, within their vetting IT systems, vetting clearance records where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ applicants have committed criminal offences; and / or ○ the record contains other types of concerning adverse information. 					
<p>Essex Police's Corporate Vetting Unit (CVU) is fully compliant with this recommendation. This information is recorded on the Corevet, Centurion and CCU Intelligence systems.</p>					
RAG Rating (please mark with an X):					
RED		AMBER		GREEN	x
Recommendation 3					
<p>By 30 April 2023, chief constables should take steps to make sure that, when granting vetting clearance to applicants with concerning adverse information about them:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ vetting units, counter-corruption units, professional standards departments, and HR departments (working together where necessary) create and implement effective risk mitigation strategies; ○ these units have enough capacity and capability for this purpose; ○ responsibilities for implementing specific elements of the risk mitigation strategy are clearly defined; and ○ there is robust oversight. 					
<p>A process is in place between the CVU, CCU and HR to ensure risk mitigation is in place where adverse information / criminal association is declared. During the HMICFRS vetting and CCU inspection in November 2022, 40 vetting cases were reviewed and not one error was identified.</p>					
RAG Rating (please mark with an X):					
RED		AMBER		GREEN	x
Recommendation 4					
<p>By 30 April 2023, chief constables should make sure that, when concerning adverse information has been identified during the vetting process, all vetting decisions (refusals, clearances and appeals) are supported with a sufficiently detailed written rationale that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ follows the National Decision Model; ○ includes the identification of all relevant risks; and ○ takes full account of the relevant risk factors described in the Vetting Authorised Professional Practice. 					
<p>Essex Police's CVU is fully compliant with this recommendation. During the HMICFRS vetting and CCU inspection in November 2022, 40 vetting cases were reviewed and not one error was identified. There is a standardised decision-making form which follows the National Decision Model and this was shared with HMICFRS during the inspection.</p>					
RAG Rating (please mark with an X):					
RED		AMBER		GREEN	x

Recommendation 7					
By 31 October 2023, chief constables should introduce an effective quality assurance process to review vetting decisions, including routine dip sampling of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ rejections; and ○ clearances where the vetting process revealed concerning adverse information. 					
Essex Police's Corporate Vetting Unit (CVU) Supervisors and / or the Force Vetting Manager (FVM) counter sign every failure and / or significant adverse information. The Head of Department routinely QAs the FVM's decisions. Under consideration is to QA a higher quantity and more regularly, with a clear governance structure in place. During the HMICFRS vetting and CCU inspection in November 2022, 40 vetting cases were reviewed and not one error was identified.					
RAG Rating (please mark with an X):					
RED		AMBER		GREEN	X
Recommendation 8					
By 30 April 2023, chief constables should make sure they comply with the Vetting Authorised Professional Practice by analysing vetting data to identify, understand and respond to any disproportionality.					
HR has a buddy scheme and the CVU attends a weekly meeting to progress all ethnic minority applications and unblock any issues. The CVU holds and produces ethnic minority vetting data which seeks to identify any disproportionately in failure rates. The data is difficult to interpret as ethnic minority applicant numbers are low and small numbers of failures can present as large percentage disparities when compared with white applicants. However, every ethnic minority application is subject to a five-stage review process, and the force can accurately identify, track and measure disproportionality in vetting decisions. This process was shared during the local HMICFRS inspection and we are now fully compliant. The CVU is satisfied that every failed ethnic minority applicant has failed in accordance with APP and decisions would withstand future scrutiny. However, more work needs to be done in this area. The Professional Standards Department is currently reviewing and exploring all national requirements, including the 'Shining a Light on Betrayal' report to identify any gaps. It should also be noted there is no mandatory requirement for applicants to declare their ethnicity, so there are further gaps in our data.					
RAG Rating (please mark with an X):					
RED		AMBER		GREEN	X
Recommendation 11					
By 30 April 2023, chief constables who have not already done so should establish and begin operation of a policy requiring that, at the conclusion of misconduct proceedings where an officer, special constable or member of staff has been issued with a written warning or a final written warning or been reduced their vetting status is reviewed.					
There is a process in place within PSD to flag up and conduct vetting reviews on all officers / staff subject to a misconduct sanction, so we are fully compliant with this recommendation.					
RAG Rating (please mark with an X):					
RED		AMBER	x	GREEN	
Recommendation 13					
By 31 October 2023 , chief constables who have not already done so should establish and begin operation of a process to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ identify the required vetting level for all posts within the force, including designated posts requiring management vetting; and ○ determine the vetting status of all police officers and staff in designated posts. As soon as possible after this, these chief constables should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ make sure that all designated postholders are vetted to the enhanced (management vetting) level using all the minimum checks listed in the Vetting Authorised Professional Practice; and 					

- give continued assurance that designated postholders always have the requisite level of vetting.

The Essex CVU maintains a master Excel list of all officers and staff, detailing their current posts and vetting statuses. However, the process to maintain this list is resource intensive and not the best IT solution for managing such an important piece of work. Work is ongoing to ensure processes are streamlined in order to support the upkeep and maintenance of the master record, and the CVU is also exploring whether CoreVet (the nationally recognised vetting IT system) could be better utilised. This also needs to be considered against the backdrop of a large and constantly moving workforce who take up new posts and different roles every day, across multiple Commands. That said, HMICFRS was extremely complementary about the process within the CVU. During the hot debrief, the lead inspector stated that, *“With a few exceptions, the whole of the workforce is vetted and, where they are not, the Vetting Manager knows the details of them and can clearly pinpoint them through tracking on bespoke designed spreadsheets”*.

RAG Rating (please mark with an X):

RED		AMBER		GREEN	x
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Recommendation 15

By 30 April 2023, chief constables should:

- make sure that all police officers and staff are made aware of the requirement to report any changes to their personal circumstances;
- establish a process through which all parts of the organisation that need to know about reported changes, particularly the [force vetting unit](#), are always made aware of them; and
- make sure that where a change of circumstances creates additional risks, these are fully documented and assessed. If necessary, additional risks should lead to a review of the individual’s vetting status.

The newly launched Line Managers Checklist has the requirements to remind officers and staff - it requires advertising and reinforcement with managers to complete. All applicants are told upon clearance that they must submit all changes to vetting. Robust supervision and monitoring will determine compliance levels. In June 2023, the force checked compliance levels for the Line Managers Checklist, the results of which were as follows –

Status Text	Total by Status	% Total
Complete	6,311	92.43%
Initial	1	0.01%
In Progress	516	7.56%
Total:	6,828	

Essex Police believes it is now fully compliant with this recommendation.

RAG Rating (please mark with an X):

RED		AMBER	x	GREEN	
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Recommendation 16

By 31 December 2023, chief constables should make routine use of the Police National Database (PND) as a tool for revealing any unreported adverse information about officers and staff. To help this, the College of Policing should:

- working with the National Police Chiefs’ Council lead for counter-corruption, change the Counter-Corruption (Intelligence) APP to include a requirement for the PND to be used in this way; and
- change the PND Code of Practice (and any subsequent code of practice concerning the Law Enforcement Data System) to include a specific provision that allows for the PND to be used in this way.

Awaiting the national guidance from the College of Policing and NPCC lead for Counter Corruption to shape the national structures and processes. In light of the recent national climate following the PC Carrick case, national work is ongoing to ensure every officer and member of staff is PND checked. Essex is contributing to this national requirement and will await the national direction moving forward. All CVU staff are being re-trained in the use of PND, including bulk uploads and scheduled searching to ensure checks are conducted more routinely, as opposed to just during the vetting and re-vetting stages.

RAG Rating (please mark with an X):

RED		AMBER		GREEN	x
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Recommendation 18

By 30 April 2023, chief constables should make sure that there is a robust response to any criminal allegation made by one member of their force against another. This should include:

- o consistent recording of allegations;
- o improved investigation standards; and
- o sufficient support for victims and compliance with the [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales](#).

We are compliant in this area, with tried, tested and established processes in place, which work effectively. All criminal allegations reported by one member of Essex Police against another member of Essex Police are recorded in line with the National Crime Recording Standards. Allegations of on-duty criminal behaviour are investigated by the Essex Police Professional Standards Department (PSD). Allegations of off-duty criminal behaviour are investigated by a team outside of the area / command in which the Essex Police member suspected of a crime works. Specialist investigators are deployed to investigate the reported criminal behaviour, as and when required. For example, the Adult Sexual Offences Investigation Team will investigate an allegation of rape. The PSD monitors the progress of the criminal investigation (where they are not the investigators) and holds a separate conduct investigation in subjudice (as required).

The PSD, including the Counter Corruption Team, will support a criminal investigation being completed by another team, as and when requested. Where there are particular sensitivities with alleged off-duty criminal behaviour, the PSD may also take those cases on. Criminal investigations are subject to initial and subsequent regular supervisor and manager reviews. This includes setting of case action plans and reviews against actions set.

The PSD reviews all criminal cases following an outcome disposal before commencing the conduct investigation element (unless parallel enquiries are running, in which case there is close liaison between the two teams). The PSD review can identify, task and complete additional actions. VCC duties and requirements are managed in accordance with statutory requirements, with twice weekly centralised report dissemination of VCC compliance. VCC updates are a mandatory update requirement at the force daily management meeting.

All Essex Police members who are victims of crime receive the same level of support as a non-police member, with referrals to external support agencies being made as required. Additionally, Essex Police offers in-house support through a nominated welfare officer, support organisations and occupational health.

Following the HMICFRS inspection of Essex Police in November 2022, confirmation was received that this recommendation could be closed.

RAG Rating (please mark with an X):

RED		AMBER		GREEN	x
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Recommendation 20

By 30 April 2023, chief constables should adopt the NPCC sexual harassment policy.

A new Essex Police policy was published in February 2023 in line with the NPCC Sexual Harassment Policy following consultation. We are now fully compliant.

RAG Rating (please mark with an X):

RED		AMBER		GREEN	X
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Recommendation 24

By 31 October 2023, chief constables should make sure their professional standards departments attach a prejudicial and improper behaviour flag to all newly recorded relevant cases.

A new tag has been created on Centurion, which is the national PSD IT system. When allegations come into PSD, checks are conducted on both Centurion and the CCU intelligence system to identify whether there have been previous conduct matters, intelligence or concerns, which need to be considered in conjunction with any new assessment and decision making. We are therefore compliant.

RAG Rating (please mark with an X):

RED		AMBER		GREEN	x
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Recommendation 25

By 30 April 2023, chief constables should make sure their professional standards departments and counter-corruption units routinely carry out all reasonable wider inquiries when dealing with reports of prejudicial and improper behaviour. These inquiries should ordinarily include (but not be limited to) sampling the following, in relation to the officer under investigation:

- their use of IT systems;
- incidents they attended, and incidents they are otherwise connected to;
- their use of work mobile devices;
- their body-worn video recordings;
- radio location checks; and
- misconduct history.

All investigations within the PSD / CCU are led by a Detective Inspector or Detective Sergeant. The investigation described in the recommendation is routine for PSD / CCU investigations and will form part of the investigative Main Lines of Enquiry. Following the HMICFRS inspection in November 2022, it was agreed this recommendation could be closed.

RAG Rating (please mark with an X):

RED		AMBER		GREEN	x
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Recommendation 26

By 30 April 2023, chief constables should make sure their professional standards departments:

- produce and follow an investigation plan, endorsed by a supervisor, for all misconduct investigations; and
- check all reasonable lines of inquiry in the investigation plan have been concluded before finalising the investigation.

Every conduct investigation has Terms of Reference, which set the parameters of the investigation. Once a case is tasked to the Essex Police Professional Standards Department (PSD) Investigation team to investigate, a DS is required to complete an initial review and investigation plan. This review covers:

- Outline of the circumstances of the case
- IOPC referral and involvement
- Severity Assessment – who completed it and what was it set at?
- Whether it is a crime or conduct investigation (along with primacy)
- Details of Regulation notices / notices of investigation and Terms of Reference served / to be served
- Suspension or restriction details
- Investigating officer details and declaration of any conflict of interest (and, if there is, what action is being taken).
- Details of the officer / staff member under investigation and details of when and how contact is to be maintained.
- Welfare management of the officer / staff member
- Details of Federation or Unison representation and support
- Details of the complainant and update requirements

- Designation of Interested Parties and update requirements
- Timeliness monitoring and action completion recording requirements
- Main Lines of Enquiry to be progressed
- Media management

The DS is then required to complete regular periodic reviews of each case, addressing the key points of the investigation as it progresses. Timings of case reviews are determined by the status and progression of the case.

Every investigation has DI oversight, with particular attention paid to cases that are assessed at gross misconduct. The Head of PSD reviews every conduct case which requires a determination as to whether there is a case to answer or not. The Head of PSD is a Detective Superintendent who, as part of their case review, checks to ensure all reasonable and proportionate lines of enquiry have been completed and all areas of the Terms of Reference have been addressed. The PSD DCI reviews all cases where there is a submission that a re-assessment is required because the circumstances upon which the original conduct assessment was made are now known to be different / not to apply. There is additional PSD DCI oversight for violence against women and girls (VAWG) conduct cases and those cases reaching their 12-month timeliness reporting stage.

RAG Rating (please mark with an X):

RED		AMBER		GREEN	X
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Recommendation 28

By 30 April 2023, in the forces where we have not carried out fieldwork during this inspection, chief constables who have not already carried out a review of all allegations relating to prejudicial and improper behaviour, should do so. The review should be of cases from the last three years where the alleged perpetrator was a serving police officer or member of staff. The review should establish whether:

- o victims and witnesses were properly supported;
- o all appropriate authority assessments, including assessments which didn't result in a complaint or misconduct investigation, were correct;
- o investigations were comprehensive; and
- o any necessary steps are taken to improve the quality of future investigations. These reviews will be subject to examination during our next round of inspections of professional standards departments.

This recommendation describes the national VAWG Taskforce work which PSD fully supported and a review was undertaken on all cases during the past 3 years. Broadly, all findings were positive, with some gaps identified around signposting victims to support and a historical disconnect between Commands leading on the criminal investigation and PSD dealing with the conduct. Both these gaps have been addressed and investigations were found to be of a good standard, with sound decision making and rationales. HMICFRS has seen and noted this update but prior to sign off, the evidence presented will need to be tested by the Force Liaison Lead.

RAG Rating (please mark with an X):

RED		AMBER		GREEN	X
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Recommendation 29

With immediate effect, chief constables must make sure that forces use Regulation 13 of the Police Regulations 2003 for underperforming officers during their probationary period, rather than the Police (Performance) Regulations 2020.

Both PSD and Learning & Development have a good understanding of the Regulation 13 process. The PSD DCI has regular meetings with Learning & Development and works closely with HR and training is about to be delivered to a number of key Commands. The challenges remain around the Regulations and Home Office Guidance, which firstly places a reliance on an admission made by the officer and, secondly, dictates that matters of gross misconduct should be dealt with through the misconduct route and not Regulation 13. We have ongoing examples and recent officers dismissed through the Regulation 13 process.

RAG Rating (please mark with an X):

RED		AMBER		GREEN	X
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Recommendation 32

By 30 April 2023, chief constables should make sure that:

- all intelligence concerning possible sexual misconduct by officers or staff (including abuse of position for a sexual purpose and internal sexual misconduct) is subject to a risk assessment process, with action taken to minimise any risk identified; and
- rigorous additional oversight arrangements are in place to monitor the behaviour of officers subject to the risk assessment process, especially in cases assessed as high risk.

Intelligence relating to sexual misconduct is managed through our Operation Pershore process. This involves an objective risk assessment and scoring matrix to determine the risk someone poses. Based on this assessment a person may be adopted as an Operation Pershore nominal and if so, they are subject to periodic and ongoing monitoring.

RAG Rating (please mark with an X):

RED		AMBER		GREEN	X
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Recommendation 33

By 31 March 2023, chief constables should make sure that counter-corruption units (CCUs) have established relationships with external bodies that support vulnerable people who may be at risk of abuse of position for a sexual purpose, such as sex-worker support services, drug and alcohol and mental health charities. This is to:

- encourage the disclosure by such bodies, to the force's CCU, of corruption-related intelligence relating to the sexual abuse of vulnerable people by police officers and staff;
- help the staff from these bodies to understand the warning signs to look for; and
- make sure they are made aware of how such information should be disclosed to the CCU.

Since the last HMI inspection, the CCU has built relationships with a number of partner agencies who support vulnerable people. In 2021/2022 we provided training on AoPSP to over 200 people from 20 external organisations. The new Prevention and Engagement Team is now established and there is a comprehensive programme of work, which includes a number of training sessions and inputs to partners around spotting the signs of AoPSP and how they can report it. Essex Police is now fully compliant with this recommendation.

RAG Rating (please mark with an X):

RED		AMBER		GREEN	X
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Recommendation 34

By 30 April 2023, chief constables should make sure that their counter-corruption units actively seek corruption-related intelligence as a matter of routine.

The counter corruption teams do conduct proactive intelligence development. This includes analysis of mobile phone billing for repeated / high contacts, Organised Crime Group / County Lines contacts. We have a reliable lawful business monitoring system which we use both proactively and reactively, and especially in cases of sexual misconduct. We have just recruited our first Systems Analyst and Auditor, who will significantly enhance our proactive capability through systems monitoring. We also have the support of the regional Anti-Corruption Unit which works in this proactive space looking at cross border corruption. Their Operation Dioptra (data washing against OCG / police telephone numbers) is a good example of this. The HMICFRS report following our November 2022 inspection stated that "The force used a variety of techniques to develop and investigate corruption-related intelligence. We found good supervisory oversight throughout". We are now compliant with this recommendation.

RAG Rating (please mark with an X):

RED		AMBER		GREEN	X
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Recommendation 35

By 31 March 2023, to protect the information contained within their systems and help them to identify potentially corrupt officers and staff, chief constables should make sure that:

- their force has the ability to monitor all use of its IT systems; and
- the force uses this for counter-corruption purposes, to enhance its investigative and proactive intelligence gathering capabilities.

The force utilises software procured through the 7F collaboration to monitor force systems. Software is used both reactively and proactively to identify signs of sexual misconduct and wider wrongdoing. As a force we have just recruited our first Systems Analyst and Auditor who will become the SME for this software and have responsibility for developing and enhancing our monitoring capability. The force has also recruited specialists who will support the monitoring process.

In November's HMICFRS inspection it was noted that "the force can monitor all its IT systems across handheld, mobile and desktop devices. It proactively checks activity on mobile devices. This helps identify potential misconduct including improper contact with vulnerable victims or organised crime groups. The force monitors individuals when intelligence shows they pose a higher risk of sexual misconduct. We also saw evidence of IT monitoring of people who were the subject of other corruption intelligence." The report also noted that "The force has a lawful business monitoring (LBM) policy. The policy allows the CCU to audit all force mobile phone data. In addition, it allows for proactive monitoring of IT systems in support of force's approach to tackling corruption."

When specifically reporting on intelligence development it was recognised that "the force used a variety of techniques to develop and investigate corruption-related intelligence. We found good supervisory oversight throughout. We found two cases of proactive intelligence collection. These resulted from proactive use of the force IT monitoring system."

RAG Rating (please mark with an X):

RED		AMBER		GREEN	X
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Recommendation 36

By 30 April 2023, chief constables should establish and begin operation of an improved system of mobile device management, with accurate record keeping concerning:

- the identity of the officer or staff member each device is allocated to; and
- what each device has been used for.

IT has a good understanding of which officers are allocated what devices and this is managed through Viva Track and enhanced by the Blackberry Enterprise Server (BES). There are currently 4,809 mobile devices issued and attributed to staff.

During the inspection it was noted that the force could demonstrate effective management of mobile devices through existing systems. The report stated that "The force has a lawful business monitoring (LBM) policy. The policy allows the CCU to audit all force mobile phone data. In addition, it allows for proactive monitoring of IT systems in support of force's approach to tackling corruption. The force can attribute all force mobile devices issued to individuals across the workforce. Devices are issued to individuals only when with written acknowledgement of the force's LBM policy. This includes the instruction that devices can be used for 'work purposes only' and users should have no expectation of privacy".

Essex Police is now compliant with this recommendation.

RAG Rating (please mark with an X):

RED		AMBER		GREEN	X
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Recommendation 37

By 30 April 2023, chief constables should:

- convene, and hold on a regular and continuing basis, [people intelligence meetings](#); or
- establish and begin operation of an alternative process to support the presentation and exchange of corruption-related intelligence, to identify officers and staff who may present a corruption risk.

This is a concept that has been developed in Durham and was recognised in a recent peer visit by the new Counter Corruption Prevention and Engagement Manager. This is not a process that Essex currently utilises but it will be a piece of work led by the Prevention and Engagement Manager in

consultation with HR / PIU. In summary, it's a mean of looking holistically at certain officers or staff, in terms of potential debt, conduct, sickness, business interests, and / or performance issues and seeing whether future risks can be identified. The new Prevention Analyst will play a key role in this piece of work once recruited.

The PSD already looks at the bigger picture when assessing risk and looking to identify patterns or themes through complaints, vetting, business interests and intelligence, but there may be a gap in terms of better liaison with HR, local management, and other relevant departments to better inform a holistic picture. The HMICFRS inspection confirmed that Essex Police is compliant with this recommendation.

RAG Rating (please mark with an X):

RED		AMBER		GREEN	x
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Recommendation 38

By 30 April 2023, chief constables should make sure that all corruption-related intelligence is categorised in accordance with the NPCC counter-corruption categories (and any revised version of these).

As a force, we already use the ACCAG Counter Corruption categories to classify all intelligence. HMICFRS has confirmed this recommendation can be closed as the force has demonstrated compliance.

RAG Rating (please mark with an X):

RED		AMBER		GREEN	x
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Recommendation 39

By 30 April 2023, chief constables should make sure they have a current-corruption strategic threat assessment, in accordance with the Counter-Corruption (Intelligence) Authorised Professional Practice.

As a force, we have a strategic threat assessment signed off by the DCC. HMICFRS has stated that this recommendation can be closed as the force can demonstrate compliance.

RAG Rating (please mark with an X):

RED		AMBER		GREEN	X
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Recommendation 40

By 30 April 2023, chief constables should make sure their counter-corruption units:

- produce and follow an investigation plan, endorsed by a supervisor, for all counter-corruption investigations; and
- check all reasonable lines of inquiry in the investigation plan have been concluded before finalising the investigation.

The CCU Standard Operating Procedure (revised 2022) details expectations of investigation and intelligence plans. In summary, all investigations / intelligence are initially assessed by a supervisor. Intelligence / investigations are also assessed at monthly intervals by a supervisor and, if a piece of intelligence cannot be developed into a positive intervention (investigation / Risk Management Meeting), it can only be closed with a supervisor's review.

The HMICFRS inspection report of Essex Police's CCU and vetting arrangements stated that " We reviewed 60 corruption intelligence files. We found two cases where the force chose not to make any intervention. This may have resulted in some missed opportunities to develop the intelligence further and mitigate corruption risks. In all other cases the counter-corruption Unit (CCU) responded effectively. The force used a variety of techniques to develop and investigate corruption-related intelligence. We found good supervisory oversight throughout. We found two cases of proactive intelligence collection. These resulted from proactive use of the force IT monitoring system".

All CCU investigations have an investigative plan endorsed by a supervisor with all reasonable lines of enquiry followed.

We are now fully compliant.

RAG Rating (please mark with an X):

RED		AMBER		GREEN	X
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Recommendation 41

By 30 April 2023, chief constables should strengthen their business interest monitoring procedures to make sure that:

- records are managed in accordance with policy and include cases where authorisation has been refused;
- the force actively monitors compliance with conditions that are attached to the approval, or where the application is refused;
- regular reviews of each approval are carried out; and
- all supervisors are properly briefed about business interests held by members of their teams.

The Business Interest Policy is owned and managed by the Head of HR Resourcing, although the Counter Corruption Unit has a significant role in the decision making. Every application for a secondary business interest is first considered by the officer's line management. It is then assessed by the DCI Counter Corruption to consider any intelligence / history about the officer to appropriately assess any risks posed. The decision is then made by the Head of HR Resourcing considering the line manager's and DCI CCU's comments. The Head of HR Resourcing and DCI CCU will frequently meet to discuss applications and there is further scrutiny and governance through the Integrity and Counter Corruption Board. Moving forward, we will ensure that, as officers / staff move or change line management, the record of that Business Interest goes with them.

HMICFRS, in its recent inspection report, stated that "policies were comprehensive and reflect the APP guidance. Each process involves individuals submitting an online form. We found the force was managing all these processes effectively. For example, clear links between the notifiable associations and vetting processes, local monitoring of business interest conditions and close monitoring of the gifts and hospitality register by the Deputy Chief Constable". Essex Police is now compliant with this recommendation.

RAG Rating (please mark with an X):

RED		AMBER		GREEN	X
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Recommendation 42

By 30 April 2023, chief constables should strengthen their notifiable association procedures to make sure that:

- they are compliant with the Counter-Corruption (Prevention) Authorised Professional Practice (APP) and that the obligation to disclose all associations listed in the APP is explicit;
- there is an effective monitoring process to make sure that any conditions imposed are being complied with; and
- all supervisors are correctly briefed on the notifiable associations declared by members of their teams.

The Counter Corruption (Prevention) APP lists the following as associations that should be disclosed: those with unspent convictions, those charged with criminal offences, those under investigation, those dismissed or required to resign from policing, private investigators, journalists and those who have associations with extremist groups. The Essex Police procedure on Notifiable Associations explicitly lists the above list as applicable associations.

There are currently 1,300 associations recorded within the Counter Corruption Unit. It will be a priority for the new Prevention and Engagement Team to review all recorded associations to ensure the risk is still appropriate and that any conditions imposed are being adhered to. This will be an ongoing process.

We do not routinely brief supervisors on notifiable associations relating to their staff but we will consider how we do this given the volume of associations and the varying degrees of risk associated with association.

The HMICFRS inspection report stated that, "At the time of our inspection, we found these policies were comprehensive and reflect the APP guidance. Each process involves individuals submitting an

online form. We found the force was managing all these processes effectively. For example, clear links between the notifiable associations and vetting processes, local monitoring of business interest conditions and close monitoring of the gifts and hospitality register by the Deputy Chief Constable". Essex Police are now compliant with this recommendation". Furthermore, a Notifiable Association marker has been added to CoreVet. Work is ongoing to ensure every person with an NA is recorded on CoreVet to enable regular reports to be produced to support CCU activity. However, we are compliant already based on the HMICFRS inspection comments, and this work is over and above what other forces are doing.

RAG Rating (please mark with an X):

RED		AMBER		GREEN	x
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Recommendation 43

By 30 April 2023, chief constables should make sure that a robust process is in place for completing annual integrity reviews for all officers and staff.

An annual integrity review is undertaken as part of the refreshed Managers' Checklist. The HMICFRS inspection report stated that "the force's personal development review (PDR) system, introduced in October 2022, includes an integrity question set. This specifically asks about any changes in personal circumstances. 94% of staff have completed their PDR". In June 2023, the force checked compliance levels for the Line Managers Checklist, the results of which were as follows –

Status Text	Total by Status	% Total
Complete	6,311	92.43%
Initial	1	0.01%
In Progress	516	7.56%
Total:	6,828	

Essex Police believes it is now fully compliant with this recommendation.

RAG Rating (please mark with an X):

RED		AMBER	x	GREEN	
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Area for improvement 1

Forces' use of vetting interviews is an area for improvement. In more cases, forces should interview applicants to explore adverse information of relevance to the case. This should help with assessing risk. When they carry out such interviews, forces should maintain accurate records and give copies of these to interviewees.

Since the pandemic, the FVM has not been conducting vetting interviews. The team manages the communication well via email and phone calls with the candidates. Interviews would be utilised on an ad hoc basis if there was a need. Should there be a requirement for an Interview the CVU would be fully compliant.

RAG Rating (please mark with an X):

RED		AMBER	x	GREEN	
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Area for improvement 2

Automated links between force vetting and HR IT systems are an area for improvement. When specifying and procuring new IT systems for these purposes, or developing existing ones, forces should seek to establish automated links between them.

The Force Vetting Manager has created a new process whereby HR data will also include vetting levels. Furthermore, the IT solution will enable the vetting unit to be informed when someone changes role, into one which requires a different level of vetting. This was shared with HMICFRS during the vetting inspection, and they were highly impressed with it.

Work is in progress to enable this IT solution to go live. The Force Vetting Manager has set up a working group with senior HR colleagues to progress the upload every employee's vetting status onto the SAP system. Once completed, HR will be able to run a monthly report, which will highlight

any employee who is in a post without the correct vetting status, and identify risks and issues which can then be addressed.

RAG Rating (please mark with an X):

RED		AMBER	x	GREEN	
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Area for improvement 3

Forces' understanding of the scale of misogynistic and improper behaviour towards female officers and staff is an area for improvement. Forces should seek to understand the nature and scale of this behaviour (like the work carried out by Devon and Cornwall Police) and take any necessary action to address their findings.

There is ongoing work through force level and local staff surveys to better understand the scale of the problem. The force has also invested in a new Professionalism Engagement Team as part of force growth, which includes analysts to develop and enhance data which then informs activity. The force has been robust around all conduct cases, with internal and external media strategies to deter future behaviour and make the force's position very clear. The force has a Head of Professionalism, who is also the tactical lead for VAWG and is delivering against numerous prevention focused programmes of work, in keeping with the new Professionalism Strategy, about how everyone looks, leads, works, learns and behaves. There is ongoing training to new recruits, supervisors and managers, with a real focus on misogyny and VAWG. The force's new Prevention and Engagement Team is now fully established, including 3 new engagement officers, a dedicated analyst and a systems auditor. A 12-month programme of work has been developed which includes training sessions, briefings, drop-in days and partnership activity. Furthermore, tactical proactivity has been increased to better identify inappropriate and misogynistic behaviour. Every public complaint is now tagged where it is VAWG related so we are able to see themes and trends emerging through our analytical work. The PSD has also set up an internal Independent Advisory Group (IAG) consisting of representation from each Staff Network and Association to help gain a broader understanding around policing culture and the scale of misogyny in Essex Police. As part of this group, live anonymised examples are shared to get a broad view in terms of what is and isn't acceptable behaviour and how serious the behaviour is considered to be. We are also about to go live with VAWG SPOCs in each command who will be able to signpost people to the right support or towards PSD if something needs reporting. This will be available by the VAWG SharePoint page. We also have a Task and Finish Group lead by a Superintendent to review how we investigate DA and serious sexual offences where the victim and perpetrator both work for Essex Police, to help protect all parties. The group will then present a number of recommendations around how improvements can be made. A new PSD dashboard is also being developed which will help identify potential cultural issues within individual teams, stations, departments and Commands, by presenting data in a way that gives a richer picture, overlaying complaints and conduct data which can be filtered down to team / individual levels.

RAG Rating (please mark with an X):

RED		AMBER		GREEN	x
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Area for improvement 4

Forces' data quality is an area for improvement. Forces should make sure they accurately categorise all items of sexual misconduct intelligence. Sexual misconduct cases that don't meet the definition of AoPSP (because they don't involve the public) shouldn't be recorded as AoPSP.

The ACPO Counter Corruption Advisory Group (ACCAG) categorises sexual misconduct into five distinct areas, of which one is AoPSP, and Essex categorises intelligence using these five categories. Only AoPSP where members of the public are affected is categorised as such. HMICFRS has confirmed this AFI can be closed as complete.

RAG Rating (please mark with an X):

RED		AMBER		GREEN	X
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Area for improvement 5

Workforce awareness of corruption-related threats is an area for improvement. Forces should routinely brief police officers and staff on the pertinent and sanitised content of their annual counter-corruption strategic threat assessment.

This is the primary purpose of the Prevention and Engagement team. The team is predicated on the idea that we must do more to inform our workforce (collectively and individually) of corruption threats and what they must do to identify and mitigate these threats. The fact that we are developing a team to manage this area and that we did so prior to this inspection demonstrates our recognition of the risk. The new Prevention and Engagement Team is now fully recruited to and embedded. Raising awareness around corruption-related risks and threats will be factored into their programme of work over the next 12 months through a number of bespoke briefings.

A report into the effectiveness of vetting and counter-corruption arrangements in Essex Police

About us

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) independently assesses the effectiveness and efficiency of police forces and fire and rescue services, in the public interest. In preparing our reports, we ask the questions the public would ask, and publish the answers in accessible form. We use our expertise to interpret the evidence and make recommendations for improvement.

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1. Introduction

In September 2021, we changed the way we report on how effectively forces manage vetting and counter-corruption.

Previously, we inspected these areas as part of our [police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy \(PEEL\)](#) programme and provided our findings in the inspection report.

The new arrangements mean we will inspect each force separately to PEEL, although we will continue to use the same methods and produce a report containing our findings, graded judgments and any areas for improvement or causes of concern. The report will be accessible via a web link from the most recent force PEEL report.

Good

Essex Police is good at vetting, IT monitoring and counter-corruption.

In November 2022, we inspected Essex Police to examine the effectiveness of the force's vetting, IT monitoring and counter-corruption arrangements. We briefed senior personnel in the force at the end of the inspection. It should be noted that we didn't gather evidence during our inspection in relation to the wider culture of the workforce. We didn't assess the overall leadership of the executive team and senior managers in setting expectations and standards across the organisation.

This report sets out our findings. It includes an area for improvement identified at the time of the inspection, which we recognise the force may have already addressed.

2. How effectively does the force vet its officers and staff?

Vetting authorised professional practice

In 2021, the [College of Policing](#) published the [authorised professional practice \(APP\) on vetting](#). The APP explains the role of vetting in assessing the suitability of people to serve in the police service, as a [police officer](#), special constable or member of [staff](#). It sets out the minimum standards that should be applied for each clearance level. It also lists the minimum vetting checks that should be undertaken on the applicant, their family and associates. The APP has a large section providing guidance on assessing threat and risk in relation to vetting decisions.

The vetting APP applies to the police forces maintained for the police areas of England and Wales as defined in section 1 of the [Police Act 1996](#).

Force vetting IT system

In 2020, the force upgraded its vetting IT system. Staff in the HR department have access to this system. HR provides the [force vetting unit \(FVU\)](#) with a series of regular and bespoke reports. These allow the FVU to track internal moves, promotions and people leaving the force. Furthermore, the IT system highlights vetting renewals four months in advance. This allows the FVU to plan and send relevant documentation to officers and staff.

At the time of the inspection, force vetting data was due to be uploaded onto the HR IT system before the end of 2022. This will help both vetting data and HR data to be viewed on a single system.

Current vetting of workforce

Essex Police told us that as of November 2022, it had a total of 6,294 police officers, special constables, police staff and police community support officers.

The force told us there were 33 people in post (22 police officers and 11 police staff) without the correct level of vetting for their role.

The force has a good awareness of these cases. Some relate to individuals whose vetting has expired. Others are posts that had recently been made [designated posts](#), which require a higher level of vetting. In these cases, access to more sensitive data is restricted until the individual's vetting application is approved and clearance given.

Demand and workload

The FVU uses a series of spreadsheets to manage its workload. At the time of our inspection, the force had 246 vetting applications yet to be dealt with.

The FVU is effective at predicting future vetting demand with HR. The force vetting manager (FVM) maintains records of predicted recruitment dates and the expected number of officers joining through the [Police Uplift Programme](#) one year in advance. The FVU considers this information alongside future vetting renewals to plan its work.

FVU staff told us their workloads are manageable. The force has increased staffing levels in the FVU to cope with additional demands from the uplift programme. Where necessary, the FVM uses overtime during periods of higher demand.

Essex Police grants non-police personnel vetting (NPPV) clearance to contractors, volunteers and people who work in organisations that share police premises. The force uses a combination of the FVU and the [national contractor vetting service](#) hosted by Warwickshire Police to carry out NPPV checks.

The force told us that as of November 2022, there were 1,018 non-police personnel. Of these, seven were not vetted. The force had risk assessed them and none had access to sensitive data.

The force has a good process to maintain accurate NPPV records. Nominated members of staff across the force are responsible for informing the FVU of any changes in non-police personnel. The FVM maintains a spreadsheet to manage this information. When the FVU is informed that a person is no longer contracted, their vetting clearance is cancelled and access to buildings and IT removed.

Designated posts

Some police roles have access to more sensitive information and require a higher level of vetting known as [management vetting \(MV\)](#). The extent to which the role requires working with [vulnerable people](#) is also a factor for forces to consider when deciding if a role requires MV. The vetting APP states that forces should keep a record of all MV roles on a [designated posts](#) list.

The force has designated 667 posts and maintains a list of them. The FVM has recorded a rationale for designating each post. When HR creates a new role, the FVM decides whether the post should attract a higher level of vetting. The force reviews the list of designated posts annually.

Generally, the force doesn't allow people to take up a designated post before their MV clearance is granted. The FVU prioritises any new MV applications to make sure that posts can be filled without delay.

The FVU is notified four months in advance when MV renewals are due. We found there were 12 people in designated posts who didn't have current MV. In seven of these cases the post had only recently been designated. The other five cases were all due to absence and had been risk assessed.

The FVU had completed all the required minimum checks in the MV cases we reviewed.

Transferees

Vetting APP allows forces to accept vetting clearance from another force if it is no more than one year old. But many forces choose to vet officers and staff new to their organisation, even if they are transferring from another force with a current vetting clearance.

Essex Police has chosen to vet all transferees and those who have left the service and applied to rejoin. The FVU requests a [professional standards department \(PSD\)](#) complaint and conduct history, as well as any counter-corruption unit (CCU) [intelligence](#), from all forces in which the individual has previously served.

Change of circumstances

The force has taken steps to improve the workforce's awareness that they must report any changes of personal circumstances, for example marital status, name changes or significant changes to personal finances.

PSD provides training to all new recruits, people being promoted and those moving to certain posts. The force's personal development review (PDR) system, introduced in October 2022, include questions about risks, such as business interests. It specifically asks staff about any changes in their personal circumstances. The force told us that 94 percent of staff have completed their PDR.

On average, the FVU receives two notifications of changes in personal circumstance every day, suggesting the workforce has a good understanding of when to report these changes.

When it receives such notifications, the FVU conducts vetting enquires to identify risks and to decide if the individual's vetting status is affected. The FVU requests that a new vetting form is completed if the changes are considered significant.

PSD informs the FVU of all [misconduct](#) meeting or hearing outcomes. The FVU complies with the APP requirement to review a person's vetting status if misconduct proceedings result in reduction in rank, [written warning](#) or [final written warning](#).

Vetting decisions

The force has a three-tiered approach to vetting decisions. If the vetting reveals no adverse information, the vetting researcher will grant clearance. Where there is adverse information, the team leader makes the vetting decision and records their rationale. In cases where there are more serious concerns, the FVM makes the final decision, also recording a supporting rationale.

The FVM has introduced a decision-making template to guide the FVU when processing vetting applications. FVU staff told us that they found this very useful when documenting their rationale for vetting decisions. The force told us that other FVUs in the southeast region are adopting this template.

The FVU regularly conducts interviews to clarify written responses in vetting applications.

Risk mitigation measures

The force regularly uses risk mitigation measures to support its vetting decisions. This includes restrictions on where people can be posted, monitoring applicants' social media activity and regular reviews of applicants' management of their finances.

The FVU refers some cases to the CCU to monitor individual's use of the force's IT systems to help manage potential risks. The force uses a diary system which prompts a check with CCU to make sure that agreed risk mitigations have been implemented. The FVU also informs line managers regarding any risk mitigations.

The force produces a counter-corruption strategic threat assessment (STA) annually. This outlines the current corruption threats facing the force. The CCU has shared both the force's and the region's STAs with FVU staff. This is in line with the vetting APP.

Appeals and quality assurance

The head of the CCU handles all vetting appeals. The FVM routinely examines all vetting refusals for quality assurance purposes. The force would benefit from also quality assuring vetting clearance decisions, particularly those where the process had revealed adverse information.

Disproportionality

The APP states there is a risk that vetting has a disproportionate impact on under-represented groups. Furthermore, it requires forces to monitor vetting applications, at all levels, against [protected characteristics](#) to understand whether there is any disproportionate impact on particular groups. Where disproportionality is identified, forces must take positive steps to address this.

The force maintains records of the results of all vetting applications from people who declare a protected characteristic, including religion, age, gender, gender reassignment, disability, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. Analysis of all vetting applicants between January and June 2022 showed no disproportionality in vetting refusals for people who had declared a protected characteristic.

The force assists applicants from an ethnic minority group by assigning a member of staff to support them through the vetting process.

Vetting file review

We asked a vetting specialist from another force to review 40 clearance decisions from the preceding 3 years related to police officers and staff who had previously committed criminal offences or that the force had other concerns about. The files included transferee and recruitment vetting decisions.

The vetting specialist agreed with all the force's vetting clearance decisions. Decision-makers are using the vetting APP and the [National Decision Model](#) to guide their decisions. They sometimes make explicit reference to them within their rationale. We saw evidence of the FVU using risk mitigation strategies in relevant cases.

3. How effectively does the force protect the information and data it holds?

Lawful business and IT monitoring capability

The force can monitor all its IT systems across handheld, mobile and desktop devices. It proactively checks activity on mobile devices. This helps identify potential misconduct including improper contact with vulnerable victims or [organised crime groups](#).

The force monitors people when intelligence shows they pose a higher risk of sexual misconduct. We also saw evidence of IT monitoring of people who were the subject of other corruption-related intelligence. However, the force needs additional resources to make full and effective use of its IT monitoring software. We urge the force to review its CCU staffing levels to make sure there are sufficient resources to meet demand.

There are strong links between the force IT department and the CCU during the procurement process for new IT systems. No new systems can be introduced to the force without the prior approval of the CCU. This ensures new systems include suitable auditing functions or other measures designed to prevent and detect misuse.

IT monitoring policy

The force has a lawful business monitoring policy for monitoring and recording staff communications. The policy allows the CCU to audit all force mobile phone data. In addition, it allows for proactive monitoring of IT systems to identify and tackle corruption.

Digital device management

The force can attribute all mobile devices issued to individuals across the workforce. Devices are issued to specific individuals. The lawful business monitoring policy stipulates that the primary purpose of the force's ICT is for policing purposes and there can be no expectation of privacy if used for personal use.

Information security – encrypted apps

The force has a comprehensive social media policy and detailed guidance. Both documents have been circulated to the workforce. [Encrypted apps](#) aren't permitted on devices.

PSD provides training and guidance to the workforce about the risks associated with the misuse of social media. Officers and staff we spoke to showed awareness of the force's expectations of them. The force's operational security manager has also provided extensive training to the workforce to highlight the threats from social media and encrypted apps.

4. How well does the force tackle potential corruption?

Intelligence

Sources of corruption-related intelligence

The force has an anonymous confidential reporting line. Between 1 January 2020 and November 2022, it received 132 reports. There were:

- 61 reports in 2020;
- 44 in 2021; and
- 27 in 2022.

We examined 60 corruption intelligence files, of which 27 were reports from members of the workforce. We found two cases that were the result of proactive intelligence collection.

Police corruption categorisation

The force correctly categorises intelligence in line with the counter-corruption APP.

Partnership working to identify potential corruption

The force has developed working relationships with agencies and organisations that support vulnerable people. It plans to extend this to more organisations. To date, this work has been completed by CCU investigators. This has an impact on their ability to investigate corruption.

The CCU has recruited a new prevention and engagement lead. It is actively recruiting four further prevention staff. This means the force will have a greater opportunity to encourage partner agencies to report suspected [abuse of position for a sexual purpose \(AoPSP\)](#). We strongly urge CCU managers to ensure that new prevention staff prioritise the development of professional relationships with external agencies and organisations.

Identifying corruption threats

Counter-corruption strategic threat assessment

In June 2022, the force's counter-corruption STA was published. The STA identifies the force's main corruption risks. It also highlights emerging threats and some organisational vulnerabilities.

The force doesn't publish the STA or communicate the corruption threats to the workforce. It provides some detail to departmental heads at quarterly meetings. However, we encourage the force to consider publishing an edited STA. This will give the workforce a better understanding of the force's current corruption threats.

Counter-corruption control strategy

The force has a counter-corruption [control strategy](#) based on the [4P-approach](#) (pursue, prepare, protect and prevent). It clearly sets out the priorities identified in the STA.

Implementation plan

Each of the corruption threats identified in the STA and control strategy are considered in detail within the force's implementation plan. There is a designated person responsible for each task and clear timescales for completion. At the time of our inspection, the identified tasks were due to be completed by April 2023.

Managing corruption threats

Intelligence development

We reviewed 60 corruption intelligence files. We found two cases where the force chose not to take action. This may have resulted in missed opportunities to develop the intelligence further and mitigate corruption risks. In the other 58 cases the CCU responded effectively. The force used a variety of techniques to investigate and develop corruption-related intelligence. These investigations were well supervised.

We found two cases of proactive intelligence collection using the force's IT monitoring system.

Identification of those who pose a corruption risk

The force holds people intelligence meetings when required for individual cases. The director of HR also chairs a force support forum, which includes at which the head of PSD, senior managers, HR, finance, legal services, and the training department. At the meeting, they share information about people with significant welfare concerns, helping to identify anyone who pose a corruption risk. The CCU uses a matrix to identify those people who pose a risk of AoPSP or sexual harassment in the workplace. It regularly monitors them, including IT auditing. The CCU creates an

investigation plan for those assessed as being a higher risk. During our inspection, we examined the matrix and found it was well maintained. The force uses similar arrangements for individuals who pose other types of corruption risk.

Capacity and capability to investigate corruption

The CCU is a small team of experienced detectives and a crime analyst. The CCU develops potential corruption intelligence. When further investigation is required, the CCU hands over the investigation to the PSD. We found very few cases investigated wholly by the CCU. This is due to limited resources.

Until the engagement and prevention team referred to earlier in this report are in post, the existing specialist CCU resources can't focus sufficiently upon corruption investigations. This is a risk to the force.

Furthermore, the CCU has secured funding for an additional intelligence researcher. This post will be dedicated to routine and IT monitoring. Senior officers in the CCU told us they intend to closely monitor their team's workload. We agree this will be important to make sure the force is able to continue to manage its corruption threats effectively.

Specialist resources

The CCU including the senior management team are experienced in covert law enforcement. When required the force can access resources for covert investigations through the [regional organised crime unit](#) or the National Crime Agency.

Policies designed to prevent corruption

Clear and concise corruption prevention policies help to guard against corrupt activity, but can't guarantee to prevent corruption, or in themselves stop corrupt practice. They provide guidance on how police officers and staff should behave. They should clearly state what is expected of members of the workforce and what actions they should take to protect themselves and the organisation from corruption.

The counter-corruption (prevention) APP sets out what policies forces should have and gives guidance on their content. Our inspectors examine their policies in these areas:

- Notifiable associations: policies should cover how the force should manage the risks related to officers and staff who may associate with, for example, criminals, private investigators, or members of extremist groups. They should require the disclosure by officers and staff of such associations.
- Business interests: policies should state when the force should allow or deny officers and staff the opportunity to hold other jobs. They should explain how the force will manage the risks that arise when officers and staff are allowed to hold them.

- Gifts and hospitality: policies should cover the circumstances in which police officers and staff should accept or reject offers of gifts and/or hospitality.

We found Essex Police's policies were comprehensive and reflect the APP guidance. Members of the workforce submit an online form if they have notifiable associations or business interests, or have been offered gifts or hospitality. We found the force was managing these processes effectively.

Sexual misconduct

The force recognises AoPSP as serious corruption. During the file review, we found the CCU consistently referred these cases to the [Independent Office for Police Conduct](#).

We found the CCU routinely develops intelligence about sexual misconduct beyond the scope of the initial allegation. In each case, the CCU researches the person and assesses them against an AoPSP/sexual misconduct risk matrix. Where the CCU assessed the risk as low and the intelligence couldn't be developed, we saw good use of early interventions through risk management meetings.

The force has introduced the College of Policing learning material for AoPSP as mandatory training. This is supported by poster campaigns, intranet articles and the publication of the outcomes of gross misconduct hearings. CCU has provided further training to line managers. We found a good knowledge of AoPSP across the workforce.

Members of the workforce who report sexual misconduct are offered support from the Police Federation at an early stage in proceedings. This means people may be more confident to report sexual misconduct.

Area for improvement

The force should improve how it collects, assesses, develops, and investigates counter-corruption intelligence by ensuring that its counter-corruption unit has sufficient resources and suitably trained staff to meet demand and allow for proactive intelligence collection.

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Report title: Professionalism, Trust and Confidence in Essex Police	
Report to: Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel – Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee	
Report author: Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner	
Date: 20 September 2023	For: Noting
Enquiries to: Pippa Brent-Isherwood (Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer) pippa.brent-isherwood@essex.police.uk	
County Divisions affected: All Essex	

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to summarise for members of the Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee the key findings of Baroness Casey’s independent review into the standards of behaviour and internal culture of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), and how these are being responded to in Essex.

2. Recommendations

The Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee is invited to note the contents of the report, identifying any areas that require further clarification or comment.

3. Context / Summary

In October 2021, following the rape and murder of Sarah Everard the previous March by a serving Metropolitan Police Officer, along with various other high-profile incidents, the then Home Secretary commissioned Baroness Louise Casey to examine the force’s culture and operations. Casey’s review found significant and widespread cultural and organisational failings and echoed the findings of racism and discrimination in previous reports. The review team also found institutional sexism, misogyny and homophobia in plain sight, along with systemic failings in the way the service is run and its ability to protect and serve Londoners. Among other things, the review concluded that:

- Whilst there has been improvement in the gender mix and ethnic diversity of officers, the MPS has not done enough to make its workforce reflect and represent the community it polices, particularly at the higher ranks.
- There is widespread bullying within the MPS, particularly of those with protected characteristics. Nearly a quarter of staff and officers (22%) reported

experiencing bullying. This had been experienced more acutely by women and those who were LGBTQ+, disabled or from ethnic minorities.

- 46% of black and 33% of Asian officers and staff told the review they had personally experienced racism at work. Casey described ethnic minority officers as being “doubly isolated: Isolated at work by virtue of their colour; and isolated in their community by virtue of having joined the Met.” Black and Asian officers and staff leave the organisation at a faster rate and were far more likely than their White colleagues to raise a grievance.
- Black officers and staff were 81% more likely to be subject to a misconduct case than their white counterparts, while Asian officers and staff were 55% more likely, and Regulation 13 notices (which are served on officers deemed to be “unsuitable for policing”) are disproportionately served on black, Asian and ethnic minority probationers. Allegations against black and Asian officers and staff were more likely to result in a “case to answer” decision than those against their white counterparts.
- Within the community, force is used much more widely on black Londoners than on other groups, and Casey concluded that the MPS “under-protects and over-polices” black Londoners.
- Female recruits resign at four times the rate of all probationers, with over a third (36%) of female probationers resigning in 2020/21 and 2021/22. A third of the women surveyed by the review team reported that they had personally experienced sexism at work, with 12% reporting directly experiencing sexual harassment or assault. Allegations relating to sexual misconduct and other discriminatory behaviours are less likely than other misconduct allegations to result in a “case to answer” decision. The proportion of domestic abuse allegations resulting in a “case to answer” decision is also substantially lower than for all case types.
- The MPS has “a systematically biased misconduct system”. Concerns raised through misconduct and complaints processes are not well recorded and are more likely to be dismissed than acted upon. The prevailing culture in the MPS does not encourage reporting of wrongdoing; rather those who experience it fear being ostracised, moved or removed for speaking out. This has meant that patterns of behaviour and escalating incidents which are the hallmarks of predatory behaviour have not been identified.
- Recruitment and vetting systems are poor and fail to guard against those who seek positions of power in order to abuse them.
- The MPS does not make ethical standards sufficiently clear, does not ensure that staff and officers adhere to them, and has not demonstrated clear consequences for those who do not. In particular, the MPS is not clear about what constitutes gross misconduct and what will be done about it.
- The MPS sees scrutiny as an intrusion. It has held the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) at arms-length, and not shared information and data with it, whilst MOPAC has not provided the strategic oversight function that governance of the MPS requires. Similarly, internal audit is viewed by the force

as a process to get through rather than as an assurance function that can be used to drive improvement.

As a result of all this, public trust and confidence in the MPS has fallen to its lowest ever point, particularly amongst black and ethnic minority groups.

The review found deep seated cultures that need to be tackled if the MPS is to affect sustainable change, including:

- Too much hubris and too little humility –A “we know best” attitude means that, too often, the MPS acts in its own self-interest rather than in the interests of the communities it serves.
- Defensiveness and denial – A cultural shift is required for the MPS to become a reflective and learning organisation that invites scrutiny, challenge and assurance. Currently, an aversion to accepting criticism means that the organisation has not acknowledged or learnt from its mistakes. Racist, misogynistic, homophobic and other discriminatory behaviour has been tolerated, ignored or dismissed as “banter”.
- An optimism bias, which blames individual “bad apples” rather than identifying and addressing systemic issues. Its processes do not effectively root out bad officers, help to tackle mediocre officers, or truly support and develop good officers. The absence of basic management practices and supervision has created a culture in which poor practice is tolerated and those who work hard are not recognised.
- Elitism – Valuing and prioritising specialist units whilst deprioritising neighbourhood policing and public protection has meant that staff in Borough Command Units (BCUs) report lower levels of satisfaction than those who work in other areas, and that staff turnover is significantly higher in the BCUs than in other commands. As well as generating a sense of elitism within some parts of the service, this has reduced levels of experience and knowledge within the BCUs and has weakened connections with long-established communities.

Whilst the focus has been on the MPS and its response to Casey’s report, it has necessarily affected all police forces. Casey’s observations of the dysfunctional relationship that had developed between MOPAC and the MPS also have implications for other police and crime commissioners and their electoral mandate and role in holding their Chief Constables to account.

In Essex, the Chief Constable has adopted the approach of acknowledging the report and its findings, taking the time to understand the strengths and weaknesses within the force by listening to colleagues and stakeholders, and then communicating the findings and next steps. Casey’s report and the extent of its applicability to Essex has been the subject of discussion within the PFCC’s Senior Management Team (SMT), the Chief Constable’s Chief Officer Group (COG) and Senior Leadership Team (SLT). The Chief Constable and Deputy Chief Constable have engaged directly with the Chairs of the Independent Advisory Groups (IAGs), staff support networks and unions. Relevant data sources have also been considered.

In May 2023, the force hosted a Professionalism, Trust and Confidence Conference for the force’s most senior levels of leadership - which was also attended by

representatives of the PFCC, IAGs and other “critical friends” - to examine, check and challenge the emerging findings. This was followed up by further work and action planning within individual commands.

The report attached at Appendix 1 summarises the findings of all the work undertaken in this regard by Essex Police. Overall, the report concludes that Essex Police does not face the same gravity of challenge identified by Casey, but it still has work to do.

The report identifies many areas of strength, including:

- Essex Police staff and officers have the highest rate of job satisfaction across all forces surveyed by Durham University.
- Staff and officers spoke positively about the local strategy and vision (which is also supported by strong findings from the most recent staff survey results¹) and recognised that there are strong and positive relationships between the force and the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner’s office.
- The Essex Police workforce generally experiences high levels of inclusivity within their work teams, supported by a culture of valuing individuals and respecting their differences.
- Essex Police has doubled the ethnic diversity of the force in three years, and gender diversity has also improved, with the proportion of female officers being the highest ever on record. However, it still has some way to go to be truly representative of both.
- Whereas Casey found a lack of confidence among black and female members of the community in London, the opposite can be found in Essex, where confidence among ethnic minority groups and females is increasing and, in some cases, higher than amongst white or male groups. 79% of ‘non-white’ respondents report having confidence in Essex Police, compared to 75% of white respondents. 76% of females report having confidence in Essex Police compared to 74% of males². In addition, while only half of black Londoners are confident in the MPS’s ability to reduce or prevent crime, non-White British and Irish respondents surveyed in Essex are more likely than White British respondents to agree that Essex Police is dealing with crime and ASB in their area. Whilst Casey found black Londoners to be less confident than white Londoners in being treated fairly by the MPS if they reported a crime, non-White British and Irish respondents in Essex are more confident of receiving a good service if they reported a crime or incident than their white British and Irish counterparts. These are sentiments that were repeated by our IAG representatives, meaning we can be confident in their reliability.
- Essex Police follows strict processes for assessing the suitability of applicants wishing to join the force, and in 2022 rejected 119 individuals at the vetting stage, meaning that those with concerning backgrounds or behaviours were denied entry into our force.
- The force’s communications around acceptable standards of behaviour and the need to overcome prejudice are regarded by the workforce as being clear.
- The workforce reports high levels of ethical leadership from line managers across the force and the positive impact this has on team inclusivity.
- Contrary to what Casey found in London, Essex Police has significantly

¹ Essex Police staff were found to have the highest level of vision clarity than all other forces surveyed.

² Public Views and Experience of Policing and Criminal Justice in Essex Q3 2022/23 Survey Results.

enhanced the officer resources allocated to areas such as child abuse, adult abuse, offender management, and mental health. A proactive order enforcement team was introduced in 2022, and the force's domestic abuse capabilities have grown.

Despite these areas of strength however, the report also acknowledges that:

- Discrimination exists for some of the Essex Police workforce - although we may struggle to see and hear it - and we could use data more effectively to understand this. Our challenge now is ensuring we hear about all discrimination within the force so that we are in a position to address it and support our workforce effectively.
- There is less disproportionality in Essex than in London in relation to the use of stop and search, but there is more to do to meet our aspirations of removing disparity in line with the force's Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Strategy. Although an internal audit found reasonable assurance that stop and search is used in a proportionate and legitimate manner, and of the engagement that the force has with communities to provide assurance on those activities, individuals in Essex who self-identify as black are 2.6 times more likely to be stopped than white individuals³, which is slightly lower than the figure of 3.5 for the MPS⁴.
- Ethnic minority individuals are just over 1.5 times more likely to be arrested than white individuals, rising to 2.3 times more likely for black individuals.
- The proportion of individuals who have been subject to the use of force also continues to be higher for ethnic minorities compared to the rest of the community in Essex. During 2022/23, 9.3% of subjects were recorded as black, which is 5.9 percentage points above the 3.4% black resident population in Essex.
- The Essex Police workforce reported similar frustrations to those felt in the MPS about resourcing levels and the impact this is having on their ability to deliver the service they aspire to, particularly within local and community policing teams. Whilst we can be reassured by the positive views of our IAGs, and by our robust governance and decision-making around resourcing and deployment, we must not lose sight of the impact of those decisions on community understanding and confidence.
- Similar to what Baroness Casey found in the MPS, the focus in Essex on police officer numbers has led to high vacancy levels being held in police staff posts (at 13% compared to 1.8% for police officer posts), which has impacted the support those teams can give both to the front line and to the force more broadly. This is particularly noticeable in specialist roles (e.g. analysis, IT, and project management) where we face additional challenges from industry competition. As the national Police Uplift Programme (PUP) winds down, we anticipate that this disparity will begin to be addressed.
- There is a perception within Essex that experience is more valued in specialist commands than in local and community policing teams, leading to high levels of turnover in those teams compared to the longer retention of officers in specialist commands. This perceived loss of experience on the front line is felt to be impacting the force's connection with the community. Concerns were

³ Stop and search data Q3 2022-23

⁴ Note that the figure for the MPS uses population data preceding the 2021 census data.

raised about the relative inexperience among sergeant ranks as a consequence of being newer in service, and therefore the lack of organisational and operational awareness to drive high standards.

In light of these findings, the force has identified a number of future risks, challenges and opportunities including:

- Ensuring that it can consolidate and understand feedback about discrimination more effectively, and access and utilise relevant data routinely and effectively.
- Improving the confidence of the whole workforce to report grievances and misconduct, and trust that these processes will resolve them effectively and in a timely manner.
- With approximately 40% of the workforce having less than five years' service, future leaders will be less experienced. This may mean that behaviours and actions that fall short of the expected standards occur more frequently. The force must therefore ensure that sufficient training and support is available to help first line managers succeed in supporting their young-in-service officers.

The force has identified five key recurring themes within its findings:

1. Use of data and information - The importance of improving our use of data and information to understand fully our current and future challenges and make informed decisions.
2. Maximising employee feedback - A more dynamic and frequent approach to gathering staff feedback would complement other data and information in helping the force to understand how effectively it is delivering policing, as well as the employee experience.
3. Supporting our leaders, especially first line managers.
4. Learning lessons - There was a strong sense that there is a time-limited opportunity to be seen to learn from Casey's findings, and to use this opportunity to enhance our 'brand' as Essex Police, and to contribute to re-building the policing brand across England and Wales.
5. Understanding our business - Whilst we already do well in this area, we need to maintain a tight understanding of how demand management, governance, and business processes interact across the organisation, which will support us in effective and adaptable decision making and drawing out efficiencies across the organisation.

The progress made in addressing these areas will be reviewed at a second Senior Leadership Team (SLT) seminar in November 2023.

Following consideration of the report, the PFCC's Senior Management Team has also agreed several actions arising from the learning, including:

- Continuing to receive and scrutinise regular progress reports on the implementation of the force's Professionalism Strategy via the PFCC's Performance and Resources Board.
- Continuing to scrutinise the results of the independent victim satisfaction and

public confidence survey on a quarterly basis.

- Scrutinising the results of the latest Essex Police staff survey.
- Continuing to receive and scrutinise a quarterly report from HR (covering recruitment, retention and turnover, sickness and attendance management and staff performance), including through the lens of the findings of the Casey Review.
- Through budget setting and monitoring, as well as scrutiny of the regular HR and Force Growth Programme reports, ensuring a full understanding and proper scrutiny of the level of deployable resources available to the force and how they are deployed.
- Continuing to meet quarterly with the Professional Standards Directorate to understand fully the themes arising from complaints and misconduct cases and how these are being addressed.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Professionalism, Trust and Confidence in Essex Police

Chief Officer Group

Date: 27/07/2023

Authors:

ACO Fiona Henderson; Strategic Development Officer

Version: 3.5

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2 *Executive Summary*

On 21 March 2023, Baroness Casey published her review into conduct and standards within the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). This was following the murder of Sarah Everard in March 2021 by a serving Metropolitan Police officer, which prompted the then Home Secretary to commission an immediate and full review into the force's culture and operations.

The review exposed significant and widespread cultural and organisational failings, some of which repeat the findings of racism and discrimination from previous reports (McPherson, 1999, Lammy, 2017¹, and Home Affairs Select Committee 2021²), whilst others highlight sexism, misogyny, and homophobia alongside systemic failings in the way the service is run and their ability to serve the people of London.

Whilst attentions remain on the MPS as they address these issues, Baroness Casey's review has affected all police forces in England and Wales, with Chief Constables committing to understanding and addressing the scale and nature of the same challenges in their own forces.

At Essex police, the direction and intentions of CC Harrington have been clear:

- To acknowledge the findings of the review and that they are not limited to the Metropolitan Police Service.
- To listen to the workforce, our partners and our public to understand their experiences, concerns, and reflections- providing a safe environment through which this can happen.
- To pause, reflect, and understand the position of Essex police.
- To identify areas of strength as well as areas requiring improvement.
- To communicate these and commit to improving where necessary, using our existing infrastructure to drive activity (policies, strategies, governance).

Consequently, a period of research and review has been undertaken across the force to establish, as far as possible, whether we face the same challenges and to the same degree as the MPS, and has involved the following:

- Direct engagement between chief officers and force leaders, as well as with IAG representatives, staff and officer support networks, and those not in a leadership position.
- Engagement between force leaders and their wider commands.
- Review of relevant material including independent staff surveys, federation surveys, internal surveys, HMICFRS and audit findings, internal data, as well as a review of feedback received through a range of channels.

¹ *The Lammy Review: An independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System*. Published September 2017, [The Lammy Review \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/654442/the-lammy-review.pdf)

² *The McPherson Report: Twenty-two years on*. Published July 2021, [The Macpherson Report: Twenty-two years on - Home Affairs Committee - House of Commons \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/home-affairs-committee/publications-and-reports/the-mcpherson-report-2021/)

This activity has so far highlighted the strength of feeling among the Essex Police workforce, at every level and across all roles. Not only in their concerns that we face similar challenges to the MPS, but in their pride and commitment to serving their public.

Although more work is required to fully understand the view of the Essex public, we are reassured and grateful that whilst our partners acknowledge that Essex Police may face some of the same challenges, they are committed to supporting us in this.

This reassurance is strengthened further by the independent external views about our performance and culture, most notably Professor Les Graham of Durham University who we have collaborated with for seven years to measure and understand the strength of feeling across our workforce in several areas. Having completed three force-wide surveys and four national surveys in this time, Professor Graham has commented that the results highlight a workforce within Essex Police who feel on average high levels of inclusivity in their work teams with a culture of valuing individuals and respecting difference. He adds that the force's communications around acceptable standards of behaviour and the need to overcome prejudice are seen as clear. Moreover, that the workforce reports experiencing a high average level of ethical leadership behaviour from their immediate supervisor, average levels of antagonism to diversity are low and internal motivation to overcome prejudice is reported as high. Additionally, Professor Graham comments that the results support the view that Essex Police has demonstrated its ability to achieve improvement for the workforce by being prepared to measure difficult topics and taking interesting in understanding and applying the findings.

Taking this into account, this report will outline what we have found in our own activity: the feelings of our workforce and partners, the strengths and weaknesses of our business, and where we must now focus our attentions for either improving or retaining the high standards we already hold. In this first version of the report, there are no formal recommendations, however our findings and proposals are intended to prompt discussion around future activity which, in due course, may become formalised through new or existing mechanisms. This activity falls predominantly in five areas throughout the report:

1. Use of data and information.
2. Maximising employee feedback.
3. Supporting our leaders.
4. Learning lessons.
5. Understanding our business.

3 *The Casey report: Setting the scene*

Baroness Casey's findings are wide-reaching and expose failings in almost all aspects of the way in which the MPS operate and has attracted responses from across the political and policing landscape.

- Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, has pledged that immediate and lasting improvements will be made to the way police forces vet new and existing employees.
- The Head of the College of Policing, CC Andy Marsh, has pledged to overhaul the leadership, training, and support given to police leaders to enable them to develop the values and cultures we strive for.
- The NPCC lead at the time, CC Martin Hewitt, expressed the commitment of all Chief Constables to embed behavioural change throughout their forces, and outlined how many of the concerns raised in the review are being addressed through existing workstreams which provide a mechanism for learnings to be captured and fully understood.

Importantly though, these challenges are not limited to policing, nor the public sector. Whilst discrimination has been highlighted in other public services recently, misogynistic and elitist cultures have also been exposed within the private sector.

A recent survey found that despite almost 40% of the NHS workforce being from a minority background, racism and discrimination were both evident on a large scale³ with 70% of those who'd experienced racism choosing not to report it for fear of reprisal and lack of procedural justice (BMA, 2022). At the same time, sexism, racism, homophobia, and bullying were all exposed within the Fire Service as recently as March this year (2023)⁴ whilst in the private sector, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) are in crisis after claims of sexual misconduct and a 'toxic culture'⁵, and Goldman Sachs are paying for years of sex-discrimination⁶. It is obvious that reforms are needed across public and private sector organisations, and that there are deep societal roots to such issues experienced in the workplace.

To understand the scale and nature of these challenges within Essex Police, we have invited feedback from all ranks and roles within the organisation, and it has been heartening to see how many have independently read or engaged with Baroness Casey's report. This internal paper has been driven largely by their willingness (and our partners' willingness) to share their thoughts and feelings, and by their strength of feeling about the standards we should aspire to within policing. As a result, we have been able to develop a rich understanding of experiences and perceptions which, combined, signify a collective commitment to ensuring Essex Police is inclusive and professional, and that policing remains a profession to be proud of. This degree of internal reflection is significant, as it provides a starting point for change and improvement.

Our internal strategies (including Diversity, Equality, and Inclusiveness; VAWG; Media and Communication; and Professionalism) are all based on a sound understanding through data and evidence, meaning we can be confident

³ [Delivering racial equality in medicine \(bma.org.uk\)](https://www.bma.org.uk/news/2022/07/delivering-racial-equality-in-medicine).

⁴ [Values and culture in fire and rescue services - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services \(HMICFRS\) – Home | His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services \(HMICFRS\) – Home \(justiceinspectors.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/news/2023/03/values-and-culture-in-fire-and-rescue-services)

⁵ [CBI suspends key activities after rape and sex assault allegations - BBC News](https://www.bbc.com/news/business-61888888)

⁶ [Goldman Sachs to pay \\$215m in sex discrimination case - BBC News](https://www.bbc.com/news/business-61888888)

in our aspirations to value difference. Likewise, our public trust and confidence survey, Durham staff survey, and federation surveys provide us with the voice of those we serve and those we employ.

Not for the first time, this is an opportunity not to be lost. To take stock, reflect on our culture, our processes, and our people, and to question whether we are doing everything we can to understand our operating context. And importantly, not to lose sight of Casey's findings nor the lived experiences that we *have* heard of from our workforce. To do this, we commit to incorporating our internal findings into existing governance and to growing our understanding of workforce feelings through a safe and accessible environment for open and honest discussion. This must be between all levels of the organisation, with a particular focus on creating an environment in which staff and officers feel comfortable and able to reach out to their senior leadership teams.

It must also be with a view to understanding the issues that have an external impact, as much as those that impact internally. We are fortunate that there is a good level of trust and confidence already within the Essex community⁷, and that independent assessments have found we have strong business processes in critical areas (vetting and counter corruption most notably⁸), but it is essential to recognise where there is similarity in organisational structure, and complexities of a changing workforce, that enabled the behaviours and culture that Casey identified in her report to manifest within the MPS.

For the purposes of our response in Essex, the findings of the review have been addressed as seven overarching themes which has allowed us to focus on key aspects of each, whilst also identifying where there is crossover.

1. **Discrimination.** Both within the service as well as towards the public.
2. **Community understanding and engagement.** Linked closely to our ability to serve and protect effectively.
3. **The culture within specialist commands.**
4. **Resourcing,** and the impact this has on the quality of policing.
5. **Accountability, scrutiny, and governance,** and the importance of engaging with processes that are designed to support Chief Constables in running legitimate, effective organisations.
6. **Misconduct and grievances,** and whether procedural justice is encouraged through robust and fair process.
7. **Business model and management.** Whether the right leadership, culture and processes exist for the police service to operate effectively.

Each of the seven themes has been reviewed in detail to assess the position in Essex Police against the below points:

- i) Feedback from staff, partners, and the public.
- ii) What the evidence says (data, inspections, other findings).
- iii) Existing organisational mechanisms and assurances.
- iv) Future risks, challenges, and opportunities.
- v) Future proposals over the short, medium, and long term.

It is important to note that our assessment of supporting evidence has been strongly driven by the feedback we received on each theme, with some themes naturally attracting more attention than others. Because of this, and

⁷ 75% of respondents to our independent perceptions survey indicated they think Essex Police are doing a good or excellent job.

⁸ Publication date of HMICFRS findings still to be confirmed.

the limitations in time, the report will provide different levels of detail in places. This should not be seen as a reflection of the relative scale or importance of a particular issue- this report is intended as a starting point for further work so draws on the main themes that were identified from this early stage.

4 Discrimination

Discrimination exists for some of our workforce, although we may struggle to see and hear it, and we could use our data more effectively to understand this. We are reassured that we are in a better position than that of the MPS as identified by Casey for disproportionality in our policing activity, although there are improvements that we could still make.

Our challenge now is ensuring we hear about all discrimination within the force so that we are in a position to address it and support our workforce effectively.

4.1 Findings from the MPS

The Casey report identified institutional homophobia, misogyny, sexism, and racism as well as other forms of discrimination. Among her published findings for discrimination were:

- We have found a culture of discrimination that takes many forms in the Met but is felt most acutely by those who cannot hide their differences from the White male norm, particularly people of colour and women. We have found racism, misogyny and homophobia in plain sight.
- We have also seen institutional misogyny, sexism and homophobia in the organisation and are concerned about those with other protected characteristics, in particular those with disabilities.
- This 'resistance to difference' emerges in a culture of bullying experienced by a significant minority of the organisation. Those who do not conform to the prevailing culture face discrimination, bullying and barriers to thriving and progressing in their careers.
- We have identified institutional homophobia, misogyny and racism in the Met. This can be seen in overt discrimination, mistreatment and abuse of LGBTQ+, women and Black, Asian and ethnic minority officers and staff; unfair outcomes for these groups inside the organisation as a result of bias in processes and systems and in attitudes and behaviours; unfair outcomes in communities that result from under protection, from over-policing, or from both; and a culture of downplaying and denial of discrimination and repeated unwillingness to accept and deal with institutional failures that let down Londoners.

Using data that was available to the MPS, Casey was able to identify an over representation of individuals from minority or protected groups in several areas:

- Those that self-identify as Black are 3.5 times more likely to be stopped and searched by the MPS than their white counterparts⁹.
- Those that self-identify as Black were over 3 times more likely to be handcuffed, 4.5 times more likely to have a baton used against them, and nearly 4 times as likely to have a Taser fired on them¹⁰.
- 58% of males under 18 who were strip searched were described as Black by the officer conducting the search¹¹.

4.2 Assessment of the position in Essex police

4.2.1 Workforce, public and partner feedback

“We don’t all ‘get it’, particularly at a senior level”

Feedback from staff and officers was mixed. Whilst some officers and staff reported that discrimination exists within Essex Police (although not to the same levels found within the MPS), others reported that it wasn’t a behaviour they had experienced or witnessed themselves. This mixed feedback is not unsurprising given the personal nature of those behaviours however, it leaves no doubt that discrimination has been, and still is, experienced or witnessed within the force, through examples of racism, misogyny, and perceptions of positive discrimination based on protected characteristics. Notably, Essex employees identified a lack of focus on disability-related discrimination within Casey’s report despite it referencing the high proportion of grievances of this nature in the MPS.

4.2.2 What the evidence says about Essex Police

Where Casey found a lack of confidence among black and female members of the community in London, the opposite can be found in Essex where 79% of ‘non-white’ respondents report having confidence in Essex police, compared to 75% of white respondents. Likewise, 76% of females report having confidence in Essex police compared to 74% of males¹². These are sentiments that were repeated by our IAG representatives meaning we can be confident in their reliability.

Similarly, **we are less disproportionate than the MPS for stop and search, but there is more to do** to meet our aspirations of removing disparity in line with our DE&I strategy. For example:

Use of stop and search. In Essex, individuals who self-identify as black are 2.6 times more likely to be stopped than White individuals¹³, which is slightly lower than the figure of 3.5 for the MPS¹⁴.

Arrests. Ethnic Minority individuals are just over 1.5 times more likely to be arrested than white individuals, rising to 2.3 times more likely for black individuals.

⁹ Met stop and search data – referenced in [BARONESS CASEY REVIEW Final Report \(met.police.uk\)](#)

¹⁰ Met use of force data – reference in [BARONESS CASEY REVIEW Final Report \(met.police.uk\)](#)

¹¹ [Strip search of children by the Metropolitan Police Service - new analysis by the Children’s Commissioner for England | Children’s Commissioner for England \(childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)](#)

¹² Public Views and Experience of Policing and Criminal Justice in Essex Q3 2022/23 Survey Results.

¹³ Stop and search data Q3 2022-23

¹⁴ Note that the figure for the MPS uses population data preceding the 2021 census data.

Use of force. For 2022/23 the proportion of individuals who have been subjects of the use of force continues to be higher for ethnic minorities compared to the rest of the community in Essex. 9.3% of subjects were recorded as black, which is 5.9 percentage points above the 3.4% black resident population in Essex.

To draw comparisons with national and MPS trends, data is only available for the financial year 2021/22¹⁵, however the findings show that use of force in Essex occurs at a lower rate against individuals identifying as black, than in the MPS or nationally. Importantly, individuals of black ethnicity are still over-represented in use of force in Essex:

Handcuffs: Individuals of black ethnicity and aged between 10 and 64 were 2.5 times more likely to be handcuffed by Essex Police than their white peers. Overall, black individuals accounted for 10% of all subjects where handcuffs were used in Essex, which compares to 14.9% nationally and 37.8% in the MPS.

Baton: Individuals of black ethnicity and aged between 10 and 64 were 6.5 times more likely to have a baton used against them by Essex Police than their white peers. Overall, black individuals accounted for 15.4% of all subjects where a baton was used in Essex, which compares to 20.1% nationally and 44.2% in the MPS.

Taser: Individuals of black ethnicity and aged between 10 and 64 were 3 times more likely to have a taser used against them by Essex Police than their white peers. Overall, black individuals accounted for 17.1% of all subjects where a taser was fired in Essex, which compares to 16.5% nationally and 44.9% in the MPS.

Additionally, HMICFRS found no disproportionality in our rates of vetting refusals when analysed against all protected characteristics. It is difficult to draw the same conclusion for misconduct and grievance investigations due to the low number of ethnic minority employees facing investigation, however complaints data from 2022/23 shows the following about complaints of discrimination:

- 49% of all complaints classified as 'discrimination' fell in the category of 'race', followed by 'disability' (19%).
- Of all discrimination complaints investigated and closed within the same period (regardless of category), acceptable service was deemed to have been given in 81% of cases. Unacceptable service was deemed to have been given in 4% of cases.
- Between 01/09/2022 and 28/02/2023 there were 212 complaint strands identified as being VAWG related, of which 130 related to dissatisfaction in handling a case and 82 related to police perpetrated behaviours.

Finally, whilst we were not able to complete extensive analysis on HR data for this report, we are able to see that a proportionality lower number of female officers leave the service in Essex after less than three years than their male counterparts. Although this cannot be used as a direct indicator of levels of misogyny, it is reassuring that we appear to retain female recruits at a higher rate than males.

4.2.3 Existing organisational mechanisms and assurances

Our strong internal policies and strategies ensure we deliver policing fairly and proportionately in Essex. These include our stop and search, professional standards, and harassment policies, as well as our diversity and inclusion, and professionalism strategies. These are borne out routinely through operational and organisational activity and are supported by strong governance processes including our stop and search scrutiny panel, professionalism board, and diversity equality and inclusion board.

¹⁵ [police-use-of-force-apr2021-mar2022-tables.ods](#)

We also commit publicly to supporting diversity through our membership to signatory schemes including the 'Race@work', 'Disability Confident', and 'Carer Confident' initiatives. In addition, we actively promote equal access to a policing career for those facing other challenges, for instance through the Military Charter. There are gaps in our membership however, including within the LGBTQ+ sphere and this is something that we must rectify to demonstrate our commitment to equality and inclusion for all.

Listening/discussion circles are active across the organisation which allow safe environments for honest feedback and are complemented by a growing number of proactive workstreams focussing on specific challenges. Examples include the anti-misogyny board and the 'Your Voice Forum' where the command team have 'open floor' discussions on thematic or topical issues. Whilst our proactivity in tackling discrimination is clear, there are differences in approach between commands and departments which, despite the flexibility it offers, makes it difficult to coordinate our understanding as an organisation. Better coordination would generate better shared awareness and joined-up activity.

The strength of feeling about having appropriate provisions for reporting and addressing discrimination highlights the importance of our existing Professionalism and DE&I strategies and governance processes which support our ambition to be anti-racist, anti-misogynistic, and anti-sexist. Likewise, our ability to communicate this effectively through our valuing difference campaigns.

4.3 Moving forward in Essex

4.3.1 Future risks, challenges, and opportunities

Ongoing external scrutiny will mean we need to be more attuned to the levels of discrimination within Essex. To enable this, we should ensure we are able to consolidate and understand feedback on discrimination more effectively, and to access and utilise relevant data routinely and effectively.

A changing workforce as well as changing social norms and values will present new forms of discrimination. To be able to understand and address these effectively, we need to be forward looking in our workforce and community engagement and to appreciate changing needs. We can achieve this through maximising interactions and better use of data from a range of sources, as well as being actively engaged in issues emerging nationally.

4.3.2 Future options

Develop our approach to gathering and consolidating staff sentiment to become more dynamic in our understanding and our response.

Review the coordination and governance of sounding boards and support networks to ensure we are joined up in the way we gather and consider issues and concerns, and how these reach senior leaders and chief officers.

Better access to and use of PSD data will transform our understanding of discrimination within the complaints, grievance, and misconduct process, allowing us to assess the proportionality and fairness of our actions and decisions, and to offer confidence to our workforce to trust the systems in place.

5 *Resourcing*

Our workforce reported similar resourcing frustrations to those felt in the Met, particularly within local and community policing teams and the impact this is having on their ability to deliver the service they aspire to. Whilst we can be reassured by the positive views of our IAGs, and by our robust governance and decision-making around resourcing and deployment, we must not lose sight of the impact of those decisions on community understanding and confidence.

Our challenge now is ensuring we retain the strong officer numbers we achieved through recent recruitment activity and that we equip and support our leaders to deal effectively despite ongoing resourcing challenges.

5.1 Findings from the MPS

Baroness Casey raised concerns over the way in which resourcing was managed, whereby Casey stated:

- Reductions in the numbers of contributions made, by civilian staff, PCSOs and Special Constables, together with the impact of other organisational changes, have contributed to additional pressures on warranted officers on the frontline, reduced efficiency in dealing with crime, and a loss of public trust and confidence.
- We saw no evidence that the Met had an evidence-based approach to its workforce planning that took account of past, existing or predicted demand.
- The de-prioritisation and de-specialisation of public protection has put women and children at greater risk than necessary.
- While the frontline is struggling and public confidence at an all-time low, the culture of the Met drives them to spin excitement and promote elite policing roles, rather than emphasising the values of consent and integrity inherent in the Peelian principles and the oath of allegiance, and the importance of frontline policing and a real connection to Londoners.

5.2 Assessment of the position in Essex Police

5.2.1 Workforce, public and partner feedback

Several themes emerged from our engagement activity showing that concerns about resourcing cuts across several areas.

'Frontline' resilience:

Under staffing of local and community policing teams was a key concern, noting the pressure this adds on remaining officers within those teams to manage demand effectively, causing higher levels of sickness. Not only is this seen to exacerbate the resourcing challenge, but it is seen to be detrimental to the level of skills and experience within a team at any given time (affected further by the increasingly short length of service in those teams).

Like Baroness Casey found in the MPS, our focus in Essex on police officer numbers is also seen to have directly impacted the number of 'occupied' police staff posts and therefore the support those teams can give to the front line, as well as their ability to support the organisation more broadly.

There is a perception that experience is more valued in specialist commands than in local policing and community policing teams, leading to high levels of turnover in those teams compared to the longer retention of officers in specialist commands. This perceived loss of experience on the frontline and challenging resource levels are thought to be impacting our connection with the community.

Leadership and support:

Feedback highlighted the considerable pressure that our support networks are under to help employees and the organisation manage the impact of high-profile events such as Couzens, Carrick, and Casey. Those networks are delivered by employees who volunteer their time alongside their substantive roles and who feel they carry significant responsibility for ensuring staff and officers feel supported. It is vital that those who develop and deliver those networks feel supported and that senior leaders understand what this entails.

Despite the work of the media and communications team to highlight good practice and to show that we value our workforce, the importance of feeling supported and valued was reiterated strongly across all feedback groups. Particularly, there was strong feedback in places that connections between senior leaders and their teams does not foster the sense of support they are seeking. We can be reassured by the most recent Durham staff survey results which show Essex to score highly on feeling valued by the organisation but in the current socio-economic climate, it is vital that we adapt our approach if necessary.

Consistency in the level of experience within officer leadership ranks was also highlighted as a concern. Not just for mentoring newly warranted officers into effective team members, but for providing clarity of direction on force priorities and quality of service. Specific feedback highlighted concerns about the relative inexperience among sergeant ranks as a consequence of being newer in service, and therefore the lack of organisational and operational awareness to drive high standards. By comparison, there was agreement that police staff leaders are more likely to stay in their roles for longer, allowing for consistency and resilience to develop at lower ranks and for there to be a sense of stability within their teams. Whilst chief officers work hard to ensure that the movement of new officers is kept to a minimum, it is harder to apply the same principle to leadership roles where there are fewer individuals to fill critical posts. Where it is not possible to retain leaders in their roles, it is essential that we support them and their teams effectively including by providing clarity on the direction of the organisation.

Future recruitment:

Employees are concerned that, in the light of Baroness Casey's report, we will struggle to attract new recruits to Essex Police, particularly those from diverse backgrounds. Not just because of a growing mistrust in policing across the UK, but because of our proximity to London and therefore perceived proximity to the failings identified by Casey within the MPS. Whilst it was widely recognised that our 'We Value Difference' recruitment campaign has helped to reduce disparity in workforce representation¹⁶, it is also understood that we have much further to go to achieve

¹⁶ Between 2020 and 2023, the proportion of black, Asian and minority ethnic applications rose from 6% to 13%, whilst applications from females rose from 26% to 39%.

a fully representative workforce in all respects (ethnicity, gender, disability etc.), with a suggestion that we could seize this opportunity to appeal to a different pool of potential recruits.

Importantly though, and as Casey finds, policing can attract people for the wrong reasons, and this puts the responsibility on each force to do as much as they can to identify risks before individuals are able to join the service¹⁷. This is a concern that was shared by our partners, particularly in relation to the risks presented by MPS officers on transfer to Essex Police. Unsurprisingly then, the importance of personal and professional values featured strongly throughout our feedback as a key component in recruitment.

Training:

The importance of high-quality officer training was clear throughout our workforce feedback, with a concern that training delivered by non-specialists does not equip officers effectively. It was felt that by drawing on associate training officers for subject-specific development would not only help deliver high quality inputs (and therefore enhanced skills among officers in future) but would signify the value we place on their knowledge and experience.

5.2.2 What the evidence says about Essex Police

There have been no decisions to deliberately weaken any part of Essex Police (including staff roles) and in some instances we have enhanced our resilience in areas which the MPS chose to reduce. However, we acknowledge that recruitment and resourcing decisions have had an unavoidable impact in places. For instance:

LPT officer movement: There has been no conscious decision to de-prioritise local policing roles, however it is clear from our local perceptions survey that the degree to which our communities feel understood is falling (currently 53%, down from 71% previously).

Police staff roles: Police staff roles are not seen to be any less important than officers, however the mandated focus on officer posts has led to high vacancy levels being held in most police staff areas (13% compared to 1.8% for police officer posts). This is particularly noticeable in specialist roles where we face additional challenges from industry competition (analysis, IT, and project management for instance). As the national Police Uplift Programme (PUP) winds down, we anticipate that this disparity will begin to be addressed.

Public protection capabilities: In recent years we have significantly enhanced our resilience in these areas which has included additional officers allocated to child abuse, adult abuse, offender management, mental health, and Quest teams. Additionally, a proactive order enforcement team was introduced in 2022, and our domestic abuse capabilities have grown in readiness for changes to the risk assessment process. These changes are particularly relevant in the context of Casey's 'call' for improved charge rates for crimes against women and girls- in Essex, solved rates for Domestic Abuse and Sexual offences are on a positive trajectory¹⁸, which is not the case in all forces, and is an indication that our public protection resourcing decisions have been effective.

¹⁷ In Essex, we rejected 119 police officer applicants at the vetting stage throughout 2022 because our processes identified information which was not in keeping with the values and behaviours of the force.

¹⁸ Solved rates for sexual offences and domestic abuse have been improving over each consecutive month throughout 2023 so far.

Our child protection capability is expected to be assessed as 'good' in an upcoming HMICFRS inspection. This is based on a robust self-assessment of our capabilities in 'leadership and management'; 'assessment and help'; 'ending involvement'; 'recording'; and 'police detention'.

5.2.3 Existing organisational mechanisms and assurances

Essex police follow strict processes for assessing the suitability of applicants wishing to join the force, and in 2022 rejected 119 individuals at the vetting stage, meaning that those with concerning backgrounds or behaviours were denied entry into our force. Alongside continuous development of our recruitment campaigns, we are reassured that we are focussing our energy effectively on the diversity we would hope to attract to policing, with the results being a strong indication of success:

- We have doubled the ethnic diversity of the force in three years, and gender diversity has also improved, although we still have some way to go to be truly representative on both.
- We were the first UK police force to create a broad inclusion recruitment campaign in 2020 (We Value Difference) which directly helped HR and L&D colleagues to exceed the initial target for officer recruitment under the Police Uplift programme. This campaign has received national awards and has been shared with other forces, and is being expanded to enhance our focus on valuing diversity within the organisation and valuing our communities- both of which directly influence recruitment and retention.

Essex Police follow a robust succession planning process which ensures our future leaders are only considered for promotion once they can demonstrate the necessary skills, experience and personal qualities for being a strong leader. Decisions are reached through a chief officer or senior manager-led review¹⁹ of individuals put forward by their own line manager and supported by strong evidence within their PDRs. This means that those being considered for promotion should already be operating at the highest standard, which will be developed further, if successful, through ongoing support from the Essex and Kent Police Leadership Academy. It is important to note that whilst concerns about leadership suitability covered a range of ranks and grades, first line management was prominent within that, and we may wish to review how we can best use our existing processes to deliver the most effective leaders at that level.

To complement our succession planning, we make resourcing decisions based on thorough assessments of skills and capability gaps/requirements by our HR team. This evidence drives chief-officer decisions about our resourcing priorities which then supports the movement of our workforce, where necessary, to meet those needs. All decisions are rooted in firm rationale surrounding current and future risks and challenges, as well as our force priorities.

Where we have identified significant resourcing challenges, particularly linked to performance challenges, we have established a programme of major change which is being led by a chief officer and supported by senior police leaders with a view to improving staffing levels, and therefore performance, in critical areas.

¹⁹ Reviews take place at different frequencies for different levels of promotion, but at least once a year for all ranks from PC through to superintendent, and equivalent police staff roles.

5.3 Moving Forward in Essex

5.3.1 Future risks, challenges, and opportunities

Future leaders will be less experienced, making it difficult to maintain standards and deliver quality investigations. We are already experiencing the effects of this in Essex and the same is being reported at a national level. We must ensure that sufficient training and support is available to help first line managers succeed.

Officer applicant pipeline shrinks, which will be felt most acutely on the front line. We have an opportunity to review our recruitment strategies to appeal to a broader section of society, and to ensure the representation of our workforce continues to improve. This could include reaching out to those who are considering a second career.

Staff applicant pipeline shrinks, and existing staff continue to seek better paid opportunities outside policing, meaning our support to the organisation is less efficient and we are unable to keep up with future requirements. We must be committed to offering an experience that appeals to those wishing to use their skills and expertise to serve the public and should include a review of pay awards when necessary or appropriate, but particularly when faced with significant industry competition.

Socio-economic uncertainty puts additional strain on the workforce causing both officers and staff to seek employment elsewhere, or for their morale and commitment to be affected. We must ensure that our welfare and support packages adapt to meet changing needs, and that they remain accessible to all.

5.3.2 Future options

Develop our approach to gathering and consolidating staff sentiment specifically around leadership, and using this to inform our thinking about recruitment, continuous professional development, and support provisions. To incorporate an element of sentiment in our performance management processes would strengthen the link between our leaders and the success of the organisation, with the benefit of it encouraging personal accountability.

Ensure we are getting the most out of our recruitment, succession planning and promotion processes, with specific attention on drawing core values from our leadership candidates.

this in mind, there were suggestions to consider an independent review of specialist teams in Essex, as well as to explore opportunities for specialist and non-specialist teams to engage more frequently and meaningfully to ease concerns.

6.2.2 What the evidence says about Essex Police

Findings from our recent HMICFRS armed policing inspection highlighted evidence in several areas which indicates a supportive working environment, and good use of processes to help mitigate against extreme elitism manifesting:

- A positive working environment, particularly in the use of de-briefs to support collective learning.
- Strong local and regional governance mechanisms.
- Good training and exercising (including JESIP).
- Effective use of planning support including through APSTRA development and tactical advisors.
- Armed Firearms Officer (AFO) morale is high, supported by Strategic Firearms Commanders (SFCs) being easily contactable.

6.2.3 Existing organisational mechanisms and assurances

Notably, it has been difficult to establish what (if any) differences exist in the formal and informal processes which support our specialist commands, compared to the larger policing teams. Anecdotally, whilst local policing teams share a view that specialist teams are less approachable, specialist teams are seen to be accommodating when an approach is made- which was borne out in HMICFRS observations during their inspection. Likewise, there is some suggestion that specialist teams feel separated from the force. In the absence of robust evidence one way or the other, we should be cautious about interpreting anecdote and might benefit from exploring the relationship between specialist teams and the wider organisation in a more structured way.

6.3 Moving forward in Essex

6.3.1 Future risks, challenges, and opportunities

Cultural divide between local policing and specialist teams. If left unchecked, there is a risk that perceived elitism and other cultural inadequacies develop into deep-rooted issues that are not understood or meaningfully addressed. There are several options that could help with our understanding on this:

- Feedback mechanisms that allow insight to be captured in specific areas.
- Encouraging more frequent cross-command working, with an opportunity to debrief the benefits and challenges as well as to develop a richer understanding of colleagues across the force.
- Routine, effective use of PSD and HR data to monitor the level of representation of each command in complaints and grievance processes. Note that particularly low representation should be explored in the same way we would explore particularly high representation.

Regionalisation of specialist resources. If regionalisation of specialist resources is supported and implemented, we would need to ensure that our officers and staff operating in that space are supported in understanding and adhering to the values and behaviours expected within Essex Police and remain as part of the Essex Police family.

Inexperienced workforce. With an increasingly inexperienced workforce, it will be tempting to retain experienced officers within specialist commands so that the high level of skill required for those roles is not lost. Whilst this would mean that capability within specialist commands is protected, we would limit our future specialist resilience across the wider workforce as well as the cross-pollination of diverse personalities and cultures between different teams. As things stand, the data that would allow us to compare and track the service of officers is difficult to obtain and interpret.

6.3.2 Future proposals

Identify and facilitate opportunities for **specialist and front-line teams to work together more often**, with a view to breaking down invisible barriers and creating a culture in which neither team are suspicious of the legitimacy of the other.

Make better use of workforce data to understand and address trends and challenges in the relative lengths of service between specialist and non-specialist commands. This is with a view to encouraging representation within those teams.

7 *Accountability, Scrutiny and Governance*

There were no obvious concerns about our accountability, scrutiny, and governance mechanisms at Essex Police, with most being cited as effective routes for ensuring the organisation runs effectively. This is supported by positive feedback from scrutiny bodies that we have effective processes in place in most areas. Some concern does exist though about the effectiveness of how we coordinate and communicate those mechanisms to ensure effective business delivery.

Our challenge now is to maximise the effectiveness of governance processes to help us retain high standards and productivity at a time when we are being asked to do more.

7.1 Findings from the MPS

In her review, Baroness Casey published the following relating to accountability, scrutiny and governance:

- A dysfunctional relationship has developed between the Met and MOPAC, with defensive behaviours on one side and tactical rather than strategic approaches on the other; and the system as a whole does not

hold or deliver real consequences where failures persist. Better and more open accountability is needed to restore public trust.

- We heard that the Met had frequently invoked the concept of operational independence, at times to deter further scrutiny.
- The Met doesn't open its doors to alternative views, or to challenge. This is both short-sighted and undermines policing by consent.
- Their internal audit processes are not valued by the organisation as a process of assurance and early warning.
- The misconduct process is not fit for purpose.

7.2 Assessment of the position in Essex Police

7.2.1 Workforce, public and partner feedback

Broadly speaking, feedback from our workforce did not identify the degree of concern about accountability, scrutiny and governance that Casey exposed in the MPS.

Staff and officers spoke positively about strategy and vision (which is supported by strong findings from our recent Durham staff survey results²²), and about our success so far in addressing D,E and I challenges. Employees also recognised strong and positive relations with our Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's office. When staff spoke about accountability, scrutiny and governance, there was a sense that stronger governance processes could be beneficial in several areas, including:

- How we learn from past police failings (specifically, the findings of the McPherson report).
- Developing better processes for sharing and learning from lived experiences and feedback in Essex.
- Being appropriately objective in our investigation of internal grievances (including those of misconduct at a senior level).
- Having clear leadership expectations and communicating them effectively.
- Introducing policy to address specific discriminatory behaviours, rather than as a subset of an overarching policy.
- Ensuring that we are monitoring ourselves end-to-end, rather than only at the beginning or at the end of an issue.
- Having structures and processes that allow better and meaningful engagement and accountability between chief officers and all other levels of the organisation, with a view to achieving high levels of trust and confidence across the workforce.

Importantly, staff were keen to share their views that we cannot be complacent in these issues- which itself requires strong accountability, scrutiny and governance.

²² Essex Police staff were found to have the highest level of vision clarity than all other forces surveyed.

7.2.2 What the evidence says about Essex Police

Without listing the wide-ranging governance, scrutiny and accountability mechanisms embedded across the organisation, our audit and inspection findings provide rich insight and reassurance about the adequacy of those processes for addressing a number of the themes covered in the Casey review:

External audit findings:

- **Overtime** (links to resourcing) – **Substantial Assurance** including in the use of the Resource Management Unit, and specifically the governance around approving and allocating overtime.
- **Community Safety Partnerships** – (links to community understanding) - **Reasonable Assurance** including an assessment of how the force ensures compliance with statutory requirements, our assessment of the benefits delivered through the CSPs, how the CSPs are operating, and the influence of the force on delivery of Essex Police priorities.
- **Independent Advisory Groups** (links to community understanding) – **Reasonable Assurance** including on how Independent Advisory Groups are formed, their aims, objectives, and activities, and how they demonstrate value delivered against those aims and objectives.
- **Communications** (links to community engagement) - **Reasonable Assurance** including on our compliance with our own communications policies and protocols.
- **Risk Management** (links to business model and management) - **Reasonable Assurance** including an assessment of our application of newly introduced risk scoring mechanisms and whether risks are managed effectively by their risk owners in line with policy and best practice.
- **Stop and Search** (links to community understanding) - **Reasonable Assurance** including in our use of stop and search in a proportionate and legitimate manner, and the engagement that the force has with communities to provide assurance on those activities.
- **Governance – Board Structure and Internal Inspections** - **Reasonable assurance** specifically relating to adequate and well-structured governance processes and the role of the continuous improvement team in ensuring best application of process and procedure.

In addition, our most recent PEEL inspection findings highlight an ‘**effective strategic planning and performance management framework**’ alongside effective join-up between the Police and Crime Plan, force priorities and several boards and performance meetings to support delivery. They reported a robust and evidence-based performance framework with a good range of measures and key performance indicators to support service delivery.

7.2.3 Existing organisational mechanisms and assurances

The positive assessment of Essex’s governance and accountability mechanisms is evident in our routine activity, which includes:

Engaging with inspection findings and recommendations. Essex Police follows robust mechanisms to ensure HMICFRS findings and recommendations are acknowledged and responded to appropriately. This includes monthly HMICFRS updates to the Chief Officer Group and quarterly reporting to the OPFCC as well as a strong dialogue between our HMICFRS FLL and force FLO. This is on top of self-assessments throughout the year that are used to assess the force’s position on key thematic areas ahead of inspections or where concerns are raised internally. In addition, from June 2023, the Force Performance Board will act as the arbitrating platform for closing tier 1 and 2 HMICFRS recommendations. Together, these mechanisms enable us to work transparently and collegially with HMICFRS to improve where necessary, whilst also being able to share best practice when appropriate.

Sufficient internal audit processes. To complement our engagement with inspection activity, Essex Police engage in equally robust audit processes, coordinated by our continuous improvement team and undertaken by independent external audit bodies. A schedule of audits is agreed for each financial year which reflects the areas of business that are either in need of a refreshed audit or where we have chosen to focus based on internal concerns. The findings of the audit activity inform the Joint Audit Committee (which comprises of a chair and four members appointed jointly by the PFCC and the Chief Constable, but who are independent of the PFCC, and Chief Constable). The committee considers findings of internal audit reports (or their summaries), the assurance provided, and the adequacy of the response by the Chief Constable. The force provides an update on the progress against outstanding management actions from internal audits to each quarterly meeting.

Risk management. Any risk which is identified either through external inspections and audits or through our own monitoring activity is assigned a senior responsible owner and tracked through our Risk STAR chamber to ensure that appropriate and effective action is being taken and that the risk owner and business area are held to account. The risk STAR chamber convenes every quarter, and progress is monitored through the six-monthly Joint Audit Committee.

Effective working relationship with the OPFCC. Essex police enjoy an incredibly supportive and open relationship with the OPFCC, who are informed of any issues and risks as soon as practicable and who have a seat at the table of a number of key meetings. This allows us to be joined up on our approach to challenges, including those from central government.

7.3 Moving forward in Essex

7.3.1 Future risks, challenges, and opportunities

Arguably the most significant challenge facing all police forces is the degree to which scrutiny is increasing from central government. Driven largely by new strategies and initiatives, which require evidence of implementation and effectiveness, there is a risk that forces' abilities to satisfy those requirements stifles the effectiveness of their own internal scrutiny and governance processes. More acutely, there is a risk that increasing centralised scrutiny will begin to challenge the operational independence of Chief Constables.

7.3.2 Future options

Develop our business mapping capability to build a clear understanding of how internal and external governance and accountability operates around priority business. This will be beneficial for accommodating an increasing number of new requirements, or for identify gaps in our existing processes. A piece of work to develop a business mapping capability is being scoped within the Continuous Improvement and Analytics directorate.

The importance of a **clear leadership strategy** was highlighted within our workforce feedback as a key driver of effective governance and accountability. By ensuring every employee knows how their role contributes to the overall operations of Essex Police, and how they contribute to effective accountability and governance will be key to a refreshed leadership strategy in due course.

8 *Misconduct and Grievances*

Workforce sentiment is split, with strong feeling in places that the misconduct and grievance process is ineffective, including the role of managers in identifying and addressing concerns. Others have shared positive experiences of being listened to and having their concerns addressed, which is supported by independent findings that our culture and processes are conducive to effective misconduct and grievance management. However, we are lacking the evidence to determine this one way or the other.

Our challenge now is to improve the confidence of our workforce to report into and trust that the processes which deal with grievances and misconduct will resolve them effectively and in a timely manner.

8.1 Findings from the MPS

Baroness Casey concluded that the misconduct and grievance processes within the MPS are flawed, among the published findings:

- The prevailing culture in the Met does not encourage reporting of wrong-doing, rather those who experience it fear the consequences of being ostracised, moved or removed for speaking out.
- The Met's internal misconduct process takes too long, is worse with regard to sexual misconduct, fails to spot patterns of poor behaviour, results in allegations being more likely to be dismissed than acted on, places a heavy burden on those raising concerns and has racial disparity across the system... with white officers dealt with less harshly than Black or Asian officers.
- Black and Asian officers and staff are far more likely than their White colleagues to raise a grievance. In particular, Black officers and staff are twice as likely as their White colleagues to raise a grievance.

8.2 Assessment of the position in Essex Police

8.2.1 Workforce, public and partner feedback

The issue of grievances and misconduct attracted some of the strongest sentiments from the workforce in Essex Police, particularly the way PSD conduct internal investigations. Importantly, those who expressed their concerns also highlighted that the subsequent lack of trust and confidence that some of the workforce feel is similar to the sentiments of the workforce in the MPS.

For some employees, there is a reluctance to report concerning behaviour to PSD for fear of the wrong action being taken (for instance, the subject being moved as opposed to the behaviour being addressed) which has led to concerns over the proportionality and consistency of PSD investigations and mistrust caused by a perceived lack of rationale or transparency around PSD outcomes.

As well as the impact of an internal investigation on an employee's wellbeing, the feedback from our workforce highlighted the importance of treating victims of internal misconduct in the same way we aspire to treat all other victims- ensuring there is parity in our code of practice for all victims.

Finally, the importance of the first line manager role in dealing with misconduct was acknowledged by our workforce, and reinforces the support we need to provide to staff and officers in those leadership positions, particularly those that are relatively new in service themselves. Equipping first-line managers with the skills and understanding to identify and respond to misconduct, whether they see it themselves or it is reported to them by others, is crucial for repairing the confidence of the wider workforce in this area.

8.2.2 What the evidence says about Essex Police

Positive 'speaking out' culture:

From the strength of feedback, it is clear there are concerns we need to understand in more depth, and which indicate that we are not immune to Casey's findings- specifically, we need to ensure we hear and acknowledge the discrimination experienced by some of our employees²³. And whilst it is reassuring that our workforce feel that they are in an environment where they can safely raise concerns to their line management and feel supported by the organisation²⁴, this is lower for reporting to PSD²⁵.

Reassuringly, our long-standing relationship with Durham university has allowed us to track these sentiments over several years, with our most recent staff survey indicating that the underlying culture within Essex Police is one which encourages staff to speak out, as well as one which is seen to address concerns when they are raised. The results show that our workforce identified strong ethical leadership from line managers across the force and the positive impact this has on team inclusivity, internal motivation to treat others with respect, higher levels of engagement and lower frequencies of experiencing hindrance stressors. This indicates that when our staff speak out, line managers work to resolve any issues identified.

Adequate processes:

Essex police received positive feedback from an HMICFRS-led inspection into vetting and counter corruption functions, with key findings which include:

- Staff and officers feel they are supported effectively after reporting sexual misconduct.
- Processes are in place which encourage and demonstrate proactive identification of concerning behaviour, which is then communicated effectively between key commands (vetting, HR, counter corruption) for monitoring or to address.
- The counter corruption unit were seen to routinely develop their intelligence on concerning individuals beyond the initial allegation to ensure we satisfy investigative thresholds.
- The decisions of the vetting manager in all cases reviewed during the inspection were supported by HMICFRS inspectors, indicating a consistent and fair decision-making process.

Representation of black employees in the misconduct process:

Whilst the findings from the vetting and CCU HMICFRS inspection did not highlight any discrimination within the misconduct process, it is difficult to establish this within the data itself because of the relatively low numbers of

²³ Our internal VAWG survey found that 16% of female respondents reported being a victim of attitudes and behaviours of a VAWG nature between 2020 and 2022.

²⁴ 89% of respondents to the VAWG survey reported feeling comfortable raising concerns of a VAWG nature to their line management, whilst 84% reported that they would feel supported by the organisation if they were to do so.

²⁵ By comparison, 63% felt they would be comfortable reporting behaviours and attitudes of a VAWG nature to PSD.

ethnic minority employees within the misconduct process at one time²⁶. However, data available from the Home Office would indicate that Essex does not have higher rates of black officers under misconduct investigation than nationally²⁷. Data for the MPS was not available for the same comparison, but the analysis used by Casey for her report shows that in the MPS, black officers were almost twice as likely to be the subject of a misconduct allegation than their white peers²⁸.

In addition, and although not a misconduct matter, HMICFRS findings also highlight the steps taken by Essex Police to ensure that individuals from an ethnic minority background are supported throughout the vetting process. This reflects our low tolerance for discrimination within that process specifically as well as our awareness of the potential for it to occur.

8.2.3 existing organisational mechanisms and assurances

Strategy: In May 2022, Essex Police launched its new 2022–2025 Professionalism Strategy, which is supported by a Professionalism Delivery Plan and a clear set of Supervisory Standards. The strategy is complemented by existing policy relating to discipline, standards, and whistleblowing as well as the introduction of an anonymous email reporting line into PSD. Essex Police have also invested in a Professionalism Engagement Team to educate the workforce further and to build confidence in identifying and challenging inappropriate behaviour quickly and effectively.

Governance: The ethics committee introduced in 2017 is still active and is strengthened by the participation of our PSD in a Regional Ethics Board as well as our internal ‘Learning the Lessons’ board which brings together the College of Policing, force legal representatives, HR, continuous improvement teams and PSD to consider common themes featuring in complaints and misconduct matters. Additionally, the Integrity and Anti-Corruption Board chaired by the Deputy Chief Constable meets quarterly to understand relevant issues arising within Essex Police; to ensure that the force takes a balanced and proportionate response to them, and that we operate within an ethical framework that promotes, reinforces, and supports the highest standards expected of staff. A representative of the PFCC attends these meetings.

Process: Essex Police follow robust processes for identifying and dealing with internal and external complaints, as well as monitoring the levels and trends of those we are receiving.

External complaints can be received through a number of routes, including through the force control room and the quality of service team, and are audited regularly by the OPFCC. Any complaint which is classified as discrimination is automatically referred to PSD.

To complement this, Essex Police enjoy strong relationships with community groups which provide an objective perspective on our professionalism and standards, ensuring we learn from concerning behaviours and can adapt to changing expectations. In addition to regular formalised meetings between senior leaders and local independent

²⁶ Of the finalised PSD cases for 2022, 9 out of 149 investigations involved an ethnic minority officers. There were 2 black officers under a PSD investigation out of 13 black officers in workforce, 2 Asian officers out of 41 in the workforce and 5 mixed race officers out of 81 in the workforce compared to 135 white officers out of 3415 in workforce.

²⁷ 90% of officers under misconduct investigation in Essex are white, compared to 69% nationally. In both cases, approximately 1% are black. [Home Office Misconduct Data Tables.ods](#)

²⁸ [Analytical Report - evidence to support Baroness Casey of Blackstock's conclusions about the current misconduct system in the Metropolitan Police Service](#)

Advisory Groups (IAGs) representatives from those groups are invited to scrutinise our activities in key areas such as PSD and strip search, with a view to inviting the same independent scrutiny over custody.

Internal complaints (grievances) can also be received through a number of routes including reporting directly to management or anonymous reporting to PSD.

These formal routes for internal reporting are complemented by listening circles which have been implemented by PSD, in collaboration with support networks, to provide a safe environment in which employees can discuss concerns before being communicated through the appropriate channels. Specifically, there have been recent listening circles to hear directly about the concerns over PSD and their management of complaints and misconduct.

8.3 Moving forward in Essex

8.3.1 Future risks, challenges, and opportunities

Inexperienced workforce:

With approximately 40% of the workforce with less than five years' service, it is possible that this will mean behaviours and actions that fall short of the expected standards occur more frequently which means it is vitally important that our leaders are prepared for supporting their young-in-service officers. Making better use of our own data to understand the causes of poor conduct will help with this and with identifying prevention opportunities.

Changing social norms:

Acceptable behaviours, and levels of tolerance within society will continue to change as the global speaking out culture continues to gather pace, and social movements continue to represent those causes. As a public service that is increasingly susceptible to legitimacy challenges, it is important that we continue to take steps to identify and engage in emerging social issues, using our existing strong connections with community groups and making best use of the cultural awareness that exists in our workforce.

8.3.2 Future options

Effective use of data is vital if we are to understand our complaints, grievance, and misconduct issues and to be confident that our processes are effective. This is already being explored to some extent between PSD and the Performance Analysis Unit (PAU) which, once developed, will allow us to improve our transparency with our own workforce as well as our communities, where appropriate.

Transparency around PSD processes and outcomes (where appropriate) will begin to generate better trust and confidence within our workforce meaning we might expect to see higher levels of reporting of concerns.

9 *Community Understanding and Connection*

Linked closely to resilience challenges in local and community policing teams, our workforce reported similar concerns to those raised in the Met about the erosion of community understanding and therefore how much our communities trust us. Whilst we can be reassured by the positive views of our IAGs, those concerns seem to be borne out in data which shows community understanding falling away.

Our challenge now is to mitigate the impact of resilience challenges on the connection felt between our local and community policing teams and their public. We can achieve this by continuing to innovate in the way we engage and communicate with our communities.

9.1 Findings from the MPS

Baroness Casey explored the MPS community understanding and connection; among her published findings:

- When discussing austerity Baroness Casey states: Other steps taken to deliver efficiencies have weakened the management and delivery of frontline policing in the capital and its connection to Londoners.
- While the Met has aspirations to engage with London's communities, it does not do enough to make its workforce look like and represent the make-up of the community it polices, undermining both trust and confidence, and effectiveness.
- The level of central direction in local policing, and a patchwork and centrally-directed approach to addressing resourcing gaps, impacts on a BCU Commander's ability to truly 'own' their local area, and to set their own direction and tone with their community.
- The Met's approach to engagement tends to focus on the need for the public to understand the Met and the difficult job it faces.
- The function and purpose of community engagement had been 'deprioritised' and members of the public who wanted to work with the police had been side lined and not valued.

9.2 Assessment of the position in Essex Police

9.2.1 Workforce, public and partner feedback

Reduced resilience in local and community policing teams is a significant concern among our workforce, with a fear that this is driving a disconnect with our communities and compounded by the sense that experienced staff are retained within specialist teams. Whilst it provides comfort to hear that our officers are committed to serving their communities through strong relationships and consent, the level of concern reflects the extent to which they feel those conditions are being jeopardised. Our workforce clearly understands that the levels of disconnect in the MPS are driven by their larger resilience challenges, but the magnitude of the impact which was highlighted in our staff feedback should be acknowledged.

In contrast, the feedback from IAGs has been positive, with representatives across the county reporting that they don't see the same challenges with community understanding manifesting in Essex. Overall, they reported feeling well connected and well informed about local policing and that Essex Police understood the different needs of their

communities. Whilst this is incredibly positive, we should keep in mind that this feedback is a condensed view presented by well-respected and trusted representatives, and that other views will exist outside of those formal dialogues. It was clear that police attendance at IAGs varied across the county which is something we must address.

Transparency and communication also featured strongly in feedback from both our workforce and our community representatives, with both groups acknowledging that there is always more we can do. Our use of data was of particular interest in that context, as was the work of police staff- and how we can combine the two to promote the work of the police more effectively by exposing police staff to the public.

What is reassuring, is the depth of thought this issue has been given by our workforce in an effort to prevent us reaching the same position in the MPS as identified by the Casey review. As an example, there is a keenness to bring community representatives into DE&I training so that staff and officers can hear about and learn from their lived experiences. Likewise, to extend existing initiatives whereby officers undertake immersive development by engaging meaningfully with communities that they are less familiar with.

Finally, the workforce recognises our existing potential to promote our good work so that we continue to capture the support and trust of our public without the need for them to defend their local police.

9.2.2 What the evidence says about Essex Police

Our independent public perception survey provides a rich source of representative feedback from across our communities, whether they have been in contact with the police or not. And whilst we can see some promising trends, we are conscious of the need to understand the areas where we are performing less well, and to take steps to improve.

Key trends that we have recently drawn from this data include:

- A larger proportion of Essex residents believe that the police are doing a good or excellent job than before the pandemic²⁹, however the proportion who feel that the police have a good community understanding is reducing³⁰.
- Confidence among ethnic minority groups and females is increasing in Essex and, in some cases, is higher than white or male groups.
- The confidence of victims in Essex has not dropped in the same way that it has for non-victims, although there is still a disparity between the two, with victim confidence being lower overall.

9.2.3 Existing organisational mechanisms and assurances

Engagement Strategy. The force has an existing engagement strategy written by the head of continuous improvement and the public contact manager; however this is several years old now and may benefit from review alongside the communications and media strategy which was referenced in section 5 (resourcing). Particularly with a renewed understanding of our community demographics³¹, we need to ensure our strategies are well-targeted and effective.

²⁹ 75% up to the end of December 2022, compared to 65% up to the end of December 2019.

³⁰ 53% up to the end of December 2022, compared to 60% up to the end of December 2019.

³¹ Detailed Census data has now been released, allowing us to understand how our demographic composition has changed.

Community engagement activity. At every level, officers are encouraged to engage proactively with their communities in formal and informal settings and by representing the force at local and county-wide events. Alongside the vital role that our Community Safety and Engagement Officer (CSEOs) perform, this not only ensures our public are able to see and speak to their local police, but it serves as a rich source of insight for ensuring we are delivering the service they need and expect. Logging this activity is key to understanding how effectively we are engaging, and a process for this has recently been reintroduced with a view to informing and improving future activity. These logs are in the early stages of development and may benefit from technical or innovative oversight to maximise and future proof our capabilities.

Trust and confidence portfolio. The DCC-led trust and confidence portfolio provides the necessary governance structure for ensuring we understand and respond to existing and emerging confidence issues. Meeting on a six-monthly basis, the Public Confidence Board is a platform for discussing a range of data and insight including our independent public perception data, campaign material, quality of service findings, and public engagement activity reports. The meeting is attended by external partners as well as OPFCC representatives, with certain aspects also scrutinized separately through OPFCC scrutiny boards.

9.3 Moving forward in Essex

9.3.1 Future risks, challenges, and opportunities

Ongoing legitimacy challenges from MPS and others:

The legitimacy challenge in policing will not be easily resolved and is amplified by similar challenges across the public sector as well as ever-changing social norms. As a result, it may feel like we are under more pressure, more often from our communities, partners, and other stakeholders, to do better or to explain our wrongdoings. It is important that there is a culture within Essex police to be resilient to those challenges but not unnecessarily defensive. This can be achieved through positive engagement and transparency which allows our local communities to see that there are clear differences between the narrative driven by the failings identified by Casey in the MPS, and the nature of policing in Essex.

Remembering the basics:

Baroness Casey made reference to the Peelian principles throughout her report, highlighting the importance of retaining close community connections. These connections are at the heart of policing in Essex; however it is easy to be distracted by initiatives that unknowingly draw us away from 'the basics'. We should ensure that wherever we innovate or make changes to our operations, we continue to consider what the impact will be (if any) on the principles of community-led policing.

Partnership resilience:

One of the biggest challenges in policing is the resilience of our partners in managing demand which is shared across the system. Increasingly, as all public sector organisations are becoming more stretched, the demand is shifting and presenting new challenges for policing as the 'last port of call,' which in turn means that system failings are seen to be failings in policing. As the frequency of these failings increase, policing risks being seen as the organisation repeatedly at the centre of tragedy or professional wrongdoing. Collaborating effectively with partners to fully

understand shared demand and to be able to meet it dynamically together will help explain how the system as a whole, but policing specifically, is fair.

Funding:

Baroness Casey identified at the centre of the MPS failings with their communities was an absence of 'front-line' engagement, be that as a result of limited resourcing or because of ineffective strategies and activity. Essex police are not immune to those challenges and to making difficult decisions about officer re-deployment, which are brought about by the extreme funding constraints we continue to face. However, as one of the lowest funded forces per head of population, it is a considerable achievement that three quarters of our community think we do a good or excellent job, and is an indication that we manage to retain a good reputation despite those challenges. We must continue to ensure that community impact is at the heart of our operational decision making.

9.3.2 Future options

Continue to innovate. Consider new engagement opportunities which would enhance public understanding of policing as a whole by exposing aspects of policing that are otherwise hidden but which are key to delivering an excellent service. Feedback from engagement with external stakeholders identified a gap in their understanding of police staff roles which might be preventing them appreciating the culture and dynamics of the organisation and therefore the significant effort from all employees to ensure the public are protected. Knowing that front line officers are only part of the equation, could help with developing a narrative about the commitment and dedication of those individuals which would add important context to the media focus on the front-line.

Maximise community insight. It is essential that we use available insight as effectively as possible to better understand our communities needs and their feelings towards policing. With the 2021 Census data having been recently released, and a rich source of insight from our own public perceptions data, there is an opportunity to do so, and to expand this even further to other available datasets including the Crime Survey for England and Wales and MOSAIC.

10 Business Model and Management

Like our accountability, scrutiny and governance processes, there were no obvious concerns about our overall business model and management, with evidence of effective demand management and organisational decision-making. However, we must ensure we can plan effectively for the future, identifying emerging challenges in good time to adapt our processes.

Our challenge now is to retain this good position but to capture future challenges effectively within our planning processes so that we can adapt effectively and swiftly to changing needs.

10.1 Findings from the MPS

In addition to the failings specifically around misconduct, vetting, governance and scrutiny processes, Baroness Casey also reported failings in the overall running and management of the MPS. Specifically, Casey reports:

- The problem, however, is not its size but its inadequate management. The Met is run as a set of disconnected and competing moving parts, lacking clear systems, goals or strategies. It runs on a series of uncoordinated and short-lived initiatives, long on activity but short on action. There is no workforce plan, no strategic assessment of the needs and skills of the organisation, and demand modelling is outdated.
- The organisation has a 'we know best' attitude. It dismisses external views and criticisms, and adopts the attitude that no one outside the Met can understand the special nature and unique demands of their work.
- The management of people is poor. The Met's processes do not effectively root out bad officers, help to tackle mediocre officers, or truly support and develop good officers ... and its own policies, practices and culture serve to exacerbate the problem.
- The Police Uplift Programme has been a missed opportunity to improve the diversity and skills base of its workforce ... If recruitment continues its current trajectory, it will take at least another thirty years, until 2053, to reach gender balance. It will take even longer, until 2061, to reach 46% Black, Asian and ethnic minority representation – what is needed to be representative of London today, let alone the even more diverse city it will be in nearly 40 years' time.

10.2 Assessment of the position in Essex Police

10.2.1 Workforce, public and partner feedback

It is reassuring that despite the examples of good business management that we have drawn on in this report, our workforce in Essex is alive to the need to continuously improve, and to be able to do this through self-reflection. They are under no illusion that we operate in a perfect environment, which is in stark contrast to defensiveness and denial position Casey identified in the MPS, and means we are more likely to recognise and respond effectively when things go wrong. It was clear that there are aspects of our business model in Essex which our workforce feel could be sharpened, and include:

- Ensuring we have the right **educational programmes** and platforms for embedding acceptable behaviours and improving them where necessary.
- Ensure we are **maximising our strategic planning and governance mechanisms** to be effective in shaping our future workforce and demand management capabilities, and that unintended consequences of structural changes are avoided.
- **Resist moving hastily between priorities** to avoid draining resources in key areas.
- Being active in **demonstrating how we have identified and embedded learnings** either from our own challenges and downfalls or from those experienced by others.
- **Ensure key messages are consistent and backed up by action** at all levels of leadership so that staff know what is expected and what they can expect in return. This includes embracing the 'be the change' ethos, actively promoting psychological safety (particularly with lower-level concerns) and recognising (through actions and words) when the workforce feels challenged or deflated. This genuine, proactive approach to organisational challenge is likely to drive our workforce to have trust and confidence in their leaders.
- **Review and adapt our local policy to reflect the changing demands of policing**, particularly where the impact of new policy is still being understood. Working from home is a frequently cited example, where policy changes have been made to improve working conditions but might also be hindering our ability to identify and respond to behaviours and practices that jeopardise our good work.
- **Review and refresh our approach to understanding workforce sentiment and wellbeing**. A more dynamic approach producing richer insight would not only mean we can understand the impact of workforce challenges in a timelier manner but that employees are more likely to engage in findings and activity generated by that understanding.

10.2.2 What the evidence says about Essex Police

Essex police are fortunate to have access to recent independent findings which highlight good practice in many areas, however these should not be used as the only source of self-reflection and should be balanced against the unstructured insight we can access from our workforce and our stakeholders. Specifically, we can be reassured by the findings below:

Business processes in critical areas:

The findings from our recent HMICFRS inspection into vetting and counter corruption show that we have strong working practices for highlighting and managing risk as well as for managing demand effectively in our vetting services. In addition to the positive findings already discussed in this paper, the following also applies:

- Good awareness of employees requiring a vetting refresh or enhancement, with suitable restrictions implemented, if necessary, until checks have been completed.
- Good understanding of future vetting demand, and timely adjustment of staffing levels to meet that demand.
- Effective use of existing business process (e.g. PDR) to identify integrity risks at an early stage.
- Consistency of decision-making by templatising process so that vetting staff follow the same logic and rationale for all vetting decisions.

Awareness of staff sentiment about the organisation:

Findings from the Durham Staff Survey indicate that Essex Police employees generally feel positively about the management and running of the organisation. As examples:

- Overall, the workforce in Essex police is more positive than national comparisons.
- There appear to be significantly lower levels of hindrance stressors in Essex Police than nationally. This is believed to be influenced by initiatives such as the Chief Constable's 6000 conversations tour where stressors could be identified and, wherever possible, resolved. Essex police are the standout force for this measure.
- Strong indication of positive team environments across the force.
- Strong indication of force autonomy, particularly around speaking out.
- The highest rate of job satisfaction across all forces surveyed.
- A sense that Essex police employ the 'right people'.

Representative workforce

The representativeness of Essex police has improved in recent years, both for ethnic minority and gender representation, however there is still further to go in both areas.

- The 4.12% of our workforce who are of an ethnic minority background compares to 11.2% of the wider population of Essex, and to the previous figure of 3.53% in 2019.
- The 48% of our workforce who are female compares to 51.3% of the wider population.

Well designed, and well targeted recruitment activity from the media and communications team has been key to this success, and recently won an IESE award for its innovative and creative approach. The supportive working environment we offer to our workforce is also a significant factor here.

Effective understanding of demand:

Essex Police have robust processes for monitoring demand and performance which enables effective decision making on tactical and strategic matters. From our most recent HMICFRS PEEL inspection, we can be reassured by the following findings:

- The force understands demand facing neighbourhood policing teams and manages resources in line with that demand.
- In addition, the force understands the crime demand it faces more generally and what resources it needs to meet it effectively.
- The force is meeting the challenges of high and fluctuating demand and an inexperienced workforce within its local policing teams.
- The force's financial plans, including its investment programme, are affordable and will support it to continue to meet future demands.
- Essex Police actively seeks opportunities to improve services by working effectively with other forces.

However, with complexity and demand increasing, we need to adapt to new ways of understanding and managing our performance in key areas, which was also identified by HMICFRS:

- The force needs to improve the time it takes to respond to non-emergency public calls for service and reduce the abandonment rate and wait times.
- The force needs to do more to ensure that routine calls for service are properly assessed and prioritised and any delays in response are kept to acceptable levels.

- Ensure there is capacity and capability to undertake nationally recognised risk assessments (MOSOVO) in a timely manner and ensure that the quality and timeliness of supervisory reviews are of a standard that enables it to effectively manage risk.
- Strategically, the force needs to ensure that it understands capability and capacity in more detail to improve resource deployment and effective management of demand.

10.2.3 Existing organisational mechanisms and assurances

As demonstrated already in this report, Essex Police have strong organisational management processes which are well-established across all areas of business and at all levels. This means that each policing challenge is understood separately as well as in the context of our overall mission, and that effective decisions can be made at a tactical and strategic level. Sitting above those strong mechanisms is a force plan which is clear, consistent, and well understood by employees³².

Particular assurances around our business model and management activity, are:

Operational effectiveness is driven by well-established Tactical Tasking and Coordination Groups; Gold groups for thematic challenges; partnership working structures for shared demand; and well-structured strategic collaboration with the fire and rescue service, health service and ambulance service.

Demand and performance are closely monitored through a rigorous reporting and accountability schedule which includes local performance meetings (monthly), chief officer performance oversight (monthly), PFCC performance accountability meetings (monthly), force-wide self-assessment of strategic priorities (quarterly), force-wide performance and leadership forums (quarterly), six-monthly strategic demand meetings, and the annual production of the Force Management Statement. Together, this means that Essex Police has a continuous finger on the pulse and will be further enhanced with the ongoing roll out of data visualisation solutions which will provide richer, more dynamic insight into our demand challenges.

Resourcing is managed through similarly robust activity which includes:

- Resourcing priorities are reviewed and agreed quarterly by the chief officer team based on an assessment of operational and organisational priorities and emerging challenges.
- A monthly resourcing deployment meeting, chaired by the director of HR and attended by chief officers, determines officer deployment in line with an assessment of priorities and supporting.
- The Efficiency, Savings and Growth board (chaired by the DCC) provides oversight and governance of bids to increase resourcing and, if agreed, ensures these are delivered in a timely manner.
- Risks around capability and capacity are monitored through the risk STAR chamber, with mitigating actions in place to reduce the impact.
- Additional mechanisms have also been in place throughout the Police Uplift Programme to monitor uptake against targets and to manage our activity accordingly. As a result, we have comfortably exceeded our original intake target with a strategy allowing us to always remain close to our new officer establishment.
- Essex Police have also developed comprehensive retention provisions including a 'Thinking of Leaving' support function which is promoted through HR and complemented by the work of retention ambassadors.

³² In the most recent Durham staff survey, vision clarity scored moderately high for both officers and staff and was high against the national average. While still higher than that seen in 2017 for both role groups, vision clarity has declined slightly on average since the 2019 pulse survey.

The initiative encourages potential leavers to consider their options and motivations and to discuss openly with their line managers which, in turn, allows us to better understand employees' reasons for leaving and to consider preventative actions we could take in future.

Employee support is crucial for maintaining a well-run organisation and is at the heart of how Essex Police operate. Among many other initiatives, this includes:

- A Diversity, Equality and Inclusiveness strategy which drives the organisation towards being increasingly diverse, fair, and inclusive for our workforce as well as our service users.
- Employee networks provide support and guidance over a vast range of issues affecting a growing number of employees. These include support for those with caring responsibilities, disability, flexible working, addiction, bereavement, fertility and adoption, maternity and paternity, single parent families, and work life balance.
- Targeted Continuous Professional Development opportunities for under-represented employee groups.
- A chief officer-led staff parity portfolio, focussing on how we attract, retain, develop, and recognise police staff who play a vital role alongside their officer colleagues.
- Evolving policy which ensures officers are able to take rest days owed to them in a timely manner.

Financial planning follows a well-established schedule with reports feeding into key governance boards throughout the year. Monthly finance, MTFS, treasury management, and budget setting updates all feature at monthly Chief Officer Group meetings as well as at other strategic boards (for example at Joint Audit Committee) and OPFCC-led meetings (strategic board and PRSB for instance).

Risk management is crucial for ensuring all other business cycles can deliver the required outcomes and is achieved through extensive activity across the organisations. This includes:

Operational risks and management risks are both reviewed monthly by Ch/Supt, Head of Department, or chief officer owners, and supported by the risk and planning officers who produce regular reports and verbally assess each risk with its owner. These then feature on monthly SLTs and through the Force Risk register.

Strategic Risks are reviewed monthly or quarterly, again with support from the risk and planning officers. The quarterly cycle also supports the DCC-led risk STAR chamber where strategic risks are assessed for changes in score and effectiveness of mitigating actions, which then informs reporting to the chief officer group and joint audit committee.

Scheduled monthly and quarterly activity is complemented by a focus on risk throughout the year in other areas such as FMS production, representation at the NPCC risk management forum, risk practitioner groups, risk training, and ongoing tailored support to individual risk owners.

Overall, the effectiveness of the planning and monitoring cycles at Essex Police meant we were able to deliver all programmes of change that had been scheduled for 2022/23 and to close the financial year comfortably within our financial tolerance.

10.3 Moving forward in Essex

10.3.1 Future risks, challenges, and opportunities

The **complexity of policing, coupled with funding challenges**, means our processes and business models will need to adapt to remain effective at addressing our priorities. It is vital that we work collegiately on this to ensure we are adapting together and not developing new practices that have unintended consequences on demand management across commands. These challenges are amplified even further by industrial activity in partner organisations which puts further pressure on policing as the ‘last resort’ service.

A growing appetite for **governance, accountability, and strategy-setting from central government** is already having an impact on local forces, often leading to complexity and duplicity in our efforts to address national priorities as well as our own. Going forward we would benefit from developing a business mapping capability which allows us to see points of similarity and points of difference in national and local requirements and where these are well-managed in force or where we have gaps in our existing approach. This would enable us to respond confidently to new demands whilst avoiding duplication of effort or conflicting activity.

Attractiveness of public sector employment. The effectiveness of our business model depends entirely on the strength and resilience of our workforce. Notwithstanding the success of our recent recruitment activity, there is a strong chance that our pool of potential applicants shrinks over the coming years as the impact of the cost-of-living crisis deepens and job seekers of all ages, and with different levels of experience, find better security in other sectors. To counteract this, we need to ensure that our recruitment and retention activity can respond dynamically to capture the attention of *all* potential employees rather than targeted cohorts. As an example, and frequently cited in employee feedback, was the breadth of experience and knowledge that we could bring into the police from individuals who are considering a second career both as staff and officers.

10.3.2 Future options

Partnership strategic demand monitoring. To support our ongoing partnership collaborations, particularly in the innovative and transformational space, we should consider how we can improve our understanding of shared demand on a more routine basis. As well as understanding demand in topical areas such as mental health and VAWG, it would be beneficial to capture changes and future challenges in demand more broadly, which would further enhance our future planning capabilities, both as single agencies and as a collective. A cross-system strategic demand group is an option here.

Business mapping. As per section 7 (governance, accountability and scrutiny) an early scoping exercise to map activity across the organisation is underway in the Continuous Improvement and Analytics directorate, which should be expanded to show how we are capturing key workstreams (local and national) in our processes and to identify where duplication can be avoided or where we are failing to address a requirement adequately.

11 Reflections

Essex police do not face the same gravity of challenge identified by Casey, but we still have work to do.

The impact of Baroness Casey's report will be lasting and has certainly remained a focal point within Essex Police in the short term, with our workforce feeling strongly that policing remains a profession to be proud of and that we should do what is needed to make changes and improvements.

The willingness of our employees to engage in discussion about Casey's findings has been key to developing our initial assessments, however this is by no means a complete process. Going forward we will want to explore each area in more detail and, although we may choose to focus our attentions on specific issues, there are some key recurring themes that feature as potential future ambitions, and which cut across all aspects:

1. Use of data and information.

Throughout our assessment, we highlighted the importance of improving our use of data and information to fully understand our current and future challenges and make informed decisions.

2. Maximising employee feedback.

A more dynamic approach to gathering staff feedback (including greater frequency) would directly complement our use of other data and information to understand how effectively we are delivering policing, as well as giving us the tools to be more routinely in tune with the experiences and feelings of our employees.

3. Supporting our leaders.

Across all themes, leadership has been a key factor in how we assess ourselves, but particularly the critical role of our first line managers. We need to understand what improvement, if any, we could make to the support we give those leaders to be highly effective.

4. Learning lessons.

There was a strong sense that there is a time-limited opportunity to be seen to learn from Casey's findings, and to use this opportunity to enhance our 'brand' as Essex police as well as to help re-build the policing brand across England and Wales. Being clear on how we will embed learnings and demonstrate improvements will be key, and includes how we choose to frame and articulate the issues raised by Casey going forward.

5. Understanding our business.

Whilst we already do well in this area, we need to maintain a tight understanding of how demand, governance, and business process interact across the organisation which will support us in effective and adaptable decision making and drawing out efficiencies across the organisation.

It is clear that there *is* work to do, however we should be reassured by the reflections of independent professionals who have assessed us to be an employer who is seen by the workforce to be supportive, ethical, and clear in our direction. In particular, Professor Les Graham of Durham University, who is in agreement with this:

Essex Police and the Durham University Policing Research Unit (PRU)³³ have collaborated over the past seven years to conduct research into the attitudes, motivation and wellbeing of the policing workforce and aspects of the workforce culture. Three force-wide surveys have been completed and Essex Police have also participated in four national surveys.

Professor Graham³⁴ has commented that the results of the collaborative research support the view that Essex Police is a relatively positive force and has demonstrated ability to achieve improvement for the workforce.

In terms of culture, the latest staff survey highlighted that the workforce within Essex Police feel on average high levels of inclusivity in their work teams with a culture of valuing individuals and respecting difference. The force's communications around acceptable standards of behaviour and the need to overcome prejudice are seen as clear. Moreover, the workforce reports experiencing a high average level of ethical leadership behaviour from their immediate supervisor, average levels of antagonism to diversity are low and internal motivation to overcome prejudice is reported as high.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that individuals in Essex Police are highly motivated to serve the public, achieve a positive impact on the communities they serve and keep people from harm. Members of the workforce also report a high sense of satisfaction in their jobs and being prepared to invest their energy into their work, and are prepared to make improvements in how they serve the public.

Professor Graham has been impressed by the forces' approach and efforts to reduce hindrance stressors and barriers to individuals doing their work, and the recent work to improve clarity of the force vision. For both of these measures, Essex Police now compares very favourably in comparison to other police forces.

Professor Graham reports that he has found Essex Police to be prepared to measure difficult topics, interested, and focused on the results and findings, and proactive in their implementation of policy changes and interventions to achieve improvements for the workforce. Professor Graham highlights that Essex Police were the first force to collaborate with the PRU to measure the frequency that members of the workforce experience sexism and inappropriate behaviour and to examine the importance of individuals' motivation to overcome prejudice and bias. This innovative work assisted in the development and successful completion of a national research project in policing into diversity, equality and inclusion.

³³ The Policing Research Unit (PRU) at Durham University (over the past ten years) has conducted local research with 39 police forces across England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It has also conducted three national surveys within policing in England and Wales on the topic of wellbeing and one national research project within policing in England and Wales to examine diversity, equality, and inclusion.

³⁴ Professor Les Graham established and leads the Policing Research Unit at Durham University.

12 Trust and Confidence seminar: 26 May 2023

On Friday 26 May, the findings of this report were presented to an extraordinary senior leadership event attended by staff and officers of superintendent rank and above and equivalent police staff grade, as well as by internal and external members of support networks, scrutiny panels and advisory groups.

The reason for bringing our senior leaders together in this way was to demonstrate our commitment to recognising and addressing the challenges we face in Essex, some of which are similar to those exposed in the Metropolitan Police. And in doing so, to consolidate our position, facilitate meaningful discussion, and to set expectations for the next phase of our response to Baroness Casey's review, with particular emphasis on the role of our leaders in delivering this.

The all-day, chief officer-led seminar focussed on five key thematic areas (discrimination, leadership, misconduct and grievance, specialist commands, and community understanding) each of which were presented to attendees before being discussed by command groups to consider the actions they could take to address each challenge. Crucially, to also consider what a successful outcome would look like and how they would measure that.

Throughout the day, those attending as members of support networks, scrutiny panels and advisory groups were invited to act as critical friends by offering alternative perspectives or by challenging our thoughts on how best to make improvements. Their contributions were invaluable on such complex issues and as a result, the proposals that were presented back to the group by each command were well-considered and open-minded.

As well as an appreciation for the ongoing task ahead, the output of the day was a set of draft proposals that will be developed further to underpin our framework for targeted action and accountability, with a view to revisiting progress at a second seminar in six months' time.

13 Conclusions and next steps

From the insight we have drawn throughout this report, the engagement that took place at our trust and confidence seminar, and from our ongoing work with partners to understand public perception, it is clear that like all other police forces, Essex Police are not immune to the challenges that manifest in the Metropolitan Police. And that it is all our responsibilities, whatever our rank or role within the organisation, to ensure that we continue to develop a culture which is diverse, inclusive, and equal; where our workforce feel supported and listened to; and where our public feel understood.

Taking independent assessments into account, and with our strong governance and accountability infrastructure, Essex Police are in a good position to meet this challenge and to drive improvements, where needed, through the organisation.

This has already begun with the outputs of our leadership seminar and, rather than relying on a separate strategy, will progress under the DCC's oversight of the existing professionalism portfolio. Senior leaders are now required to submit final proposals to be approved by the chief officer team, detailing the activity *they* will undertake to make improvements in each of their commands, including how they will achieve this, and how we will be able to measure success. The proposals are required to be realistic and specific, and to draw on existing policy and practice to focus explicitly on their own actions rather than suggestions about wider organisational change.

Allowing time for progress to be made, accountability against these proposals will initially be through a second trust and confidence seminar in November 2023 where senior leaders will be required to evidence their commitment to their actions and the success of their activity. Following this, existing professionalism governance processes will provide the necessary mechanisms for us to monitor progress against the wider professionalism, trust and confidence agenda, and means we can be held accountable not only to ourselves but to others.

14 Appendices

Appendix 1: Feedback

Verbal and written feedback was collated from several in-person and virtual meetings (listed below), as well as through the Federation survey and informal feedback opportunities. Verbatim comments have not been transcribed here, however are available on request, should they be required.

- Extraordinary Essex Police Senior Leadership Team meeting held on 23 March 2023.
- Strategic Independent Advisory Group held on 31st March 2023.
- Force Performance and Leadership forum held on 6th April 2023.
- Command Level Senior Leadership Team meetings- various.
- Professionalism, Trust and Confidence Seminar held on 26th May 2023.

Report title: Essex County Fire and Rescue Service People Strategy Action Plan Update	
Report to: Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel – Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee	
Report author: Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority	
Date: 20 September 2023	For: Noting
Enquiries to: Colette Black (Director of People Services) 07917 556964 colette.black@essex-fire.gov.uk	
County Divisions affected: All Essex	

1. Purpose of Report

This report is provided for information. It provides a snapshot of progress against the delivery of the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service’s (ECFRS’s) People Strategy Action Plan for Quarter 4 2022/23 and Quarter 1 2023/24 and looks ahead to the next period.

2. Recommendations

The Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee is invited to note the contents of the report, identifying any areas that require further clarification or comment.

3. Context / Summary

Delivery of the People Strategy continues to be regularly reviewed by two governance boards; the Portfolio Management Board for ‘change the business’ activity and the People Strategy Board for ‘run the business’ activity. The PFCCFRA’s Performance and Resources Board also reviews progress on a regular basis. In addition, delivery of some elements of the strategy is audited in line with our audit plan.

In this report, an update is provided on each of the six pillars as detailed below:



An update of activity provide against each pillar of the programme is detailed below. The activity update reflects progress in achieving the Quarter 4 2022/23 and Quarter 1 2023/24 deliverables. The task bars within the paper are extracted from a People Strategy Action Plan dashboard which is used to monitor the progress of the programme. The data is accurate as at 14 August 2023.

All pillars continue to be on track to complete within the programme schedule and we are proactively looking ahead to 2024-2028. Whilst some minor delays are noted, all are recoverable, except for completion of refurbished BA chambers which has some external dependencies.

In addition, as a learning organisation, we review relevant external reports as they arise in order to identify learning and best practice. To this end, during the period we reviewed “An inspection of vetting, misconduct and misogyny in the Police Service” (HMICFRS, 2 November 2022) and the “Independent Culture Review of London Fire Brigade” (Nazir Afzal, 28 November 2022). Learning from these reviews led to the creation of our ‘Safer Together’ approach. The six workstreams associated with ‘Safer Together’ were commissioned in December 2022. The progress of these is reflected in the ‘Culture and Values’ pillar below.

Further still, on 30 March 2023, HMICFRS published a report entitled ‘Values and Culture in Fire and Rescue Services’ (attached at Appendix 1). This report included 35 actions which have been adopted in full (where relevant to FRSs / CFOs). The service’s latest report on its progress in implementing these recommendations, submitted to HMICFRS in May 2023, is attached at Appendix 2.

Culture: Engaged and Valued

Start	Finish	Progress	Task Count	Attention Required	Overdue	On Track	Completed
01/04/2020	29/03/2024	81%	45			9	36
Total			45			9	36

The task bar shows that, of 45 actions that were required to deliver the pillar, 36 are now complete and the remaining nine are on track to be complete by 31st March 2024. Examples of deliverables completed during the period include:

- New 'High Performing Teams' training was created and launched.
- Process improvements in HR Support were delivered, including process mapping and implementation of an electronic Movements and Promotions form to increase productivity and accuracy and deliver a better customer experience.
- Employee Survey feedback and action planning sessions were delivered.

Further to the planned activity, as a result of the reviews referred to above, an approach called 'Safer Together' was launched in December 2022. The six workstreams of this approach, and a brief note of our associated actions, are detailed below:

	Recommendation	Action
1	Safer Recruitment – The police report includes numerous observations regarding recruitment and vetting.	Safer Recruitment audit complete.
2	DBS checks	We are continuing to implement DBS checks across the service.
3	Safe Share - Both reports include observations regarding the ability of colleagues to report concerns.	We have introduced 'Safe Share' to enhance colleagues' routes to share concerns, in line with the infographic below.
4	Cultural Maturity Model – Both reports include observations regarding the culture and behaviours of the organisations they refer to.	Alongside the existing Core Code of Ethics implementation, an early stage Culture dashboard has been launched as a means of monitoring values, behaviour and culture.
5	Mapping – There are 23 recommendations in the LFB report and 43 in the police report.	We have mapped our current practice against these to ensure that we have noticed any insight or learning. This mapping has been reviewed by independent consultants and verified.

6	Managing Allegations – Both reports include recommendations about ensuring past cases and complaints have been managed well.	We have independently reviewed all grievance cases and allegations made in the last 12 months to ensure that they have been managed appropriately.
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Sharing a concern

Supporting you to speak up



 **Helpful policies:** Code of Conduct inc. Code of Ethics, Dignity at Work, Grievance, Wellbeing Matters, Whistleblowing. All policies can be found on the Intranet - HR Policies and Guidance.

Fair, Kind and Inclusive Workplace

Start	Finish	Progress	Task Count	Attention Required	Overdue	On Track	Completed
01/04/2020	29/03/2024	77%	46			16	30
Total			46			16	30

The task bar shows that, of 46 actions that were required to deliver the pillar, 30 are now complete and the remaining 16 are on track to be complete by 31st March 2024. Examples of deliverables completed during the period include:

- Race equality and International Women’s Day events were created and delivered with emergency service colleagues.
- New mandatory training called ‘Inclusive Behaviours’ was developed and launched.

- A new intern from 'Change 100 Leonard Cheshire' commenced work.
- We are now collecting neurodiversity data for the workforce.
- A People Impact Assessment hub and guidance has been developed and launched.

Leadership and Development

Start	Finish	Progress	Task Count	Attention Required	Overdue	On Track	Completed
01/04/2020	29/03/2024	77%	49				49
Total			49				49

The task bar shows that all 49 actions that were required to deliver the pillar have been delivered. Examples of deliverables completed during the period include:

- The next phase of leadership development training was launched.
- Process improvements were delivered, with a coaching app and booking app ready to go live to support productivity and efficiency.

Training

Start	Finish	Progress	Task Count	Attention Required	Overdue	On Track	Completed
01/04/2020	29/03/2024	77%	65			13	52
Total			65			13	52

The task bar shows that, of 65 actions that were required to deliver the pillar, 52 are now complete and the remaining 13 are on track to be complete by 31st March 2024. Examples of deliverables completed during the period include:

- An independent review of the learning system, pdrPro, commenced.
- New immersive training packages utilising Hydra technology were launched.

Resourcing and Talent Management

Start	Finish	Progress	Task Count	Attention Required	Overdue	On Track	Completed
01/04/2020	29/03/2024	77%	45			12	33
Total			45			12	33

The task bar shows that, of 45 actions that were required to deliver the pillar, 33 are now complete and the remaining 12 are on track to be complete by 31st March 2024. Examples of deliverables completed during the period include:

- A new transfer policy was agreed and published.
- An updated strategic workforce plan was published.

Delivery of a new applicant tracking system is progressing but the 'go live' date has been delayed to September 2023 due to parts of the team being in business continuity.

Wellbeing, Health and Safety

Start	Finish	Progress	Task Count	Attention Required	Overdue	On Track	Completed
01/04/2020	29/03/2024	<div style="width: 81%; background-color: #00a651; height: 10px;"></div> 81%	66	<div style="width: 6%; background-color: #e31a1c; height: 10px;"></div> 6		<div style="width: 4%; background-color: #00a651; height: 10px;"></div> 4	<div style="width: 56%; background-color: #4db6ac; height: 10px;"></div> 56
Total			66	6		4	56

The task bar shows that, of 66 actions that were required to deliver the pillar, 56 are now complete, four are on track to be complete by 31st March 2024 and six require attention to bring them back on track. These have been delayed due to a period of absence and a retirement. New postholders are now in place and these deliverables will be back on track from September 2023.

Looking Forward

A review of the People Strategy commenced in September 2023 with a view to a new strategy being in place in 2024. An initial planning session to consider the People Strategy and associated action plans for 2024-2028 has already been held. Full consultation will commence later in September 2023.

In the meantime, a recent review of our apprenticeship approach resulted in some recommendations which are being considered as 'change' activity. These may be included in the People Strategy action plan for 2023/24. If this is the case a change notice request will be submitted to the Portfolio Management Board.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Values and culture in fire and rescue services (HMICFRS, March 2023)

Appendix 2 - Values and culture in fire and rescue services – ECFRS Progress Report (May 2023)

Values and culture in fire and rescue services

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Scope

This report focuses on the values and culture of all 44 fire and rescue services (FRSs) in England and draws on the evidence collected through our inspections of FRSs since 2018. We define values as principles or standards of behaviour, and culture as ideas, customs and behaviours. We define 'poor', 'unacceptable' and 'inappropriate' cultures and behaviours as those which have or have the potential to negatively affect others. These behaviours include bullying, harassment and discrimination.

We have particularly focused on issues that have been seen in more than half (at least 26) of FRSs and are having a detrimental impact across the sector. These include:

- bullying, harassment, and discrimination;
- lack of fairness and diversity; and
- reporting and handling of concerns, including allegations of misconduct.

We know that the culture in an FRS can be heavily influenced by the behaviour of individuals, including those in positions of senior responsibility. We have, therefore, reviewed the competence of leaders from station level to chief fire officers in all services. This includes how they are trained and developed and how they behave. We have reviewed the training given to managers and staff to help them perform their roles effectively. Those who oversee FRSs' performance – including elected members of fire and rescue authorities and police, fire and crime commissioners – have a responsibility for scrutinising services and making sure they promote positive cultures.

It is vitally important that services promote equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace to make sure they are as fair and diverse as possible. When equality, diversity and inclusion are incorporated well into a service, staff feel included, valued and able to speak freely. This creates a positive professional culture in which staff can provide a safe and effective service for the public.

This report examines what is working well, what needs to change and the barriers to making improvements.

To help services to improve and learn from each other, we have highlighted some examples of promising and innovative practices we found during our inspections.

We use:

- [promising practice](#) to describe activities that we found to be working well in a service where there are positive measurable outcomes which have been observed or monitored;
- [innovative practice](#) to describe new ways of working in a service that may not have been formally evaluated but that have the potential to produce more positive outcomes but haven't been subject to any testing or monitoring.

Foreword

Fire and rescue services (FRSs) carry out a vital public service, helping people in our communities every day. But since we started inspecting them in 2018, we have repeatedly found evidence of poor values, culture and behaviour, including bullying, harassment and discrimination, in many of the 44 FRSs in England.

While some services have made some improvements since our first round of inspections in respect of values and culture, too many need to do more. It is well documented that compassionate and fair working cultures are vital to staff well-being, productivity, efficiency, retention and motivation.

I, therefore, welcome the commissioning of this spotlight report by the Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire. It is an opportunity to pay much-needed attention to this area and to take action to improve the values, culture, fairness and diversity of FRSs which are still so clearly in urgent need of change.

We have repeatedly expressed concerns that the culture evident in too many FRSs is unacceptable and needs to change. This led us to recommend that the sector should have a code of ethics. The code was developed by the [Fire Standards Board](#) in partnership with the [Local Government Association](#) and the [Association of Police and Crime Commissioners](#). The Fire Standards Board published the code in May 2021.

Some individuals within the sector have argued that such behaviours are confined to 'pockets' of services. We disagree. In previous reports, we have described how some of what we found is toxic. We have been criticised by some for using this language. Again, we disagree. Our evidence shows that such concerns are widespread, and this report brings together evidence from a number of sources.

As an independent inspectorate, when we believe services or their senior leaders are failing to demonstrate and promote positive values and cultures, we will continue to bring this to the public's attention.

Between February 2021 and August 2022, we carried out our second full round of inspections. Based on our findings on values and culture, we issued:

- [causes of concern](#) to five services;
- requires improvement or inadequate grades to 17 services; and
- 66 [areas for improvement](#) across 35 services.

On the basis of our findings on fairness and diversity, we issued:

- causes of concern to five services;
- requires improvement or inadequate grades to 26 services; and
- 72 areas for improvement across 32 services.

Even services that we have graded as good in these areas have some staff who behave inappropriately. Therefore, the service can still be issued with an area for improvement. Grades represent a snapshot of evidence that was available to us at a point in time. And, of course, inspection may not uncover every instance of inappropriate behaviour, such as bullying, harassment and discrimination. This spotlight report has helped us to review these issues in greater detail and in a more systemic way than individual FRS inspections ordinarily allow us to.

Between 28 June 2018 and 1 February 2023, we received 842 submissions to our [independent reporting line](#) from staff in every single service in England. A substantial number (218) of them related to these themes.

In February 2023, we asked every service to give us information about all allegations of gross misconduct currently under investigation or consideration from the last year. We also asked for cases of alleged misconduct and other grievances and complaints where the alleged behaviour of individuals calls into question the culture and values of the organisation.

The information provided shows that inappropriate language/behaviour and bullying and harassment associated with a protected characteristic accounted for more than half of the cases. Almost half of the case information shared by services related to closed cases. Investigations into some of these cases resulted in:

- approximately a quarter of individuals leaving the service, of which almost half left through retirement or resignation; and
- police involvement in one in ten cases.

Because the responses we received contained varying levels of detail, we aren't confident that this presents a complete picture. We also have concerns about the adequacy of reporting, investigation and outcomes in respect of the handling of conduct and misconduct matters. It is important to note that just because a service has misconduct cases, it doesn't necessarily mean its culture is poor.

Services must make sure that they are psychologically safe places to work in. This includes offering secure ways for staff to raise concerns and give feedback, without fear of repercussion and in the knowledge that concerns and allegations will be robustly investigated. We believe that further inspection is required in this area.

Our findings about two services (Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service and London Fire Brigade) were serious enough to contribute to their being placed in our 'engage' enhanced monitoring process. Our inspection reports for these services were

published in July 2022. In late 2022, London Fire Brigade published a report [Independent Culture Review of London Fire Brigade](#). The review's disturbing findings, as well as recent media disclosures, have quite rightly heightened public, sector and staff awareness and concerns about these issues.

Unacceptable behaviours sadly exist throughout society, and no workforce is completely immune to bullying, harassment and discrimination. But in those organisations with a responsibility to keep the public safe, and where public trust and confidence are so important, it is right that higher standards are demanded. There is no place in FRSs for any person who is unfit to fulfil a role that protects the public. Not only do communities need to be able to trust FRS staff, but in highly pressured scenarios and in a working environment where colleagues spend so much time together, staff need to be able to trust and depend on one another for their own safety.

In recent years, there have been increasing concerns about the extent of shocking behaviour by police officers. Much of this behaviour, including the investigation into allegations of bullying and harassment at Charing Cross police station ([Operation Hotton](#)) attracted adverse media reporting. These, and many other incidents, have led many to conclude that a police culture of misogyny and predatory and improper behaviour has been allowed to develop and thrive.

We reported on the link between organisational culture and 'prejudicial and improper behaviour' in policing in our 2022 report, [An inspection of vetting, misconduct, and misogyny within the police service](#).

The report defines prejudicial and improper behaviour as:

"Any attitude and/or behaviour demonstrated by a police officer or police staff that could be reasonably considered to reveal misogyny, sexism, antipathy towards women or be an indication of, or precursor to, [abuse of position for a sexual purpose](#)."

While this definition relates to misogyny, for our purposes, we apply prejudicial and improper behaviour more broadly to cover all [protected characteristics](#). The report contains examples of inappropriate behaviour, such as bullying, harassment and discrimination, towards both force staff and members of the public. It stated that:

"During the inspection, we heard numerous examples, mainly from female police officers and staff, of such attitudes and behaviour towards them. This was usually, but not exclusively, from their male colleagues. When police officers and staff don't treat colleagues with respect and courtesy, it suggests that they may be more likely to behave in a similar way towards the public and towards vulnerable women."

I have no reason to believe this link doesn't also apply to fire services. This report contains examples of inappropriate behaviour, such as bullying, harassment and discrimination, towards both service staff and members of the public.

Recent allegations against staff in several services, which have been featured in the media, are both shocking and saddening. These have only deepened my concern that we are looking at the tip of an iceberg.

Posts by popular, albeit unofficial, fire and rescue-specific social media accounts appear to portray misogyny, racism and homophobia as banter. One Instagram account had over 7,500 followers at the time of writing this report (though at the time of publication it appears to have been deleted). While there is no way of knowing how many of these followers are current FRS staff, the account was aimed at firefighters, so it is fair to assume a substantial number of them were from services. This is concerning, considering there are only 44,350 FRS staff in total in England, 34,960 of which are firefighters.

While following these accounts doesn't mean that all members hold such views, membership implies support (at least tacit support) for such behaviours. I urge staff to think carefully about the message that this sends to their colleagues and the public. Societal norms and 'laddish' cultures are no excuse – bullying, harassment and discrimination have detrimental effects on staff, services and the communities they serve.

The public trust emergency service staff with their lives and call for their support at times of greatest need; they have a right to expect a certain standard of behaviour from them. As Sir William Macpherson commented in the [Stephen Lawrence Inquiry](#):

“The argument that there is some excuse for poor behaviour because the culture of the Service can only be expected to mirror that of wider society and its behaviours, since that is from where we draw our personnel, is simply specious. We demand exemplary conduct from those we employ.”

It is evident that the development of informal subcultures has led to staff being sometimes expected to conform to certain ways of thinking and behaving. This has led to the prevalence of 'in groups' and 'out groups' – for example, in some [watch](#) arrangements. We explain this in more detail in our [section on subgroups](#). This need for conformity risks reducing space for or recognition of individual thought or personal preference; something we found aligns with the findings of our *An inspection of vetting, misconduct, and misogyny within the police service* report, where some female police officers and staff told us they felt they needed to acquiesce to prejudicial and improper behaviour. The findings also highlighted that people may be ostracised if they are seen to speak out against their peers. As we have said repeatedly, the culture across too much of the fire sector is stagnant and needs to be brought into the 21st century.

The lack of workforce diversity in every FRS throughout England also inhibits the ability to tackle these cultural issues. According to data gathered by the Cabinet Office in 2018, compared to other public sector staff, firefighters were the least ethnically diverse workforce. In the four years between 2014 and 2018, FRSs made the least improvement in diversity.

But FRSs should focus on more than just recruitment as a way of improving diversity. Making sure workplaces are inclusive for all and improving staff understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion will also help them to retain staff and to encourage those with talent and potential to progress through the organisation, irrespective of background. This is an essential building block to the cultural and behavioural improvements that are so clearly needed.

The public has a right to know that not only will they receive an effective service from those working in FRSs but that the staff they encounter are safe and suitable to work, not only in terms of operational competence but also in respect of conduct. Our report *An inspection of vetting, misconduct, and misogyny within the police service* found that effective background checks can help prevent a culture of misogyny and predatory behaviour from developing and thriving.

But currently, there are insufficient standards in relation to background checks for FRSs to follow, and there are no legal obligations for them to check new or existing staff. Although many FRSs do choose to carry out Disclosure and Barring Service checks, it is currently for services to decide if or how they conduct any background checks; this creates an unacceptable risk which must be addressed.

The [Independent Cultural Review of London Fire Brigade](#) contains a worrying number of examples of appalling behaviour towards members of the public, including searching through women's drawers looking for underwear and sex toys during [home fire safety visits](#). We currently have no way of knowing how many unsuitable people are in these trusted roles, especially those that are public-facing.

A recent review of FRS background check arrangements found that these varied from service to service. As a result, we have little assurance that all FRS staff, many of whom are working directly with some of society's most vulnerable people, are safe and suitable to carry out these roles. The [Fire Standards Board's safeguarding standard](#) states that FRSs must "implement appropriate and proportionate processes that minimise the risk of recruiting people who may be unsuitable to work with those who are at risk of harm". Chief fire officers and the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) have, in the past, called on the Government to introduce, as a minimum, Disclosure and Barring Service checks for all new staff; this is no longer simply desirable, it is an essential first step.

Although consistent background check processes may not prevent all unsuitable individuals from working in FRSs, a statutory requirement and a background check standard are needed as a bare minimum to mitigate this issue and help services make informed decisions about who works for them.

Some staff told us that they didn't trust the processes for raising concerns and described a culture where they have been, or fear they will be, targeted because of reporting. This may mean that however good FRSs are at taking appropriate action to remedy concerns, including handling misconduct allegations appropriately, they might miss cases which should be investigated.

The recommendations made in this spotlight report are intended to assist FRSs to improve values, culture, fairness and diversity. Our recommendations are aimed at both national bodies that have the power to make changes and at FRSs. These recommendations and improved values and culture must also be supported by those organisations we don't inspect, such as fire and rescue authorities and trade unions.

I urge:

- leaders of FRSs to accept the findings set out in this report and our service reports in full;
- the relevant bodies to prioritise these recommendations;
- national organisations with influence to consider how they can work with and support FRSs to act on the findings set out in this report; and
- staff at every level of every FRS to reflect on our findings and take whatever personal steps necessary to treat those they work with, and members of the public, with the utmost dignity and respect.

To the FRS staff who have shared their experiences with us: thank you. While it isn't for the inspectorate to investigate specific allegations, without your insight, we wouldn't have been able to write this report. Such insight continues to be invaluable, including through our staff surveys and during our inspections.

I would also like to extend my thanks to those who are already doing all they can to improve the cultures nationally and in their services. To go against the grain can take real courage. Please continue; your efforts aren't going unnoticed.

There are many thousands of professional people working in fire and rescue who provide a great service to their communities. It continues to concern me that some members of the service don't treat each other or members of the public with respect and in some cases, have intentionally caused harm.

It is time for this behaviour to stop.



Roy Wilsher OBE QFSM

HM Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services

Our recommendations

Raising concerns

Recommendation 1

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

Recommendation 2

By 1 October 2023, National Employers, the [Local Government Association](#) and the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) should review any current independent arrangements whereby staff can raise concerns outside their FRS. They should then ensure that all FRS staff have access to an independent reporting line that can be used as a confidential way to raise concerns outside their own FRS.

Recommendation 3

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

Recommendation 4

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

Recommendation 5

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

Background checks

Recommendation 6

By 1 January 2024, the Home Office, working with the Ministry of Justice, should make sure that the Government incorporates fire and rescue authority employees within the [Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 \(Exceptions\) Order 1975](#) so that they are eligible for the appropriate DBS checks.

Recommendation 7

By 1 May 2024, the Home Office, working with the fire and rescue sector, should make sure that the [Police Act 1997 \(Criminal Records\) Regulations 2002](#), or a similar appropriate legislatively enabled solution, makes detailed provisions for fire and rescue services.

Recommendation 8

By 1 December 2023, the [Fire Standards Board](#), in liaison with the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#), should review the existing relevant standard(s) and underpinning guidance. It should:

- clearly state the requirements for background checks undertaken by services;
- clarify the minimum requirements (including levels of DBS checks) for all roles, particularly roles where staff have access to vulnerable members of the public;
- define the standards required to embed a culture across fire and rescue services that empowers all members of staff and local communities to report concerns; and
- be subject to review following any legislative change.

Recommendation 9

By 1 January 2024, chief fire officers should:

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

Recommendation 10

By 1 September 2023, chief constables should make sure they are appropriately using their Common Law Police Disclosure powers in circumstances involving employees of fire and rescue services.

Misconduct handling

Recommendation 11

By 1 December 2023, the [Fire Standards Board](#), in liaison with the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#), should review the existing relevant standard(s) and supporting guidance to clearly state how services should handle staff disclosures, complaints and grievances.

Recommendation 12

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

Recommendation 13

By 1 December 2023, the [Fire Standards Board](#), in liaison with the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#), should review the existing relevant standard(s) and supporting guidance to clearly state how services should handle misconduct and safeguarding-related allegations and outcomes. These should include requirements to:

- conduct and complete investigations, whether or not the staff member under investigation leaves;
- consider whether the incident requires immediate dismissal;
- provide training for staff who are carrying out investigations; and
- ensure the diversity/neutrality of the investigation panel/person.

Recommendation 14

By 1 March 2024, chief fire officers should provide assurances to HMICFRS that they have implemented the standard on misconduct allegations and outcomes handling.

Recommendation 15

By 1 October 2023, the Home Office should work with the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) and fire and rescue service employers to make sure there is a process to handle misconduct allegations against chief fire officers. The Home Office should immediately notify HMICFRS of any allegations and outcomes that it is aware of.

Recommendation 16

By 1 October 2023, the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) should develop and manage a national barred list that holds details of staff who have been dismissed for gross misconduct (including staff who have already left services). It should ensure that this list is referred to in all appointment processes to prevent those who are barred from rejoining another service. After the College of Fire and Rescue has been established (see recommendation 25), it should take responsibility for managing the list.

Recommendation 17

With immediate effect, chief fire officers should notify HMICFRS of any allegations that have the potential to constitute staff gross misconduct that:

- involve allegations of a criminal nature that have the potential to affect public confidence in FRSs;
- are of a serious nature; or
- relate to assistant chief fire officers or those at equivalent or higher grades.

Recommendation 18

By 1 August 2023, chief fire officers should provide assurances to HMICFRS that all parties are supported in relation to ongoing investigations.

Recommendation 19

By 1 July 2023, the Home Office should examine whether any appeal processes for fire and rescue misconduct cases are appropriate.

Leadership

Recommendation 20

By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should have plans in place to ensure they meet the [Fire Standards Board's leading the service standard](#) and its [leading and developing people standard](#).

Recommendation 21

By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should make sure there is a full, 360-degree feedback process in place for all senior leaders and managers (assistant chief fire officer equivalent and above) in service.

Recommendation 22

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

Recommendation 23

By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should seek regular feedback from staff about values, culture, fairness and diversity, with due regard to the [leading and developing people standard](#). They should show how they act on this feedback.

Recommendation 24

By 1 October 2023, chief fire officers should put plans in place to monitor, including through the gathering and analysis of staff feedback, [watch](#) and team cultures and provide prompt remedial action for any issues they identify.

Management and leadership training and development

Recommendation 25

By 1 January 2025, the Government should establish a College of Fire and Rescue, as proposed by the [White Paper Reforming our Fire and Rescue Service](#). There should be no further delay to its implementation.

Recommendation 26

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

Diversity data

Recommendation 27

By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should make sure their equality impact assessments are fit for purpose and, as a minimum, meet the requirements of the [National Fire Chiefs Council equality impact assessment toolkit](#).

Recommendation 28

By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should review how they gather and use equality and diversity data to improve their understanding of their staff demographics, including applying and meeting the requirements of the [National Fire Chiefs Council equality, diversity and inclusion data toolkit](#).

Recommendation 29

By 1 December 2023, the Home Office should publish greater detail on the protected characteristic data it collects about FRS staff, including joiners and leavers, by rank and role.

Recommendation 30

By 30 December 2024, the Home Office should align the data it collects on protected characteristics with the [Office for National Statistics harmonised standard](#) and publish this data.

Recommendation 31

By 1 December 2024, the Home Office should collect and publish experimental statistics on public complaints and conduct matters in relation to FRS staff, similar to that which it currently publishes on police forces in England and Wales.

Improving diversity

Recommendation 32

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

Recommendation 33

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

The Core Code of Ethics

Recommendation 34

With immediate effect, chief fire officers should review their implementation of the [Core Code of Ethics](#) and make sure it is being applied across their services.

The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England

Recommendation 35

By the end of this Parliament, the Government should consider the findings and recommendations in this report when refreshing the [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England](#).

Summary

We have repeatedly expressed concern about values and culture in the fire and rescue service since we began inspections in 2018

Since our first fire and rescue service (FRS) inspections in 2018, failure to demonstrate positive values as well as evidence of poor behaviours (such as bullying, harassment and discrimination) and culture have been a recurring theme throughout our reports. In 2018 and 2019, in our first round of inspections (Round 1), our findings were stark. We found long-standing and apparently deep-rooted issues relating to values, culture, fairness and diversity. The situation was described to us by some in the sector as an “old boys’ club”.

As a result, we recommended that England’s FRSs would benefit from a code of ethics. In May 2021, part-way through our Round 2 inspections, the [Fire Standards Board](#) in partnership with the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#), the [Association of Police and Crime Commissioners](#) and the [Local Government Association](#), established the [Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services](#) and a [Code of Ethics Fire Standards Code](#). We are encouraged that many services are working to implement these.

Not enough progress has been made

Everyone has a right to be treated with dignity and respect at work and to feel safe. While some progress has been made, it is clear that there is more to be done to improve values and culture in FRSs. The scale and pace of progress must improve.

From February 2021 to August 2022, we carried out our second full round of inspections (Round 2). We continued to find that:

- some services need to get better at promoting positive professional cultures;
- most services need to do more to improve equality, diversity and inclusion; and
- progression opportunities for staff aren’t equal, which is hindering the potential for greater diversity of thought in services’ leadership teams.

In our first round of inspections, we issued requires improvement or inadequate grades to half (22) of the 44 services in relation to our findings on their values and cultures. In our Round 2 inspections, although we found that around a quarter (12) of services had improved, we issued requires improvement or inadequate grades to just under half (17) of FRSs and to around a fifth (8) which had deteriorated.

Causes of concern are currently in place in relation to values and culture in five services.

In Round 2, we issued requires improvement or inadequate grades in relation to fairness and diversity to over half (26) of the services. In our first round of inspections, we issued these to roughly the same number (28) of services. Similarly, causes of concern are currently in place in relation to fairness and diversity in five services.

We continued to find examples of bullying, harassment and discrimination in some services

We were deeply concerned by some of our findings in our Round 2 inspections. For example, staff survey results provided examples of bullying, harassment and discrimination in all services. This often included staff behaving towards each other in inappropriate and unacceptable ways.

In at least 11 services, we found evidence of racism, sexism and homophobia and a culture where staff, including managers, didn't always feel confident to challenge poor behaviour, such as bullying, harassment and discrimination. Many people we spoke to told us they felt they couldn't challenge ideas or poor behaviour without detriment and that staff were scared to speak out. We also heard that those who did speak out were sometimes victimised. However, this wasn't always the case – some services handled concerns appropriately.

Some examples of unacceptable behaviours include:

- a senior officer referring to a Black colleague using the 'n-word' and putting it down to "having a laugh";
- two male firefighters joking with a female firefighter that they were "going to rape her" and the three of them acting out the rape together;
- homophobic abuse written on a firefighter's locker;
- no action being taken by senior leaders against reported or witnessed discriminatory or bullying behaviour;
- inappropriate language about female members of staff;
- bullying new recruits and humiliating them; and
- staff feeling it is unsafe to report inappropriate behaviour.

Further examples are included in our detailed findings.

We moved two services into our engage phase of enhanced monitoring

Our findings about the values, cultures, fairness and diversity at Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service and London Fire Brigade were serious enough to contribute to the services being placed into our engage process of enhanced monitoring. We will continue to monitor values and culture and other issues in these services.

Defining the problem

What do we mean by values and culture?

For this report, values are defined as principles or standards of behaviour and culture is defined as ideas, customs and behaviours in fire and rescue services (FRSs).

What do we mean by equality, diversity and inclusion?

Equality, diversity and inclusion are closely linked to values and culture. In this report, it is defined as ensuring fair treatment and opportunity for all. It aims to eradicate prejudice and discrimination against an individual or a group of individuals' protected characteristics.

Why are values and culture important?

It is well documented that staff well-being, productivity, efficiency and motivation are linked to compassionate and fair working cultures. It states in the [Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008–18](#) that:

“They [FRSs] must drive how we treat each other as members of the Service; how we treat each of our customers; how we interact with the diverse communities we serve, and how we deliver our services to those communities. To be an effective Service our policies, practices and procedures must be fair, providing equality of opportunity to all employees and an appropriate and effective service to all parts of the community.”

Ensuring staff safety, well-being and productivity

Our evidence shows that some FRS staff have behaved poorly over many years and that this has negatively affected other staff and, in some cases, the public. Where these behaviours go unchallenged, there is a risk that they are accepted and normalised.

FRS staff at times work under pressure and in dangerous scenarios. They need to be able to trust and depend on one another for their own safety. In extreme examples, the effect of a poor culture can mean that individuals don't believe they can rely on colleagues to protect them.

Providing a safe and effective service to the public

Values and culture have an effect on the quality of service provided. Research by NHS England has found evidence of a clear link between staff experience and patient satisfaction ([Links between NHS staff experience and patient satisfaction: analysis of surveys from 2014 and 2015](#)). And in 2011, [research funded by the Department of Health](#) showed:

“Good management of NHS staff leads to higher quality of care, more satisfied patients and lower patient mortality. Good staff management offers significant financial savings for the NHS, as its leaders respond to the challenge of sustainability in the face of increasing costs and demands.”

While such extensive research isn't available for the fire and rescue sector, it is reasonable to suggest there may be a similar link between services' effectiveness and their cultures.

In our second round of inspections, almost two thirds (12) of the 17 services that we issued a requires improvement or inadequate grade in relation to values and culture were also issued requires improvement or inadequate grades for their effectiveness. And a key finding of the 2015 [Independent review of conditions of service for fire and rescue staff in England](#) (the Thomas review) was that culture and trust are at the centre of many of the changes needed to create a high-performing service aligned with the needs of the people it serves.

The [Independent Cultural Review of London Fire Brigade](#) includes examples of firefighter behaviour towards members of the public that are completely inexcusable. As one member of staff in the review commented: “It's now reached a point with me that I tell my female friends not to let male firefighters in the house. I would advise any single woman not to let them in to check smoke alarms.”

Alongside the allegations recently covered in the media, it is clear why some members of the public might mistrust FRS staff and why the standing and reputation of services might be damaged. No one should feel they can't rely on or trust their FRS. Cultures must improve to make sure that the public trusts FRS staff to provide a quality and safe service for all.

Services have legal obligations

All public sector organisations have a legal obligation to deal effectively with bullying, harassment and discrimination. As far as possible, they must prevent it and tackle it properly when it happens.

This obligation includes fostering good relations between those who have protected characteristics (as defined in the [Equality Act 2010](#)) and those who don't. FRSs are no different and penalties for breaking the law can be severe. Services should carry out this duty in everything they do. This includes making sure their equality impact assessments are fit for purpose.

Culture is linked to discrimination

During our second round of inspections, all but one of the services that we issued a requires improvement or inadequate grade in relation to values and culture were also issued requires improvement or inadequate grades in relation to their fairness and diversity.

As Sir William Macpherson, who led the [1999 inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence](#), pointed out, individuals tend to conform to the norms of occupational cultures.

We cover in the main body of this report how [watches](#), which operational staff in most services are a part of, can particularly lead to the development of subcultures, which in turn can foster unacceptable behaviours, such as bullying, harassment and discrimination. We have reported on the negative side of [watch cultures](#) in some FRSs (which is similar to the negative side of canteen culture referenced in the *Stephen Lawrence Inquiry*).

These cultures and subcultures can shape perceptions of certain communities or those with protected characteristics and negatively affect how they are treated, both as colleagues and as members of the public receiving a service.

This has been going on for far too long.

Methodology

Our approach

On 16 January 2023, we published the [terms of reference](#) for this review. We aimed for publication by April 2023. We adopted a targeted approach to researching, gathering and analysing evidence. As part of our terms of reference, we considered the following specific themes, which align with our inspection framework:

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

We focused predominantly on evidence collected from our second round of fire and rescue service (FRS) inspections and prioritised the services which:

- were issued a cause of concern or area for improvement in these areas;
- were issued an outstanding grade in these areas; or
- have shown examples of innovative or promising practice in these areas.

We also reviewed evidence relating to:

- how services are using the [Core Code of Ethics](#);
- [watch cultures](#); and
- the influence of other factors or organisations.

We used the following sources of evidence:

- our service inspection reports
- our evidence gathering templates
- our independent reporting line
- our staff survey (to which we received 11,486 FRS staff responses)
- our national reports
- our policing reports on similar matters
- relevant external research in this area
- relevant literature sources, including evidence from other sectors
- publicly available evidence on how FRS cultures may be influenced.

This approach meant we could consider in detail and at a sector level both positive and negative cumulative evidence. It also supported the identification and analysis of trends and behaviours across services.

Our findings

As set out in the [summary of findings](#), issues concerning values and culture in fire and rescue services (FRSs) aren't new. We have been reporting our concerns in this area since 2018 when we carried out our first round of inspections (Round 1), and we have described the culture in some services as toxic. While we found, in our second full round of inspections (Round 2), that some services' values and culture had improved since then, the grades and [causes of concern](#) we issued highlight a continued need for change.

In our second round of inspections, we were particularly concerned to find that there are still unacceptable levels of bullying, harassment and discrimination in some services.

Improvements in some services' values aren't always reflected in staff behaviours

In Round 2, it was encouraging to find that many services have invested in attempts to improve their values and culture and that most do have a clear set of values.

Approximately a quarter of services (12) have made some progress with their values, communication with staff and visibility of leaders since our first round of inspections. The services that have made these improvements have seen these changes result in improved behaviours among staff.

In one service, staff talked positively about the service's approach to values and the introduction of a behavioural competency framework. For example, the main staff communications, including the intranet, staff magazine and manager information sheet, are based on the service values. In this service, the new behavioural competency framework and employee code of conduct had been sent to every employee. We saw behaviours that reflected the values at all levels in this service.

In Round 1, another service received a cause of concern for its values and culture. This was removed in Round 2. The progress it has made also translated into a grade improvement. This service fosters positive cultures, and we found limited examples of bullying and harassment.

But in many services, efforts to improve values and culture haven't always translated into improvements in staff behaviours.

This finding is reflected in the outcomes of our Round 2 staff survey, to which we received 11,486 FRS staff responses. The survey showed that 94 percent of respondents are aware of their service's statement of values, but only 52 percent of respondents thought their service was extremely or very effective at providing a positive culture that reflects the service's values.

Services need to find ways to bridge the gap between their values and how they proactively promote them to staff. To make improvements to cultures that staff can feel, services need to make sure that staff adhere to these values through regular use and demonstration by managers. If they aren't already, services might find helpful solutions by looking outside the sector, such as to NHS organisations that are performing highly in this area.

Bullying, harassment and discrimination are, to varying degrees, still problems in all services

We identified examples of poor behaviour, such as bullying, harassment and discrimination, in all services we inspected in Round 2. The services with the worst examples and toxic cultures are the ones to which we issued causes of concern. But there are many other services with serious issues, ranging from examples of inappropriate behaviour, such as bullying, harassment and discrimination, to cases of gross misconduct and criminal conduct. Information shared by services in relation to misconduct, grievance and complaint cases shows that over half involved inappropriate language/behaviour and bullying and harassment associated with a protected characteristic. Some of the specific examples reported to us include:

- no action being taken against reported discriminatory behaviour. This includes a firefighter who reported a senior officer for a racist comment and felt that his account of events was questioned. He was then questioned and told the alleged offender "wouldn't behave in such a way". The senior officer then threatened "to make his life hell";
- a senior officer referring to a Black colleague using the 'n-word' and putting it down to "having a laugh";
- homophobic abuse found written on a firefighter's locker;
- men using women's toilets and women not feeling confident to challenge this;
- no action being taken by managers who witnessed bullying behaviour and inappropriate comments;
- a perception among staff that women are appointed due to their gender, rather than on merit. Several people expressed this view, with individual experiences described using inappropriate language, including "if you menstruate or have a vagina, you're more likely to get the job" and "you have to be a woman to get on";
- staff not wishing to work in specific areas of the service because of poor behaviours;
- humiliating staff during training sessions if they made mistakes;

- staff being ‘shouted down’ by senior teams if they challenged decisions;
- staff feeling it is unsafe to report inappropriate behaviour and that their concerns wouldn’t be listened to or acted on appropriately or confidentially;
- staff being reluctant to speak up about or challenge inappropriate behaviours as they felt that doing so would affect their prospects, have adverse consequences for them or lead to a ‘negative mark’ against their name and being told it would be “career suicide” to do so;
- staff being reluctant to raise issues with middle and senior management, as they were told they would be moved if they did; and
- a watch manager refusing to support positive action to promote the FRS as a career for under-represented groups.

The results of our Round 2 staff survey provide another indication that there is a problem in relation to staff behaviours.

- In the 17 services that we issued requires improvement or inadequate grades in relation to values and culture, we found that reports of bullying, harassment and discrimination were higher. Of the staff from these services who responded to our survey, 15 percent reported experiencing bullying or harassment and 20 percent reported experiencing discrimination, compared with 11 and 14 percent from those we issued good or outstanding values and culture grades to.
- These reports came from FRS staff at all levels but were most often about alleged cases of senior staff bullying more junior staff (75 percent of 1,478 reports of bullying and 85 percent of discrimination reports in the staff survey). This was also reflected in the information we received relating to misconduct allegations.
- Some groups of staff, such as those with under-represented protected characteristics, are more likely to experience bullying and harassment. (For more detail, see the section titled [Most services need to do more to improve their equality, diversity and inclusion](#) (EDI).)

Services need to do more to address these problems.

Subgroups, including watches, can foster unacceptable behaviours and poor cultures

We have seen and heard the potentially damaging effects of subgroups and subcultures within FRSs leading to the development of significant ‘in groups’ and ‘out groups’. The example of [watch cultures](#) is covered below. Other examples identified during our inspections, such as the differences in staff experience between operational and non-operational staff are also highlighted elsewhere in this report.

Similarly, Fire Brigades Union slogans, such as ‘member with backbone’ printed on t-shirts and the term ‘scab’ used openly on social media, have the potential to also cause rifts. This undermines the positive effect that a strong staff association

can bring. These all risk harming the culture in a service by ostracising people who don't conform rather than supporting colleagues to, for example, raise concerns.

During our first round of inspections, we expressed concerns about the effect of watches on service cultures. Watches are common across services and are a long-standing workforce model.

The way watches operate is unique to the fire service and often results in staff working on the same team together for many years. Operational staff work, train and eat in close proximity to each other and often sleep at the station overnight. They are considered families by some operational staff, but they can exclude others and affect individuals not seen to fit in. We heard that it takes a strong leader to be a watch commander who doesn't become part of the watch subculture.

We found that, in some services, watches had created their own subcultures, which were contrary to service values and are impenetrable for new staff. As a result, we found some watches had normalised certain unacceptable behaviours, such as bullying, harassment and discrimination. They were resistant to change, and members of the watch were reluctant to seek professional support out of fear of being viewed as weak.

The [*Independent Culture Review of London Fire Brigade*](#) drew the same conclusion. Examples of this behaviour from brigade watches featured in the report include continually mocking people's religion, taking bets on who would be the first person in a team to sleep with a woman and filling people's helmets with urine. And, as pointed out in the foreword, there are similarities between watch culture and the canteen culture described in the [*Stephen Lawrence Inquiry*](#).

During our Round 1 inspections, we advised that FRSs should carefully review the future of watches and consider the advantages of alternative working arrangements. The [*Independent review of conditions of service for fire and rescue staff in England*](#) also found that watch cultures need to change – this report was published eight years ago and yet we are still finding problems in this area.

In our Round 2 inspections, at one service, a firefighter told us they had witnessed two male firefighters joking with a female firefighter that they were "going to rape her", and the three of them acted out the rape together. We also found instances where new recruits joined the service with a positive attitude and no apparent disposition to certain behaviours but soon felt the need to assimilate into the prevailing culture to "fit in".

In another service, staff told us that the culture in general was "toxic" and behaviours on watches were "pack-like". And they told us that on watches, people didn't always challenge inappropriateness towards race.

In another service, we heard of station managers making off-the-cuff comments and inappropriate banter about female and gay staff. There was an expectation that female staff should make the tea. Bullying of new recruits led to one on-call firefighter needing to move station.

We also found instances of:

- on-call firefighters being treated differently from wholetime firefighters;
- people who challenged inappropriate comments being shunned by colleagues who said their comments were banter; and
- watch managers refusing to support positive action.

Some services have revised their working arrangements with positive results. Other services would do well to consider whether watches are still the most appropriate way to manage teams. They should also consider how those teams can be made more inclusive and how behaviour of the type set out in this section of the report can be eliminated.

Staff can feel unable to challenge or report poor behaviours

Non or under-reporting of bullying, harassment and discrimination is common in organisations with poor cultures. As a result of the subgroups and subcultures previously mentioned, we were told that a lack of action by some services in previous cases led to a belief that reporting wouldn't help. Some staff reported to us that they don't trust the processes and described a culture where they have been, or fear they will be, targeted as a result of raising concerns. When staff have challenged inappropriate behaviour, such as bullying, harassment and discrimination, they have been told they must have misheard or that it was merely banter.

One firefighter reported feeling that their "card would be marked" if they raised concerns. They told us that there was an "us and them" atmosphere between firefighters and senior managers. They felt that the service may not reach an appropriate outcome in response to a grievance.

In one service, a female firefighter reported bullying to the assistant chief fire officer, as she felt unable to formally report it through the correct leadership channels.

In several services, we found a worrying trend of staff not raising concerns if they felt they weren't part of an 'old boys' club'. We also heard from staff who felt others could get away with inappropriate behaviours, such as bullying, harassment and discrimination, "if they know the right people". Some groups of staff we met in some services reported that they didn't have the confidence to challenge poor behaviours, and we were told that managers dealt with reports either inconsistently or not at all. In another service, after a firefighter's reports regarding a senior officer making a racist comment were dismissed, he was threatened. He was told "friends investigate friends" in services and that it was "career suicide" to challenge the status quo.

In another service, the staff told us that on watches, people didn't challenge inappropriateness towards race: "So people lie and stick together in pack mentality, even though they know it's wrong, as they're afraid of being ostracised."

We found evidence of low trust in grievance processes in 13 services. In one service, we were told the main reasons for staff not raising grievances were concerns about being labelled as a troublemaker and feeling there would be no action taken.

In another, staff told us some senior leaders didn't try to identify and resolve workforce concerns. They detailed examples of raising concerns with senior managers, with no positive results for staff.

And in yet another service, staff told us that some longer-serving members of staff sometimes used language or displayed behaviours that didn't align with service expectations (we found this in more than one service). Newer members of staff told us that they were willing to challenge this, which has helped to change the organisational culture. Staff also told us that, while the service is trying to tackle the issue, they felt that the culture wouldn't really change "until the older generation retires". However, some watch cultures are so strong that they survive beyond the retirement of staff members who behaved inappropriately. Staff told us of racist, sexist and homophobic comments and behaviours which had gone unchallenged or been dismissed as banter.

Our Round 2 staff survey found that in services with good or outstanding grades around values and culture, staff felt more able to challenge than in services with requires improvement or inadequate grades. Similarly, in good or outstanding graded services, staff felt more confident about how to give feedback to all levels.

Staff from ethnic minority backgrounds who have experienced bullying or harassment are less likely to report it than White members of staff. The results of our staff survey showed that 62 percent of respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds didn't report it, compared to 41 percent of White respondents.

Many staff members who didn't report bullying or harassment said this was because they believed nothing would be done. Services need to make sure they understand why some staff believe this and take action to rectify the issue.

Some managers are unable to deal with or challenge inappropriate behaviours

One potential reason why some staff might be reluctant to raise concerns is that they have little faith in their manager's ability to handle them in the right way. In our Round 2 inspections, we found that some managers didn't manage or challenge bullying or inappropriate behaviours, such as bullying, harassment and discrimination, even if they witnessed them.

One station (middle) manager told us that they didn't feel confident raising grievances, as they believed it would adversely affect their position and future career. Managers need to know that if they raise concerns, they will be supported and that they won't face adverse consequences. Support, including giving managers the necessary training and a zero-tolerance and early intervention approach to inappropriate behaviours, needs to come from the top. Unless managers receive support themselves, they can't effectively support their staff.

One service has heavily invested in openly discussing positive action and EDI-related topics. For example, it has established what it calls 'brave space talks', where sensitive issues can be discussed in a safe environment. As a result, staff are well engaged and have improved their understanding of positive action.

Staff need a secure way to raise concerns

Services need honest staff feedback so they can identify areas for improvement and take appropriate action where misconduct allegations are concerned. If they ignore these problems, serious issues may go unnoticed and potentially get worse.

All staff – and particularly those in emergency service roles where the lives of both staff and members of the public are at risk – need reporting processes they trust as safe, without fear of any reprisals. They also need to know that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated properly and that outcomes or sanctions will be appropriate.

Staff reporting certain matters are protected by law under the [Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998](#). These include:

- a criminal offence, such as fraud;
- that someone's health and safety are in danger;
- risk or actual damage to the environment;
- a miscarriage of justice;
- that the company is breaking the law (for example, by not having the right insurance); and
- that they believe someone is covering up wrongdoing.

Making a declaration covered by this legislation gives an employee certain protections.

There is no consistent process, policy or standard for FRS staff to raise concerns either nationally or locally. This means we don't have evidence of the efficacy of any current reporting processes, besides the fact that staff don't always feel comfortable raising concerns.

Given the particular cultural issues set out in this report and the reluctance of some staff to raise concerns, the sector is in need of such a process.

Other sectors with such processes have reported successes. For example, the NHS in England has [freedom to speak up guardians](#). The freedom to speak up initiative gives staff an alternative route to line managers and encourages a “positive culture where people feel they can speak up and their voices will be heard, and their suggestions acted upon”.

One FRS has introduced a ‘speak up champion’, and concerns have been brought to its attention this way. This initiative allows staff to raise concerns in an informal manner. It has helped the service to see and hear the challenges it faces with regard to embedding an understanding of EDI. The process is seen as complementary to the grievance procedure and provides an alternative/informal way of raising concerns without fear of recrimination. We will consider how well this approach is working in our next inspection.

The police service in England has the [Independent Office for Police Conduct report line](#). Police officers and staff can email or call the line to report concerns of wrongdoing, that a criminal offence has been committed or where there is evidence of conduct that would justify disciplinary proceedings. While a reporting method of this kind for FRSs would help, it alone isn’t the answer to the challenges that surround raising concerns.

Recommendation 1

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

Recommendation 2

By 1 October 2023, National Employers, the [Local Government Association](#) and the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) should review any current independent arrangements whereby staff can raise concerns outside their FRS. They should then ensure that all FRS staff have access to an independent reporting line that can be used as a confidential way to raise concerns outside their own FRS.

Recommendation 3

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

Recommendation 4

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

Recommendation 5

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

Background checks of fire and rescue service staff need to improve to reduce risk of harm to both staff and the public

FRS employees hold positions of trust, especially given the role of the firefighter in prevention and protection activities. Each service has a duty to make sure that its staff and volunteers are equipped and trained to support and carry out their safeguarding work. They should also ensure that robust and rigorous checks are in place to make sure staff are suitable for their jobs.

Services also have a legal obligation to have appropriate safeguarding arrangements in place. These duties are underpinned by the standards set out in [section 11 of the Children Act 2004](#) and sections [42](#) to [46](#) of the [Care Act 2014](#).

But there are no consistent standards for FRSs to follow in relation to background checks, and there are no specific legal obligations for fire and rescue services/authorities to conduct particular checks on new or existing staff. Therefore, despite the above obligations, it is for authorities to decide if and how they conduct any background checks before appointing staff. Greater consistency of approach is needed.

A recent review of information provided by FRSs regarding their employee background checks showed that there is wide variation and inconsistency in approach.

As we said in our 2022 report, [An inspection of vetting, misconduct, and misogyny in the police service](#), police forces need effective systems to prevent unsuitable job applicants from joining. FRS staff are also in positions of power and have access to vulnerable individuals. We see no reason why FRSs shouldn't also have effective and robust background check processes, especially as FRS staff face less professional scrutiny than their policing peers, as there is no equivalent to the [Independent Office for Police Conduct](#).

We also see no reason why these processes can't be applied retrospectively to make sure not only that new recruits are suitable and safe to work but that the current workforce is, too.

The public deserves assurance that the FRS staff they come into contact with have been subject to background checks prior to carrying out these roles. This is particularly important when considering the link between effective background checks and cultures of misogyny and predatory behaviour seen in policing. It is also important in light of the examples of inappropriate behaviour from firefighters towards members of their communities set out in recent allegations.

We welcome the progress made by the Home Office and the [National Fire Chiefs Council \(NFCC\)](#) to incorporate members of FRSs in the [Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 \(Exceptions\) Order 1975](#). This would mean staff must disclose any caution or conviction to the service.

We also encourage services and authorities to consider the need for an increased level of checks for those roles that carry out specific or regulated activities as defined by the [Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974](#), the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975, and the [Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006](#).

Where there is a public protection risk and a pressing social need to share information, [Common Law Police Disclosure](#) gives police forces in England (and Wales) a power to pass information to the employer or regulatory body. However, it was beyond the scope of this report to examine the extent to which police forces are currently using this power to pass information to fire and rescue services about their staff. Chief constables should make sure they are appropriately using this power in circumstances involving employees of fire and rescue services.

Recommendation 6

By 1 January 2024, the Home Office, working with the Ministry of Justice, should make sure that the Government incorporates fire and rescue authority employees within the [Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 \(Exceptions\) Order 1975](#) so that they are eligible for the appropriate DBS checks.

Recommendation 7

By 1 May 2024, the Home Office, working with the fire and rescue sector, should make sure that the [Police Act 1997 \(Criminal Records\) Regulations 2002](#), or a similar appropriate legislatively enabled solution, makes detailed provisions for fire and rescue services.

Recommendation 8

By 1 December 2023, the [Fire Standards Board](#), in liaison with the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#), should review the existing relevant standard(s) and underpinning guidance. It should:

- clearly state the requirements for background checks undertaken by services;
- clarify the minimum requirements (including levels of DBS checks) for all roles, particularly roles where staff have access to vulnerable members of the public;
- define the standards required to embed a culture across fire and rescue services that empowers all members of staff and local communities to report concerns; and
- be subject to review following any legislative change.

Recommendation 9

By 1 January 2024, chief fire officers should:

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

Recommendation 10

By 1 September 2023, chief constables should make sure they are appropriately using their Common Law Police Disclosure powers in circumstances involving employees of fire and rescue services.

Allegations of misconduct should be handled appropriately

There is no room in any FRS for someone who behaves inappropriately or perpetuates toxic cultures. As we have reported in relation to police background checks, some individuals who are assessed as suitable when they first join a service may become unsuitable later in their career. When this happens, services need effective systems to identify these individuals and, if necessary, dismiss them.

We have seen a recent instance where, despite serious allegations amounting to gross misconduct being upheld following an investigation, a senior officer was able to retire rather than be dismissed. This sends the wrong message to staff, would-be perpetrators and the public.

Information shared by services in relation to a misconduct, grievance and complaint case shows that in the course of the associated investigations, approximately a quarter of individuals were dismissed, and almost half of those individuals were permitted to resign or retire. The proportion of staff who can apparently avoid sanction points to a significant flaw in current misconduct arrangements.

Recommendation 11

By 1 December 2023, the [Fire Standards Board](#), in liaison with the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#), should review the existing relevant standard(s) and supporting guidance to clearly state how services should handle staff disclosures, complaints and grievances.

Recommendation 12

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

Recommendation 13

By 1 December 2023, the [Fire Standards Board](#), in liaison with the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#), should review the existing relevant standard(s) and supporting guidance to clearly state how services should handle misconduct and safeguarding-related allegations and outcomes. These should include requirements to:

- conduct and complete investigations, whether or not the staff member under investigation leaves;
- consider whether the incident requires immediate dismissal;
- provide training for staff who are carrying out investigations; and
- ensure the diversity/neutrality of the investigation panel/person.

Recommendation 14

By 1 March 2024, chief fire officers should provide assurances to HMICFRS that they have implemented the standard on misconduct allegations and outcomes handling.

Recommendation 15

By 1 October 2023, the Home Office should work with the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) and fire and rescue service employers to make sure there is a process to handle misconduct allegations against chief fire officers. The Home Office should immediately notify HMICFRS of any allegations and outcomes that it is aware of.

Recommendation 16

By 1 October 2023, the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) should develop and manage a national barred list that holds details of staff who have been dismissed for gross misconduct (including staff who have already left services). It should ensure that this list is referred to in all appointment processes to prevent those who are barred from rejoining another service. After the College of Fire and Rescue has been established (see recommendation 25), it should take responsibility for managing the list.

Recommendation 17

With immediate effect, chief fire officers should notify HMICFRS of any allegations that have the potential to constitute staff gross misconduct that:

- involve allegations of a criminal nature that have the potential to affect public confidence in FRSs;
- are of a serious nature; or
- relate to assistant chief fire officers or those at equivalent or higher grades.

Recommendation 18

By 1 August 2023, chief fire officers should provide assurances to HMICFRS that all parties are supported in relation to ongoing investigations.

Recommendation 19

By 1 July 2023, the Home Office should examine whether any appeal processes for fire and rescue misconduct cases are appropriate.

A positive culture is created in services where the leadership is visible, transparent and fair

How individual leaders behave sets the tone for the rest of the service. In our Round 2 staff survey, 94 percent of respondents said they are aware of their service's statement of values. But only 27 percent of those respondents agreed that senior leaders consistently model and maintain service values. This apparent gap indicates a disconnect between policy intent and observed behaviour.

In our inspections, we have found that services with leaders who are visible to their staff, lead by example and are open to challenge appear to have fewer bullying, harassment and discrimination issues than services with less visible, autocratic leaders. For example, the new chief fire officer in one service has reportedly had a direct positive influence on the service culture.

In services with a clear understanding of discipline and grievances, promotions, retention and successful recruitment processes, a lower proportion of staff who responded to our staff survey indicated that they had experienced bullying, harassment and discrimination. These services provide good training, use equality impact assessments effectively and promote positive action while ensuring that staff understand it. Senior leadership teams are visible and consult with staff.

These services also have strong internal staff networks, clearly understood and demonstrated values and a positive health and safety culture. All of this helps to create a sense of inclusion, trust and support.

We found that staff were also more positive about the culture of the service when leaders were accountable for their behaviours. For example, in one service, staff told us managers admitted when they had made a mistake and were open and honest about it. And in another service, the deputy chief fire officer gave a personal apology to staff who had been subject to bullying and harassment. In both cases, staff felt that this was a positive demonstration of service values.

But these behaviours aren't reflected in all services. In one service, it was clear that limited senior leader visibility had led to mistrust across parts of the organisation. We saw a similar lack of visibility in several other services. This was often attributed to either an unwillingness to listen or to an autocratic style of management. Lack of visibility makes it difficult for senior leaders to create a positive culture where staff adhere to the values expected of them.

The British Army has also encountered cultural issues and inappropriate behaviours. As part of an independent audit of army culture, it is seeking to "reinforce the best and weed out the worst", including extending its reporting to include middle-ranking officers, to improve transparency and identify the very best contemporary leaders to drive cultural change throughout the organisation.

Leaders at all levels of all FRSs should know if they are meeting the needs of their staff, including how they respond to allegations of bullying, harassment or discrimination. They should use staff feedback to make improvements and continually assess how they can lead compassionately and improve the cultures in their services.

The [Fire Standards Board](#) has recently implemented two professional standards, called [leading the service](#) and [leading and developing people](#), which build on the [Core Code of Ethics](#). We discuss these further in the section titled [National work is supporting fire service improvements](#).

Recommendation 20

By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should have plans in place to ensure they meet the [Fire Standards Board's leading the service standard](#) and its [leading and developing people standard](#).

Recommendation 21

By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should make sure there is a full, 360-degree feedback process in place for all senior leaders and managers (assistant chief fire officer equivalent and above) in service.

Recommendation 22

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

Recommendation 23

By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should seek regular feedback from staff about values, culture, fairness and diversity, with due regard to the [leading and developing people standard](#). They should show how they act on this feedback.

Recommendation 24

By 1 October 2023, chief fire officers should put plans in place to monitor, including through the gathering and analysis of staff feedback, [watch](#) and team cultures and provide prompt remedial action for any issues they identify.

Supervisors and middle managers need to be better trained in how to effectively manage, develop and support their staff

Services generally focus heavily on maintaining the operational competence of their staff, but in too many services, we found little or no training about the leadership and management skills that are needed to effectively manage staff. Leadership and management training is an essential element of handling grievances, managing absences, conducting performance development reviews and supporting the development and progression of staff.

This lack of leadership and management training means that managers sometimes aren't equipped to appropriately challenge, or that they lack the confidence to address, poor behaviours, such as bullying, harassment and discrimination. This can be a particularly acute problem in watches, where poor behaviour often goes unchallenged. It can also be very difficult for newly promoted staff, as many services don't provide appropriate or timely training, instead expecting them to learn on the job.

In one service, staff reported that they felt managers aren't always able to empathise. We found that one watch commander hadn't had any training in relation to mental health, despite being in the role for 14 years.

Most services to which we issued good or outstanding grades in relation to this area have good performance development review processes and completion rates. We found that services with gateways for promotion processes showed the most

improvement between our inspections in terms of values and culture, and the processes were received positively by staff.

Also, formal and informal conversations about learning, development and performance are more likely to take place in services with positive cultures. Staff in these services are more likely to have had a conversation with their manager about their learning and development. Services with a positive culture have a better understanding of their workforce's skills and capabilities and how to manage them.

One service has a range of online learning resources. It also has access to external learning providers to help all staff (not just supervisors or managers) to do their jobs effectively. Clear training plans are in place, and it provides learning hubs where staff can access additional learning and development.

Aspiring and current managers would benefit from acquiring leadership and management skills to become more effective leaders. Training to improve these skills would improve the cultures within their services and could include the following:

- inclusive leadership training
- training on how to create compassionate working cultures
- training on how to handle difficult conversations for managers
- specific development opportunities for staff with protected characteristics.

The NFCC's leadership project was commissioned in response to the challenges facing current and future leaders in the fire sector. It consists of a suite of national products and tools that are being developed in line with the [NFCC leadership framework](#).

A lack of leadership and management skills isn't a problem unique to FRSs, and other organisations have found ways to mitigate it. For example, the [NHS leadership academy](#) develops NHS leaders at a national level through a variety of programmes, resources and activities.

The [Civil Service accelerated development schemes](#) aim to develop high-potential individuals to build a robust and diverse pipeline to the most senior and critical Civil Service roles. As part of this, the future leaders' scheme provides a leadership development curriculum, which supports civil servants in accelerating their development as well as learning more about their personal leadership effectiveness.

In May 2022, the Home Office published the [White Paper Reforming our Fire and Rescue Service](#), in which it set out a proposal for a College of Fire and Rescue. The college could provide a central, consistent source of learning and development resources for staff to use to help them become better managers and leaders. But progress towards its inception has been too slow.

Recommendation 25

By 1 January 2025, the Government should establish a College of Fire and Rescue, as proposed by the [White Paper Reforming our Fire and Rescue Service](#). There should be no further delay to its implementation.

Recommendation 26

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

Most services need to do more to improve their equality, diversity and inclusion

Culture and inclusion go hand in hand, and greater diversity improves performance and innovation.

As set out earlier in this report, during our second round of inspections all but one of the 17 services that we issued a requires improvement or inadequate grade in relation to values and culture were also issued requires improvement or inadequate grades in relation to their fairness and diversity. This is no coincidence.

Throughout all 44 services, we issued requires improvement or inadequate grades to over half (26) and causes of concern to five in relation to fairness and diversity.

These problems are long-standing. In 1999 (19 years before we started inspecting FRSs), the then Fire Service Inspectorate carried out its *Thematic Review of Equality and Fairness in the Fire Service*. It issued 23 recommendations targeting greater equality and fairness for FRS staff. And since 2018, when HMICFRS started inspecting FRSs, we have highlighted the lack of fairness and diversity across all services in England.

Progress to improve EDI in FRSs is far too slow.

There isn't enough diversity in fire and rescue services

It is important that FRSs reflect the diversity of the communities they serve to maintain public trust and provide a better service to the public.

But the workforce of England's FRSs still doesn't represent many of the communities that it serves.

In 2018, [according to data gathered for a government report](#), only 4 percent of firefighters were from an ethnic minority background compared to 16 percent of the working-age population. The FRSs were the least ethnically diverse workforce out of the 12 public sector workforces explored in the report.

The proportion of firefighters from an ethnic minority background increased from 3.8 percent in 2014 to 4.1 percent in 2018. This was the smallest increase out of the 12 public sector workforces. It is clear, therefore, that services must do more to recruit and retain people from diverse backgrounds.

One service has introduced a ten-week course which aims to give support, training and guidance to people from under-represented groups who are interested in joining the FRS. It is run at fire stations, before the formal recruitment process, and gives applicants a realistic understanding of the varied role of a firefighter.

Another service is investing in recruitment and using positive action to improve recruitment diversity. It has adapted and targeted how it approaches and interacts with potential candidates and has employed a positive action officer. The chief fire officer is also the 'positive action champion'. It makes sure its assessment panels are diverse so that all candidates can relate more to the service, including under-represented groups.

In 2017, another service implemented an effective and successful apprenticeship programme. The apprentices have been recruited to a variety of roles across the service. This has helped positively change the organisation's culture. In the last cohort, 50 percent were women and 25 percent were from an ethnic minority background.

Services need to be more inclusive to support and retain staff

Our most recent public perceptions survey found that the diversity of a service was a prominent barrier to considering a career in the FRS for 23 percent of respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds compared to only 9 percent of White respondents. And inclusivity of the FRS was seen as a barrier for 19 percent of respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds compared to 10 percent of White respondents. Services need to promote EDI meaningfully to both current staff and potential joiners.

Some senior leaders have pointed to challenges in recruiting diverse workforces as being connected to the issues surrounding fairness, diversity and culture within their services. But representation of different walks of life alone isn't enough. Recruitment isn't the sole solution to improving services' values, cultures, fairness and diversity.

As an example, the NHS is very well represented by staff from ethnic minority backgrounds. In 2018, 46 percent of hospital doctors in England were from an ethnic minority background. But despite this representation, NHS staff still face discrimination. In more than three quarters (77 percent) of all NHS trusts, staff

with ethnic minority backgrounds reported higher rates of bullying, harassment and abuse from colleagues than White staff did.

Senior leaders who are focused on recruitment would do well to also consider if they are doing everything they can to improve the inclusivity of their organisational cultures. Their existing staff who should feel respected and valued are more likely to be positive advocates for others to join.

As a minimum, senior leaders should encourage staff to report discrimination and inappropriate behaviour, such as bullying, harassment and discrimination, and then act on these reports promptly and appropriately. This is one reason why the steps outlined earlier in this report, about raising concerns and handling misconduct allegations, are so important.

While some services have attempted to improve their EDI, including the production of EDI plans, these good intentions often don't lead to actual changes in the diversity of the workforce or to improvements that staff can perceive. This may mean potential staff don't join or current staff may leave services prematurely.

Discrimination is prevalent

Failing to deal with issues of fairness and diversity may have a wider negative effect on services' cultures and if unchallenged, may in turn perpetuate unacceptable behaviours. Some groups of staff, such as those from ethnic minority backgrounds and those who are disabled, neurodiverse and/or from the LGBTQ+ community, are more likely to experience bullying and harassment.

In our Round 2 staff survey, we asked staff throughout England about their experiences of discrimination. We found:

- Of the 11,486 staff survey respondents, 17 percent (1,920) had experienced discrimination in the past 12 months.
- There were higher rates of reported discrimination from respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds than from White respondents: of the respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds, 20 percent had experienced discrimination compared to 16 percent of White respondents.
- Of the female respondents who had experienced discrimination, 41 percent said gender was a factor compared with 16 percent of the male respondents.
- Those who self-reported as disabled, neurodiverse or from the LGBTQ+ community were also more likely to report that they had experienced discrimination in the last 12 months.

In one service, staff told us of homophobic and racial slurs being dismissed as banter. They gave us examples of racist and sexist comments and behaviours which had gone unchallenged.

Previous reviews have found that bullying, harassment and discrimination were a daily feature of some female firefighters' lives. Some reviews have found that women, staff from ethnic minority backgrounds, LGBTQ+ and neurodiverse staff experience poor treatment and do less well in their careers. One review cited an example where a Black firefighter had had a noose put above his locker.

In November 2022, the Home Office published a report on [Pathways and barriers to leadership in fire and rescue services](#), based on research carried out in 2020. The report found:

“Many (predominantly female) staff consider the workplace a very male-dominant, macho environment with some hostility towards women’s place in the service. There were also a couple of reports of hostile comments towards the ethnicity of some staff; some participants, however, mentioned that the culture in their service had improved in recent years with the recruitment of new staff.”

Inclusive practices are crucial to give all staff a voice and influence

Inclusive practices mean people from all backgrounds are able to influence key decisions and processes in their teams and organisations. This results in a wider range of experiences, perspectives and views being available, leading to more comprehensive decision-making and better staff attitudes. Services should take steps to make sure that the needs of staff more likely to be perceived as outsiders or under-represented are considered and that these staff have a voice and influence.

In eight services we inspected in Round 2, we found examples of innovative and promising EDI practice. In most cases, the services have invested in promoting EDI, with measurable strategies to improve diversity. Each service has introduced a broad range of new initiatives internally as well as positive action programmes to improve recruitment from under-represented groups.

One service has established a positive approach to EDI through several staff networks and an equality and inclusion working group. These groups organise a range of different activities in the service and are led by senior leaders. Staff are confident to address inappropriate language and behaviour. They also feel sure that the service will act on matters raised using the most appropriate and open approach.

Services should complete equality impact assessments to a high standard

While services are generally completing equality impact assessments, their quality varies, and some don't seek staff input. By not involving their staff with the equality impact of their processes, services may exacerbate existing divisions relating to EDI. Services should understand the effect their work has on those with protected characteristics, both in their communities and at work.

Recommendation 27

By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should make sure their equality impact assessments are fit for purpose and, as a minimum, meet the requirements of the [National Fire Chiefs Council equality impact assessment toolkit](#).

Staff aren't being trained well enough in equality, diversity and inclusion

Our inspections show that a lack of robust EDI training is directly linked to staff not properly understanding EDI. We found that too many services don't give staff enough ongoing and relevant EDI training. It is in these services that staff rarely understand the benefits of positive action. Some services rely heavily on e-learning rather than using face-to-face interaction and workshops which can be more beneficial for staff understanding.

Services often don't carry out training frequently enough. And, while most services provide some form of EDI training, in some it isn't mandatory and is focused on new recruits. As a result, it isn't always completed by the longer-serving staff, who invariably need it most. At one service, we found that formal EDI training hadn't been carried out in ten years.

Our local representative survey found that EDI training is offered more readily in services with good culture. In services that we issued a good grade in relation to this area, there is a big difference between those who are simply ticking a box by providing EDI training via e-learning every two or three years and those who are providing regular update EDI sessions through different learning platforms and methods, such as webinars, 'lunch and learns' or lived-experience discussions. When we spoke with staff on inspection at these services, we found strong evidence that this training was being well received by them. This is in contrast to other services where staff simply stated they have completed the expected mandatory learning.

As the staff in services aren't representative of the communities they serve, services must make sure they are receiving EDI training.

Positive action is misunderstood by many staff, and can lead to division

We found that across many services staff didn't understand the benefits of positive action. In one service, many staff incorrectly believed that the service lowers its entry standards to recruit individuals with specific protected characteristics. And in another service, staff described positive action as "positive racism". This could lead to some feeling that diversity is 'being done to them'.

Some staff from ethnic minority backgrounds told us that positive action made them uncomfortable and felt that, rather than seeking high-calibre staff, services were trying to fill quotas. One group of staff we met said they felt the lack of understanding of

positive action wasn't just a service problem but a societal one, including a belief that women aren't strong enough to be firefighters.

Some services are doing well to improve staff understanding and appreciation of positive action, but awareness of the nature, purpose and benefit of positive action needs to improve across the sector.

At one service, new recruits are given positive action awareness training as part of their induction. The service has also provided a range of information (including 'myth-busting information') for existing members of staff to help improve understanding. This information is distributed through, for example, in-person visits by the executive team.

Services don't understand the diversity of their staff

Services that view activities to support EDI as box-ticking exercises also tend not to recognise the value of equality impact assessments and gathering quality diversity data.

Many services don't have a good understanding of the diversity of their staff at all levels, including in senior leadership teams. And many aren't using their data or making it readily available. This means services aren't using diversity data to drive their EDI plans. And they aren't clear on what action they need to take to improve the diversity of their workforces. Therefore, EDI initiatives risk being aimless and lacking momentum. This also limits understanding of these issues nationally.

From our inspection evidence, we have found there are a few possible reasons for this, including:

- staff not understanding the reasons and benefits of declaring their diversity;
- staff not understanding the benefits of positive action;
- staff being actively hostile to declaring their diversity to the service; and
- services not effectively gathering the data, particularly at the employment stage.

One service encourages all staff to provide their diversity data, but the current level of declaration of this information throughout that service is consistently below the England level. As of 31 March 2021, 22 percent of the service's staff hadn't declared their ethnicity. This is higher than the England figure of 9 percent.

Another service doesn't have enough meaningful workforce equality data to inform its impact assessments. This means it can't effectively understand how potential changes may affect its workforce. It also can't accurately say how well its workforce represents the residential population, as it doesn't hold ethnicity data for a high proportion of its workforce. As of 31 March 2021, 38 percent of this service's staff members hadn't declared their ethnicity to the service.

This lack of understanding might prevent services from identifying and remedying problems. For example, there are still some services that don't have adequate facilities for female staff at operational stations. This includes female and male changing lockers located next to one another and beds in dormitories only separated by a row of lockers or a privacy curtain. At one station in a service, there are no changing facilities for females, so female firefighters have to get changed in the toilets.

More publicly available equality data is needed to better understand the challenges the sector faces. In particular, more published data is needed to understand the diversity of leadership in FRSs nationally.

Recommendation 28

By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should review how they gather and use equality and diversity data to improve their understanding of their staff demographics, including applying and meeting the requirements of the [National Fire Chiefs Council equality, diversity and inclusion data toolkit](#).

Recommendation 29

By 1 December 2023, the Home Office should publish greater detail on the protected characteristic data it collects about FRS staff, including joiners and leavers, by rank and role.

Recommendation 30

By 30 December 2024, the Home Office should align the data it collects on protected characteristics with the [Office for National Statistics harmonised standard](#) and publish this data.

Recommendation 31

By 1 December 2024, the Home Office should collect and publish experimental statistics on public complaints and conduct matters in relation to FRS staff, similar to that which it currently publishes on police forces in England and Wales.

Not all staff are treated fairly

We found that in many services, staff experiences of being treated fairly are dependent on their job type. Non-operational or on-call members of staff often report experiencing worse treatment than their operational or wholetime counterparts.

Negative behaviour towards certain groups of staff can adversely affect career progression and opportunities for them in the service. It can also lead to poor treatment from other staff groups and, in some cases, senior managers.

Compared to other staff groups, on-call staff reported greater levels of discrimination in services with requires improvement or inadequate grades for values and culture. All staff should be treated fairly and with respect. They should be given the same opportunities, regardless of their role or rank.

In one service, we found there are different recruitment arrangements in place in the fire protection team for operational and non-operational staff. In another, some non-operational staff told us they felt their career paths were limited and that they were pigeonholed. In another service, the chief fire officer excluded non-operational staff from a staff engagement session, perpetuating an 'us and them' culture.

In one service, non-operational managers can't investigate a grievance against an operational member of staff. In another, some staff told us they felt it was difficult for operational staff to raise grievances, as they felt "it creates an awkward atmosphere" in the station. They said that in stations there is a lot of mistrust around the grievance process. This may lead to fewer issues being raised and resolved, increasing the likelihood of a poor culture prevailing.

In another, some groups of staff told us that they felt they were treated differently. Some on-call staff felt ostracised in some locations, and some non-operational staff said they don't always feel valued.

But there are examples of services that are making sure there are opportunities for all staff.

In one service, there are good opportunities for non-operational staff to develop and progress. It gave us examples which included a staff member being given an opportunity to embark on a two-year management apprenticeship qualification. The service acknowledged that, given there isn't a gateway process for non-operational staff, these opportunities should be better advertised. A 'metro map' is being produced to show staff what development and qualifications are needed to get from one place (role) to another.

Since our last inspection, one service's fire prevention department has created non-operational line manager roles. Operational staff previously carried out these roles. This means there are more progression opportunities for non-operational staff, and the service can better select the right people for the job.

Progression opportunities limit diversity in leadership teams

Effective understanding of workforce skills and capability is linked to culture. We have highlighted here, and in our annual and national reports, that progression opportunities aren't equally available for all staff – on-call and non-operational staff generally don't receive the same opportunities as their wholetime operational colleagues. This can lead to services failing to recognise and develop talent. It can also reduce opportunities to improve diversity in senior leadership teams; most female staff and staff from ethnic minority backgrounds work in non-operational roles so this affects them disproportionately.

Some leadership job adverts require incident command experience, which would generally be gained from operational roles. This experience should only be required if absolutely necessary for the role or to maintain operational rotas, particularly for senior management roles.

In one service, promotion processes aren't fair and accessible for all staff. We were told that if female members of staff who work flexible hours are offered a promotion, the service tries "to force [staff] back into normal shifts". One woman had to decline a promotion offer because she couldn't work the shift pattern.

But we did find some positive examples. One service runs a high development potential scheme which is open to internal and external applicants. The most recent intake was two female candidates who applied after seeing the posts advertised at their local rugby club.

In its research and analysis report, [*Pathways and barriers to leadership in fire and rescue services*](#), the Home Office found that staff felt there were few opportunities for promotion. It found that non-operational staff who participated in the research "felt especially aggrieved by limited opportunities, citing no visible pathway in their specialism". And it found that on-call staff and non-operational staff "believed they had fewer promotion opportunities compared with wholetime staff".

The Home Office also said that barriers to progression can include:

"Issues related to personal characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, family situation and age. Meanwhile, other wider barriers were linked to organisational cultures, such as issues related to perceived favouritism in leadership chains. These perceived barriers were typically considered to reflect the culture and attitudes within FRSs and leadership chains and were often seen to impede staff progression."

The Home Office points to several areas in which FRSs could focus their attention regarding talent management and progression. These include:

“Providing greater levels of consistency in the delivery of development programmes, which may be fostered through nationally backed programmes to increase the consistency in delivery and access.”

This is an area that some services have spent considerable time and effort improving, and the [NFCC's talent management toolkit](#) was developed to support FRSs at every stage of the talent management cycle, making sure people with the right skills, behaviours and values are in the right roles at the right time. But when the career pathways for staff are ineffective, and when combined with poor succession planning, it isn't surprising that staff in these services don't think the process is fair.

We hope that the College of Fire and Rescue proposed in the [White Paper Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service](#), when established, will give greater support to services and a more consistent approach to developing staff and nurturing talent.

Poor talent management, promotion processes and succession planning can lead to unfairness

We found that most services have a fair and transparent promotion process, but many staff (49 percent of our Round 2 staff survey respondents) perceived them as unfair. Recruitment and promotion processes are perceived to be fairer by staff in services that are good or outstanding in relation to values and culture.

Some staff in one service described its promotion processes as “feeling corrupt”. They expressed this frustration after applying for promotions many times and, despite being unsuccessful, not receiving any feedback or support. They told us: “If your face doesn't fit – you won't get in.”

Some staff in another service talked about a “new club in town”. They commented that it was easy to predict who was going to be promoted based on who they socialised with.

Perceptions of nepotism are particularly apparent in services where there is no effective talent management in place and where staff development is limited.

In one service, we heard that the promotion policy is distorted or blatantly ignored when individuals are cherry-picked for senior roles. We were told some individuals are permitted to “leapfrog” through the promotion progress. This is despite them not having the necessary accreditations or even sitting the exams that are required.

A senior leader at another service was offered a temporary promotion while a replacement was found. Once this period ended, they were offered another senior position without needing to go through any promotion process. The role they were offered didn't previously exist in the service.

Some services need to improve their succession plans, particularly at a senior level

Perceptions of, and actual unfair, promotion processes are sometimes linked to poor succession planning. We found that some services didn't actively seek to diversify their senior leadership. This can lead to staff lacking confidence in the services' promotion processes.

One service has improved the way it manages succession planning for senior leadership roles. This service has signed a regional agreement to allow opportunities for the secondment of senior managers between services. This is to fill gaps while a full and open recruitment process takes place. The secondees gain experience of working as a principal officer, while the service benefits from a mutual exchange of knowledge and development.

Recommendation 32

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

Recommendation 33

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

National work is supporting fire service improvements

The Fire Standards Board recently introduced its leadership and people fire standards

In December 2022, the [Fire Standards Board](#) introduced two professional standards called [leading the service](#) and [leading and developing people](#). They build on the [Core Code of Ethics](#).

The leading the service standard sets out how senior leaders in the fire and rescue service (FRS) can make sure organisations provides excellent service to the community, built on positive relationships and trust.

The leading and developing people standard sets out how to establish, maintain and deploy a competent, diverse and motivated workforce. This includes carrying out robust workforce planning, having effective policies and processes and developing a variety of entry routes to attract and recruit a diverse workforce.

HMICFRS takes fire standards into consideration when conducting inspections but doesn't assess FRSs directly against these standards.

The National Fire Chiefs Council is promoting values and culture

The [National Fire Chief Council's \(NFCC\) people programme](#) is committed to making sure that the public has the most capable FRSs and that their cultural values and behaviours make them great places to work. As the [NFCC](#) is a strategic organisation, it is the responsibility of the leaders in each service to implement NFCC guidance.

The programme's work includes promoting equality, diversity and inclusion in FRSs, highlighting the values of their services and encouraging open, flexible and inclusive cultures. It does this by working with FRS employers, the workforce and trade unions to identify and promote best practice.

The NFCC's people programme is in its second phase. It is focusing on cultural reform and strengthening leadership, including working on diversity and recruitment.

The NFCC produces tools and guidance for FRSs to use and has started to map the Fire Standards Board's standards against the programme.

A key development has been the introduction of the Core Code of Ethics. The code was developed by the Fire Standards Board in partnership with the NFCC, the [Association of Police and Crime Commissioners](#) and the [Local Government Association](#), in response to our recommendation in the [2019 State of Fire Report](#). The Fire Standards Board published the code in May 2021.

The code sets out five ethical principles:

- putting communities first
- integrity
- dignity and respect
- leadership
- equality, diversity and inclusion.

The NFCC suggested that services use the Core Code of Ethics to carry out a gap analysis of their existing behavioural frameworks, values, and cultural approaches, and to make sure that the principles of the code are incorporated into them. Everyone in every FRS in England is expected to follow the code.

Most services are adopting the Core Code of Ethics

In our Round 2 inspections, we found most services are adopting the Core Code of Ethics, though to varying degrees.

One service has incorporated the Core Code of Ethics into its own 'code of ethical conduct', which has been signed by all staff. And members of the senior leadership team have signed up to a 'senior code'. The service has also laid out a set of behavioural expectations in its initiatives 'a customer promise' and 'a promise to each other'. We saw during our inspection that these initiatives have worked well. Staff gave us positive accounts, such as people being respectful of each other and feeling looked after by the service.

Another service has a workplace charter that incorporates the Core Code of Ethics. It sets out the standards of behaviour expected in the service. It was evident throughout our last inspection that there was a positive culture in the organisation. Senior leaders have a clear plan for the service. All staff understand that having a positive culture is a service priority. Positive behaviours are firmly in place, accepted, carried out and understood across the whole organisation.

In our Round 3 inspections, we hope to continue to see services taking the implementation of the code seriously.

Recommendation 34

With immediate effect, chief fire officers should review their implementation of the [Core Code of Ethics](#) and make sure it is being applied across their services.

The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England should be strengthened

The [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England](#) is prepared by the Secretary of State. It sets out guidance and priorities that fire and rescue authorities must comply with. The Government has a duty under the [Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#) to produce the framework and keep it current.

Recommendation 35

By the end of this Parliament, the Government should consider the findings and recommendations in this report when refreshing the [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England](#).

Conclusion

Implementing the recommendations in this report is crucial for change

Some services have improved since our first round of inspections. And national efforts, including the [Core Code of Ethics](#), have certainly helped bring the issue of poor cultures in fire and rescue services (FRSs) into focus. We also understand that many people working in FRSs have made a significant effort to improve their values, culture and diversity. But the findings from our most recent inspections have shown that a great deal more work is needed to improve values and culture. Even some services that are good in this area have more to do. This isn't a time to be complacent.

The recommendations in this report are designed to guide the relevant individuals and organisations in the right direction. But they are the minimum of work that we expect those involved to carry out. Services and national organisations should continuously consider what more they can do to improve values and culture in FRSs.

Some changes may take time, but for others, there is no reason why they can't be implemented immediately. A joint, concerted effort is needed by every single person and organisation at every level of the fire and rescue sector and those aligned to it. Every single person working in an FRS, and every member of the public, deserves to be treated with respect and compassion.

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HMICFRS report: Values and cultures in fire and rescue services

Recommendations

Raising Concerns

	Recommendation	Progress	By When	Gap – further actions
1	Chief fire officers should make sure their services provide a confidential way for staff to raise concerns and that staff are aware of whistleblowing processes	<p>The service has multiple ways to raise concerns. These include:</p> <p>A confidential and independent whistleblowing helpline, 'Protect'.</p> <p>A newly launched (16th January 2023) helpline, 'Safe Share'.</p> <p>Since January 2023, awareness of how to share concerns has been highlighted to staff on several occasions, including through:</p> <p>Desktop 'wallpaper' since January 2023</p> <p>16 January 2023 – presentation at Managers Briefing for cascade to all staff</p>	1 October 2023	<p>Obtain data from 'Protect' to establish usage which might help to demonstrate staff awareness (by 31 May 2023).</p> <p>Undertake pulse survey to check in that staff are aware of how to share concerns (by 30 June 2023).</p> <p>Work with Staff Network leads to check in that staff are aware of how to share concerns (by 30 June 2023).</p>

HMICFRS report recommendations

	Recommendation	Progress	By When	Gap – further actions
		<p>27 April 2023 – e-letter from CFO to all staff</p> <p>27 March 2023 – included in Leaders Conference</p> <p>31 March 2023 – e-letter from CFO to all staff</p> <p>Various dates – CFO included in ‘Ask me Anything’ sessions</p>		
3	<p>Chief fire officers should review the support available for those who have raised concerns and take any action needed to make sure these provisions are suitable.</p>	<p>In December 2022, an independent review of all grievance cases and allegations made in the last 12 months was commissioned. The aim of this was to ensure that concerns have been managed appropriately and, if this is not the case, that lessons can be learned. The cases that were reviewed included those which referenced bullying, harassment, criminal allegations, racism, misogyny, prejudicial and improper behaviour and misconduct.</p>	<p>1 June 2023</p>	<p>Going forward, all employees that raise a concern will have a single point of contact from the HR team. Throughout the lifespan of a case, there will be qualitative ‘check in’ points to ensure that updates are being given and support is suitable. On conclusion of a case, a series of quantitative questions will be asked of the person who raised concerns. Questions will include satisfaction about the support provided.</p> <p>A report will be provided to the CFO and SLT in December 2023 which reflects the qualitative and quantitative feedback from this approach.</p>

HMICFRS report recommendations

	Recommendation	Progress	By When	Gap – further actions
		<p>This review was received and considered by the CFO in April 2023. Whilst there were recommendations which have been adopted, the review concluded that concerns had been managed appropriately and outcomes of the cases were considered to be broadly reasonable.</p> <p>Separate to this, counselling support is available to all staff and is well utilised. In 2022/23, 117 colleagues used our counselling services.</p> <p>Coaching is also available to all staff and is well utilised. 244 people have utilised this in the last 12 months.</p>		
4	Chief fire officers should assure themselves that updates on how concerns are being handled are shared with those who have raised them. The	In relation to how concerns are being handled, see progress detailed in recommendation 3. A review was commissioned and	1 June 2023	Please see action point 3. Recommendations from ‘Safer Together’ will be incorporated into the People Strategy Action Plan 2022/23 and 2023/24 as appropriate.

HMICFRS report recommendations

	Recommendation	Progress	By When	Gap – further actions
	<p>updates should be given in an accessible way that encourages trust and confidence in the service response.</p> <p>Consideration should be given to creating a professional standards function to handle conduct concerns in service (or from an external service), to have oversight of cases, to make sure they are conducted in a fair and transparent way and to act as a point of contact for all staff involved</p>	<p>received. This has provided the necessary assurance.</p> <p>In relation to a professional standards function, consideration is being given to this.</p>		<p>Finalise draft role profile for a temporary Head of Professionalism who will be tasked with exploring options for creating a professional standards function (by 31 May 2023).</p>
5	<p>Chief fire officers should make sure they provide accessible information for all staff and members of the public on how they can raise concerns and access confidential support (including through external agencies). Chief fire</p>	<p>Information is available for all staff about how they raise concerns and access confidential support (see evidence referred to for recommendation 1).</p> <p>Information is available for the public on how they can raise concerns. This information is accessible and ‘two clicks’ from the</p>	1 June 2023	<p>The PFCC’s website does not currently detail how Fire and Rescue related complaints will be responded to (to be discussed by 31 May 2023).</p> <p>Public perception survey to include a question about whether members of the public know how to raise concerns (by 31 December 2023).</p>

HMICFRS report recommendations

	Recommendation	Progress	By When	Gap – further actions
	officers should also make sure accessible information is provided on how concerns and allegations will be investigated in a way that ensures confidentiality and is independent of the alleged perpetrator.	main ECFRS webpage. This includes a statement about confidentiality. Our annual report also details how concerns can be raised.		

Background checks

	Recommendation	Progress	By When	Gap
9	<p>Chief fire officers should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> immediately review their current background checks arrangements and make sure that suitable and sufficient background checks are in place to safeguard their staff and communities they serve; and make sure that appropriate DBS check 	<p>In relation to background checks, a full Safer Recruitment audit was carried out with feedback provided on 1 March 2023. This resulted in some recommendations which have been implemented.</p> <p>On 9 August 2022, the CFO and SLT approved an approach to requesting basic DBS checks for all FRA staff and representatives of the service.</p>	1 January 2024	<p>Continue with implementation of additional DBS checks (CFO and SLT to be provided with an update on 12 July 2023).</p> <p>By 31 March 2024, all members of staff will have a DBS check.</p>

HMICFRS report recommendations

	Recommendation	Progress	By When	Gap
	requests have been submitted for all existing, new staff, and volunteers, according to their roles as identified by the Fire Standards Board	On 15 November 2022, an implementation plan was approved by the CFO and SLT. This began with a consultation period which concluded on 28 April 2023. Implementation is proceeding as planned.		
10	Chief constables should make sure they are appropriately using their Common Law Police Disclosure powers in circumstances involving employees of fire and rescue services.	In January 2022, the CFO and the Chief Constable agreed use of common law police disclosure powers. These have been used appropriately since then for cases where there is substantial public interest. A presumption to disclose convictions and other information to relevant parties, unless there are exceptional reasons not to do so, is considered lawful. We are notified in relation to all recordable convictions, cautions, reprimands, and final warnings unless there are exceptional, reasons which make it inappropriate to do so.	1 September 2023	No further actions required.

Misconduct Handling

	Recommendation	Progress	By When	Gap
12	Chief fire officers should provide assurances to HMICFRS that they have implemented the standard on staff disclosure, complaint and grievance handling.	This standard has not yet been developed or published. We will implement the standard as soon as it is available.	1 March 2024	N/a
14	Chief fire officers should provide assurances to HMICFRS that they have implemented the standard on misconduct allegations and outcomes handling.	This standard has not yet been developed or published. We will implement the standard as soon as it is available.	1 March 2024	N/a
17	Chief fire officers should notify HMICFRS of any allegations that have the potential to constitute staff gross misconduct that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • involve allegations of a criminal nature that have 	As requested by HMICFRS, an initial notification was made on 14 February 2023. Since that date, further notifications have been made as allegations which meet the stated criteria have arisen.	Immediately	No further action required.

HMICFRS report recommendations

	Recommendation	Progress	By When	Gap
	the potential to affect public confidence in FRSs; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are of a serious nature; or • relate to assistant chief fire officers or those at equivalent or higher grades. 			
18	Chief fire officers should provide assurances to HMICFRS that all parties are supported in relation to ongoing investigations.	Existing support is in place as detailed in response to recommendation 3.	1 August 2023	As with recommendation 3. In addition, work will be undertaken with staff networks to understand whether any different or further support would be welcomed (by 30 June 2023). Safer Together recommendations to be included in People Strategy Action Plan 2022/23 and 2023/24 as required.

Leadership

	Recommendation	Progress	By When	Gap
20	Chief fire officers should have plans in place to ensure they meet the Fire Standards Board's leading	Actions relating to both Fire Standards to be provided to Continuous Improvement Board by 1 September 2023.	1 June 2023	Actions relating to both Fire Standards to be provided to Continuous Improvement Board by 1 September 2023.

HMICFRS report recommendations

	Recommendation	Progress	By When	Gap
	the service standard and its leading and developing people standard.			
21	Chief fire officers should make sure there is a full, 360-degree feedback process in place for all senior leaders and managers (assistant chief fire officer equivalent and above) in service.	<p>360-degree feedback is regularly used as a development and feedback tool throughout the organisation. We utilise a tool called TLQ-360 and support delivery of feedback with coaching sessions to support the transformation of feedback to action.</p> <p>360-degree feedback has been used 62 times in the last 12 months. The Service Leadership Team last had formalised 360 feedback in 2020.</p>	1 June 2023	<p>360-feedback, using the existing TLQ 360 tool, will be utilised by all members of SLT within the organisation by 1 October 2023 (mid-year appraisal time). Feedback will be supported by both group and individual coaching (by 1 December 2023).</p> <p>Next level to be complete by 31 March 2024.</p>
22	Chief fire officers should make sure there is a full, 360-degree feedback process in place for all other leaders and managers in service. The process should include gathering feedback from a wide range of sources including colleagues and direct reports	As above, TLQ-360 is in place and regularly utilised.	1 September 2023	<p>360-feedback, using the existing TLQ 360 tool will be utilised by 1 October 2023 (mid-year appraisal time). Feedback will be supported by both group and individual coaching (by 31 March 2024).</p> <p>The rest of the organisation will continue to have access to TLQ-360 feedback as they currently do.</p>

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	Recommendation	Progress	By When	Gap
23	Chief fire officers should seek regular feedback from staff about values, culture, fairness and diversity, with due regard to the leading and developing people standard. They should show how they act on this feedback.	<p>Extensive feedback received through 2022 staff survey.</p> <p>Feedback from staff survey acted upon through action plans and activity woven into annual planning and People Strategy Action Plan.</p> <p>Appraisals for April / May 2023 included a prompt to discuss wellbeing, values and behaviours.</p> <p>A continuous schedule of SLT visits to all stations and departments enables opportunities for feedback.</p> <p>Feedback is also encouraged from a variety of other sources including 'Ask Me Anything'. Recent letters received anonymously have provided an opportunity to seek further feedback.</p>	1 June 2023	<p>Additional pulse surveys to be run through June 2023 to further seek feedback.</p> <p>A cultural dashboard is being developed to be produced six-weekly for the SLT. The dashboard will include themes from Safe Share (by 1 October 2023).</p>
24	Chief fire officers should put plans in place to monitor, including through the gathering and analysis of staff feedback, watch and team cultures and provide	Monthly reporting is in place which reports on a number of metrics which are cultural indicators e.g. absence levels and employee relations cases.	1 October 2023	Cultural dashboard to be created by 1 October 2023.

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	Recommendation	Progress	By When	Gap
	prompt remedial action for any issues they identify.	<p>A number of actions are in place to enable two-way communication. These include:</p> <p>Six weekly meetings take place between the CFO and approximately 100 leaders of the service.</p> <p>Monthly 'ask me anything' sessions with the CFO which are open to all.</p> <p>A rolling schedule of SLT visits to all stations and departments.</p> <p>These communication opportunities provide opportunity for issues to be raised and responded to.</p>		

Diversity data

	Recommendation	Progress	By When	Gap
27	Chief fire officers should make sure their equality impact assessments are fit for purpose and, as a minimum, meet the requirements of the	An independent external review was commissioned in April 2022 with feedback and recommendations from the independent reviewer provided on	1 June 2023	Commission a follow up review to assess maturity level with enhanced PIA approach in place. PIA app to go live (pending user testing). Create a PIA quarterly review board for

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	Recommendation	Progress	By When	Gap										
	National Fire Chiefs Council equality impact assessment toolkit	<p>3 July 2022. At that point the ECFRS PIA maturity level was assessed as ‘embracing’.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2">ECFRS & PIA Maturity level (Now)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Compliant</td> <td>PIAs completed to avoid legal risks</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Embracing</td> <td>PIAs are completed has some influence but largely seen as separate from the policy/strategy or project</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Integrated</td> <td>The PIA is seen as core & governs the policy/strategy or project</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Inclusive</td> <td>The PIA consistently governs the policy/strategy or project and regularly challenges and enhances the policy/strategy or project</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Since then, our PIA approach has been enhanced with a PIA hub launched to support colleagues’ use of PIAs.</p>	ECFRS & PIA Maturity level (Now)		Compliant	PIAs completed to avoid legal risks	Embracing	PIAs are completed has some influence but largely seen as separate from the policy/strategy or project	Integrated	The PIA is seen as core & governs the policy/strategy or project	Inclusive	The PIA consistently governs the policy/strategy or project and regularly challenges and enhances the policy/strategy or project		assurance and learning (by 1 October 2023).
ECFRS & PIA Maturity level (Now)														
Compliant	PIAs completed to avoid legal risks													
Embracing	PIAs are completed has some influence but largely seen as separate from the policy/strategy or project													
Integrated	The PIA is seen as core & governs the policy/strategy or project													
Inclusive	The PIA consistently governs the policy/strategy or project and regularly challenges and enhances the policy/strategy or project													
28	Chief fire officers should review how they gather and use equality and diversity data to improve their understanding of their staff demographics, including applying and meeting the requirements of the National Fire Chiefs Council equality, diversity and inclusion data toolkit	Equality and diversity data are reported on a monthly basis to the Performance and Resources Board. This is utilised more broadly to demonstrate ‘due regard’ through People Impact Assessments (PIAs). Our PIA approach has been enhanced with a PIA hub launched to support colleagues’ use of PIAs.	1 June 2023	No further action required; continue with existing action.										

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	Recommendation	Progress	By When	Gap
		Whilst the NFCC EDI data toolkit is focussed on ethnicity data, the principles of data collection outlined within the toolkit have been applied more broadly.		

Improving Diversity

	Recommendation	Progress	By When	Gap
32	Chief fire officers should, as a priority, specify in succession plans how they intend to improve diversity across all levels of the service. This should include offering increased direct-entry opportunities.	<p>The CFO and SLT re-considered use of Direct Entry on 1 November 2022 and agreed to continue engaging with the self-funded NFCC direct entry project and the pilot sites, taking on board their learning over the next 12 months and diarised to consider participation in the next phase in September 2023</p> <p>The CFO and SLT also committed to continuing use of the strategic workforce plan to ensure that we have planned internal development to address</p>	1 June 2023	<p>Continue with existing actions.</p> <p>Next positive action plan due 1 September 2023. Succession plans to include direct link to diversity (by 1 September 2023).</p>

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	Recommendation	Progress	By When	Gap
		<p>recruitment challenges in specific areas and to ensure that our staff have the right operational skills and competencies. We continue to create development plans, focussed on those identified through LRS and succession plans which see development at an appropriate speed for the individual.</p> <p>Positive action plans are in place and a pre-mortem relating to this work was carried out on 4 May 2023.</p> <p>We are currently exploring a research project with the University of Essex regarding positive action and improving diversity.</p> <p>Use of Practice to Progress will further target development of individuals who are currently under-represented.</p>		
33	Chief fire officers should develop plans to promote	The Leadership, Resourcing and Succession (LRS) pool is in place	1 August 2023	We will develop a series of case studies from existing non-operational

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	Recommendation	Progress	By When	Gap
	<p>progression paths for existing staff in non-operational roles and put plans in place to reduce any inequalities of opportunity</p>	<p>for all roles. The LRS is essential in meeting current and future demand for skills and capacity.</p> <p>We have multiple examples of progression paths for existing staff in non-operational roles but could do more to highlight these.</p> <p>We are engaging with Practice to Progress to support development of all employees that are under-represented within our service.</p> <p>We are using the NFCC Supervisory Development package.</p> <p>Coaching, appraisal and development conversations are available for all and are well utilised.</p>		<p>colleagues who have accessed promotion and which highlight the progression paths available (by 31 July 2023).</p> <p>We will launch 'Practice to Progress' to support development of all employees that are under-represented within our service (by 31 July 2023).</p>

The Core Code of Ethics

	Recommendation	Progress	By When	Gap
34	<p>With immediate effect, chief fire officers should review their implementation of the Core Code of Ethics and make sure it is being applied across their services.</p>	<p>Implementation of the Core Code of Ethics was reviewed by SLT in November 2022 and by the Performance and Resources Board in December 2022. The next review is due in June 2023.</p> <p>Discussion around the Core Code is continual. The April 2023 Managers Briefing included the review of Ethics and Values.</p> <p>All appraisal conversations in April / May 2023 included a discussion point regarding the Core Code of Ethics.</p> <p>An independent audit into culture and behaviours (including the Core Code of Ethics) is taking place in May and June 2023.</p>	Immediately	<p>Provide review of implementation and audit feedback to CFO and SLT in July 2023.</p>