

Recommendation	RAG Status	Public Narrative
<p>With immediate effect, chief fire officers should notify HMICFRS of any allegations that have the potential to constitute staff gross misconduct that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	<p>Complete</p>	<p>Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service provided details of all relevant cases for a period of 36 months.</p> <p>In addition, an independent desk top review of these cases between September 2017 and March 2023 was commissioned. Key findings of this report were analysed resulting in a number of recommendations which are now being implemented.</p>
<p>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>Complete</p>	<p>The Service continues to work towards the full implementation of the Core Code of Ethics Fire Standard in order to embed it across the service. The Code is inextricably linked to the organisation's values and the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion. The values of the organisation are well defined and fully embedded. This is reflected in the latest HMICFRS report 2023 - 2025 where the service was judged as 'Good' in terms of promoting the right values and culture. The implementation of Fire Standards is ongoing and is part of a new Fire Standards Implementation Framework which ensures that the highest risk/priority standards are progressed and completed as necessary.</p>
<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>Complete</p>	<p>There are a number of ways in which staff can raise concerns depending on their issue and desire to remain anonymous. Staff are safeguarded against harassment or victimisation should they raise an issue. Details of how the investigation may progress and where staff can receive independent advice is explained. Several policies and pathways exist to support staff to raise concerns at work; Dignity at Work Policy, Disciplinary Policy, Code of Conduct, Resolving Grievances, Domestic Abuse, Social Networking Policy. These set out expectations in terms of behaviour and provide guidance on how to raise concerns. An independent helpline 'Safecall' is available to staff and is well publicised within internal communications. Support is available from a dedicated Psychological Wellbeing Co-ordinator and referral pathways to Occupational Health are in place.</p>
<p>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</p>	<p>Complete</p>	<p>Individuals who raise concerns under the Dignity at Work Policy are provided with an acknowledgement of their complaint and are informed of the outcome of investigation whilst maintaining confidentiality and impartiality. Human Resources and Strategic Managers have oversight of all internal investigations whilst they are ongoing and, once concluded, the outcomes are shared with Service Leadership Team.</p>

<p>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>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.</p>	<p>Complete</p>	<p>There are a number of ways that staff can raise concerns depending on their issue and desire to remain anonymous. Staff are safeguarded against harassment or victimisation should they raise an issue. Details of how the investigation may progress and where staff can receive independent advice is explained. Several policies and pathways exist to support staff to raise concerns at work; Dignity at Work Policy, Disciplinary Policy, Code of Conduct, Resolving Grievances, Domestic Abuse, Social Networking Policy. These set out expectations in terms of behaviour and provide guidance on how to raise concerns. An independent helpline 'Safecall' is available to staff and is well publicised within internal communications. Support is available from a dedicated Psychological Wellbeing Co-ordinator and referral pathways to Occupational Health are in place.</p> <p>The NFRS website has a page which allows members of the public to contact the service to raise an issue. There is also the option to contact the service via email or telephone to raise a complaint. All complaints are logged and dealt with in accordance with the Complaints Procedure.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>Complete</p>	<p>The service has a Fire Standards Steering & Assurance Group that meets monthly to review progress across those fire standards that have been prioritised according to risk. Robust monitoring processes provide assurance and ensure close monitoring of progress whilst working towards alignment. The 3 lines of defence methodology has been implemented across the Fire Standards where levels of evidence are provided against the risk posed by the criteria. 3 lines of defence is required for anything categorised as high risk, 2 for medium, and 1 for low. The first line of defence is anything that enables the day to day running of the business such as training or low level policies. Second line of defence is your QA and management oversight such as reporting in to senior leaders (Core and Service measures). A third line of defence is where an external review, peer review, or external consultation has taken place.</p>
<p>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>	<p>Complete</p>	<p>Northumberland County Council co-ordinates a 360 degree feedback process. This is currently in place for Principal Manager positions within the service and is in the process of being rolled out. Senior Managers have been prioritised for the next tranche of 360 reviews.</p>
<p>Chief fire officers should seek regular feedback from staff about values, culture, fairness and diversity, with due regard to the leading and developing people</p>	<p>Complete</p>	<p>Northumberland County Council administers a Staff Survey on a 12-18 month basis. This is an opportunity for staff to comment on the things that are important to them such as levels of management support, job satisfaction, their health and wellbeing etc. A staff engagement portal has been established as well as various staff networks; Pride, Autism</p>

standard. They should show how they act on this feedback.		Spectrum Disorder, Carers, Enable Disability, Mental Wellbeing, Menopause, Race Equality etc. Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service has a number of forums in which staff are able to provide feedback, for example 'Fire Away' forum, Team and manager meetings, Annual Principal Officer visits to stations/departments.
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.	Complete	The service undertakes Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) on all new policies/procedures and projects. Impact assessments, including EIAs, are integral to an overall Service Order Policy and are a requirement before any policy/procedure or project can progress through governance routes for sign-off.
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.	Complete	The service uses a number of sources of equality data to improve understanding of staff demographics. Sources include the Home Office Fire Statistics Data Tables on workforce and the data collected by Northumberland County Council which is published in an annual Workforce Report.
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.	Complete	Work is underway with our HR and Organisational Development colleagues from across the County Council regards this action. NFRS is working to align its internal systems and processes with NFCC toolkits/ Talent Management processes etc. Although we are not considering Direct Entry at this stage within Service, we have supported HR processes that will help us to improve diversity across the organisation. NFRS will continue to develop internal career pathway support processes such as our portfolio system for both grey and green book staff.
The Home Office should examine whether any appeal processes for fire and rescue misconduct cases are appropriate.	Not Applicable to NFRS	
Chief fire officers should provide assurances to HMICFRS that all parties are supported in relation to ongoing investigations.	Complete	Numerous HR policies details the support that is available for staff. For example, support for staff during investigations is detailed within the Raising Concerns at Work policy with the option of maintaining anonymity. The Dignity at Work policy, provides protection from retaliation and or victimisation following a complaint being made under Dignity at Work/or the investigation. Support is available from the Psychological Wellbeing coordinator and an Occupational Health referral can be made if necessary. Further support is available from the relevant line manager and or HR. Any subjects of disciplinary action are provided with support during investigations. This includes access to occupational health, psychological wellbeing coordinator. If an individual is suspended, they are provided with a link officer and may also have access to trade union support.
Chief fire officers should develop plans to promote progression paths for existing staff in non-operational	Complete	We are working on the use of the portfolio system for all staff groups to ensure we are considered for all staff members within the Service. As part of the County Council, we also have a separate Organisational Development function that supports our Green Book staff

<p>roles and put plans in place to reduce any inequalities of opportunity.</p>		<p>via HR policies and providing statutory and mandatory training and accesses a wide range of development opportunities such as the Living Leader programme. NFRS is also planning to buy a product called Learn-pro which is a fully E-learning systems that will be used to develop and maintain competences across all staff groups. Portfolios developed for green book roles in the Prevention Safe and Wellbeing Team pilot. Further work and discussions to be held to extend this to all Green Book staff.</p>
<p>Chief constables should make sure they are appropriately using their Common Law Police Disclosure powers in circumstances involving employees of fire and rescue services.</p>	<p>Not Applicable to NFRS</p>	
<p>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.</p>	<p>Extended</p>	<p>Northumberland County Council co-ordinates a 360 degree feedback process. This is currently in place for Principal Manager positions within the service and is in the process of being rolled out. Senior Managers have been prioritised for the next tranche of 360 reviews.</p>
<p>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>	<p>Complete</p>	<p>There are a number of ways that staff can raise concerns depending on their issue and desire to remain anonymous. Staff are safeguarded against harassment or victimisation should they raise an issue. Details of how the investigation may progress and where staff can receive independent advice is explained. Several policies and pathways exist to support staff to raise concerns at work; Dignity at Work Policy, Disciplinary Policy, Code of Conduct, Resolving Grievances, Domestic Abuse, Social Networking Policy. These set out expectations in terms of behaviour and provide guidance on how to raise concerns. An independent helpline 'Safecall' is available to staff and is well publicised within internal communications. Support is available from a dedicated Psychological Wellbeing Co-ordinator and referral pathways to Occupational Health are in place.</p> <p>The NFRS website has a page which allows members of the public to contact the service to raise an issue. There is also the option to contact the service via email or telephone to raise a complaint. All complaints are logged and dealt with in accordance with the Complaints Procedure.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>Not Applicable to NFRS</p>	

<p>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.</p>	<p>Not Applicable to NFRS</p>	
<p>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.</p>	<p>Not Applicable to NFRS</p>	
<p>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.</p>	<p>Complete</p>	<p>Feedback from staff is gathered through the Staff Survey which is administered by NCC. Feedback can be separated into directorate level. In terms of the organisational culture, the corporate values are firmly embedded and this has been recognised by the HMICFRS. The service continues to embed the People Strategy commitments and the Core Code of Ethics. The values, People Strategy commitments and the Core Code of Ethics are inextricably linked and the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion run throughout each. CPD days are used as an opportunities to reinforce/promote a positive culture. Development Portfolios incorporate modules that link both indirectly and directly to creating a culture of fairness and respect. Policies encourage informal interventions (informal resolution/facilitated resolution, resolution through mediation) in most cases as an initial starting point. Where escalation is necessary, the service monitors the outcome of grievance/discipline investigations to identify any key themes and learning.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>Complete</p>	<p>The college of Fire and Rescue Services is expected to open in the future and NFRS will assist with this as necessary through on-going engagement with the Home Office and the National Fire Chiefs Council.</p> <p>Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service continues to work to achieve the Fire Standards Board Fire Standards.</p> <p>The service is aligned to the NFCC Leadership Framework and engagement continues with the National Fire Chiefs Council and the Home Office.</p>
<p>The Fire Standards Board, in liaison with the National Fire Chiefs Council, should review the existing relevant</p>	<p>Not Applicable to NFRS</p>	

<p>standard(s) and underpinning guidance. It should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 		
<p>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.</p>	<p>Not Applicable to NFRS</p>	
<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	<p>Not Applicable to NFRS</p>	
<p>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.</p>	<p>Not Applicable to NFRS</p>	
<p>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</p>	<p>Not Applicable to NFRS</p>	

1975 so that they are eligible for the appropriate DBS checks.		
<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 requests have been submitted for all existing, new staff, and volunteers, according to their roles as identified by the Fire Standards Board 	Extended	The service has reviewed its position with regards to staff checks and not has clarified the level of check required for each role in the organisation. These checks will be for new and existing staff and will be refreshed every 3 years.
Chief fire officers should provide assurances to HMICFRS that they have implemented the standard on staff disclosure, complaint and grievance handling	Complete	<p>The service commissioned an independent desk top review of investigations undertaken between September 2017 and March 2023. Key findings of this report were analysed and cross-referenced with other independent culture reviews across the sector to identify common, cross-cutting themes and maximise learning. This resulted in a number of recommendations which are now being implemented. The service also undertook a review of all policies relating to staff disclosures and grievance handling highlighting areas that require clarification to ensure accessibility and aid interpretation.</p> <p>An update regarding ongoing and recently concluded investigations is provided to Service Leadership Team.</p> <p>The implementation of Fire Standards is ongoing and is part of a new Fire Standards Implementation Framework which ensures that the highest risk/priority standards are progressed and completed as necessary.</p>
Chief fire officers should provide assurances to HMICFRS that they have implemented the standard on misconduct allegations and outcomes handling.	Complete	<p>The service commissioned an independent desk top review of investigations undertaken between September 2017 and March 2023. Key findings of this report were analysed and cross-referenced with other independent culture reviews across the sector to identify common, cross-cutting themes and maximise learning. This resulted in in a number of recommendations which are now being implemented. The service also undertook a review of all policies relating to staff disclosures and grievance handling highlighting areas that require clarification to ensure accessibility and aid interpretation.</p> <p>An update regarding ongoing and recently concluded investigations is provided to Service Leadership Team.</p> <p>The implementation of Fire Standards is ongoing and is part of a new Fire Standards Implementation Framework which ensures that the highest risk/priority standards are progressed and completed as necessary.</p>
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	Not Applicable to NFRS	

appropriate legislatively enabled solution, makes detailed provisions for fire and rescue services.		
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 Applicable to NFRS	
The Home Office should align the data it collects on protected characteristics with the Office for National Statistics harmonised standard and publish this data.	Not Applicable to NFRS	
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.	Not Applicable to NFRS	
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.	Not Applicable to NFRS	