

SCPB 20/01/23 LFB Update

Independent Culture Review

In 2021 LFB Commissioner Andy Roe commissioned Nazir Afzal OBE to carry out an independent Culture Review. The Commissioner was clear in setting up the review that it would look at the culture of the whole organisation, including watches, teams and departments, and himself. Nazir and his team heard from over 2,000 current and former members of our staff who shared their experiences of working in the Brigade.

The review was commissioned following the tragic death by suicide of trainee firefighter Jaden Matthew Francois-Esprit in 2020. Before Jaden's death, we knew there were longstanding issues with poor culture and behaviour at the Brigade. We made many attempts to address the issues, but without success. We commissioned the review to give our staff, as well as former staff and community groups, a chance to provide feedback on our culture and to receive an independent analysis so we can improve it.

What the review found:

The final report is a challenging and sobering read for us all. It is clear that LFB processes have meant that women, Black, Asian and ethnically diverse people and members of the LGBTQ+ community are more likely to experience poor treatment and do less well in their career here. The accounts of shockingly poor behaviour and painful experiences over many years are completely unacceptable.

The 92-page report included 23 recommendations with 33 outcomes. This was an independent, objective view of our culture, and the voice of over 2000 of our staff. We therefore accept the findings of the review entirely. There is no place for discrimination, harassment or bullying in London Fire Brigade.

Our immediate actions:

Our staff tell us that they don't feel safe speaking up, and that the Brigade don't respond to complaints effectively. To address this, we have introduced a new External Complaints Service to support all staff groups. People who experience discrimination, bullying or harassment can raise it with their manager or directly to our External Complaints Service.

Our External Complaints Service for staff was launched on Monday, 28 November. Starting from Monday, 12 December we are recording weekly statistics, including the number of calls received by the service and the status of the complaints. The below data covers the period from to the end of Thursday 12, January.

- Number of contacts (via phone, email and webform): 134
- Number of LFB staff suspended while investigations take place: 9
- Number of complaints resolved: 37
- Number of dismissals: 0

We're making a permanent shift in our approach to leadership. It is the responsibility of our leaders to set and uphold high standards, so those leaders who do not value transparency, accountability and fairness will no longer have a place in the Brigade. We also expect our leaders to own their past mistakes. Our senior leaders are taking part in inclusive leadership training that is targeted to make sure they fully understand the issues outlined in the Independent Culture Review.

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The report describes the behaviour of some staff in their dealings with the public that is both horrifying and completely unacceptable. These people jeopardise not only the trust that is placed in the LFB, but the safety of those who will now be dissuaded from requesting our help, putting lives at risk. To address this, we will pilot the use of body worn cameras with the aim of deploying them across the Brigade to give protection to the public during Home Fire Safety Visits. Anyone behaving inappropriately during their public-facing work will be dismissed.

The report also reveals the many ways in which some of our people are marginalised, have their careers limited or are treated differently from their colleagues, based on their race, sex, sexuality, age or other characteristics. Starting this month Dr Jenny Simnett has been appointed to lead an independent review of our People Services department.

We are creating an independent Audit Committee to monitor our progress against the recommendations of the review. The Audit Committee will oversee the delivery of our culture review recommendations and outcomes, including the transition of our existing Togetherness Programme to the Audit Committee

Changes to HFSVs target the highest risk people

When HFSVs were first introduced, our targets were numerical, reaching 80,000 visits a year. In recent years, we have focused more on targeting high-risk people in local communities to better reduce overall levels of risk in London. Staff from departments across the Brigade began work on an HFSV Improvement Plan in 2019 to make HFSVs more tailored and efficient in order to target the most vulnerable people in the community.

Using data from incidents and fatal fires, we have expanded the high-risk individual criteria in order to triage people who request an HFSV for themselves - or are referred to the Brigade for an HFSV - into four new risk categories:

- very high
- high
- medium
- low

Our approach is to offer targeted, tailored support to prevent fires where the risk is highest across London.

People in the medium, high and very-high-risk categories will still receive an in-person HFSV and free smoke alarms as needed. When the new strategy goes live, expected 01/04/23, we will respond to all very high-risk referrals within four hours, around the clock.

This out-of-hours facility will be a new service for London. These priority HFSVs for very high-risk individuals will help us to protect the most vulnerable people in the community. Our criteria for these priority visits include the risk of arson, as well as a set of very high-risk characteristics and behaviours.

High and medium risk individuals will also be offered an HFSV within an agreed set timeframe, dependant on their level of risk.

Low risk people will not get an HFSV, people in the low-risk category will be encouraged to use our online Home Fire Safety Checker or take part in a telephone HFSV. They will still therefore have access to tailored safety advice that is directly relevant to their homes. However, to focus on the most at-risk people, we will stop providing in-person HFSVs and free smoke alarms for low-risk people. The new process is not in place yet, however as this is developed further guidance will be provided to our partner agencies on referrals and what support we can offer.

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