

GREATER MANCHESTER POLICE, FIRE & CRIME PANEL

Date: 18th September 2024

Subject: GMFRS Culture First Update

Report of: Ben Norman Deputy Chief Fire Officer

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide the Police, Fire and Crime Panel with an update on the cultural journey that has taken place within Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS) embodied by its Culture First approach. This journey is by no means over as the service continues to challenge itself and makes significant progress.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Members of the Panel are asked to:

- Note the contents of this report and provide feedback.

CONTACT OFFICERS:

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Equalities Impact, Carbon, and Sustainability Assessment:

N/A

Risk Management

N/A

Legal Considerations

N/A

Financial Consequences - Capital

N/A

Financial Consequences - Revenue

N/A

Number of attachments included in the report: 0

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

[Values and culture in fire and rescue services - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)

[Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service 2023-2025 - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)

[Standards of behaviour: The handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)

TRACKING/PROCESS	
Does this report relate to a major strategic decision, as set out in the GMCA Constitution	No
EXEMPTION FROM CALL IN	
Are there any aspects in this report which means it should be considered to be exempt from call in by the relevant Scrutiny Committee on the grounds of urgency?	No
TfGMC	Overview & Scrutiny Committee
N/A	N/A

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Initially prompted by the independent report into the culture at London Fire Brigade, released in November 2022, over the next few months there were several additional cultural review reports published along with media revelations on the unacceptable workplace culture and instances of poor behaviour across the Fire & Rescue sector.
- 1.2 This instigated a sector wide response with the National Fire Chiefs Council's (NFCC) first ever Culture and Inclusion Conference in March 2023 resulting in a Culture Action Plan for the whole sector and a refreshed approach and focus of attention by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS), beginning with the Spotlight Review into Values and Culture released in March 2023 resulting in 35 recommendations, 20 of which were the responsibility of Chief Fire Officers and more recently a Thematic Inspection of Standards of Behaviour and Misconduct, released in August 2024 with 15 subsequent recommendations.
- 1.3 It is important to note that GMFRS' cultural journey had however started much earlier to this with Chief Fire Officer, Dave Russel's '10 Asks' launched in November 2021. This very much focused on how people treat each other within the service. This doesn't mean that GMFRS was or is, immune to poor behaviour and misconduct but the key difference was that as a service, there was and currently is a zero tolerance approach to inappropriate and offensive behaviour. This was preceded by setting up of the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian in April 2021 and the roll-out of inclusive Cultures training for the whole workforce.
- 1.4 These solid foundations have now been built on with the introduction of the 'Culture First' approach and Culture First Board launched in May 2023 which contribute to the aim of making GMFRS a truly inclusive place to work.

2. GMFRS' CULTURAL MILESTONES

- 2.1 Since April 2023 there have been several key milestones in relation to the Culture First approach adopted by GMFRS, with the significant ones highlighted below:

Key Milestones	
Culture became a standing agenda item at Deputy Mayor's Executive	April 2023
Culture First Board with independent co-chair launched	May 2023
Independent reporting line launched	June 2023
Cultural Sounding Panel launched	July 2023
Practice to Progress (P2P) Independent Equality Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI) Maturity Matrix Audit took place	October 2023
P2P EDI Maturity Matrix Audit Report released	January 2024
Launch of the internal Culture Campaign – WE ARE GMFRS; Strengthening Our Inclusive Culture which build on the Inclusive Cultures face to face training commences	May 2024

2.2 As can be seen by the activity below, much of it was to ensure a solid foundation for employee voice and to increase organisational understanding of what it means to work for GMFRS. Each of these milestones have contributed to further learning and in-depth reflective analysis as part of the reporting undertaken on a regular basis to the Deputy Mayor Executive (DME).

Deputy Mayor Executive (DME) Board Reporting

2.3 As part of the DME Board Culture reporting, progress against HMICFRS Recommendations is monitored alongside key themes and activities that have taken place in the preceding period. These include; reflective benchmarking against other Fire and Rescue Services' Independent Culture Reviews, in-depth analysis of disciplinary, grievance and bullying and harassment cases in GMFRS, the number and nature of independent reporting line reports, the changing demographics of GMFRS, any Learning, Exit Interview and staff survey data and themes; and development of the Culture First Board.

Culture First Board

2.4 The Culture First Board is co-chaired by Chief Fire Officer, Dave Russel and an independent co-chair, Sunita Gamblin QPM. Over the past year the attendance of the board has expanded to include leads from newly created staff network groups that have been created, including the Peer Support Group, Earth Forum and the Cultural Sounding Panel. These groups build on the five already embedded staff network groups who are represented at the meeting alongside the trade unions, Freedom to Speak Up Guardian and the Service Leadership Team.

- Since its inception the Board has evolved not only in its attendance but in its maturity, with members now sharing real life experiences including what it feels to be a woman in Fire and how members of the majority group were impacted by the recent civil unrest. This evolution has led to recommendations including the creation of a Culture First Delivery Group allowing for additional time for Employee Voice and reflections within the Culture First Board. The Culture First Delivery Group is responsible for delivering the implementation of cultural initiatives and interventions coming out of the Culture First Board alongside actions within the EDI Action Plan.

Independent Reporting Line

2.5 The independent reporting line was launched in June 2023 and is delivered for GMFRS by Crimestoppers. The line was created following the HMICFRS Values and Culture Spotlight Report recommendation and complements the organisation's existing arrangements for staff to speak up. The line is completely confidential, and the service does not share information about individuals who raised the concern.

- 2.6 Upon launching the line, a communications campaign took place across the service to ensure that all employees were aware of the offer; this included a blend of on and offline communications.
- 2.7 In its first year of operation nine reports of concerns were received; these were for a variety of concerns. As they are received reports are closely monitored, and an initial fact find takes place, followed by an investigation as appropriate and any organisational learning which flows from the investigation.

Cultural Sounding Panel

- 2.8 The Cultural Sounding Panel was launched in the summer of 2023 to hear employee voice from across the organisation on key topics in a structured and constructive way. Items that have gone to Cultural Sounding Panel include increasing the response to employee surveys, feedback following recent civil disorder, etc.
- 2.9 Colleagues on the panel appreciate the opportunity to contribute to organisational initiative at an early opportunity and those who take topics to the panel have found that it's a really positive snapshot of feedback from a diverse range of voices and how initiatives could be received.

P2P EDI Maturity Matrix Audit

- 2.10 An independent organisation, P2P, was tasked with undertaking an audit of GMFRS' maturity in relation to EDI policies and practices. Taking into account 'survey fatigue' and the HMICFRS Inspection Survey that was live at the time; P2P evolved their methodology to include more interactive focus groups and one to one meetings as set out below. They met with key stakeholders on a one-to-one basis and held group engagement sessions across the Service, on-site and online. The team held;
- 5 one-to-one in-person meetings
 - 18 one-to-one online meetings
 - 6 engagement sessions with 111 attendees
 - 4 middle manager sessions with 23 attendees
 - 4 supervisory sessions with 34 attendees
 - Total staff engagement = 191 people
- 2.12 In summary, the report concluded that:
- it was evident to the review team from each interview, engagement session and documentation reviewed, that Chief Fire Officer (CFO) Dave Russel is committed to further developing a more inclusive workplace where all individuals can thrive.
 - One of the difficulties organisations can face when developing their desired organisational culture is the lack of clarity or defined goals – this cannot be said

of GMFRS. They found the EDI Strategy is well-defined, and an action plan complements it.

- Like many other organisations, the review considers that GMFRS faces a challenge relating to a level of 'diversity fatigue' amongst staff concerning EDI.
- Whilst there is substantial evidence of the Service working hard to increase the diversity of its workforce, the percentage of female and minority ethnic firefighters remains a percentage point lower than the national firefighter average. It is clear that the Service recognises that increased diversity and representation will lead to a more inclusive culture, something to which GMFRS is showing a very real commitment to through their ongoing recruitment campaign.

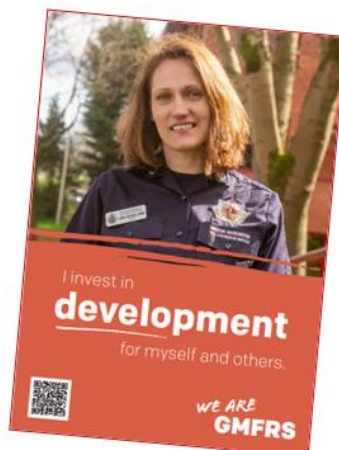
2.13 The report provides in depth analysis of current situation in respect of:

- The EDI Strategy
- Communication
- Service Leadership Team
- Recruitment
- Training Centre
- Development
- EDI Training
- Community Engagement
- Equality Impact Assessment
- Facilities
- Community Accessibility
- Reward and Recognition
- Staff Networks

WE ARE GMFRS – Culture Campaign

2.14 'We Are GMFRS' is a photo and video-led campaign featuring real people who work for the service and their stories. It's a broad 'umbrella' campaign to reach all staff, focusing on positive behaviours – encouraging people to live the services' values and challenge behaviours that fall short. It was launched in May 2024 and since that time engagement has been closely monitored. A full evaluation will take place once the campaign concludes. The campaign comprises:

- 834 views of campaign articles.
- 938 total video views to date.
- 70 poll votes – Most popular vote: '*We Are GMFRS will help raise awareness of what it means to have a positive, respectful and inclusive culture.*'



Strengthening Our Inclusive Culture Training

2.15 The Strengthening Our Inclusive Culture training builds on the previously run Inclusive Culture training. It has taken on board feedback from P2P continuing with the conversational approach to learning. It utilises case studies, scenarios and activities to cover topics on values, challenges with inclusivity and analyses knowledge, actions, and support to develop our inclusive culture. Roll out of this training commenced in May 2024 and is planned throughout the year for all colleagues across the organisation. The training is not without its challenges, however attendees have appreciated the approach with comments such as:

“having had EDI training through career in army and as part of joining GMFRS – the session had been different and the best one they had been on yet – “we need to do more this way – the way [the trainer] explained things during the session today was ‘it’.”

One delegate chose to share that they felt the session was a “breath of fresh air” and that they were really relieved to have the session, compared to “what they thought it was going to be.”

2.16 The impact of this training is already being realised with attendees citing that they will put the following into practice after the session:

“Be more aware of microaggression's in particular and what might feel like a joke or a comment to make, it might be the 100th time someone has been asked that during their week.”

3 EXTERNAL RECOGNITION OF OUR CULTURAL JOURNEY

- 3.1 HMICFRS cited GMFRS as having positive Practice in its establishment of the Culture First Board with an Independent Co-Chair
- 3.2 HMICFRS approached GMFRS to host the first ever Positive Practice event for the Fire Sector in April this year. The event had a focus on leadership and culture and cited GMFRS’ promising practice in this area.
- 3.3 As part of the Parliamentary Select Committee into the Culture of the Fire and Rescue Service; GMFRS is mentioned positively by Andy Cooke (HMICFRS) as a good example of an FRS that is working hard to improve its culture
- 3.4 Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service was shortlisted for nine awards at the National Excellence in Fire and Emergency Awards; winning Emergency Service of

the Year, Most Influential LGBTQ+ Individual of the Year for Jax Effiong and Project of the Year for the Atlas Project.

- 3.5 Awarded 2024 Gold Award from Stonewall UK, as we reached a staggering 34th out of nearly 300 organisations in the Workplace Equality Index.
- 3.6 Gained a Bronze Award for our first submission with the Race Equality Matters for our Race Equality work so far.
- 3.7 The organisation came 92nd in the Top 100 Apprenticeship Employers which was entered by more than 800 employers across England this year.
- 3.8 Multiple meetings have taken place with the Home Office's Integrity and Workforce Team to share good practice.

4 NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 Over the next year there are several activities that are due to take place to continue with the Culture First Journey. These include but are not limited to:
 - Continued rollout of Strengthening our Inclusive Culture Training taking on board learning from the sessions to build into future Culture initiatives.
 - Recruitment of an Operational Member of Staff within the Culture and Inclusion Team to support engagement with our operational workforce.
 - Completion of the NFCC EDI Maturity Matrix Level 4
 - Create refreshed a EDI Culture and Inclusion Strategy to complement the new Fire Plan.
- 4.2 All of the above will be monitored as part of the Culture First Phase 2 project reporting.

END.