

**ESSEX POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY**

Essex County Fire & Rescue Service

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| Meeting | **Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel: Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee** | Agenda Item |  |
| Meeting Date | 18 April 2019 | Report Number |  |
| Report Author: | Tracy King, Assistant Director | | |
| Presented By | Jo Turton, Chief Executive/Chief Fire Officer | | |
| Subject | **Standards within Essex County Fire and Rescue Service** | | |
| Type of Report: | Briefing Paper | | |

**1. Introduction**

This paper outlines the approach to setting and managing standards in Essex County Fire & Rescue Service (ECFRS) and aims to inform the Chief Fire Officers presentation at the next Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel: Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee.

**2. Governance**

Until 1October 2017, Essex Fire and Rescue Authority (EFA) provided the non-executive governance of ECFRS. Essex Fire and Rescue Authority formed on April 1, 1998, made up from 25 elected Members, nominated by Essex’s three constituent councils: Essex County Council, Southend-on-Sea Borough Council and Thurrock Borough Council.

On 1 October 2017, governance transferred to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority (PFCCF&RA). Under this governance model ECFRS and Essex Police remain two discrete organisations.

The PFCC has developed an Ethics and Integrity Framework which applies to the Fire and Rescue Service and which is also built on the Nolan Principles. The role of the Chief Fire Officer is explicitly linked to the Nolan principles within the constitution.

**3. Organisational Culture**

In 2014, a cultural review of ECFRS was commissioned by the EFA, following serious incidents including the suicides of two serving firefighters, allegations of bullying and intimidation, and ongoing and protracted industrial disputes. The publication of the review report led to the formation of the Expert Advisory Panel.

The Expert Advisory Panel was made up of specialists from several sectors including Steve McGuirk, former Chief Fire Officer at Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service. Under his leadership, the service moved quickly to progress key recommendations from the review around cultural, operational and governance issues.

As part of the work that was undertaken during this time a new set of Service Values were developed by ECFRS staff for ECFRS staff. It was envisaged that these values would become a catalyst for change and a statement of behaviours that were expected from all staff and volunteers.

The values are;-

**We are open, honest and trustworthy**

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We respect and honour all we do for the Service and our colleagues, being transparent and consistent in our communications and throughout our work.

**We are courageous in everything we do**

Having the confidence to always own our part and not be a bystander in order to progress and learn from our experiences.

**We work as one team**

All in it together to deliver a safer Service and a safer Essex. What part do you play?

**We are always professional**

We proudly stay ahead of the game by embracing training and development, continually learning, while delivering professional standards to efficiently serve our community.

**We value the contribution of all**

We create an inclusive and non-judgemental environment that respects people as individuals and embraces diversity.

We value everyone equally, create opportunities and celebrate our successes.

These values were embedded into the new Service Strategy.

**4. Code of conduct**

The service also has clear behaviour standards set out in its Code of Conduct to assist colleagues in maintaining and understanding the guiding principles of standards and conduct. The Code of Conduct provides reference to the Nolan Principles set out by the Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life.

The importance of the Nolan principles is that they provide a number of standards to guide the interpretation of legislation, decisions and actions of those employed in public office.

The Nolan principles are as follows:-

* **Selflessness** – Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, their family or their friends.
* **Integrity** – Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.
* **Objectivity** – In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.
* **Accountability** – Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.
* **Openness** – Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.
* **Honesty** – Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.
* **Leadership** – Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

No Code of Conduct can cover all circumstances that may arise and emphasis is, therefore, placed on the standards of performance and behaviours which are expected rather than making a list of rules or possible breaches.

Whilst this Code sets standards and is a good practice guide, all employees should be aware that, where considered appropriate, any behaviours that fall below an acceptable standard will be investigated and may lead to disciplinary action. It is expected that all employees set and adopt high standards of conduct and behave politely, respectfully and professionally to all Service users, colleagues and outside agencies. The Service is committed to promoting equality of opportunity, diversity and to eliminating unlawful discrimination.

The Service does not tolerate any acts of violence, threatening behaviour, verbal abuse or malicious cruelty towards any Service users, colleagues and outside agencies. Any complaint relating to actions that are inconsistent with the ECFRS Code of Conduct are taken seriously and are subject to a thorough investigation, with action taken as appropriate.

All employees are expected to carry out the full duties of their jobs to an acceptable standard with appropriate support, supervision and training. All employees are expected to co-operate with all reasonable requests and instructions from managers.

All employees are expected to arrive punctually for work, training events and meetings, barring exceptional circumstances. In the case of absence from work due to sickness, employees must notify their line manager at the earliest opportunity.

As a socially responsible employer and being committed to the highest ethical standards, the Service expects employees to conduct themselves both on and off duty in a reasonable and responsible manner to ensure that their actions do not damage the reputation of the Service or bring the Service into disrepute.

**5. Monitoring of progress against culture improvement**

Sir Ken Knight, former Government Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor, visited the Service in July 2016 to undertake a review. He aimed to provide assurance to the Fire Authority that actions taken, set against the Lucas Report recommendations, were suitable and proportionate and that satisfactory progress was being made. This assessment highlighted that, while progress had been made in respect of laying the foundations against organisational and cultural transformation, there was still some way to go in embedding change.

Progress made during 2017 has been maintained and extended. Significant improvements are evidenced in an independent cultural review conducted by Essex County Council in spring 2018. Progress is equally evident in other areas of the Service including:

* Service Leadership Team (SLT) – following the appointment of a new Chief Executive/Chief Fire Officer in April 2018, the SLT has been restructured to increase capacity and resilience.
* The newly restructured SLT will go live on 1 April 2019. This includes Karl Edwards as Director of Corporate Services and Rick Hylton as Deputy Chief Fire Officer (1 year secondment). Further recruitment is planned to fill the Director of Operations post on a permanent basis. On a temporary basis we have a post holder from our Strategic Level Talent Pool; Moira Bruin. We have also invested in additional capacity by creating a senior People, Values and Culture role, this post is also being filled from our Strategic Level Talent Pool by Colette Black. Our Strategic Level Talent Pool is being opened to new applicants in Autumn 2019.
* Fire and Rescue Plan – working with the Office of Police Fire Crime Commissioner’s, the Service has assisted in the development of the UKs first Fire and Rescue plan which sets out strategic priorities for the period 2019 – 2024.
* In October 2018 the Service engaged with the Local Government Association (LGA) to conduct a Peer Review Self-Assessment and have since developed a Service Improvement Plan based on the Peer Review feedback report.
* Significant Projects – the Service Leadership Team has set out 10 strategically significant priorities for the Service.
* Continued improvements - in employee and industrial relations with all representative bodies which has resulted in no disputes in the last two years and a significant drop in the number of disciplinary actions taken.
* The application of continuous improvement including the recent amendments to the Talent Pool process which are in line with ECFRS aspiration to develop people with the skills we need now and in the future.

We are working hard to create a fair, diverse and inclusive culture. As part of encouraging this we have:

* A Dignity at Work Policy that colleagues can refer to if they are unclear about expectations,
* 50 Dignity at Work Champions who have received training and are able to offer support across the service,
* Published equality objectives and an Inclusion and Diversity Strategic Action Plan,
* Introduced Professional and Inclusive workplace visits, we are entering phase 2 using some external capacity,
* Published gender pay information – our mean pay gap is down from 15.6% to 10.9%,
* Positive action in our recent recruitment of firefighters - 10.2% of our wholetime firefighter offers in 2018 were to women,
* Development and awareness sessions such as dyslexia awareness,
* A developing a Women’s forum,
* An established LGBT+ forum,
* A good working relationship with the Asian Fire Service Association,
* Run tri-service International Women’s Day events,
* Encouraged informal and alternative resolution to grievance and disciplinary process resulting in formal cases decreasing with informal resolution higher,
* Clear appraisal and talent pool processes.

**6. Fire Standards Board**

At present, a national standard of behaviours for the Fire and Rescue Service does not exist.

As part of the Government’s fire reform agenda aimed at supporting the ‘continuous improvement’ of fire and rescue services in England, a new independently chaired Fire Standards Board is being established which will be responsible for:

* Overseeing the identification, organisation, development and maintenance of professional standards for fire and rescue services in England
* Agreeing priorities and commissioning standards to be developed
* Maintaining oversight of standards in development
* Approving professional standards once developed, including ensuring they have been appropriately validated and assured
* Considering over time whether published standards remain current

The board will have an independent chair and vice chair and will be made up of a number of key stakeholders including the National Fire Chiefs Council, the Home Office, the Local Government Association, the Association of Police & Crime Commissioners and the College of Policing.

The Board will be supported by the Central Programme Office of the National Fire Chiefs Council who are based out of London Fire Brigade HQ

**7. Public Complaints**

Public complaints are reported through the Performance and Data Team. The Policy that is at the heart of the how we handle public complaints is currently subject to review and consultation, to ensure our process is fair, open and transparent. Whilst the Service does not receive a high number of complaints it is committed to ensuring that when a member of the public does complain their concerns are taken seriously and dealt with professionally.

A summary of complaints received is reported on a monthly basis to the Service Leadership Team and the Police Fire Crime Commissioner via our Organisational Performance Report. A sample of this information is given below:-

*Complaints and Compliments 7 complaints and 2 compliments were received in January 2019. The main complaint themes were Fire Safety (4), Staff Attitude/behaviour (2), and Driving (1).*

*Once the new policy is agreed and published the PFCC will also on occasions dip sample complaints cases for scrutiny and review purposes.*

*Complaints and the way they are addressed by ECFRS will be an area of focus for HMICFRS when they undertake their Inspection of the Service.*

**8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no additional financial implications arising from this paper.

**9. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

There are no additional equality and diversity implications arising from this paper

**10. WORKFORCE ENGAGEMENT**

There are no additional workforce engagement implications arising from this paper

**11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no additional legal implications arising from this paper.

**12. HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

There are no additional health and safety implications arising from this paper.