

# 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](#).