

Report of the Assistant Chief Officer: Director of Prevention

2025 Review of Progress Against the 2023 Cultural Audit Recommendations

Purpose of report

1. To summarise the 2025 Review of Progress against the 2023 Cultural Audit Recommendations undertaken by Dr Deborah Willoughby and Emily Allen-Mellors.
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Recommendations

It is recommended that the Audit, Scrutiny and Standards Committee note the progress against the:

- i) Findings of the 2025 Review of Progress against the 2023 Cultural Audit Recommendations.*
- ii) Approve the proposal to channel future actions via the Culture Board.*

Introduction and Background

2. In February 2023, the Service commissioned an independent cultural audit, led by Dr Debra Willoughby in conjunction with ioda, the Service's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) training provider. The audit recognised an overall positive culture within the Service and made 15 recommendations to enable the Service to make EDI and ethics the fabric of the organisation.
3. The research team were invited back into Service to conduct a Progress Review that examined how the Service had progressed its implementation of the 15 Cultural Audit recommendations.
4. The following recommendations were made in 2023:
 - R1: Make HWFRS's EDI **Strategic Intent more explicit** across the organisation.
 - R2: Introduce **Induction Training for newly promoted Station Commanders (SCs)** and a handover period for all SCs.
 - R3: Provide **face-to-face or on-line 'Allyship Training'** for the EDI Allies and other interested stakeholders.

- R4: Continue the '**Difficult Conversations Training**'.
- R5: Offer **welfare support** to Corporate Staff when they are involved in the active administration of sensitive and/or serious issues.
- R6: Continue to provide **promotion candidates with feedback** and, whenever possible, ensure this is from the person who was involved in the actual process, avoiding the use of delegated third parties.
- R7: Implement the current plan to **cascade Neurodiversity training sessions** service wide.
- R8: Implement the current plan to **cascade Menopause Awareness training sessions** to managers and leaders.
- R9: The forthcoming **EDI training should incorporate all key aspects identified by the Cultural Audit**.
- R10: Continue to work with National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) to review the national guidance with a view to appraising and **updating the current HWFRS fitness tests**.
- R11: Recognising that the 'Positive Action Plan: Increasing Workforce Diversity' (2020-22) is under review, the research team recommends that the relevant issues from this report be **included in the updated version**.
- R12: Provide **training for discipline and grievance investigators**.
- R13: Continue to review **coaching and mentoring** process for investigators on their first one or two investigations.
- R14: Within legal guidance, consider how best to **disseminate appropriate information about discipline and grievance cases**.
- R15: Maintain **records of informal discipline**.

Method

5. Using a qualitative, content analysis interpretive approach, the ioda Progress Review Team (PRT) combined extensive document analysis with semi-structured interviews. Continuity was ensured by engaging the same core team, Dr Debra Willoughby, Emily Allen-Mellors and the original ioda corporate team.
6. The PRT also commented on the Service's progress against the 2026 inspection criteria set by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS).

Overview

7. HWFRS has successfully delivered 10 of the 15 Cultural Audit recommendations. The full report of findings can be found in **Appendix 1**.
8. Good progress has also been made on the remaining recommendations (R2, R3, R7, R8 and R13), all of which are embedded in ongoing strategic workstreams that are due for completion by the end of 2026. The PRT commented that the achievements are not only commendable, but also visible as strengthened leadership, coherent strategies, inclusive systems and empowered people,

demonstrating a holistic approach to culture, ethics, equality, diversity and inclusion.

9. Crucially, this success has not occurred by chance. Therefore, the PRT thought it important to identify critical success factors that will inform future direction and sustainability. These included a shared sense of direction, clear strategic alignment and a commitment to partnership working. The outcomes are tangible, demonstrating how a focus on people, culture and continuous improvement can drive sustainable cultural change across a Fire and Rescue Service.
10. The PRT emphasises that the next stage of progress will demand continued strategic focus, disciplined execution and a proactive commitment to ongoing improvement. The task ahead is not solely to consolidate what has been achieved, but to remain responsive to emerging challenges and evolving expectations. Sustaining long-term change will require consistent leadership, meaningful staff engagement and a culture of continuous reflection and refinement.
11. In short, the Service must approach the next phase with the same determination and clarity of purpose that has brought it this far.
12. The team is confident that the Service can achieve this through the planned additional HWFRS's workstreams and the consolidation of respondents' suggested actions.
13. The PRT was consistently impressed by the depth of commitment shown by HWFRS leaders, staff and stakeholders throughout this Progress Review. The Service's progress since the 2023 Cultural Audit is both meaningful and measurable, marked by clear alignment between strategic intent and practical action. HWFRS's willingness to reflect, adapt and engage with challenge demonstrates a mature culture.
14. With continued focus and structured planning, the PRT is confident that the Service is well placed to embed lasting, organisation-wide cultural change – 'business as usual'.

Looking Ahead: Sustaining Cultural Change

15. To maintain this momentum and embed lasting change, the PRT endorses the implementation of four key workstreams, which are prioritised for delivery in the remainder of 2025 and during 2026, as follows:
 - **Evolving the Culture and Ethics Steering Group into a formal Culture Board**, providing stronger governance and strategic oversight.

- **Developing a Culture Dashboard** to track and visualise both quantitative and qualitative cultural indicators – demonstrating transparency and accountability.
 - **Launching a People Excellence Framework**, with integrated learning pathways to strengthen inclusive leadership and organisational culture.
 - **Creating a Diversity Framework**, in partnership with external experts, to ensure best practice and robust challenge.
16. Together, these workstreams reinforce HWFRS's holistic and integrated approach to cultural transformation.
17. Progress Review interviewees agreed that cultural change must now move beyond programmes and/or campaigns and become *'the way we do things around here'*. They highlighted the need for a clear and deliberate action plan to prevent the current momentum fading over time.

The Culture Board

18. To provide stronger governance and oversight the Culture and Ethics Steering Group has evolved to become the Culture Board, chaired by the Assistant Chief Officer: Director of Prevention.
19. The Culture Board will support the Service in its cultural journey (aligned to the Culture Statement of Intent) in line with the Core Code of Ethics and maintain the excellent momentum already in place.

Conclusion

20. The Service has made significant progress in embedding a culture rooted in the Core Code of Ethics, with 10 of the 15 recommendations completed. Good progress is being made against the remaining five and progress will be further embedded by evolving the Culture and Ethics Steering Group into a formal Culture Board, providing stronger governance and strategic oversight.

Corporate Considerations

Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	None – members of the Culture Board are already employees of HWFRS.
Strategic Policy Links & Core Code of Ethics (Identify how proposals link with current priorities & policy framework and align to the Core Code of Ethics)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CRMP and core organisational strategies • Core Code of Ethics • Culture Statement of Intent • People Strategy • Mental Health @ Work Commitment
Productivity & Efficiency (Identify how proposal improves productivity or efficiency)	The renewed focus of the Culture Board will directly link to delivery of the People Strategy.
Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).	No risks associated with this report.
Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)	None required.
Equalities (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	N/A – the recommendations align with delivery of the Culture Statement of Intent and Core Code of Ethics.
Data Protection Impact Assessment (where personal data is processed a DPIA must be completed to ensure compliant handling)	N/A – no personal data has been processed.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – 2025 Review of Progress Against the 2023 Cultural Audit Recommendations