



**Anne Clarke AM**  
**Chair of the Fire, Resilience and Emergency Planning Committee**

The Rt Hon Chris Philp MP  
Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire  
Home Office

(Sent by email)

16 June 2023

Dear Chris,

**DBS disclosure and London Fire Brigade**

I am writing on behalf of the London Assembly Fire, Resilience and Emergency Planning (FREP) Committee about access to enhanced disclosure for vetting staff under the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) for London Fire Brigade (LFB).

This matter was raised with our Committee in February 2023 by the London Fire Commissioner (LFC), who at that point told us that LFB was only able to request a basic DBS clearance for its staff; but added that “all the other emergency services can do an enhanced check”.<sup>1</sup>

The Committee welcomes the Government’s recent announcement that all fire and rescue services will be able to use standard DBS checks for their staff. However, we are writing to request that you extend this measure to allow access for fire and rescue services to enhanced-level DBS checks. This is particularly important for LFB, which needs these measures to better ensure the safety and protection of Londoners who engage with LFB staff in their homes and as part of LFB’s day-to-day work.

---

<sup>1</sup> [London Assembly Fire, Resilience and Emergency Planning Committee transcript](#), 1 February 2023, p28

LFB is the biggest fire and rescue service in England and Wales by far, and one of the largest in the world. It employs over 5,500 staff, in both operational and non-operational roles. LFB carries out fire-prevention work – including, in 2021, over 35,000 in-person home fire-safety visits providing fire-safety advice to people in their own homes, with vulnerable adults prioritised for in-person visits.<sup>2</sup> LFB also does extensive work with young people: it runs a Fire Cadets service and a Junior Citizens scheme; and does fire-prevention work in schools as part of its outreach work.

The Independent Culture Review of LFB,<sup>3</sup> led by Nazir Afzal OBE, found a toxic culture in parts of LFB. The report identified specific concerns about the behaviour of LFB firefighters undertaking home fire-safety visits. The range and significance of work undertaken by LFB firefighters, combined with the findings of the Culture Review, means that LFB needs to improve its selection and vetting process for its staff undertaking these trusted roles. The LFC has been clear that enhanced DBS checks are needed to do this effectively.

In March 2023, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) published its report on values and culture in fire and rescue services.<sup>4</sup> This referenced the Independent Culture Review of LFB and its “worrying” findings. It also cited:

*“a worrying number of examples of appalling behaviour towards members of the public, including searching through women’s drawers looking for underwear and sex toys during home fire safety visits. We currently have no way of knowing how many unsuitable people are in these trusted roles, especially those that are public-facing.”*

The Committee notes the Government’s prompt action in adding fire and rescue authority employees to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975, as recommended by HMICFRS.<sup>5</sup> However, we would urge you to allow access to enhanced DBS checks as well.

Access to enhanced DBS checks was recently endorsed by the Mayor, when I asked him whether having access to standard DBS checks for staff was sufficient for LFB. He said that he welcomed the announcement that fire and rescue services would be able to carry out standard DBS checks rather than just the basic check. But he added:

*“I support the London Fire Commissioner’s call for the fire and rescue service to have powers to undertake enhanced DBS checks for staff. The fire and rescue service is the only emergency service that does not carry out enhanced checks, even where frontline staff will be working directly with vulnerable people. There is no reason why the fire and rescue service should be an exception among emergency services, particularly given the findings of the Inspectorate’s (HMICFRS) recent report about cultural issues that exist across the service nationally.”<sup>6</sup>*

---

<sup>2</sup> Nazir Afzal OBE, [Independent Culture Review of the London Fire Brigade](#), November 2022

<sup>3</sup> Nazir Afzal OBE, [Independent Culture Review of the London Fire Brigade](#), November 2022

<sup>4</sup> HMICFRS, [Values and culture in fire and rescue services](#), 30 March 2023

<sup>5</sup> HMICFRS, [Values and culture in fire and rescue services](#), 30 March 2023

<sup>6</sup> Mayor’s Question Time, [Transcript of Agenda Item 4 – Questions to the Mayor](#), 18 May 2023, p32

He went on to say:

*“The Government should tackle the remaining recommendations from the Inspectorate’s report with urgency. This includes amending relevant regulations, so fire and rescue service are able to undertake enhanced checks, like other emergency services. In the February meeting of the Assembly Fire, Resilience and Emergency Planning (FREP) Committee, the Commissioner referred to examples where the LFB has had to dismiss people in the organisation who should never have been appointed. This speaks to the fact that fire and rescue service need effective systems in place to prevent unsuitable job applicants from joining, as we have seen in other emergency services.”<sup>7</sup>*

The Committee endorses the Mayor’s call for LFB, and other fire and rescue services, to have access to enhanced DBS checks. We urge you to action this much-needed measure as soon as possible in order to ensure the safety and protection of Londoners who engage with LFB staff as part of LFB’s day-to-day work.

We would be grateful if you could please respond to the Committee by 21 July 2023. Your response should be copied to Philippa Goffe, the Committee’s Senior Policy Adviser ([philippa.goffe@london.gov.uk](mailto:philippa.goffe@london.gov.uk)).

Yours



Anne Clarke AM

**Chair of the Fire, Resilience and Emergency Planning Committee**

---

<sup>7</sup> Mayor’s Question Time, [Transcript of Agenda Item 4 - Questions to the Mayor](#), 18 May 2023, p32