

Fixing the Culture at LFB

Key information

Publication type: Current investigation

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Introduction

The London Assembly Fire Committee is investigating efforts being made by the London Fire Brigade (LFB) to tackle its cultural issues, in response to the 2022 publication of the Independent Cultural Review.

Investigation aims and objectives (Terms of Reference)

This investigation will examine London Fire Brigade's (LFB's) efforts to tackle its cultural issues since the publication of the Independent Cultural Review in 2022. It will focus on the operation and effectiveness of LFB's recently launched Professional Standards Unit and its External Complaints Service. It will seek to:

- Assess the impact these measures have had on tackling the problems of institutional misogyny, racism and issues of mental health identified by the 2022 Independent Culture Review.
- Evaluate firefighters' awareness of and confidence in the Brigade's Professional Standards Unit, and what more needs to be done to make them feel safe and supported when raising complaints.
- Compare LFB's approach to addressing cultural change with other public service organisations facing similar institutional cultural issues.
- Identify additional measures needed to address cultural issues and improve working conditions within LFB.

Key issues

The Independent Culture Review was published in November 2022. This found problems of problems of institutional misogyny, racism in LFB as well as issues with how mental health was treated. The London Fire Commissioner (LFC), Andy Roe, accepted the report's recommendations in full and published an immediate response.

Two key elements of the LFB's response to the culture review have been to set up an External Complaints Service in November 2022 and a Professional Standards Unit (PSU) in January 2024 to investigate matters relating to complaints and misconduct.

The LFC established an Advisory Panel to provide support and challenge LFB's response to the Culture Review. The Advisory Panel is not a decision-making body, but its purpose is to "support the Commissioner's mission to ensure the LFB is trusted to serve and protect London and in making the required changes to the culture of the LFB." The LFC appointed Martin Forde KC, a senior lawyer, as an independent Chair for a two-year period.

Despite these positive steps, in March 2024, HMICFRS wrote to the Commissioner identifying that there was "more work to do" to ensure LFB staff feel confident reporting and handling unacceptable behaviour.

Key questions

- Does the new Professional Standards Unit and External Complaints System have an appropriate, clearly defined role and remit within the LFB's conduct and discipline system?
- Are the new procedures dealing effectively and efficiently with complaints/misconduct relating to conduct highlighted in the Independent Culture Review and supporting culture change in LFB?
- What needs to happen to build trust and confidence in the LFB's new internal procedures?
- What lessons can LFB take from their counterparts in other public service organisations in London and beyond in addressing institutional culture issues?
- How are LFB's actions to address culture issues reflected in terms of recruitment and retention of women and minority ethnic staff?

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