

MDA No.: 1477

Title: Disclosure and Barring Service Checks for London Fire Brigade Letter

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 At the Fire, Resilience and Emergency Planning (FREP) Committee meeting on 1 February 2023, the Committee held a meeting on the Independent Culture Review of the London Fire Brigade (LFB) and resolved that:

Authority be delegated to the Chair, in consultation with the party Group Lead Members, to agree any output arising from the discussion.

- 1.2 Following consultation with party Group Lead Members, the Chair is asked to agree the Committee's letter to the Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire regarding enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service checks for London Fire Brigade staff, as attached at **Appendix 1**.

2. Decision

- 2.1 **That the Fire, Resilience and Emergency Planning Committee's letter to the Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire regarding enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service checks for London Fire Brigade staff be agreed.**

Assembly Member

I confirm that I do not have any disclosable pecuniary interests in the proposed decision and take the decision in compliance with the Code of Conduct for elected Members of the Authority.

The above request has my approval.

Signature:



Printed Name:

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

Date:

15 June 2023

3. Decision by an Assembly Member under Delegated Authority

Background and proposed next steps:

- 3.1 The exercise of delegated authority agreeing the Committee's letter will be formally noted at the Committee's next appropriate meeting.
- 3.2 The terms of reference for this investigation were agreed by the Chair, in consultation with relevant party Group Lead Members, on 16 January 2023 under the standing authority granted to Chairs of Committees and Sub-Committees. Officers confirm that the response falls within these terms of reference.

Confirmation that appropriate delegated authority exists for this decision:

Signature (Committee Services): 

Printed Name: Diane Richards, Committee Officer

Date: 15 June 2023

Telephone Number: 07925 373478

Financial Implications: NOT REQUIRED

Note: Finance comments and signature are required only where there are financial implications arising or the potential for financial implications.

Signature (Finance): Not Required

Printed Name: N/A

Date: N/A

Telephone Number: N/A

Legal Implications:

The Chair of the Fire, Resilience and Emergency Planning Committee has the power to make the decision set out in this report.

Signature (Legal): 

Printed Name: Rory Mckenna, Monitoring Officer

Date: 15 June 2023

Email: rory.mckenna@london.gov.uk

Supporting Detail / List of Consultees:

- Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman)
- Hina Bokhari AM
- Zack Polanski AM

4. Public Access to Information

- 4.1 Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the FoIA, or the EIR and will be made available on the GLA Website, usually within one working day of approval.
- 4.2 If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary.
- 4.3 **Note:** this form (Part 1) will either be published within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

Part 1 - Deferral:

Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? NO

If yes, until what date:

Part 2 – Sensitive Information:

Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under FoIA or EIR should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

Is there a part 2 form? NO

Lead Officer / Author

Signature: P. Goffe

Printed Name: Philippa Goffe

Job Title: Senior Policy Adviser

Date: 9 June 2022

Telephone Number: 07729 625453

Countersigned by Executive Director:

Signature: 

Printed Name: Helen Ewen, Executive Director of Assembly Secretariat

Date: 15 June 23

Telephone Number: 07729 108986



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”.¹

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.

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

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

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.² 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,³ 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.⁴ 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.⁵ 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.”⁶

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 (FREPEP) 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

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

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

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

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

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

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.”⁷

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).

Yours

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anne Clarke', is positioned above the typed name.

Anne Clarke AM

Chair of the Fire, Resilience and Emergency Planning Committee

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