



HM Fire Service Inspectorate

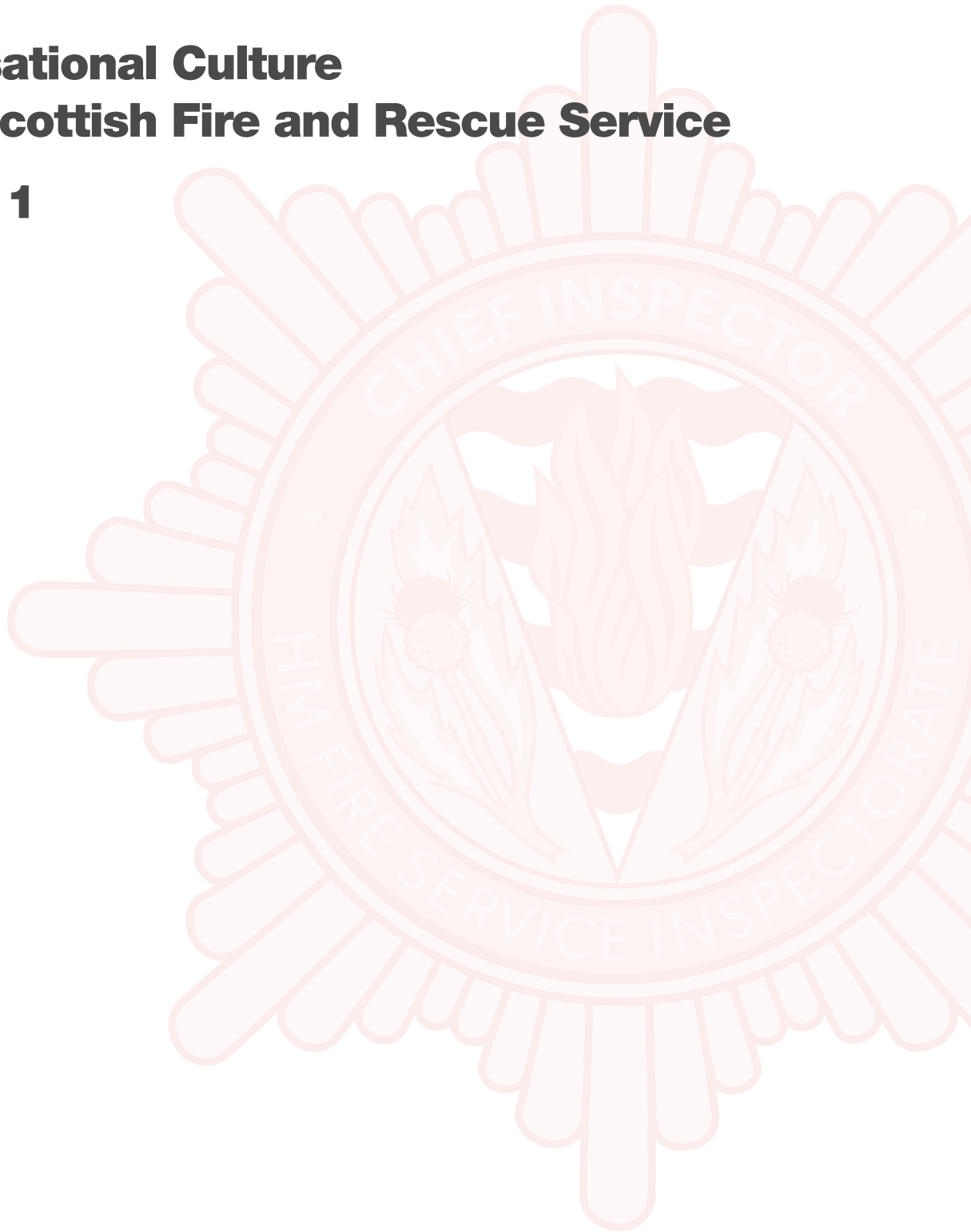
**Organisational Culture
in the Scottish Fire and
Rescue Service**

Volume 1



**HM Fire Service
Inspectorate**

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Integrity, Objectivity, and Fairness.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to all those persons that we engaged with during the course of our inspection, who provided us with information and contributed constructively to interviews during our fieldwork. We are also grateful to Professor Paresh Wankhade of Edge Hill University, and Mark Cashin QFSM DL, retired Chief Officer of Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service, for agreeing to act as advisors, providing key inputs, quality assurance peer review and academic rigour to our inspection process and to this report.

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Foreword

This report marks the first volume of HM Fire Service Inspectorate in Scotland's inspection into culture within the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS).

When we initially set the terms of reference for this inspection, our focus was to consider the corporate values, policies and procedures that help shape and support a positive organisational culture. However, as our inspection progressed, it became clear that to fully understand the culture of the Service, it was necessary to reflect not just the written policies, but also the lived experiences of the people within the organisation.

Throughout our fieldwork, many individuals spoke with us openly, candidly, and with passion about their own experiences within the SFRS. We are deeply grateful to everyone who took the time to meet with us and who shared their perspectives – positive and challenging alike. While the scope of this initial inspection did not include comprehensive fieldwork into local team cultures or wider organisational dynamics, we have chosen to include some of the views and comments provided to us. These statements speak directly to aspects of culture across the Service and provide valuable insights.

It is important to be clear that we have not undertaken sufficient evidence gathering to draw definitive conclusions about culture across the organisation. However, what we have heard during this inspection has informed our understanding and will directly influence the terms of reference and methodology for the next volume of our inspection work in this area.

Finally, we wish to acknowledge and commend the remarkable dedication of the men and women of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. Every day, across the country, they work tirelessly together – and often in the face of significant danger – to protect the people and communities of Scotland. Their commitment, professionalism, and bravery are at the heart of the Service's identity and strength.

Robert Scott QFSM

HM Chief Inspector of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

June 2025

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Introduction

1. This thematic inspection examines aspects of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) that have an influence on its organisational culture. It is the first phase of an inspection on the subject of culture. The inspection has been carried out following a period of intense scrutiny within the emergency service sector across the UK regarding culture and behaviours.
2. The subject of conduct and behaviour of staff is important, however, we don't want this report to focus on negative behaviours. This first report focuses on underpinning documents and policies that drive behaviours rather than the actual behaviours themselves. During this inspection we were clear to those we spoke to what our focus was, and that we were not looking at, or for, examples of misbehaviour or misconduct. Although misbehaviour was not a focus we did have an agreed protocol with the Service in the event that a member of staff raised a concern with us. We did not have to use this.
3. His Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI) is firmly of the view that the overwhelming majority of the SFRS staff come to their work in the belief that they are performing a valuable public service and wish to carry out their duty to the best of their abilities, respecting the public and their colleagues alike. Our inspection has been conducted following the publication of a number of reports highlighting the behaviour and conduct of staff within the emergency service sector (fire, police, and ambulance services) across the United Kingdom. Although the majority of the cases which involved the fire and rescue service related to services outside Scotland, the SFRS has previously had to respond to allegations of a bullying culture involving ex-senior members of the organisation, and we cannot assume that issues of inappropriate culture and conduct are not relevant to Scotland. We therefore believe this is an area of significant public interest. At the outset of this inspection we were of the view that we would not find a single SFRS culture. We are of that view firstly because the Service, as an organisation, is a merger of eight legacy fire and rescue services which each had their own cultures. The SFRS's workforce also perform their duties using different duty systems and in different support directorates, to diverse communities which all exert an influence on how culture and behaviours develop and manifest themselves. Additionally we also believe that the size and complexity of the SFRS make it difficult to operate as a single organisation with a single culture. Our approach is grounded in academic research which suggests that organisational culture is a product of shared symbols and meanings emerging from interactions between different members. The interpretation of organisational culture is deeply embedded in the contextual richness of the total social life of the organisational members' (Meek 1988). Notwithstanding the variety of interpretations available, a pluralist dimension to culture, acknowledging the role and existence of sub-organisational groups or sub-cultures is widely acknowledgedⁱ (Schein, 1996; Ogbonna, 1993; Wankhade et al., 2018).
4. The focus of this first report into culture is about describing the SFRS, how it sets out its corporate expectations, how it communicates these to its workforce, how it supports its staff, and how it ensures compliance through policies and process.

Corporate Expectations

5. Strategic Priority six from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Framework 2022¹ sets out the Scottish Government's expectations for the Service in relation to people. The Priority states
 'SFRS should continue to be a Fair Work employer and develop as an employer of choice. It should promote the equality, safety and physical and mental health of all its staff. SFRS should continue to maximise the effectiveness of its approach to workforce and succession planning and should be a learning organisation with equal opportunities for all. SFRS should ensure it enables innovation and change through its People Strategy. SFRS should actively strive to be an organisation that is more representative of the people and communities of Scotland that it serves.'
6. The Framework also states that the 'SFRS should continue to actively develop the culture of the organisation to embrace the values of being inclusive, diverse and fair and ensure these are fully embedded across the whole workforce.'

The SFRS stated Values

7. In April 2016 the Service published its stated values; **Safety; Teamwork; Respect; and Innovation**. We were advised that these were developed using feedback received from the Service's first cultural audit of its workforce in 2014. The Service defines the values as 'It's about how we approach our work. The words we say and how we say them. The actions we take and the way we do them.' Apart from some very minor cosmetic changes, the SFRS values document remains unaltered since its initial publication and retains a review date of December 2017. The Service's values framework provides staff with an explanation of how each value would be demonstrated as a minimum expected standard, and describes additional behaviours for those aspiring to be in, or those already in a leadership role.
8. The values have organisational prominence because they are used as branding in the majority of Service communications and routinely in the signature strip of staff emails. As part of this inspection we wanted to test the workforce's attitude towards, and understanding of, the values, and appraise the view of the workforce on the importance, or not, to them. We also wanted to assess how the Service measures staff compliance with the values and to see how closely the values mirror staff experience of working in the organisation.
9. Leadership, both at Board level and in senior management, is key to establishing a strong sense of organisational values and ethical behaviour. Research evidence points to the significant role of leaders in setting objectives and creating a supporting and nurturing organisational culture. Boardⁱⁱ and Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) members, in particular, have a central role to play in ensuring that organisational values are integral to the SFRS's performance and strategic aims. As espoused by the Institute for Business Ethics:

¹ Scottish Government: Scottish Fire and Rescue Framework 2022

‘Senior leadership ‘set the tone’ by referring to the values and expectations of the company when they address employees – and by living those values too. Ultimately, the actions of leaders speak louder than words. Messages are strengthened when leaders visibly follow the same rules as everyone else.’

10. As part of its 2024 colleague experience survey (CES), the Service asked a series of questions related to the four values. Staff were asked to consider matters such as feeling able to speak out and on equality and diversity. We cover the subject of surveys in further detail later in the report and also say more about the workforce view of the values. In this report we make reference to our findings based on our discussions with staff, we also make reference to the Service’s own staff survey responses. There are times when these might not align.
11. The Service launched a draft strategy for the period 2025–28 for public consultation on 6 February with a closing date of 2 April 2025. The draft strategy has an outcome that: ‘Our people feel valued and supported by SFRS in a culture that embraces diversity and inclusion, empowerment and accountability and drives joined up working.’ We cover these themes later in this report.
12. The Service has a Dignity and Respect policy (initially named the Dignity and Integrity at Work Policy and renamed in 2022) which sets out the Service’s expectations with regard to the value of respect. The policy is linked to a separate document relating to bullying, harassment, and discrimination, which is covered later, when behaviours displayed fall short of what is expected. The objectives of the policy are to promote a culture of dignity, integrity and respect and to clearly define the standards of behaviour required within the workplace, to signpost support and guidance in a culture where employees have the confidence to raise concerns knowing they will be treated seriously.
13. A number of Service policies have supporting documents such as Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EHRIA), Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA), and Privacy Statement. Responsibility for completing these rests with the policy owner in consultation with relevant subject matter experts. They should also be completed and agreed where relevant, before the policy is published. During our inspection we noted that not all policies had these in place. We also noted that some of the supporting documents do not reflect the policy content. For example, the EHRIA for the appraisal policy makes reference to the consideration of reasonable adjustment needs for staff, however; the policy; the managers handbook; and the staff handbook, are all silent on reasonable adjustments and how to account for them. Whilst we acknowledge that the Service has a document entitled ‘Guide to reasonable adjustments and supporting staff with a disability’ which makes reference to reasonable adjustments during the appraisal process, it is not clearly signposted within the policy or handbooks themselves.

Recommendation 1



We recommend that the SFRS, when creating and reviewing policies and procedures, ensures that all supporting documents such as EHRIA, DPIA and privacy statements etc, are also created and maintained in line with governance arrangements and guidance, where required.

Other examples of Values and Ethics in the Emergency Services

14. In England a Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services² has been issued. The Code sets out five ethical principles which are designed to provide a basis for promoting good behaviour and challenging inappropriate behaviour. The foundation for those principles is contained in a UK government publication³.
15. On 18 May 2021 the Fire Standards Board published a Code of Ethics. The role of the Fire Standards Board is to oversee the identification, organisation, development and maintenance of professional standards for fire and rescue services in England.
16. The Core Code, and the Code of Ethics, are used as reference documents by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) when inspecting English Fire and Rescue Services.
17. The Scottish Parliament is considering the Police (Ethics, Conduct and Scrutiny) (Scotland) Bill. The Bill makes provision about the ethical standards of the Police Service of Scotland, procedures for dealing with and the consequences of certain conduct by constables and how policing in Scotland is scrutinised. Among other things this Bill would require the police to have a code of ethics. There is currently no similar legislation or plans for a code of ethics for the fire and rescue service in Scotland.
18. In April 2023 an internal draft paper was prepared recommending that the SFRS considers adoption of the National Fire Chiefs Council's (NFCC) core code of ethics. It is unclear why this paper remained in draft format and was not further progressed. A revised draft paper was prepared in November 2024, recommending to the SFRS Culture Development Group, (CDG), that following a review of the alignment and experience of other fire and rescue services in relation to the NFCC Core Code of Ethics, that SFRS look to adopt and embed the Core Code of Ethics within the SFRS. Whilst there are undoubted benefits in doing this, for example, aligning the Service to the rest of the fire sector in the UK, we would caution against making any integration of ethics and values overly complex as this may reduce their resonance with staff. As part of this work the Service should consider comprehensive engagement with staff to ensure that any revision resonates with, and matters to personnel.
19. In addition to contributing to the development of the core code of ethics, the NFCC has a selection of development tools and products to support fire and rescue services in the UK to improve culture. The NFCC Culture Action Plan describes culture as the identity and practices of an organisation and its employees. The NFCC has created a culture dashboard which is a tool to monitor and understand the culture of an organisation. The dashboard supports services in monitoring and understanding their culture, identifying key issues and successful practices, enabling conversations between staff and leadership on values, culture, fairness, ethics and diversity and supporting evidence-based action. The NFCC is a membership association of which the SFRS is a member. As such the SFRS has access to the products and services available to other fire and rescue services. We suggest a greater engagement with additional available resources.

² Core Code of Ethics; National Fire Chiefs Council, Local Government Association, Association of Police and Crime Commissioners

³ The Seven Principles of Public Life; 1995

The SFRS Workforce

20. As at 31 March 2024 the SFRS employed 7,512 staff, with a gender profile of 85.6% male and 14.4% female. More details of the workforce make-up can be found in Table 1 which shows the variation in the proportion of female and male members of staff in the Service. The gender make-up of Scotland at the 2022 census was 51.4% female and 48.6% male.

Workforce	Staff Numbers			Percentage %	
Category	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male
Wholetime Operational	220	3202	3422	6.4	93.6
Retained Duty System	191	2517	2708	7.1	92.9
Retained Full Time (On-Call Support WC)	8	47	55	14.5	85.5
Control	142	29	171	83	17
Support Staff	482	405	887	54.3	45.7
Volunteer Duty System	42	227	269	15.6	84.4
All Staff (total)	1077	6380	7512	14.4	85.6

Table 1 SFRS workforce as at 31 March 2024 (source SFRS)

21. Identifying how representative the workforce is of the local community in terms of ethnicity, for example, is difficult, as recording of ethnicity is not mandatory on SFRS systems. In the Service 46% of staff have not recorded their ethnic background, or have noted it as prefer not to say, on the SFRS Human Resources (HR) and Payroll System. For those that did record their background, 52.8% recorded white and 1.2% recorded as a minority. The ethnic diversity of local communities varies across Scotland; generally rural areas of Scotland tend to be less diverse than the urban central belt.
22. It is a similar picture for disability, less than 1% of staff have recorded that they have a disability on the HR and payroll system. For the majority of staff the information is not recorded (72%), with 26% recording that they're not disabled. There may be factors which influence the low number of disabled staff employed, such as their operational role. However, there may also be a reluctance to declare disabilities and other protected characteristics such as sexual orientation.
23. Since 2018-19 the SFRS has been publishing demographic statistics for new entrants and, as part of its recruitment process, the Service is seeking to improve the diversity of its workforce by trying to attract underrepresented groups. Although some statistics are published, the full diversity of new entrants is unclear. For example, in 2023-24; of the 432 new entrants, 357 were male and 75 female. However, in wholetime recruitment, for 95.1% of new entrants, the ethnicity was not stated. A similar position exists in the recruitment of On-Call, Control, and Support staff, with respective 'not stated' figures of 94.4%; 100% and 69.9%. The Service aspires to have a workforce which is representative of the people and communities of Scotland, but without relevant data it is impossible to say whether this aspiration is closer to being achieved or not.

24. It is clear that the Service is predominantly male and therefore is not reflective of society in Scotland. The Service has stated that it will take steps to encourage the completion of sensitive information through management engagement with staff. Whilst the Service publishes demographic information in relation to its workforce, it does not provide comparative analysis of its workforce to the general working population of Scotland. The SFRS also reports every two years on the Pay Gap and occupational segregation by Gender, Disability and Ethnicity. For data exploring disability and ethnic minorities, this report is based on relatively small data sets which makes robust analysis challenging.
25. The Service introduced a new Positive Action Strategy in 2019, with the aim of promoting the SFRS as an Employer of Choice to Scotland's diverse communities, to attract, recruit and retain people from underrepresented groups. Positive Action (PA) measures are allowed in the Equality Act 2010 in order to give additional help for groups of people who share a 'protected characteristic' (for example, race, sex, or sexual orientation) in order to provide a level playing field. We make comment on PA later in the report.
26. Contractually, the workforce is broadly split into two categories, uniformed and Support staff. Within this there is further sub-division. Support staff provide the functions such as technical support and administration support services necessary for the Service to operate, for example office-based administrative staff, (who mostly work from home) and workshop-based mechanics and technicians. Within the uniform category, the workforce is split into Wholetime operational, including operations control, and On-Call operational (RDS and VDS). Station-based Wholetime firefighters are employed on a five-watch duty system based on a 10-week, continually repeating, shift cycle. Whereas On-Call firefighters are mobilised on an as required basis, responding to alerts when necessary, in addition to designated, usually weekly, training sessions. Whilst not unique to the SFRS, a lack of diversity in workforce in the Fire and Rescue Service sector has been highlighted over the last three decades, predominantly regarding the sector in England and Wales, from the Tom Bucke Report (1994) to more recent reports (Afzal, 2022; Morris, 2024) and HMICFRS inspections (2023, 2024). Improving services and community outcomes through a more inclusive, equal and diverse workforce is key for a vibrant organisational cultureⁱⁱⁱ.

Human Resource Management Structure within the SFRS

27. The SFRS's People Directorate has responsibility for the management and delivery of services to support all the human resource elements of the organisation. Within the People Directorate, the People Advice and Employee Relations team are described as acting as a first point of contact for people matters in the Service. We have already made mention of some of the Service's overarching strategic documents, such as its Long Term Vision and draft Strategy 2025-28, however, the Service does not have a current single strategic document covering People. We see this as a potential development that could bring with it obvious improvement in creating, understanding and maintaining a positive workforce culture.

Recommendation 2



We recommend that the Service engages with its workforce to develop and create a People Strategy that meets the needs of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Framework and the Service's Long Term Vision.

28. The team are there to provide advice and support on employee relations matters, people issues, case management and general HR advice. Advisors in the team are aligned to geographic areas and areas of responsibility.
29. There was a restructure of the Directorate in April 2023, and as a result there were grading and job title changes. Throughout our interviews, both with staff within the People Directorate and those outside it, the result of the restructure and the roles that staff undertake, was described as being unclear or confusing with a lack of clarity of workflows and responsibilities. From an external viewpoint, some of the confusion may be attached to the fact that there are a number of posts with the same job title, for example People Manager.
30. Despite the fact that the restructure took place in 2023, some People Directorate staff were of the view that the change was still embedding, many others felt that it didn't work and should be changed. We found that staff outside the Directorate would just contact a familiar person in the hope that they would find the answer they needed. It was regularly described to us as being difficult to raise queries with People Directorate staff, with lengthy delays or no response to phone calls or email requests. The structure was described as 'top-heavy' with too many managers and insufficient lower grade administrative posts; with some staff feeling that they were not providing value for money. This was described as having a negative impact on staff and the Directorate's ability to progress projects, and on other parts of the organisation having to fulfil functions that had previously been undertaken by People Directorate staff. We were also advised that there was not always a People Directorate member of staff in attendance at key meetings, such as attendance management meetings.

31. The restructure was also said to be the reason why some strategic work, such as that on PA, was said to have lost focus. Staff cited that prioritisation of work was an issue. The workload was described by some as being too great with too few staff, and with perceived constant changing priorities; we mention this again elsewhere in the report. We are aware that a prioritisation workshop took place in order to decide what work should take precedence, we were told that the outcome of this work was inconclusive.
32. Whilst we understand the idea behind the role of the Strategic People Partners within the revised structure, on the face of it the People Directorate appears to us top-heavy and difficult to navigate. We were advised that a post implementation review of the structure was carried out which was reported to be positive. We are of the view that this reorganisation has been very disruptive to the People Directorate, and the cause of cultural problems within it. It has also impacted the services and support it provides to the wider organisation.

Recommendation 3

We recommend that the SFRS review the impact of the current People Directorate structure with a view to improving the efficiency, consistency and capacity of the Directorate to improve delivery of service. This should include openly engaging and consulting with staff across the organisation to understand issues with the current structure. Any revision should support the delivery of the SFRS's Strategic Plan and provide the professional skills and support necessary to meet the workforce needs across the Service.

33. In carrying out any review of the People Directorate, consideration should be given to the following:
- clarity of roles and responsibilities within the Directorate;
 - an effective communication campaign to support any changes;
 - the delivery of tailored and effective support services to personnel; and
 - an evaluation of any changes implemented.
34. Prior to the most recent restructure of the People Directorate, responsibility for occupational health reporting and management of personnel moved from the Health and Safety department to become part of what is now the People Directorate. As we highlighted in our 2022 inspection report: management of health and safety: an operational focus, there is a potential weakness in the health and wellbeing function not sitting within the Training, Safety and Assurance Directorate.

Recruitment, Induction and Promotion

35. The Service has a Recruitment and Selection (All Staff) Policy, which was first published in February 2015 and was due for review in February 2017. We were unable to find any evidence that such a review had taken place and as such the 2017 version of the policy is still extant. The policy commits the People Directorate to monitor and evaluate the recruitment and selection processes, by selecting data at random from recruitment and selection campaigns.
36. There is also a Recruitment and Selection Guidance Handbook, dated April 2015 which can be read in conjunction with the policy. The handbook is designed to give managers and other employees clarity around their respective roles and responsibilities in the recruitment process.
37. The Service states that its recruitment and selection policy has been designed to be objective, impartial and applied consistently. There is a commitment to undertake a random audit of shortlisted applications to check quality control. The policy also states that the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 should be considered at all times throughout the recruitment and selection process, including the advertising of posts, the assessment of applicants, and consideration of whether any reasonable adjustments should be made to a selection process. The policy also states that each panel member will be appropriately trained to adequately carry out their role within the process.
38. We did not carry out an in-depth examination of promotions or temporary promotions within the Service as it was beyond the scope of this inspection. However, we make the following observations. The SFRS has a centrally managed, and established, promotion, selection and development programme. The central management of the process means that the Service will run substantive promotion campaigns when it is identified that there are posts to fill. These vacancies are often due to the impact of turnover elsewhere in the hierarchy, causing a chain reaction of posts to fill. The Service also has a Temporary Promotion policy, dating from 2025, due for review in April 2029. If it is known, when the vacancy first arises, that a temporary replacement will be required for longer than six months then the recruiting manager must initiate a substantive recruitment process. Otherwise the temporary promotions process can be followed, which allows the post to be filled for up to an initial six months. The policy does however, allow for an extension after six months, up to a period of 12 months.
39. In order to temporarily fill the vacancy the recruiting manager is required to consult holding pools of successful candidates from previous substantive recruitment campaigns; the short term promotion list; and the transfer request list to identify if there is a suitable candidate available. We were aware of officers who had been on temporary promotion for extended periods, which may contravene the policy, sometimes in different roles. We made observations in our East Service Delivery Area inspection⁴ regarding officers who had been on temporary promotion for lengthy periods and then not being successful in a substantive promotion process. We were of the view that there may be other ways to manage the temporary promotion process.

4 HMFSI: Inspection of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service East Service Delivery Area

40. At the time of our fieldwork a process had been run for the role of crew commanders. Candidates for promotion, and the Service, invest a lot of time and effort in the promotion process and there can often be a long lead-in time. Personnel raised with us their dissatisfaction with the process following its conclusion. We were advised that staff were told there was to be no holding pool after the successful candidates were appointed. This would mean that those that were unsuccessful would have to re-apply for the next vacancy. Further, it transpired that there were only two posts to be filled, but we understand that more than twenty staff were interviewed. We don't consider that this is an efficient way for SFRS to manage promotion for either the candidates or the Service.
41. Whilst the SFRS has a guide for reasonable adjustments, during our fieldwork we were told by some managers that they felt inadequately trained regarding the assessment and implementation of reasonable adjustments. We were also advised by training instructors that information relating to a uniformed trainee's or potential trainee's reasonable adjustment requirements were not being made available to instructors. This was then having a negative impact on their ability to adequately support individuals, either through the initial assessment process or their initial training. We would encourage the Service to ensure that when reasonable adjustments are required to support individual needs, this information is passed on where appropriate.

Area for consideration 1:

We would encourage the Service to ensure that when reasonable adjustments are required to support individual needs, this information is passed on where appropriate.

42. SFRS vacancies are predominantly advertised externally using the [myjobscotland](https://myjobscotland.gov.uk/) public and third sector recruitment portal. The policy requires that prior to advertising a post, reference should be made to the redeployment register, displaced and transfer staff list, to see if there is a suitable person for the role internally. The policy states that 'In accordance with our commitment to provide career development opportunities to SFRS employees, all posts will normally be advertised internally in the first instance'. National recruitment campaigns can receive a high volume of applications resulting in significant administration.
43. Turnover of staff within the Wholetime workforce is normally less frequent and more predictable than with staff of other duty systems. The turnover in Wholetime staff over the 12 months to March 2024 was 4.6% (down from 9.6% the previous year) and for On-Call staff was 8.9% (up from 7.9% in 2023). Under normal circumstances, the Service is able to forecast staffing changes and plan for recruitment. Workforce Planning have created a model containing trigger point to produce retirement forecasts based on factors related to age, length of service and pension scheme membership. The Service has also proactively introduced an anonymous survey to gain insight and an indication of people's retirement intentions. The Service therefore commences recruitment campaigns when it is known that there will be a requirement for Wholetime new entrants. It is likely that the next campaign will run during the summer of 2025. This planning data is also used to forecast succession requirements and plan the necessary promotion processes.

44. The Service has created a central staffing solutions team. The purpose of the team is to maximise the attraction, recruitment, retention and development of operational personnel to maintain the respective Target Operating Model.
45. Wholetime and On-Call recruitment is broadly managed centrally. The Service provides background information on its internet site for prospective applicants on what the process entails, such as details of the medical, fitness tests, psychometric test, practical test and selection centre. There is also information on a 12-week programme in order to develop fitness. Application for vacancies can be made on-line. For the On-call workforce, the recruitment campaign is open all the time, due to the continual requirement for personnel.
46. For applicants interested in becoming On-Call firefighters there is a Pre-Recruitment Engagement Programme (PREP). Once an application has been registered, personnel from the relevant local station will support the applicant in preparations to undertake the fitness and practical selection tests for On-Call firefighters. We have commented positively on the PREP process and welcomed its introduction in other reports. However, we have also made comment in other reports on the sometimes excessive time it takes for the On-Call recruitment process to be completed in some areas. From our most recent fieldwork in the North Service Delivery Area inspection this still seems to be an issue.
47. Support staff turnover is less predictable compared to uniformed staff groups. The ability to recruit into some support functions is difficult, Digital and Technology Service ((DaTS) formerly ICT) for example has experienced significant challenges in attracting and retaining staff, leading to high vacancy rates and a reliance on, market allowances, contractors and agency staff.
48. Recruitment into the Support workforce is usually managed locally to where the vacancy arises, with the support of human resources specialists. For the Support workforce when a vacancy arises the recruiting line manager will request that the post is filled by completing a vacancy request form. The job advert will be placed by the Workforce Planning and Resourcing Team. Any proposed changes to departmental structure by creating a new post must be approved by the Strategic Leadership Team; this was perceived by some members of Support staff as not a good use of their time. The policy states that consideration is given to the use of PA events to encourage applications from particular groups with different needs, with a past track record of disadvantage or low participation, to apply for a career in the fire and rescue service, or to assist them to perform to the best of their ability. We have made comment elsewhere in this report regarding PA.
49. There are standard templates for job descriptions, adverts and information packs. Guidance suggests that the templates should be reviewed to ensure that they meet the needs of the post and are suitable to engage as many applications as possible from all sections of the community. The SFRS states it is committed to the 'Double Tick' disability initiative and that its imagery is included on all recruitment material.

50. Candidate selection is made on the basis of the use of assessments such as interviews, presentations, psychometric tests and practical assessments. The policy states that psychometric assessments are only to be used by trained personnel. Although we have been assured during our fieldwork that the candidate's alignment to Service values is tested during the recruitment process, there is no mention of this within the policy. The People Directorate will ensure quality assurance by auditing a random selection of scored shortlisted applications by members of the panel.

Recommendation 4



We recommend that when the Service reviews its recruitment and selection policy, and supporting documentation, it considers explicitly incorporating the assessment of the candidate's alignment to the Service's values, throughout the selection and recruitment process.

Positive Action

51. The Equality Act 2010 allow employers to use Positive Action (PA) measures to help ensure that groups with a particular protected characteristic are not being excluded or disadvantaged in the workplace: employers can take PA measures to help minimise that disadvantage. These measures can be general actions aimed to help people overcome barriers and, in relation to recruitment, actions that reduce disadvantage and/or increase representation, specifically when it comes to deciding between equally qualified candidates, are also possible. The SFRS Positive Action Strategy 2019-2022 contains priorities and actions to address areas of underrepresentation within the workforce. There was previously a dedicated team leading on PA but this team is no longer in place.
52. In 2019 a '[break the mould](#)' campaign was launched to increase applications from women and minority ethnic groups. This direct and targeted approach to attracting applications from underrepresented groups more than doubled applications from those groups, as can be seen in Table 2. Whilst this was successful in achieving an increase of applications, the campaign has not been run again, following significant negative feedback about it. Clearly the campaign was successful in increasing applications, almost a 40% increase. Hopefully learning opportunities can be derived from the feedback received and an equally successful amended campaign could be run.

Applications	2018	2019 (Break The Mould)
Overall Applications	4373	6075
Female	360	771
Male	3998	5261
LGBTQ+	168	403
Ethnic Minority	69	157

Table 2 'Break the mould' statistics compared with previous year (source SFRS)

53. In the five years to 2024, the number of firefighters from one of the under-represented groups in Wholetime firefighting roles has dropped back to just below the starting point. For On-Call firefighters there has been an 8% reduction over the same period. However, as demonstrated in Table 3 below, as a percentage of the operational workforce, numbers have remained broadly the same.

Year	Total Wholetime	Wholetime female firefighters	%	On-Call Female firefighter	Total On-Call	%
2020	3646	224	6.14	210	2944	7.13
2021	3591	221	6.15	197	2884	6.83
2022	3540	229	6.47	192	2768	6.94
2023	3506	229	6.53	185	2737	6.76
2024	3438	223	6.49	193	2721	7.09

Table 3 Gender breakdown of staff by year (*source SFRS*)

54. No data was available that could illustrate the success of attracting applications from under-represented groups outwith 2018 and 2019 figures for the Break the Mould campaign. Nor was there any available data on the reasons for staff exiting the organisation and their declared protected characteristics, which may provide further insight to the Service. We say more about exit interviews and on the Service's access to robust data elsewhere in this report.
55. Furthermore, a change to the People Directorate priorities was brought about by the Covid pandemic, and resulted in People Directorate resources being redirected away from PA activities supporting recruitment, towards other work.
56. A proposal to review the PA strategy was prepared and presented to the SLT and the Employee Partnership forum in May 2022 which amends the delivery of PA activities to a more area-based commitment, using guidance material and a PA toolkit. The intention for Service Delivery Areas to take responsibility for PA activity using the toolkit, and therefore improve the workforce profile, is not widely understood or embedded in any policy or performance measure. Our fieldwork found little evidence to show that the strategy is embedded, communicated, is consistently applied, or that resources are known to exist to support area PA initiatives.
57. The SFRS CDG, convened in November 2023, with actions to explore its approach to attraction, recruitment, retention and development, and the reasons for staff exiting the organisation. This brief is underpinned by the analysis of recent cultural reports from UK FRS. The SFRS recognises that efforts to attract, promote and maintain a diverse workforce will require initiatives beyond PA but have provided little evidence on the progress of any actions to address this.
58. As members of the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index, where there is benchmarking of 246 UK employers, the SFRS commits to focussed improvement towards LGBTQ+ inclusion. The Service was recently awarded a gold award and a top 100 place (coming in at position 67). Whilst Service policies and procedures featured high in the scoring; monitoring, was cited as an area for improvement.

59. There are some active Employee Network Groups such as: Neurodiversity; LGBTQ+; and the Women's Employee Network. There was no active network for those from Black and Ethnic Minority Groups. These groups are referenced later in the report.
60. The SFRS holds a corporate membership for Women in the Fire Service, a UK FRS network, and SFRS staff have been supported by the Service to attend and participate at a UK level for a number of years. Whilst SFRS membership is in its infancy, the Service did host a weekend workshop on behalf of the network in 2024, demonstrating a further commitment to play an active role.
61. An example of local area activity for networking for women in their role was displayed on the SFRS website: [On Call Firefighters inspired by Chief Executive at network meeting | Scottish Fire and Rescue Service](#) However, during the fieldwork, there were examples of women being less likely to express aspects of their 'true self' in order to conform with the group norms, this may also be equally true for male staff in predominantly female areas of the organisation, with staff stating that if there was more diversity then there would be greater awareness of individual staff needs.
62. HMFSI inspections of the East Service Delivery Area (October 2023) and the West Service Delivery Area⁵ (June 2024) recognise that PA remains an area for improvement to address the disproportionate workforce representation in Service Delivery staff groups. The North Service Delivery Area inspection report has yet to publish but is likely to include similar observations.
63. In any case, the PA Strategy 2019-22 remains the most recent guidance.

Recommendation 5

We recommend that the SFRS conducts a review of its Positive Action strategy and how well embedded it is within its recruitment processes. The Service should also capture and monitor data from vacancy applications, carry out, and publish, an analysis of this information to ensure that any Positive Action activity undertaken meets the needs of protected characteristic groups.

Security vetting

64. The Service has a policy for the vetting of current and prospective employees. Linked to this policy there is a further Employment And Criminal Convictions Policy which was due for review in November 2024. All candidates applying for roles within SFRS are asked to provide details of previous criminal convictions within their application form. The Service does commit to consider applications for employment from candidates with criminal convictions, based on their merits, and will not necessarily refuse employment on the basis of criminal convictions, unless materially justified by the requirements of the role applied for. Where a candidate does not disclose criminal conviction information when requested, and is subsequently found to have criminal convictions before appointment, the candidate may be withdrawn from the recruitment or selection process. Where a candidate has been issued with a contract of employment prior to the failure to disclose being recognised, this will be addressed through the SFRS Disciplinary Policy and Procedure. There may also be circumstances where external agency and contractor staff will be required to be vetted. This is also defined within policy.

⁵ HMFSI: Inspection of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service West Service Delivery Area

65. The Service maintains a register of posts that require either a Disclosure or PVG (Protection of Vulnerable Groups) check. Policy requires managers to have an appreciation of the principles of Disclosure and the PVG scheme. Managers are also required to consider the responsibilities of any new posts created within their area in question, and assess whether the post should be subject to either Disclosure or PVG scheme membership.
66. In addition to the register of posts, the Service maintains a spreadsheet to track the applications of those who are required to have a PVG check. The individual staff member's personal record is annotated with a successful application to the PVG scheme when the Service is advised by Disclosure Scotland. This information is retained by the Service until the date the employee leaves the Service plus a further six years. This is in line with the Service's record retention policy.
67. In some circumstances, the SFRS has a duty to ensure that a referral is made to Disclosure Scotland regarding a disciplinary outcome. Discipline is covered in further detail later.
68. Under the Employee Code of Conduct, staff have a responsibility to advise their line manager in the event that they are charged with a criminal offence and thereafter the outcome of any trial. Line managers have a responsibility to advise the Local Senior Officer or Department Head of any offences reported to them.
69. A more in-depth review of vetting will be undertaken in our next inspection relating to conduct.

Induction

70. The Service has an induction policy which passes responsibility to manage the induction process to the employee's line manager, though elements of the induction itself may be carried out by other colleagues. There is an induction check-list to help guide the process and ensure completion, including reference to subjects such as expected behaviours. There is also a manager guidance note. The process should be completed within two weeks of the employee's start date and both the manager and employee are expected to sign-off the check-list to confirm that the process has been concluded. The policy also covers internal staff transfers between functions and departments. Following our fieldwork some staff felt that the induction process was inadequate on promotion.
71. The process also makes reference to ensuring that, where an employee has declared a disability, reasonable adjustments are in place. The supplementary manager guidance note states that: All SFRS personnel require to have an awareness of the following key SFRS policies;
- SFRS Code of Conduct (issued with new entrant contracts)
 - Dignity and Integrity at Work Policy (renamed Dignity and Respect Policy in 2022)
 - Disciplinary Policy & Procedure
 - Grievance Policy & Procedure
 - Managing Attendance Policy
 - Appraisal Policy & Procedure
 - Anti-Fraud Policy
 - SFRS Acceptable Use Policy
- We cover the majority of these policies elsewhere in this report.

72. A module within the on-line Learning Content Management System (LCMS), has a copy of induction material, with the exception of the Code of Conduct. LCMS is predominantly used by uniformed staff. New entrants are expected to access and read thoroughly each key policy. There is a process at the end for the employee to confirm that they have read them. The Code of Conduct forms part of the documentation new entrants receive with their contract of employment. There is a further LCMS package which must be completed covering Professional Behaviours and Equality. The module retains a three-year currency for personnel. It highlights the expectations and legal requirements of employees, relating to fulfilling their obligations for equality and diversity, along with what employees can expect from the SFRS in how it meets its obligations. The module also explains to employees, concepts of equality, diversity, inclusion and human rights and why these are relevant to their job.
73. Whilst we are aware that there is a Flexi Duty Officer (FDO) induction pack on LCMS, anecdotally in our fieldwork interviews we were told that there was either limited or no induction process before taking on the role. This was being addressed by some LSO areas running their own bespoke induction process.

Staff Training and Development

74. For new entrants, Wholetime personnel attend a three month training course at a SFRS training centre. Following graduation from this course, trainees then go into a 'development phase', where they are given three further assessments. Due to recent increased intakes of trainees, there are challenges in supporting and assessing their development phase which is proving resource intensive in some areas. We encountered trainees who had completed their development plans but could not be signed off as being competent firefighters, due to a lack of assessors and verifiers nationally to approve these plans. The assessor to candidate ratio is approximately 1:7 and the Service has an aspiration to move to a ratio of 1:5. The Service is aware of this issue and is actively working to improve this.
75. During our fieldwork we spoke to a sample of training instructors at various SFRS locations to ask them how they saw their role in promoting a positive culture within the SFRS. Of the instructors we spoke to, they overwhelmingly saw their roles as one of ensuring that training was delivered within a positive learning environment, where trainees were supported in their development and that they are able to remedy any gaps in their learning without being ridiculed for having to do so. We see this as a welcome development, as we have commented in previous reports of examples of personnel encountering what they saw as an intimidating culture adopted by some instructing staff. However, from our discussion with non-instructional staff there may be continuing isolated pockets of negative behaviours. This may be explored in more detail in a future inspection. Instructors also stated that they would underline and demonstrate the Service values during their interactions with trainees. The instructors also told us that they would challenge what they saw as inappropriate behaviour being demonstrated.
76. Initial training for an On-Call firefighter is to attend a two-week 'task and task management' course, followed by a further two weeks of breathing apparatus related training at a later date, these two courses may be delivered at different training locations. This represents a significant commitment by individuals and primary employers which can act as a barrier to individuals being willing to join the SFRS. We have previously commented, and made recommendations, regarding this training and its delivery in our 2020 report⁶ 'The Training of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's Retained Duty System Personnel'.
77. We reviewed the course material and observed delivery of part of the session covering the equality and diversity input to new entrants. We also spoke to instructors to get an understanding of the delivery of the subject of culture and the Service's values. We felt that the delivery of the content was positive and resonated well.
78. HMFSI has announced plans to undertake a future inspection of operational training and development and relevant findings will be explored further where appropriate.

⁶ HMFSI: The Training of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's Retained Duty System Personnel

79. The Service commenced a pilot project of a non-mandatory development pathway for staff in December 2022. The project focuses on enhancing the leadership and management skills of participants at a supervisory and middle management level. When we undertook our inspection of the East Service Delivery Area⁷ in 2022 we said that we looked forward to seeing an evaluation of the project in due course. To date, a full evaluation of the pilot had still not been undertaken, which we find disappointing, although feedback from participants has been sought. The volume of staff who have participated in the programme is very low when compared to eligible supervisory staff. We are aware of the challenges and cost implications involved in releasing staff from their day job to attend a development course. There are plans to further develop the pathway to include a day 2 and day 3 input covering operational aspects of the role, rather than people management skills, these elements are still in the design phase. Before the pilot commenced there had been little to no development opportunities given to aspiring or current SFRS managers. For many we spoke to, it was stated that management and leadership development was learned by observing others. We feel this is an important omission. If managers are not given the training and tools with which to properly manage the workforce then there should be no surprise when policies have not been adhered to, or are applied inconsistently. Further, as we noted in our inspection report Mental Health and Wellbeing Support in the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service⁸, transition into promoted posts and a failure to prepare personnel for these changes can have a significant and adverse impact upon the mental health of individuals. From our interviews, individuals were clearly ‘hungry’ for any form of management and leadership training. There is a willingness from both operational and support managers from across the Service to participate in these development programmes when they are available.

Recommendation 6 We recommend that the Service conclude and evaluate its internal management development pathway pilot.



80. The SFRS has placed a limited number of officers on the NFCC Middle Managers Leadership programme. The NFCC also has in place a Supervisory Leadership Development Pathway that would be accessible at a similar cost per candidate to the middle managers leadership programme, and which would allow the current deficit to be addressed in a meaningful timescale. It was reported to us the NFCC pathways do not fully deliver all of the development needs that the SFRS would seek for their personnel; however, it is our view that the limited resources of the Talent Development Team may be better suited to designing and delivering the more limited number of training modules that they and the Service consider necessary for a range of management topics to be delivered.

Recommendation 7 We recommend that the SFRS should explore the option to make use of the current NFCC Supervisory and Middle Manager development pathways as a more efficient and effective means to close the leadership and management training deficit gap.



⁷ Op.cit

⁸ HMFSI: Mental Health and Wellbeing Support in the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

81. During our fieldwork the majority of supervisory staff and watch-based managers we spoke with advised us that there had been no, or extremely limited, development of management skills before assuming their management role. The Service has made available training for some of its managers in inclusive leadership, which aims to cultivate team inclusion. Inspectors consider that this lack of development may pose a risk to the organisation where a process is not correctly followed and may have the potential to expose the Service during any formal action. In our inspection of the West Service Delivery Area⁹ we made a recommendation that the Service should conduct a review of its leadership and management development processes to provide a national standard and syllabus for delivery at all levels. We are aware that a sub-group of the CDG is looking at management development.
82. Due to the perceived lack of an internal SFRS provided development product for personnel, some LSO areas were implementing their own solution to support and develop managers, some with the participation of People Directorate staff. In our West Service Delivery area report we highlighted the provision of these local initiatives as an area of good practice. We also said we believed it would be worth developing these sessions further across all areas, in support of a national syllabus and programme being produced. During our fieldwork, it was suggested that access to directorate development opportunities, to gain experience in a functional role, was constrained due to the perceived necessary daily commute to Service Headquarters in the West Service Delivery Area.

⁹ Op.cit

HR Procedures

Appraisal – Performance monitoring

83. The Service has an appraisal process for all employees, the policy which was last reviewed in December 2023 and was due a further review in April 2024, remains extant. Appraisal and related objective setting is intended to highlight where individual performance provides a contribution to the overall SFRS strategic goals, values and vision. The SFRS is committed to developing all employees to their full potential and to improving service delivery. A fundamental aim of the policy is to ensure that each employee understands how their individual objectives relate to the achievement of the SFRS strategic aims. HMFSI are of the view that appraisals can be a contributor to staff feeling valued as part of a comprehensive performance management process.
84. The appraisal process consists of the elements of a year-end and a mid-year meeting to discuss performance and encourages employees and managers to take the opportunity throughout the year to discuss performance. In our discussions with staff we were advised that a very small number were having quarterly performance appraisal meetings. The view regarding this quarterly frequency was mixed: some liked it; others found it burdensome.
85. Appraisal dates are different for uniformed and Support staff due to the respective routine pay award dates, but generally speaking follow the same overall process of an annual and a mid-year appraisal.
86. There are guidance documents for the appraising manager and for the member of staff. There is also a non-mandatory self-assessment proforma for the member of staff receiving the appraisal. This can be completed prior to the appraisal meeting. During our fieldwork we found that, of the staff we engaged with, the self-assessment proforma was very rarely used, if known about. Further, many of those we spoke to felt that there was little value in the appraisal process, particularly from On-Call staff, though we found a similar view was held by some Support staff. The process was regularly described as a ‘tick-box’ exercise, we also made a similar observation in the inspection of the West Service Delivery Area report¹⁰.
87. We encountered a large proportion of staff from all staff groups who hadn’t had an appraisal for a number of years, including within the People Directorate. It was frequently stated that an appraisal was only of value if you were going for promotion, (where the appraisal forms part of the application process for uniformed staff), or if you wanted a training course. But here again, the value was downplayed when staff either saw no direct link between having a development request identified on an appraisal and the access to the development opportunity. Annually the Service completes a Learning Needs Analysis (LNA) review. There is a perceived lack of availability of paid for courses as these are seen to be more challenging to access due to budgetary constraints. This was not always the case, as some staff must demonstrate CPD for professional reasons, such as solicitors. Some teams and functions have made use of no cost learning opportunities that they have been able to source outwith the Service, through courses made available from representative bodies, on-line platforms

¹⁰ Op.cit

or by developing local initiatives. During our fieldwork, some staff had been waiting on a particular training course for a significant period of time, but had observed other staff members attending these courses ahead of them. This has led to some staff suggesting an unfair selection culture in course allocation, whilst some voiced those whose ‘face fits’ got all the courses. Managers also queried the spend allocation of this budget as there was no analysis available. We are advised that there are plans to identify and provide career or ‘development pathways’ for Support staff. We have been advised by the SFRS that an annual Learning and Development Report is made to the People Committee that provides analysis and the allocation of budget.

Recommendation 8



We recommend that the SFRS continue to undertake analysis and review of course allocation to ensure fair and equitable distribution of funded courses to support the SFRS in its objectives. Promote and develop impactful communication of outcomes and reasons behind funding allocation to the wider organisation. In addition, the SFRS should consider allocating time for staff to work on their development.

88. At the beginning of the appraisal process a set of objectives are intended to be agreed between the parties. The objectives must include mandatory objectives as defined on the appraisal proforma. There can be up to a further three objectives.
89. Within the appraisal policy there is the role of a countersigning officer. Their role is primarily twofold;
 - reviewing (and/or assigning responsibility for the review of) performance appraisal paperwork where an employee raises a concern regarding their appraisal ratings or non-award of a Continued Professional Development (CPD) payment / salary increment; and,
 - carrying out annual quality assurance (e.g. random sample 10% minimum of completed appraisal forms) within their department to check consistency.
90. From our fieldwork there was very limited evidence that the quality assurance check is being undertaken. There is no central electronic system to record and process appraisals, this may be contributing to some of the issues. For uniformed personnel the appraisal includes an assessment, at the time of appraisal, of suitability for promotion. The individual must be identified as ‘ready for progression’ in their latest appraisal in addition to receiving their current Line manager’s endorsement. We would recommend that the Service action the quality assurance and monitoring reviews as stated in the policies.

Recommendation 9



We recommend that the Service ensures that the quality assurance and monitoring reviews, as stated in its policies, are conducted and evidenced.

Recommendation 10

We recommend that the Service undertakes a full review of its approach to appraisals and, takes into consideration the views of the workforce, revises the process to ensure that appraisals deliver benefit and value to both personnel and the Service.

91. There is a further policy on; Managing Employee Performance, (first issued in 2016 as the Capability Policy and Procedure and then revised and retitled in 2023). This policy is used to manage and support employees where under performance has been identified as an issue. Where under performance is identified as relating to a conduct issue, rather than a lack of ability, the case would be dealt with following the disciplinary policy, which is covered elsewhere in this report.

Grievance and conduct

92. The Service's policy on managing grievance dates from December 2017, with a review date in December 2020, although the latest version of the policy, still dated 2017 was amended slightly in 2022, and is intended to be used by staff as the mechanism to raise an issue when the staff member feels aggrieved about an employment issue. An inspection of staff experiences of the policy will be undertaken in a future phase as outlined in the Chief Inspector's Plan 2025-28¹¹.
93. There is an expectation that grievances will be raised with the employee's line manager. Where the grievance relates to a serious issue, such as unlawful discrimination, then those cases will be referred to the Deputy Chief Officer.
94. The policy is to be used for all grievances, except complaints which relate to discrimination, bullying and harassment. There are other exclusions to the policy where reference must be made to other processes.
95. Reference is made to the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures¹² and the SFRS procedure states that it is compliant with that guidance.
96. The SFRS procedure has both informal and formal processes. Managers and employees are encouraged to resolve matters quickly and informally, before raising the matter formally. Employees have a statutory right to be accompanied to any grievance, or grievance appeal hearing, only under the formal part of this procedure. Whilst the policy does not refer to the provision of a welfare officer, from our fieldwork, we are aware that some staff have received the support of a welfare officer both during the formal and informal process.

Area for consideration 2:

That the SFRS should provide clarity, within its policies and procedures where applicable, of the provision of welfare support available to individuals as part of both informal and formal processes.

¹¹ HMFSI: Chief Inspector's Plan 2025-28

¹² ACAS Code of Practice on disciplinary and grievance procedures

97. There is a requirement to submit a formal grievance in writing and there is a proforma for doing so. A grievance hearing will then be arranged, where the employee will be able to explain the nature of the grievance and say how they think it should be resolved.
98. The employee should receive a written determination of the grievance and that there is a right of appeal. Again, any such appeal must be made in writing and clearly state the reason for the appeal. The appeal should be heard by a higher level of management.
99. The SFRS monitors general grievance data, including equality and diversity, in order to comply with its requirement to ensure that no groups or individuals are treated less favourably due to a protected characteristic. An overview of current grievance and discipline cases is reported to the People Committee of the SFRS Board, outlining the themes behind the cases, such as a breach of policy; breach of the Code of Conduct; and breach of contract.
100. The conduct of SFRS staff is covered by the Service's Code of Conduct, which sets out the standards all employees are expected to meet both during and outwith working hours. During our interviews, the existence of this document was well known and understood. Some staff agreeing that it was useful in stating the Service policy and the majority saying that it was common sense and in an ideal world was unnecessary.
101. There is a separate Code of Conduct document for members of the SFRS Board. This is issued by the Scottish Ministers, with the approval of the Scottish Parliament as required by the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc. (Scotland) Act 2000.
102. The Code of Conduct document for employees was updated in October 2021 and was due for review in October 2023. We were unable to find any evidence of such a review taking place. The content of the policy is wide ranging and covers matters such as standards of dress, political neutrality, data protection and conflict of interests, amongst others. The Code is associated with a further 21 other policies, procedures or documents.
103. We make comment elsewhere in this report about Service policies and proposals to change the format of some to guidance notes. We anticipate that the ongoing document conversion process will attempt to 'declutter' the policy landscape. As part of our data request for this inspection we asked for a complete list of relevant policy documents. The Service was unable to provide a full list.
104. There is an expectation within the policy that employees will report any behaviour of colleagues that fails to comply with the principles of equality and diversity. If an employee believes they have been discriminated against the policy encourages them to raise it with a line manager or another suitable person.

Bullying and Harassment

105. The Service has a Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Procedure document which was published in March 2022 and is due for review in May 2026. As with other policies reviewed, this procedure is linked to several other documents which a reader requires to consult in order to understand the definition of each category or to initiate action. For example, the definitions of what constitutes bullying, harassment or discrimination are set out within the Service's Dignity and Respect Policy rather than in the Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Procedure document.
106. The Service's staff surveys have asked specific questions around bullying, we cover the survey in further detail later.

Discipline

107. The Service has a Disciplinary Policy and Procedure document. The current version dates from March 2024 and was due for review in January 2025. The policy is supported by other documents, such as the Disciplinary Investigations Guidance. The aim of the Policy and its associated procedure is to set out the framework within which managers can work with employees to maintain satisfactory standards with regard to the fulfilment of their employment contract and their conduct. The policy is intended to encourage corrective behaviour/actions in staff and is not to be used as a punitive measure. The aim of the policy and procedure is to ensure that all employees understand what is expected of them in terms of conduct within and outside of the workplace and the consequences of failing to meet these standards. This policy document must be read in conjunction with the Service's Code of Conduct.
108. The policy gives managers guidance on, amongst other areas, representation; investigations; hearings; outcomes and the appeal process.
109. Managers who have a responsibility for disciplinary matters must attend a mandatory training course. A spreadsheet list is maintained of all managers who have had training. The training is currently delivered as a MS Teams-based input by People Advisers on an ad hoc and geographic area basis. There is a desire to have a training calendar with a link to talent acquisition. The plan is also to link into the promotion process, ensuring that newly promoted staff obtain the training at the earliest opportunity, however due to capacity issues, this is aspirational with no timescale set for achieving it.
110. The policy outlines that each Directorate, Area, or Function is responsible for ensuring that the content of the policy is adhered to, and to apply it in a fair and consistent manner. Managers are also responsible for ensuring that an appropriate People Adviser from the People Directorate is involved in the case at the earliest opportunity. By the involvement of a People Adviser there is an element of central oversight in ensuring consistency across the SFRS.
111. The policy encourages managers, where appropriate, to address minor disciplinary matters informally as promptly as possible. The purpose of this is to enable minor problems to be highlighted and dealt with quickly and to encourage employees to correct their behaviour. We were advised that in some areas of the country there was an approach of 'going straight to formal' rather than dealing with low-level matters informally. A review of formal and informal discipline may be included in the scope of future inspection activity.

Managing attendance

112. There is an Attendance Management Policy, first published in 2015 as the Managing Attendance Policy and reviewed, updated and retitled in 2021. The current version is due for review in 2026. The policy is supported by an associated Procedure and Manager's Handbook. The policy intent is to maximise attendance at work by focusing on employee wellbeing, early intervention and support mechanisms for those who are able to return to work and those who are not.
113. The policy sets out the process for managing the absence of personnel and contains timescales and trigger points. In 2022-2023 the SFRS's internal auditors undertook an audit of the management of sickness absence. Auditors found that compliance with the policy needs to be improved. There is currently no single electronic system to manage staff absences. The process is mostly manual. Auditors identified that there was no consistent method for the storage and retention of documents, thereby they had difficulty locating evidence linked to its sample of records checked. The policy requires that a return to work interview is carried out, and the Managers Handbook provides guidance on how it should be conducted. Again auditors identified in their sample a lack of evidence of these being carried out. As there is no single electronic system to manage staff absences and a lack of consistency, HMFSI are of the view that the SFRS are unable to easily capture the necessary data to demonstrate the effectiveness of the policy in its objective to maximising attendance.
114. As indicated above, the absence system is mostly manual and this includes calculating the rolling 12-month absence trigger points dictated by the policy, as the current system is unable to do it automatically. During our own fieldwork we were advised that this reliance on manual intervention can lead to inaccuracy and missed trigger points. Additionally, access to timely intervention of occupational health appointments could be lengthy impacting on staff wellbeing.

Area for consideration 3:

Consideration should be given to introducing service level agreements for occupational health appointments and potentially an accelerated access route for urgent appointments where necessary.

115. When absence trigger points are met or exceeded an Attendance Support Meeting (ASM) should be undertaken. During the internal audit, of those staff in the sample who had reached a trigger point, the majority had not been invited to an ASM. The recommendation of auditors was that 'checks should be performed by a senior staff member on a frequent basis to ensure Attendance Support Meetings have been carried out and appropriately documented'. Auditors also stated that the 'Attendance Management Guidance be updated to ensure managers responsibility to review absences within their area and ensure appropriate action and documentation is clear'. The current Managers Handbook clarifies the purpose of ASMs and responsibilities of managers in conducting them.

Exit interviews

116. The Service has an Exit Interview Policy, first introduced in February 2019 and due for review in February 2022. We were unable to find any evidence of such a review taking place the original policy is still extant. The Service recognises that understanding why employees leave their jobs can offer an invaluable source of information, particularly in terms of the overall quality of work life, and can assist in identifying opportunities to improve retention and employee engagement. The exit interview process is initiated by People Directorate administration staff on receipt of an employee's letter of resignation. The employee will receive an email inviting them to complete an exit interview questionnaire, should they wish they can also opt for a face to face exit interview with their line manager, participation in the exit interview or questionnaire process is voluntary.
117. If during the exit interview process either bullying or harassment is highlighted by the employee, the manager is expected to investigate to gain more information.
118. The policy requires that data analysis is carried out of completed exit interviews and reported through the People Directorate governance process. We indicate elsewhere that there is limited data to interrogate and no single system to allow this to be done easily.
119. The SFRS publishes detailed information regarding reasons for retirement from the Service¹³. The most common reason for wholetime leavers (74.1%) is what the Service describes as 'retirement due to age'. The most common reason for On-Call staff leaving (72%) is stated as resignation. Unfortunately there is no similar breakdown as to the reason for resignation that could provide valuable insight to the organisation. The Service has recognised that it has a low take-up of staff agreeing to an exit interview and therefore it does not have robust data to analyse why people leave.
120. The CDG has formed a subgroup tasked with reviewing the exit interview process, as it has been recognised that there are issues with how the system is currently operating. Often people have already left before being invited to participate in exit interviews, resulting in low completion rates. As described elsewhere in this report, there are systemic issues with the methods of data capture and reporting, which prevent the Service from easily understanding why people leave the organisation, beyond those leaving due to retirement. It is therefore challenging to determine what, if anything, could be done to make them stay.

General

121. During our review of Service policy documents (HR and wider) we noted that a number were beyond the review date set out for them. These review dates are self-imposed and therefore, with the exception of the impact of legislative changes which will require amendment of a policy, the fact that the policy is beyond review date may be purely presentational. The Service is aware that some of its policies are beyond their review date, and has a process in place to remind policy owners of the need for review. However, we were advised that there were insufficient resources to undertake all the reviews necessary and they were being prioritised.

¹³ SFRS: Fire Safety and Organisational Statistics 2023-2024

122. The list of policies beyond review date will be examined during late 2024-2025 and early 2025-2026 by the SFRS to establish whether a desktop review may be required to ensure these policies remain fit for purpose or whether they can have the review date extended. The People Directorate has committed to engage with stakeholders as appropriate. The Service also has plans to convert some of its policies to guidance notes, as it is considered that in some instances there is no need for a 'policy document'. We are not sure how this will simplify things for end users, this will depend on content, volume and complexity. The conversion process will be incremental during 2025-2026. Our fieldwork established that Service policies and procedures were difficult to navigate. The Service needs to consider this, as there is a risk that it is satisfying itself that employees understand key policies when in fact the sheer volume and complexity means this is not the case.

Recommendation 11



We recommend that the Service, when carrying out its review of policies, takes the opportunity to reduce them in number and to simplify them for the end user as far as possible.

123. We are aware that some organisations have a dedicated team who have responsibility for the production and review of policy. The SFRS operates a system of named individual policy owners who have this responsibility, along with their 'day job'. The Service may wish to consider if there would be advantages of moving to a dedicated team and a functional policy owner, rather than named individual format. There is currently a format template for policy documents; however, there is no accompanying guidance on how policies should be written.

Area for consideration 4:

The Service may wish to consider if there would be advantages of moving to a dedicated policy team and a functional owner, rather than the current named individual format. Consideration should also be given to the provision of supplementary guidance on policy content.

Culture Activities within the SFRS

124. We were provided with information on the Building the Future Together Programme (BFT) as supporting evidence to demonstrate work on creating a positive culture. A Cultural Framework Blueprint was developed specifically for the SFRS in September 2020. It was meant to be implemented in phases with the last phase due to conclude in March 2022. This work was created using the outcomes of a 2014 cultural audit and a 2018 staff survey. The 2014 audit resulted in a series of action plans and the development of the current SFRS Values of Safety, Teamwork, Respect, and Innovation.
125. The BFT Programme aimed to enable the creation of an organisational culture where staff actively contribute to shaping the long-term strategic vision; positively impacting on performance and delivery of strategic outcomes and objectives, enabling the SFRS to do more for Scotland.
126. There were also plans to develop a Staff Governance Charter, but this was never implemented. The Service did, however, re-publish an Equality and Diversity Charter on 11 March 2025. This Charter has a version number of 1 and retains a creation date of 21 January 2016. Whilst the focus of the document is predominantly external, and about the role that SFRS has in ensuring it plays its part in addressing inequalities present in Scotland, it does contain limited content relative to its employment practices.
127. The Cultural Framework was built around eight interdependent factors, including three 'harder' design aspects of organisational effectiveness (i.e. strategy, structure and systems) and five pillars/workstreams reflecting the 'softer' organisational culture and development elements:
 - Pillar/Workstream 1: Our Commitments
 - Pillar/Workstream 2: Leadership Style
 - Pillar/Workstream 3: Our Workforce
 - Pillar/Workstream 4: Values and Behaviours
 - Pillar/Workstream 5: Employee Experience and Engagement
128. The BFT Programme sought to embed each of these five pillars/workstreams to create an enabling environment and conditions to support the workforce to be innovative, empower leaders, build on skills, competencies and behaviours and deliver a service that is 'fit for the future'. It was stated that fundamental to this was a strong foundation of clear structures, systems and processes to ensure that the organisational infrastructure can support the future direction of travel. The stated main purpose of the BFT Programme was to embed a positive organisational culture.
129. Inspectors are unclear as to why the work of the BFT programme did not continue to fruition, though we are aware of the impact of the pandemic. We are advised that some of the work was later taken on through the activities of the CDG. Whilst this may be the case, the demise of the BFT is an example of changing priorities and cycle of 'start, stop, reinstate and rebrand' within the Service. HMFSI are of the view that had the BFT been followed through to its conclusion, this had the potential to have a positive impact on improving culture within the Service at an earlier stage.

130. As already stated, the Service created a CDG in late 2023 with the purpose of identifying and setting down foundations for mainstreaming cultural change across the SFRS, reflective of its values. There were three overriding principles for the work; attracting and supporting a more diverse candidate pool; creating a competent supervisory and middle manager cohort; and to improve business intelligence to inform future action. The terms of reference of the Group state that the 'CDG will ensure that action and decision making promote equality, diversity, and inclusion.' Its scope is 'the review, development and implementation of all activities, which ensure those working in every area of the Service feel valued, safe and able to be themselves at work, regardless of their role or position in the organisation.' Whilst there may be advantages in having such a broad scope, inspectors are of the view that it is so broad, in that almost nothing is out of scope, it may remove an element of focus for the activity of the Group and subsequent outputs or deliverables.
131. Permanent membership of the CDG is made up of senior managers of the Service and employee representative bodies, such as the FBU and UNISON. There are two observer places at each meeting which can be applied for by any staff member. The CDG reports to the SLT (Strategic Leadership Team). During our fieldwork we were interested in the level of awareness of staff of the work of the group and an overwhelming majority of staff we spoke to had never heard of it. Since the conclusion of our fieldwork a dedicated area in the Service's iHub has been created which will hopefully raise its profile. In addition to this, HMFSI are aware that following the appointment of the new Deputy Chief Officer, the culture development group work is currently being reviewed to clarify priorities and key actions.
132. We are aware that a 'gap analysis' had been undertaken by the Service which was to inform the work of the CDG. This gap analysis looked at published reports into the cultures and behaviours in other fire and rescue services, to examine the findings and to identify areas of work which might lead to an improvement in the culture of the SFRS. Namely from; the inspection reports of HMICFRS, in relation to workforce; the independent culture review of London Fire Brigade; and relevant NFCC documents, to identify the outcomes, conclusions and make comparisons to the SFRS.
133. The gap analysis produced a document identified as an action plan containing 42 actions identifying areas for development and/or improvement to support the delivery of the SFRS' cultural objectives. This list was then distilled to produce an action plan for the CDG the work of which is split into four themes: Attraction; Recruitment; Retention and Development; and Exiting the Organisation. The action plan gives a brief overview of the actions being undertaken. The document itself however doesn't detail any key deliverables or timescales for each action. If further information is desired, reference has to be made to rolling action logs for each sub-group of the CDG which has been established to take projects forward.

134. The CDG has sub-groups as shown in the diagram. We interviewed a sample of members of all groups.

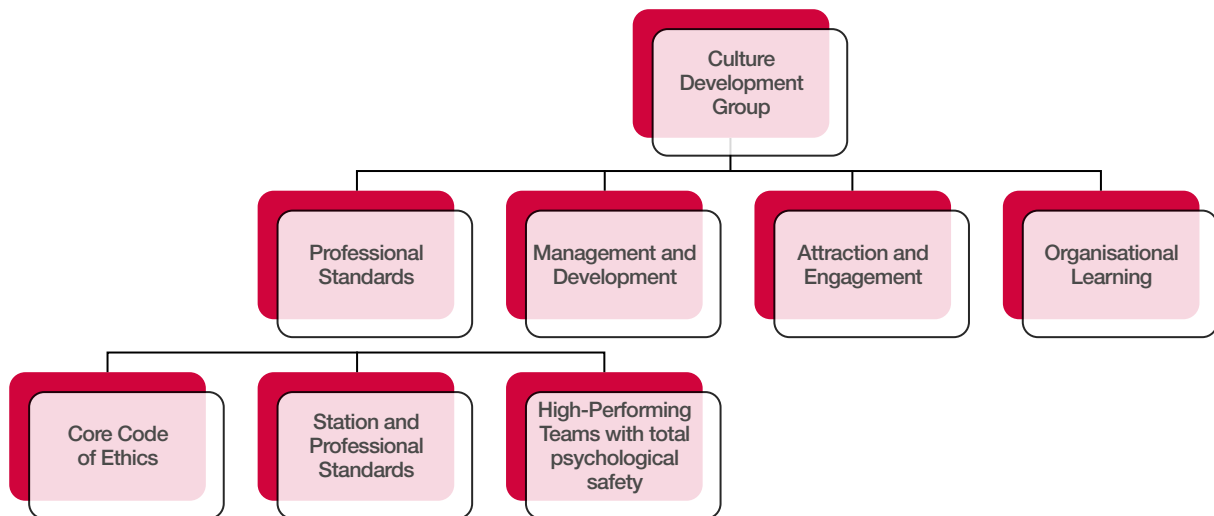


Figure 1: CDG and sub-groups

135. We asked group representatives how data was being used to inform activity and therefore what actions should be prioritised and how to quantify improvements. We were advised that access to, and use of, data was either difficult or that data didn't exist. This situation is partly the result of the fact that many processes within the SFRS relating to personnel matters rely on manual intervention to produce reports or are paper-based workflows, which are prone to delays, and have the potential for errors. There are some IT systems, but where available, these are outdated or incompatible with each other.

Recommendation 12



We recommend that the SFRS make greater use of digital technology and automation, to minimise manual intervention in the production, collation and access to data to improve decision making, prioritisation and measures of success for the CDG.

136. In the opinion of inspectors, a lack of robust data may mean that the Service is prioritising the wrong activities, or worse, is trying to solve a problem that it doesn't have. For example, 52% of staff who responded to the CES agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I feel that the SFRS support the psychological and emotional safety of myself and my colleagues'. Moreover, only 7% of staff disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement 'I feel safe coming to work'. Whilst work in relation to psychological safety may be important and still be worthy of carrying out, there may be other activities which are able to provide more tangible and definable improvements to culture in a shorter time.
137. The issue regarding access to data goes beyond the work of the CDG and has a wider impact on the SFRS. The Service has recognised this problem for some time. In June 2020 the Service started the development of an integrated system to provide information and data related to People, Training, Finance and Assets Systems, however, the scope of this programme has since been amended to People, Payroll, Finance and Training. As yet no integrated system been implemented. This delay

is having a significant impact on the Service being able to access quality data and statistics to support evidence-based decision making. We believe that the Service needs to recognise the power of data, both quantitative and qualitative, in evidence-based decision making to drive forward improvements in organisational culture.

138. The work of the sub-groups is progressing at different rates, some members described progress as slow, and there is a degree of overlap and duplication between them in areas of interest. At the time of writing, efforts were being made by sub-group leads to identify common culture related activity. This aims to identify areas for collaborative working, opportunities to maximise efficiency and sharing of resources to expedite outcomes where possible. This perhaps points to a need for greater investment earlier in the establishment of the terms of reference and work packages of the groups, to provide greater clarity of purpose and defined deliverables.
139. The Service has various strategic documents, including a Long Term Vision, and a three-year delivery plan 2024-27¹⁴. This delivery plan states that there are specific priorities for the Service to focus on in order to deliver a modern, sustainable fire and rescue service, the third of these priorities is 'to provide a workplace that creates a positive and inclusive culture, with an open and supportive environment within which all our people can operate.' As mentioned elsewhere the Service is currently consulting on a new strategy.
140. The Service states that it has six employee groups. However, the Race Network is currently inactive. We interviewed representatives of three of these groups. The groups have varying levels of engagement with Service managers, for example the LGBTQ+ group has an Assistant Chief Officer as an ally in promoting the work of the group. Despite this high level engagement, the groups are not routinely consulted in the development of service policy. We are also advised that this is also the position with the Equality and Diversity specialists within the organisation.

Recommendation 13



We recommend that the SFRS consider the role and importance of all staff networks in providing insight, advice, and guidance on the continual promotion of a fair and equitable culture.

141. Members of the employee groups and forums advised that their members help address and find solutions for problems for employees who share a protected characteristic. In addition to the employee groups there is also a Women Employee Liaison Forum (WELF), which is currently chaired by the Deputy Chief Officer and has contributed to policy improvements such as exit interviews, maternity arrangements and pregnancy support. WELF members also helped to address the lack of access to specific PPE designed for females, such as smaller tabards, and fire boots suitable for females. The neurodiversity group has been providing specific case related advice for staff related issues. Work has also been undertaken to locally promote the needs of neurodiverse staff members, as these are generally not well known, to increase awareness and support personnel.

142. An area of work which the neurodiversity group had been exploring as a potential support mechanism for neurodiverse staff, which also has scope for wider application, is an 'Employee Passport'. The purpose of the passport is to help build an inclusive and supportive work environment. The overall aim is to put workplace adjustments in place more quickly, which will allow staff to work to their full capacity. Often, workplace adjustments improve the performance of personnel and may help avoid performance management issues. One practical benefit is when a passport holder changes post or manager they don't have to re-tell their story. Research has shown this is a common issue for those with health conditions or long-term circumstances which impact on their day-to-day work. The employee passport will show what adjustments are in place, why they are in place and how they support the individual. The Employee Passport was used as part of a case study in the Service's Mainstreaming and Equality Outcomes Report 2021-2023.
143. Employee passports are already in use within the Scottish Government, some of its agencies and non-departmental public bodies. At this time the Service does not have an Employee Passport in place. We see this as a low cost effective solution to providing respect and support for personnel, ensuring that appropriate adjustments are in place proactively.

Area for consideration 5:

That the SFRS should consider the introduction of a digital employee passport system.

Social Media

144. The subject of the use of Social media is covered by the Social Media Policy; and the Acceptable Use Policy. In the Service's Code of Conduct, staff are also advised that any inappropriate social media posts will be the subject of disciplinary action.
145. The Service has many 'official' social media accounts covering its activities across the country. The scale of this presents a challenge for the organisation, as it makes it impossible to monitor centrally given the size of the Service's on-line presence. In general, the fire and rescue service brand is a strong one, and a key intent of the Service policies is to protect the reputation of the SFRS. Responsibility for ensuring compliance with the policies is passed to line managers. Individual employees also have a responsibility to comply with the policy.
146. It is clearly impossible for the Service to monitor all posts by the workforce, but from our fieldwork visits to fire stations the majority of staff we spoke to said they knew of their responsibilities around conduct, including conduct outside of work in relation to the use of social media. Staff are aware that there have been examples elsewhere where employees have been dismissed for inappropriate on-line behaviour.

Confidential Reporting Line

147. Following a robust procurement exercise the SFRS has introduced an externally provided confidential reporting line, 'Speak Up', for staff to use to raise any concerns they may have. This facility is the successor to a previous informal, internally provided, process aimed at delivering the same outcome. The new provider, Safe Call, has been awarded a three-year contract to provide the service, which was launched in May 2024. The SFRS supported the launch with a series of posters and communication to SFRS workplaces to highlight that the reporting line was available. There is also information on the Service's intranet. During our fieldwork visits to fire stations we asked personnel if they were aware of the process. In our experience the awareness of this was low, we did however see evidence of the posters being on display. Some staff we spoke to, who were aware of it, felt that it was set-up simply in order to be 'seen to be doing something'. The previous, internally provided system, had appointed contact advisors who had received training in how to handle complaints of this nature. We understand that these internal contact advisors are no longer being used for this purpose.
148. In a paper to the March 2025 meeting of the People Committee of the Board, it was stated that, in its first nine months of being open, the reporting line had been used 20 times. It was initially anticipated that there would be an annual usage of circa 29 reports. Staff can raise concerns using the process and can do so either anonymously or can agree that their identity is shared with the Service.
149. Once an issue is raised using the facility the matter would be dealt with using the relevant procedure and policy, such as discipline. At the time of writing, the confidential reporting line is not reflected in SFRS policies or procedures. This may lead to a lack of clear and transparent procedures for the handling of complaints made using the process.
150. Although, during our fieldwork, in general staff said they would be willing to use the service if needed, few staff said they would be reluctant to do so in case it led to 'reprisals', such as hampering their future career progression. Data from the Service's own CES indicated that 44% of the staff who participated, who had witnessed or experienced discrimination, bullying or harassment did not report it. Given that there is some evidence that staff have felt comfortable using the reporting line, the Service should examine ways of promoting its use based on the experience of those staff who have already done so.
151. The Service also plans, on the first anniversary of opening, to analyse the calls made using 'Speak Up' to identify any common themes, by quantity and type, which may provide valuable learning for matters relating to culture. Some learning is already taking place, in cases where the complaint was not upheld, the information shared by the reporter has resulted in enhancements to management practises. An assessment of project objectives, review of communication framework supporting the reporting line, stakeholder feedback and overview of lessons learned/areas for improvement will also be undertaken.

Area for consideration 6:

That the results of the analysis of, and learnings from, the use of the 'Speak Up' confidential reporting line are made available, as appropriate, to the workforce.

The Workforce Viewpoint

152. The majority of the uniformed staff we spoke to said that they felt respected by their immediate colleagues, and knew what the expected behaviours of the organisation were. The majority of staff also said they would be comfortable challenging each other, within their immediate peer group, if they needed to, where there were issues related to behaviour. But a limited number mentioned a fear of consequences of doing so wider than with their immediate team.
153. Operational personnel with long service described how the value of respect was more prominent now than would have been experienced in the past. For example, those with longer service described there being a more supportive environment now for trainees, with trainees being mentored by watch colleagues. This was cited as an improvement to the environment they themselves had experienced when they started their careers. Trainees we spoke to also described being well supported by their immediate colleagues.
154. During our interviews with staff, the majority of those we spoke to thought that the Service values were relevant, but that they had no strong association with them, some describing them as 'just four words'. Particularly for operational staff, there was a strong recognition of the values of teamwork and safety. There was less of an alignment by Support staff to safety, but the value of teamwork still resonated strongly. From our interviews, team working focussed on the immediate team and that each team was working in its own 'silo'. The majority of staff we spoke to also felt that the value of innovation was difficult to identify with and was perhaps more of an aspiration. Some staff felt it was even difficult to make a suggestion. Quite often middle managers were seen as 'blockers' to ideas being fed 'up the chain'. The perception of staff was that this was due to the manager's fear of supporting an idea that is later viewed as being unsuitable, and in turn having a negative impact on them and their career prospects. This view of innovation is supported by the CES survey results which found that only 29% of responding staff agreed or strongly agreed that creativity and innovation are encouraged. Although innovation is a Service value, there are no key performance indicators for it within the Service's Performance Management Framework, therefore making its effectiveness as a value hard to measure.
155. Some staff were of the view that the values were perhaps due a refresh or review, and we note that the Service's draft Strategy for 2025-2028 proposes a review of the Service values.
156. Throughout our fieldwork it was clear that there was strong bonding and cohesion with immediate team members, but this close association diminished away from the immediate team, within directorates and even within the same functions at team level. Within the support functions and directorates we were regularly told that there was 'silo working', with limited collaboration within other teams in their own functions and across directorates. In the CES, of those staff who took part, only 31% agreed or strongly agreed, that there was collaborative working across departmental functions and areas. This clearly has the potential to impact on the Service's ability to collectively focus on national priorities to progress change. It can also cause a monetary, and non-monetary waste of resources, where there is duplication of effort or non-alignment of activity. We have recommended previously that the Service

should make greater use of an option appraisal and evaluation approach in resource planning¹⁵. Support staff suggested that there was a lack of proactive planning and prioritising, and that things were always lagging behind the need. We believe that there needs to be greater clarity around decision making, particularly levels of delegated authority and empowering of individuals at a local levels. We have previously raised this issue in the West Service Delivery report and recommended that the Service review its management and governance structure with a view to identifying improvements, which would give staff more local responsibility, autonomy and flexibility. It would appear from feedback obtained during our fieldwork that this issue persists. The effectiveness of governance may be explored in greater detail in a future inspection as outlined in the Chief Inspector's Plan 2025-2028.

157. Perhaps understandably, and not exclusively restricted to uniformed staff, but staff expressed there was less of an affiliation to more senior staff above their immediate line managers. Frequently station-based staff stated that they either had frequent turnover of station commanders, and that they rarely saw them, or if they did, there was a problem. This issue was initially identified in our East Service Delivery Area inspection and restated in our West Service Delivery Area report. Some of this frequent turnover is due to some staff being temporary in that role and then being replaced by someone different on substantive promotion. There was a perception that certain areas were being used as a stepping stone for promotion resulting in a source of frustration as personnel felt that projects or issues concerning staff and stations were rarely seen through to a conclusion. Staff would often proffer an excuse for the absence of their supervisory managers by saying 'we know they're busy'. Nevertheless there was a strong desire for more visible leadership within uniformed staff. Many stated that a lack of visible leadership and interaction contributed to not feeling valued. They stated that it felt that their importance was diminished by virtue of individuals prioritising other work over interaction with them. We believe that this lack of visible leadership is influenced by post Covid pandemic working patterns, where some FDOs continue to work from home. We acknowledge the flexibility that working from home or hybrid working offers staff, we are also of the view that for some staff groups, particularly Support staff, home working is popular. There are undoubted benefits from home working. In some support functions we were told of examples of either daily or weekly 'stand-up' MS Teams meetings where work activities and priorities were briefly discussed, providing a focus and contact across teams for staff. In areas where these meetings took place, of the staff we spoke to, these meetings were valued.

Recommendation 14



We recommend that the Service evaluates the impact of home working, particularly on the relationship between middle managers and fire station-based personnel, with a view to increasing leadership visibility and interaction.

158. Visible leadership plays a crucial part in ensuring that the workforce has an accurate and up to date understanding of current priorities and 'direction of travel'. During our fieldwork we asked staff their view on communication. The majority get their communications from the weekly brief, and from our fieldwork this was well received, briefings from line managers, email and the iHub. Although there were mixed views,

the majority of staff we spoke to were of the opinion that there was too much information, particularly when returning from leave, and it was difficult to filter out what was important. For On-Call staff the issue is magnified by the limited time available to them and also the limited access to ICT equipment and broadband speeds at fire stations. We have commented on these issues before in other inspection reports. Interestingly in the CES 73% of staff agreed or strongly agreed that communications were relevant to their role. However only 44% of staff felt well informed of the activity of the wider SFRS. This latter issue was noted by us during fieldwork where the focus of personnel was on the immediate team, unit, or watch and there was less interest in the functioning of the wider organisation.

159. The influence of ‘watch culture’ was not a specific focus of this inspection, but its positive impact was referenced in our thematic inspection on Mental Health and Wellbeing Support¹⁶. Whilst there are positive impacts it is also recognised that there is potential for negative impact when inappropriate behaviours are displayed and not managed (Hill et al, 2023; Ward and Winstanley, 2006; Wankhade and Patnaik, 2019^{iv}). Some interviewees talked to us of a ‘pack mentality’ making it sometimes difficult to challenge inappropriate behaviour. We were also given examples of where female firefighters sought to conform with the majority rather than to be themselves.
160. The SFRS aims to recognise the contributions of staff via Recognition Awards covering six categories which aim to celebrate staff and teams who exceed expectations. In our fieldwork, awareness and profile of these awards was very limited and therefore do not appear to be achieving the objective. In addition to this, the SFRS has recently introduced a ‘High Five’ initiative through the Vivup benefits platform.
161. During our interviews we asked staff if they felt valued and if their managers displayed the SFRS values in their interactions with staff. The majority of those we spoke to stated that they don’t feel valued by the organisation. The phrase ‘them and us’ was often used and we did try to explore who were being perceived as ‘them’. This proved difficult to define, it was more of a generic descriptor used to describe the breach created by the hierarchy in the wider organisation and between different staff groups. Many individuals stated that they felt like ‘just a number’. One team was unhappy that they had been referred to by a senior officer as a ‘bum on a seat.’ They felt that they were not valued and were simply a resource. The 2018 survey results indicated that 31% responded positively that the actions of leaders were consistent with the values. In the 2024 CES this had increased to 39% saying that there was a positive leadership approach is consistent with the values. This correlates to our own findings during fieldwork.
162. On-Call staff unanimously described the feeling of being valued by the local community, in contrast to Wholetime personnel who didn’t describe a connection to the local community in our interactions, though there clearly was one. This is likely to be the result of the fact that On-Call staff live and are a part of their local community and therefore have a higher local profile than Wholetime firefighters.
163. On-Call staff, in relation to being valued, regularly said that the expectations of them by the Service were unrealistic and that there was a lack of recognition of On-Call commitment; ‘the more you do the more they expect’ and ‘a Wholetime expectation of a part-time service’ were phrases often used. Staff also felt put under pressure

¹⁶ HMFSI: Mental Health and Wellbeing Support in the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

to keep the pump available and that there was little to no acknowledgement of the regular hours of extra availability given beyond their contracted hours. In previous reports, we have recorded our recognition of the huge personal commitment given by On-Call personnel. Availability of On-Call staff is a well-documented challenge for services across the UK and the SFRS is no different. However, for the Service, this challenge is magnified by the fact that almost 80% of its fire stations are crewed by On-Call firefighters. Linked to the recognition of the commitment given by On-Call crews is the commitment by primary employers in releasing staff to attend incidents. We were often told of the lack of recognition by the Service of primary employers. We see this as a relatively easy issue to resolve and should be possible at little to no cost. We would encourage the Service to review how it acknowledges the contribution of primary employers to supporting the SFRS in delivering its service to the public.

164. The lack of recognition and acknowledgement was also expressed by Support staff, who often felt that they get taken for granted and that their workloads were unsustainable. Conversely a number of operational staff felt that Support staff didn't appreciate a key objective of the organisation was to respond to incidents and that sometimes the action, or inaction, of support functions hampered this. Equally some Support staff felt that their contribution to achieving the mission of the SFRS was not recognised. Obviously, all elements of the SFRS have a role in ensuring that the Service is able to deliver.

Area for consideration 7:

We would encourage the Service, its managers and commanders to consider clearly articulating and acknowledging, through relevant communication, that everyone's contribution is equally important and valued.

165. Additionally, staff often stated that Service values are not always displayed in the actions of managers, with particular reference to middle managers. In the CES only 39% of those staff who took part agreed or strongly agreed that the leadership approach was consistent with the SFRS values. In some support functions and directorates staff described to inspectors feeling 'overlooked and undervalued'. With some peer groups feeling 'downtrodden' with words like 'blame culture' or 'toxic culture' used on a number of occasions. Across the organisation, in the CES, 74% of staff believed there was a blame culture. Despite this outlook, the vast majority of staff we spoke to described taking a pride in their job and fundamentally wanting to do a good job, despite what they saw as 'the challenges'. This finding correlates with the CES result where 74% of responding staff agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoy their work. This juxtaposition should be an area of focus for the Service in its analysis of the CES results that is being undertaken by the CDG.
166. Feelings of being undervalued and overlooked can also extend to the impact that the physical environment of workplace locations can have on personnel. The fabric and facilities of fire stations have been commented on in other inspectorate reports. There are widespread examples of the working conditions being less than satisfactory, for example, either through the lack of dignified facilities for personnel to use; defective structure and leaking roofs; or sufficient access to ICT equipment. Whilst the inspectorate acknowledges that the SFRS is aware of these issues, and that Service's ability to rectify them is constrained; due to a lack of capital funding or the restrictions placed by the general unsuitability of the building itself, the Service needs to recognise that these issues are having a significant impact on the morale of some staff.

SFRS Staff Surveys

167. In 2018 the Service undertook an employee survey which received 2,161 returns (response rate of 28%). This was the first survey of its type in the SFRS. At the time of the 2018 survey there was an expectation that the Service would undertake a staff survey every two years, although, due to the impact of the pandemic, this was not to be the case. The Service did however undertake other more targeted surveys.
168. Broadly speaking the respondents to the 2018 survey indicated very positively that they worked well as a team. 87% of respondents stated they were treated fairly and respected at work and understood how the Service's values applied to them. However, only 38% felt valued. 10% of those who responded to the 2018 survey said they had personally experienced bullying or harassment at work within the previous 12 months. 11% of staff who responded said that they had personally received discrimination at work in the previous 12 months.
169. A national action plan was created following the analysis of the results of this survey. We have found it difficult to chart the progress of actions from the 2018 survey, as access to the information is not readily available. We were provided with a copy of the actions to be taken, including a timeline, in response to the survey findings. But the action plan contained no progress updates, these were blank. Charting of progress was also impacted by a change to some of the questions between the 2018 survey and the one in 2024.
170. A Colleague Experience Survey (CES) was launched on 31 March 2024 and closed on 12 May 2024. The survey information, responses and analysis was carried out on behalf of the SFRS by Skills for Justice. Skills for Justice is a not-for-profit organisation focused on workforce development in a range of public sector groups across the UK. The survey received almost 1,900 responses which equates to about 25% of the SFRS workforce. High-level results from across the Service were published on 13 August 2024. During our fieldwork we asked staff for their opinion on the survey and the published results. Disappointingly, there was very limited awareness of the results of the survey amongst the staff we spoke to.
171. The SFRS advised that further analysis of the high-level results was being undertaken to identify any geographic, directorate or workforce type trends within the data. There was also an intention to publish a report of the free text responses from the survey, however, this is still outstanding.
172. The Service also had the intention to convene focus groups to try and further understand staff views. At the time of writing there had been a delay in this element of the work as there had been a lack of take-up from employees to participate. It was anticipated that this would be done during March and April 2025, but this has been further delayed due to the lack of volunteers.
173. Whilst it is possible to chart progress in some of the results between the two surveys, this is not always possible as the questions are not identical between the two. For example in 2018 staff were asked '...have you personally experienced bullying or harassment at work?'; in 2024 this was changed to have you personally experienced or **observed discrimination** (our emphasis), bullying and/or harassment...; In 2018 there was a separate question relating to discrimination. Therefore, when you look at the change in the figures, 10% for bullying in 2018 to 21% in 2024 it is not possible

to say if the increase reflects greater bullying (or reporting of it) or if perhaps the difference relates to the discrimination element of the 2024 question, which has a far broader definition. In 2018 staff were able to indicate what the reported discrimination related to, in 2024 no further explanation by staff was sought. Positively, there was a small increase in the number of staff that said SFRS was a great place to work rising from 45% in 2018 to 48% in 2024. 74% of staff said they enjoy their work which is up from 68% in 2018. However there was a drop in the percentage saying that managers promoted discussion around work from 66% in 2018 to 48% in 2024. This last finding may be related to our own observations around a lack of visible leadership; if leaders aren't present to engage, they can't promote discussion.

174. Staff appear to have little faith that the survey will make a difference. A substantial number of staff we spoke to were of the view that there was little point in completing surveys, 'as nothing ever changes'. This echoed the response given in the 2018 survey when only 15% of staff said they had confidence in action being taken. It is not possible to directly chart shift in this result as the question wasn't asked in 2024. In addition to a feeling of apathy, some staff told us they declined to complete the 2024 survey due to concerns around anonymity, as questions included details relating to workplace location and role, thereby making it possible to identify some individuals. Others that were interviewed said they felt that the questions were 'loaded' and designed to give the answer the Service 'wanted' or pre-determined outcomes. Some were of the view that only those who had 'an axe to grind' or thought everything was 'rosy' completed it. We are aware that there were some limitations placed on the Service by Skills for Justice to the extent that it could adapt the questions in the survey.
175. Staff took the same approach to requests for comment in general, staff felt that there was limited, if any, feedback from managers on the responses given. This lack of closure of the feedback loop was leading to a feeling of disengagement. During our interviews we asked staff if they felt that a response from the Service in the form of a 'you said, we did' statement would improve their general view of surveys, overwhelmingly staff said that it would. We believe that where change is not possible then this needs to be equally well communicated. Staff want to have a 'voice that makes them feel heard'.
176. We have commented in other reports, for example in the East Service Delivery Area inspection, that a lack of direct feedback was disengaging staff. The lack of feedback also extends beyond surveys to operational areas of activity, in the West Service Delivery Area Inspection we found a degree of apathy and disappointment towards the Operational Assurance system. Many staff reported that they almost never got any feedback from being part of a process and when learning did get communicated, it had taken far too long to be disseminated. This highlights the importance of closing the feedback loop and is subject to inquiry in our thematic inspection of Operational Assurance.

Recommendation 15



We recommend that the SFRS consider publicising any action plans created following the analysis of the CES findings, specifically highlighting completed actions undertaken in response to comments made.

177. During our fieldwork we were told of an isolated instance of a locally provided, electronic ‘suggestion box’ where staff were able to make suggestions and then track progress of these. We see this as going some way to manage feedback and suggestions.

Good Practice 1

The use of an electronic suggestion box was welcomed by staff and we feel there could be benefit in rolling this out across the organisation.



178. In our fieldwork interviews we were frequently told of the negative impact that frequently changing and conflicting priorities, were having on staff experience at work. For some personnel this often coincided with a change in line management. For others it was the volume of work, with everything seen as a priority, even after attempts to deprioritise activity. It was frequently said that there were insufficient resources and capacity to both deliver new projects and at the same time some routine business as usual processes. Some were of the view that projects and activities never seemed to deliver, there were just too many competing demands. Protracted governance was also cited as a reason for slow progress on planned changes and approvals; with multiple groups or committees scrutinising activity. We were advised that it can take many months to make a small change in a policy due to the governance arrangements. As already indicated some tasks, such as governance reports, have to rely on manual interventions to provide data to carry out routine tasks. The new Chief Officer Stuart Stevens, who was appointed in October 2024, has engaged and communicated his and the organisation’s priorities and currently has a new SFRS Strategy out for consultation, as referred to earlier in this report, that will set clear priorities for the service going forward.

Recommendation 16



We recommend that the Service continue to clearly articulate national priorities, and how these will impact locally, and communicate as soon as possible when projects or proposed changes are to be delayed or cancelled.

179. During a staff consultation process for the Service’s Long Term Vision document, the Board was made aware, at a public meeting in February 2021, of the following key themes from the consultation:
- the need to clarify priorities;
 - appropriate change management processes;
 - creating capacity for change;
 - greater utilisation of technology and Support staff; and
 - change fatigue, amongst others.

At that time the Board was of the view that ‘... constant change or no progress ... both cause change fatigue.’¹⁷ The Service, like areas of the wider public sector, has had to respond to the impact of tightening budgets and changing demand. It has already indicated that there is need for change and how it delivers its service. The degree to which staff consider these issues varies. As we have said, for quite a number of fire station-based staff, and within other staff groups, their primary focus is their immediate colleagues. HMFSI are aware that the Service has made significant investment into the creation of a Portfolio Office to manage and deliver change for relevant projects.

Recommendation 17



We recommend that the SFRS continue to review its business change process to ensure that it clearly identifies that the proposed activities are not only evidenced-based, but meet organisational strategic needs, with measurable defined outcomes.

180. We visited all three Operations Control (OC) rooms. There was a change to the management structure within the OCs a few years ago. A functional basis to the management was introduced. This functional basis arrangement means that there is no dedicated on-site middle manager with overall responsibility for its operation. We encountered a lot of frustration amongst staff with this structure format, as they felt there was no single point or clear route by which they could progress issues. A review of this structure is underway and has been delayed several times since it was originally introduced. A further potential structure has been suggested and, due to the perceived inability to discuss this topic any further, staff are unclear when or if it will be implemented. This has introduced a great deal of uncertainty for personnel, particularly those in a watch management role, due to the proposed reduction in number of those roles. We have mentioned this previously in other inspections and made a recommendation that the Service completes its review of the Functional Management structure in our inspection of the West Service Delivery Area ¹⁸ It is disappointing to note that this is still outstanding and continues to have a significant negative impact on staff.
181. Our findings regarding change management are reflected by the views of those who participated in the 2024 survey where only 23% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that change is managed effectively and respectfully within SFRS.

Recommendation 18



We recommend that the Service concludes its review of the structure of Operations Control and implements any proposed changes as soon as possible.

¹⁷ Public Special Meeting – Scottish Fire And Rescue Service Board Thursday 25 February 2021

¹⁸ Op.cit

Conclusions

182. As stated at the beginning of this report we approached the inspection with the view that we didn't think there would be one overarching Service culture, but a number of cultures and sub-cultures. Following our fieldwork we believe that still to be the case. From our engagement with the workforce during our fieldwork we felt that those we met with took a great deal of pride in what they did. That they tried to do their best, despite, what some saw as unnecessary organisational challenge, through a lack of systems and resources or overburdensome governance and bureaucracy. We met with teams, and individuals, who had a strong focus of teamwork with their immediate work colleagues.
183. By its very nature the SFRS, like other Fire and Rescue Services in UK, is a hierarchical organisation. This hierarchy extends to the Support staff part of the organisation too. Some staff we spoke to said that their support directorate or function operated in a similar fashion to the more visible rank structure in the uniform part of the SFRS. We were given examples of when people have 'pulled rank' to make things happen. This power-based pattern of behaviour was identified in the Service's own 2014 cultural audit. During our fieldwork we were often told of a 'them and us' culture, which we found difficult to explore in depth. It potentially points to a feeling of distrust, disconnection and, fundamentally disengagement. There was a desire for more visible leadership. However, the majority of those we spoke to saw little benefit in engaging through the staff survey, 'as nothing ever changes'. Therefore, there needs to be more prominence given to the actions taken to address the issues of concern to personnel. HMFSI are pleased to note in a recent statement by Chief Officer Stuart Stevens stating that 'one of my top priorities is to improve the culture and leadership within the Service and we are committed to creating a workplace where all staff are treated with dignity and respect'. We are also aware of the aim of SLT to improve culture and trust across the organisation, and we envisage that the station engagement visits by SLT members, currently being undertaken, may help to counter that disengagement in the future.
184. During our fieldwork there were also descriptions of a 'blame' and, in a limited number of occasions, a 'toxic' culture within directorates. Again, there were features of this reflected within the 2014 cultural audit; where oppositional behaviours of looking for mistakes and pointing out flaws were identified. Whilst there was no question regarding a 'blame' culture within the 2018 survey, it was part of the 2024 CES, and as noted earlier 74% of respondents believed there is a 'blame' culture within the SFRS.
185. Collaboration with different parts of the organisation was highlighted as an issue in the 2018 staff survey, with only 19% of respondents believing that different parts of the SFRS work well together. In the CES 31% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that there was collaboration across departmental functions and areas to achieve shared objectives. On the face of it this is a positive improvement, however, during our fieldwork, silo working and a lack of collaboration was often cited as an issue.
186. The Service has responded to the well-publicised issues in other services in the UK by creating a Cultural Development Group (CDG) and developing a Cultural Action Plan. However, we felt that although well intentioned, the Group has been slow to progress issues since its inaugural meeting in November 2023. We feel its scope is too broad and the basis of the work of the sub-groups is sometimes not clearly defined with a lack of SMART objectives and a lack of robust data on which to build and subsequently

chart improvement. Our analysis is supported by a finding of the 2024 survey where 72% of respondents 'do not think team priorities and objectives are communicated and reflect all the SMART objectives'. The work of the CDG follows on from an earlier attempt to improve the culture of the SFRS, the Building the Future Together (BFT) programme (2021). A great deal of effort, and no doubt expense, was invested in the BFT, and although some of the work is continuing under the CDG it seems to us that impetus was lost when, for undetermined reasons, the BFT programme was halted. Clearly the global pandemic will have had an impact on the pace of seeing things through, but it does not fully explain the demise of the programme.

187. The diversity of the SFRS does not reflect that of the communities it serves. In the operational part of the organisation the workforce is still predominantly male. The Service advises, on its public-facing website, that it does use PA events to promote opportunities to currently underrepresented groups. However, evidence of how PA is used is lacking. The Service attempts to support its current operational female workforce through the work of the WELF, but some of this work shouldn't be necessary, as the issues should be mainstreamed and not require special action to resolve. Such as the issue of female firefighting footwear or tabards. This calls for better practices in improving inclusion, equality and diversity in SFRS including documenting successes and challenges in creating more inclusive, equal and diverse culture so that lessons could be learned to make necessary improvements.
188. The theme of frustration, brought about by changing priorities and perceived unsustainable workloads, was often mentioned during our interviews. Personnel said that the Service was guilty of trying to do too many things, and not achieving them. Or half doing something deemed a priority, and then dropping it for something else. This was in turn leading to a reduction in commitment to the next priority to come along.
189. Since its creation it can be argued that the Service has been in a constant state of change and there will be more to come. Change may be inevitable, as its causes are often the reaction to outside influences, such as advances in technology, and changes to lifestyles, resulting in fewer incidents. But whatever the root cause, the impact of change to the extent that it causes fatigue is not inevitable. We have already described in this report the frustration, apathy and disengagement that some staff feel. In our fieldwork, personnel frequently described the communication stream from the Service as being unmanageable, with the volume being too great. We've already said that the focus for the majority of staff is their immediate team. Consequently their interest in, and grasp of, the bigger picture is less. We found a general lack of engagement with the staff survey due to the perceived poor response when previously the workforce opinion is asked for and the lack of closure of the feedback loop.
190. Inspectors acknowledge that the Service has people policies and procedures to cover all eventualities. However, staff expressed to us that there are no clear standards around consistent application of these policies and local managers were often unclear how to interpret or apply them, some being described as 'woolly'. This finding from our fieldwork is supported by the CES where only 33% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that policies and practices are applied fairly and consistently. We acknowledge that this may include policies beyond People Directorate specific policies. Several policies stipulate procedures for monitoring, recording and quality assurance, however we found limited evidence to suggest that quality assurance was being completed.

191. Due to the perceived limited resources within the People Directorate, staff and managers often felt unsupported, and that the effective resolution of issues was often very protracted and could impact on staff wellbeing. In some instances, staff described people functions as being transactional, such as staff appraisals. Often outcomes were not adjusted to consider individual circumstances. Many staff highlighted that line managers did not always have the appropriate professional skillset in the relevant policies, we see this as a potential risk to the organisation.

List of Recommendations and Areas for Consideration

Recommendations

1	We recommend that the SFRS, when creating and reviewing policies and procedures, ensures that all supporting documents such as EHRIA, DPIA and privacy statements etc, are also created and maintained in line with governance arrangements and guidance.
2	We recommend that the Service engages with its workforce to develop and create a People Strategy that meets the needs of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Framework and the Service's Long Term Vision.
3	We recommend that the SFRS review the impact of the current People Directorate structure with a view to improving the efficiency, consistency and capacity of the Directorate to improve delivery of service. This should include openly engaging and consulting with staff across the organisation to understand issues with the current structure. Any revision should support the delivery of the SFRS's Strategic Plan and provide the professional skills and support necessary to meet the workforce needs across the Service.
4	We recommend that when the Service reviews its recruitment and selection policy, and supporting documentation, it considers explicitly incorporating the assessment of the candidate's alignment to the Service's values, throughout the selection and recruitment process.
5	We recommend that the SFRS conducts a review of its Positive Action strategy and how well embedded it is within its recruitment processes. The Service should also capture and monitor data from vacancy applications, carry out, and publish, an analysis of this information to ensure that any Positive Action activity undertaken meets the needs of protected characteristic groups.
6	We recommend that the Service conclude and evaluate its internal management development pathway pilot.
7	We recommend that the SFRS should explore the option to make use of the current NFCC Supervisory and Middle Manager development pathways as a more efficient and effective means to close the leadership and management training deficit gap.
8	We recommend that the SFRS continue to undertake analysis and review of course allocation to ensure fair and equitable distribution of funded courses to support the SFRS in its objectives. Promote and develop impactful communication of outcomes and reasons behind funding allocation to the wider organisation. In addition, the SFRS should consider allocating time for staff to work on their development.
9	We recommend that the Service ensures that the quality assurance and monitoring reviews, as stated in its policies, are conducted and evidenced.
10	We recommend that the Service undertakes a full review of its approach to appraisals and, takes into consideration the views of the workforce, revises the process to ensure that appraisals deliver benefit and value to both personnel and the Service.

11	We recommend that the Service, when carrying out its review of policies, takes the opportunity to reduce them in number and to simplify them for the end user as far as possible.
12	We recommend that the SFRS make greater use of digital technology and automation, to minimise manual intervention in the production, collation and access to data to improve decision making, prioritisation and measures of success for the CDG.
13	We recommend that the SFRS consider the role and importance of all staff networks in providing insight, advice, and guidance on the continual promotion of a fair and equitable culture.
14	We recommend that the Service evaluates the impact of home working, particularly on the relationship between middle managers and fire station-based personnel, with a view to increasing leadership visibility and interaction.
15	We recommend that the SFRS consider publicising any action plans created following the analysis of the CES findings, specifically highlighting completed actions undertaken in response to comments made.
16	We recommend that the Service continue to clearly articulate national priorities, and how these will impact locally, and communicate as soon as possible when projects or proposed changes are to be delayed or cancelled.
17	We recommend that the SFRS continue to review its business change process to ensure that it clearly identifies that the proposed activities are not only evidence-based, but meet organisational strategic needs, with measurable defined outcomes.
18	We recommend that the Service concludes its review of the structure of Operations Control and implements any proposed changes as soon as possible.

Areas for Consideration

1	We would encourage the Service to ensure that when reasonable adjustments are required to support individual needs, this information is passed on where appropriate.
2	That the SFRS should provide clarity, within its policies and procedures where applicable, of the provision of welfare support available to individuals as part of both informal and formal processes.
3	Consideration should be given to introducing service level agreements for occupational health appointments and potentially an accelerated access route for urgent appointments where necessary.
4	The Service may wish to consider if there would be advantages of moving to a dedicated policy team and a functional owner, rather than the current named individual format. Consideration should also be given to the provision of supplementary guidance on policy content.
5	That the SFRS should consider the introduction of a digital employee passport system.
6	That the results of the analysis of, and learnings from, the use of the 'Speak Up' confidential reporting line are made available, as appropriate, to the workforce.
7	We would encourage the Service, its managers and commanders to consider clearly articulating and acknowledging, through relevant communication, that everyone's contribution is equally important and valued.

Appendix A

About His Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate in Scotland (HMFSI)

HMFSI is a body that operates within, but independently of, the Scottish Government. Inspectors have the scrutiny powers specified in section 43B of the Act. These include inquiring into the state and efficiency of the SFRS, its compliance with Best Value, and the manner in which it is carrying out its functions.

HMFSI Inspectors may, in carrying out inspections, assess whether the SFRS is complying with its duty to secure Best Value and continuous improvement. If necessary, Inspectors can be directed by Scottish Ministers to look into anything relating to the SFRS as they consider appropriate.

We also have an established role in providing professional advice and guidance on the emergency response, legislation and education in relation to the Fire and Rescue Service in Scotland.

Our powers give latitude to investigate areas we consider necessary or expedient for the purposes of, or in connection with, the carrying out of our functions:

- The SFRS must provide us with such assistance and co-operation as we may require to enable us to carry out our functions.
- When we publish a report, the SFRS must also have regard to what we have found and take such measures, if any, as it thinks fit.
- Where our report identifies that the SFRS is not efficient or effective (or Best Value not secured), or will, unless remedial measures are taken, cease to be efficient or effective, Scottish Ministers may direct the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to take such measures as may be required. The SFRS must comply with any direction given.

We work with other inspectorates and agencies across the public sector and co-ordinate our activities to reduce the burden of inspection and avoid unnecessary duplication.

We aim to add value and strengthen public confidence in the SFRS and do this through independent scrutiny and evidence-led reporting about what we find. Where we make recommendations in a report, we will follow them up to assess the level of progress.

We will aim to identify and promote good practice that can be applied across Scotland. Our approach is to support the SFRS to deliver services that are high-quality, continually improving, effective and responsive to local and national needs. The terms of reference for inspections are consulted upon and agreed with parties that the Chief Inspector deems relevant.

Appendix B

How this inspection was carried out

The purpose of this inspection was to make an assessment of the organisational culture that exists within the SFRS.

An inquiry by the Inspectorate can be self-directed or can be subject to direction by Scottish Ministers. This inquiry into the SFRS is self-directed by the Chief Inspector, Robert Scott QFSM. The following persons also contributed to the inspection and to the report:

Robert Scott QFSM, Chief Inspector

Graeme Fraser, Assistant Inspector

Lynne Gow (SFRS Seconded)

Shirley Hartridge (SFRS Seconded)

We are grateful to Professor Paresh Wankhade of Edge Hill University, and Mark Cashin QFSM DL, retired Chief Officer of Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service, for agreeing to provide advice, quality assurance peer review and academic rigour to our inspection process.

The decision to carry out this inspection was intelligence-led and risk-based, influenced by the importance of the subject area.

Methodology

This inspection has involved different methods of evidence gathering and analysis:

- a desk top data review of documents and data supplied by the SFRS. The Service initially provided in excess of 400 pieces of evidence. We undertook a sense check and assessment of the content of procedural documents and compared these to statutory code of practice and industry standards
- face-to-face and virtual interviews with SFRS staff who are responsible for the development of policy and their implementation
- a series of interviews with SFRS managers and leaders to gauge the awareness of and implementation of these policies and their ease of use in practice
- face-to-face and virtual interviews with SFRS staff at various SFRS workplaces to obtain their views on the Service's communications, values and general culture
- HMFSI had intended to undertake a survey of SFRS staff as part of this inspection. However, the SFRS was of the view that doing so would have an impact on the Service's own plans to carry out a survey. Therefore, we parked our survey plans to avoid duplication of effort and we accessed and made reference to the results of the Service's survey.

Glossary

ACAS	Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service: an independent public body that provides free and impartial advice to employers, employees and their representatives on; employment rights; best practice and policies; resolving workplace conflict
CDG	Cultural Development Group
DPIA	Data Protection Impact Assessment
EHRIA	Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment
FRS	Fire and Rescue Service
HMFSI	His Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate
HMICFRS	HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services
HR	Human Resources
iHub	The SFRS intranet
LCMS	Learning Content Management System: an online learning resource for firefighters
Long Term Vision	A strategic document of the SFRS
NFCC	National Fire Chiefs Council
OC	Operations Control
Positive Action	Measures allowed in the Equality Act 2010
Protected Characteristics	Categories defined in the Equality Act 2010
RDS	Retained Duty System
SDA	Service Delivery Area. The SFRS is organised into three SDAs, North, East and West.
SFRS	Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
SLT	Strategic Leadership Team
SMART	An acronym: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time Bound
VDS	Volunteer Duty System

Endnotes

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