



The report from the latest inspection of Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) was released on 18th September 2024.

The Inspection is broken-down into three pillars: Effectiveness, Efficiency and People. In total across the 11 areas which make up the three pillars of the inspection, NFRS was graded as good in 3 of them, adequate in 5 and 3 requiring improvements. The Service has been rated as 'requires improvement' in the People pillar.

You can find our report plus the other services from tranche 3 of inspections here <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/frs-assessments/northamptonshire-2023-2025/>

In the People pillar which looks at values and culture, the inspectorate specified that the service needs to do more work to develop and establish a culture that supports EDI

In their last inspection, they identified as a cause of concern that the service hasn't made enough progress to improve EDI.

Since then, the service has developed an action plan to address the cause of concern. The HMI recognises the considerable work that has been carried out to support the necessary improvements, but there is still more work to do for the benefits to be realised.

Cause of concern

The service hasn't made enough progress since our last inspection to improve equality, diversity, and inclusion.

Recommendations

The service should improve equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) by:

- working with staff to develop clear EDI objectives and training to increase awareness of EDI and its importance across the organisation.
- developing effective ways to show how it monitors and evaluates EDI objectives, including understanding and addressing the effect positive action has on staff.
- making sure it has robust processes in place to do [equality impact assessments](#) and reviewing any actions agreed as a result;
- making improvements to the way it collects equality data to better understand its workforce demographics and needs; and
- supporting staff and managers to confidently challenge and manage inappropriate behaviour.

Below we detail our action plan to specifically address this cause of concern – it should be noted that this is part of a wider comprehensive EDI action plan the Service has in place in response to the feedback received from HMICFRS.

Engage with its staff to develop clear EDI objectives and training to increase awareness of EDI and its importance across the organisation, including understanding and addressing the impact positive action is having on staff.

HMICFRS Statement

Actions

Service has limited representation from staff groups that can help support effective decision making.

- Continue work on setting up staff networks using police networks to assist.**
- Draft and publish the staff network group policy
 - Set up networks with clear Terms of Reference and invite to actively influence Projects, Policies, and decisions.
 - Join police networks where we note its unlikely that fire is able to set up our own networks due to lack of numbers or people wating to lead them.
 - To establish an EDI working group (by July 2024) (subgroup of PACB) consisting of representatives across departments, unions, and staff networks to identify issues/progress activity and to be a conduit to the wider organisation.

<p>Staff told us that middle managers are a barrier to driving positive action</p>	<p>Work with Middle Managers so they understand what the service is currently doing and what we expect of them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service to fully understand what positive action is actually taking place and bringing this information to People and Culture Board (PACB) to assess • Based on above, Service to communicate to Middle Managers what we do and how they can help • As part of middle managers seminar dedicate time from input from Positive Action Team to speaking about their roles / responsibilities and what positive action is and how they can take ownership • Positive Action Team to do regular inputs into cohort days and consider if more regular meetings between Middle Managers and members of the positive action team should be diarised: to share best practice and gain support from them. • Positive Action Team to deliver an input within internal EDI training- begins autumn 2024. Ensure Positive Action Team is a topic discussed within safe space meetings beginning autumn 2024 • Middle managers to sit in as an observer on some of the recruitment panels so they can the independent nature an unbiased process - with the aim of then advocating fairness across recruitment processes- can begin on next recruitment processes
<p>Positive action strategy, but disappointingly this is yet to be implemented</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Via PACB the strategy owner to present an agreed implementation plan for how the strategy will be turned into actions
<p>The service knows it needs to do more to increase diversity at all levels in the workforce. There has been limited progress to improve ethnic and gender diversity</p>	<p>Continue to progress forward outcomes of Serving Pride via the PACB.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue the work of the PACB board implementing SWP outcomes • Monitor outcomes and changes to inform demographics changes in the service over time • Bolster the work of Positive Action to provide coaching towards individual from diverse backgrounds to enter the service

<p>Limited evidence to show what the service has done to address disproportionality in recruitment, retention, and promotion processes.</p>	<p>Set up better reporting and monitoring of data for promotion and recruitment to enable the service to analyse if there is disproportionality.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with staff network groups as they are established to allow for mentoring and positive action within them To build enough time in recruitment processes to ensure PA activity can take place. • To provide new recruitment material to stations and giving briefings to staff so they can have a clear understanding of their role in recruitment, ensuring they are targeting those from under represented groups and have the material to support this activity. material to be produced by sept 2024 • Deliver PA plan to recruit and retain individuals from diverse backgrounds • Set up monitoring via PACB to determine if there is indeed disproportionality in recruitment and retention / promotion. Papers to be quarterly reported to PACB noting trends in this data. • Based on the above set up targeted interventions to break down barriers if there are areas where applicants with protected characteristics failing in the processes
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Make sure it has robust processes in place to undertake equality impact assessments and review any actions agreed as a result.

HMICFRS Statement	Actions
<p>More work is needed to make equality analysis more consistent and robust: EQiAs we reviewed lacked in detail with limited use of data to form outcomes</p>	<p>Review how we sample EQiAs to ensure they are more detailed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide better links for authors of EQiAs to seek guidance to allow them to be produced as part of the policy / system / project and not a tick box after thought. • Consider sending a SEO and other key stakeholders who work within policy to NFCC EQiA training courses.
<p>HMICFRS found that although all new and renewed policies must have an EQA, that this wasn't replicated for projects or strategies, which left gaps in understanding.</p>	<p>Ensure that EQiAs carried out for all activities across the service including for those projects being managed by DDat, commercial etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and standardise the EQiA template across both Police and Fire to enable this be used for both services • Ensure that all projects and other strategies have EQiAs as part of standard practice • Review templates that ensure papers / decisions brought to SLT and other governance boards have an EQIA within them (or it is linked to)
<p>The service doesn't properly assess or act on the impact on each protected characteristic. There was an absence of data analysis or actions made from EQiAs</p>	<p>Carry out meta-analysis of EQiAs every 12 months to determine where there have been impacts on protected characteristics and if this proportionate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out an analysis of all data from EQiAs over a 12-month period to ensure that lessons are learned if there is any impact on protected characteristics. • Paper and data to be considered at PACB as part of standing item each year

Make improvements to the way it collects equality data to better understand its workforce demographic and needs.

Actions	Impact/Evidence
<p>Low return from staff around protected characteristics as they were reluctant to give information due to concerns on how it would be used. The service should do more to improve the workforce's understanding of how data is used which should help to improve trust.</p>	<p>Evidence shows that in actual fact staff returns have improved, nevertheless there is still more to be done to target these areas we believe that there is a gap in completion of PCs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• carry out analysis of the data to provide most up to date stats on %s of the workforce completing / not completing their PCs.• Analyse data to determine if certain parts of workforce (such as On-call or particular stations) are more likely to not declare• Develop bespoke interventions (and use local managers) to engage with areas that tend not to declare to understand their concerns and give reassurances about how the data will be used.• Further push out Safe to Say through internal communications• Set up 6 monthly monitoring via a report to the PACB to look at the stats for declarations and the trends so they can be identified at early stage

Support staff and managers to confidently challenge inappropriate behaviour	
Actions	Impact/Evidence
Some staff with protected characteristics did not report bullying, harassment, or discrimination due to concerns about confidentiality or being victimised	<p>Roll out independent investigation service fully to build staff confidence in confidentiality.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult with RBs around change to policy to include AAC • Roll out new investigation service • Monitor protected characteristics within formal process showing concerns raised over time through PACB • Use follow up Serving with Pride survey to examine progress made
Service has realigned its bullying and harassment policy to form part of the renewed grievance policy. We found this information to be diluted and lacks detail on bullying, harassment, victimisation, and discrimination.	<p>Review the new bullying and harassment policy to make sure it contains any details that were previously within it that may have been diluted; especially around bullying, harassment, victimisation and discrimination.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Policy to ensure that it is clear around references to bullying, harassment, victimisation and discrimination. • Carry out gap analysis against previous policy to ensure there are no missing sections • Ensure that Grey / Green book staff can get to sections of policy easily and simply
Most staff told us that they are unsure where to locate information on bullying, harassment, victimisation, and discrimination and were unaware of the policies and procedures in place.	<p>Comms to be sent out to all staff on regular basis via Weekly Bulletin that signpost people to where the new policy is.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comms to be sent out to all staff on regular basis via Weekly Bulletin that signpost people to where the new policy is • Consider having dedicated section of intranet for HR issues specifically highlighting the bullying, harassment, victimisation, and discrimination policy

The service does not provide sufficient training to managers to support them with grievance cases, discipline investigations or welfare support

Provide training for all managers in how to carry out investigations and discipline.

- Commission of Andrea Adams Consultancy as part of external investigations service to deliver investigation training to all investigating managers
- Commission of AAC to deliver training to manager who act as presiding managers in hearings
- Consider how roll out of training to all manager can take place (Levels of Leadership / cascade via Train the Trainer)
- Ensure that this is built into CPD / MoC training
- building training framework so that new managers are also trained in the future