



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham
Fire and Rescue Authority
Human Resources Committee

CONFIDENTIAL REPORTING OF EMPLOYEE CONCERNS

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Date: 10 November 2023

Purpose of Report:

To set out the provisions put in place to enable confidential reporting of concerns by employees through an independent provider.

Recommendations:

That Members note the contents of this report.

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Following recent reports of misconduct, and the findings of the Independent Cultural Review of London Fire Brigade, the Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire commissioned a spotlight report into the values and culture of the fire and rescue service.
- 1.2 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) committed to returning a report by April 2023 and in January 2023, began their assessment of the sector in this area.
- 1.3 HMICFRS considered the specific themes of values and culture (including bullying, harassment, and discrimination); training and skills; fairness and diversity; and leadership.
- 1.4 The report was published by HMICFRS on Thursday 30 March 2023. The Service has acknowledged and supported the recommendations within the report.
- 1.5 Recommendation One of the subsequent thirty-five recommendations stated that:

“By 1 October 2023, chief fire officers should make sure their services provide a confidential way for staff to raise concerns and that staff are aware of whistleblowing processes”.

2. REPORT

- 2.1 In addressing the issue of confidential reporting, the Service has engaged with various providers of independent confidential employee reporting services. These providers offer methods of reporting for members of staff about a range of issues relating to their employment with the Service and providing a “safe space” for employees to raise concerns.
- 2.2 Most of the providers offer a phone line and digital reporting platform, which enables the complainant to remain anonymous if they choose to do so.
- 2.3 The Service has opted for a company called “Say So”. A number of fire and rescue services use this provider, and discussions were held with both Derbyshire and Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Services to collaborate on a shared approach. By agreeing on a single provider, this has the advantage of sharing experience and best practice.
- 2.4 A link to the Say So website can be found here: [Say So - Anonymous reporting service \(say-so.co.uk\)](https://www.say-so.co.uk)
- 2.5 The provision offers employees access to contact via a digital portal, which is available on a 24/7 basis, or by telephone (Monday to Friday). Telephone

calls are free and monitored by staff, experienced in safeguarding and investigation issues.

- 2.6 On receiving a reported issue, Say So collate as much detail from the caller as they are willing to provide to enable the Service to look into the issue and to respond effectively. The information is passed securely to a senior point of contact within the Service who will investigate the issue raised and respond to Say So within ten days so that the employee can be updated on progress. Depending on the complexity of the issue, it may take longer than ten days to provide a full response, but the employee is kept advised if this is the case.
- 2.7 As part of the launch, Say So offer up to twenty face to face or online video meetings to employees to introduce the scheme and answer any questions, particularly to provide assurance about the confidential nature of the reporting process. They also provide leaflets, wallet cards and posters to promote the scheme within the workplace.
- 2.8 Say So visited Joint Headquarters in August for an open session with staff, which was well attended, and have visited six fire stations during September. Further visits or on-line calls are scheduled during October and November. This is to ensure that the confidential reporting facility is widely known and understood. Access to the Say So portal is available on the landing page of MyNet to ensure that it is easily accessible to staff. The scheme officially launched on 4 September 2023. Say So will provide analysis and reports to the Service regarding recurring themes or matters of concern.
- 2.9 Whilst the independent reporting provision offers an alternative way to raise concerns for employees, employees can also raise concerns through established routes, such as the Whistleblowing (Reporting of Concerns in the Workplace) Policy, through their line managers, through the Human Resources team or their trade union representatives.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The cost of providing the service is commercially confidential, however the Service has received a preferential rate due to the collaboration on procurement with neighbouring fire and rescue services. The cost of the provision can be met from within current budgets.

4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Extensive scrutiny of the security of the system and secure handling of confidential personal information has been undertaken through the Service's Information and Governance Officer to ensure data protection provisions are met.
- 4.2 The opportunity to raise concerns outside of the Service from an independent and confidential provider is intended to offer employees another route to

provide feedback to the Service and to raise issues that they may not wish to raise directly with line managers. This allows the Service to deal with issues in a timely and appropriate manner and, ideally, reduce escalation of the issues. As well as inappropriate behaviour, it also provides a route for employees to raise issues of governance, health and safety, safe systems of work, environmental or workplace issues.

- 4.3 The provision of an independent reporting provision for employees meets the requirement of the HMI Recommendation One from the Spotlight Report on the Values and Culture of the Fire and Rescue Services.

5. EQUALITIES AND ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 An equality impact assessment has been undertaken. An independent reporting provision allows employees to raise issues related to a protected characteristic in a confidential, and if preferred an anonymous, way which may increase the reporting of concerns that might otherwise be difficult to raise with a line manager or through an internal route.
- 5.2 The provision of feedback and routes to report concerns to the Service, which may include issues of integrity, leadership, professional conduct, dignity and respect and equality, diversity and inclusion, reflects the ethical standards set out within the Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

There are no environmental or sustainability implications arising from this report.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

It is important that employee concerns are raised as part of an open and transparent approach to dealing with issues, which may have implications for the Service in terms of its governance, health and safety practices, ethical standards, equality and diversity or employee relations. The provision of an independent channel, alongside other available routes, to raise such concerns ensures that issues are recognised and addressed when they are raised.

9. COLLABORATION IMPLICATIONS

Collaboration with neighbouring fire and rescue services in the procurement process provides an opportunity to share experience and best practice.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members note the contents of this report.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION (OTHER THAN PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS)

None.

Craig Parkin
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER