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Values and culture in fire and rescue service. Response from Simon Foster, West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner.

This inspection, published on the 30th March 2023, reviewed the values and culture of all 44 Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) in England, examining the following issues: a) bullying, harassment, and discrimination; b) lack of fairness and diversity; and c) reporting and handling of concerns, including allegations of misconduct.

Existing evidence collected in previous inspections since 2018 was drawn upon, but particular focus was given to those conducted in 2021 and 2022. As highlighted in the inspection, part of the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner's role is to oversee the performance of West Midlands Police (WMP) and to ensure that it promotes a positive culture, alongside FRSs and other public services.

It is widely agreed that there is an expectation of good character from employees of public services. The public has the right to expect the highest standards from the police and it is imperative that the police strive to earn and maintain trust. This requires a commitment to the utmost level of professionalism, ensuring they never abuse their powers, engage in corrupt practices, or act unlawfully. Public confidence and trust is an area that the office monitors and is keen to see continuous improvement.

Whilst the inspection made references to the unacceptable actions of police officers, largely in the Metropolitan Police Service (e.g., Operation Hotton), it would be wrong to assume that WMP is immune to such behaviours. Part of the West Midlands Police and Crime Plan is to ensure that there are effective complaints and misconduct processes that everyone can trust.

One way in which the office does this is by monitoring the effectiveness of the Professional Standards Department (PSD) and we receive monthly data on the number of complaints concerning conduct, schedule 3 and non-schedule 3 complaints and the number of days taken to investigate schedule 3 complaints. Regular updates allow the office to hold PSD to account and observe trends.

Within this inspection, the inspectorate referred to their 2022 report 'An inspection of vetting, misconduct, and misogyny within the police', which inspected the prejudicial and improper behaviour of some police officers. The report stressed the importance of effective background checks, to reduce the likelihood of the force employing officers that engage in such misconduct.

Within the PCC response, the force's current vetting practice and improvements were detailed. For example, all WMP police officers and staff in the work place, have at least the minimum required level of recruitment vetting and a new performance monitoring dashboard has been set up to send out requests for re-vetting, prior to vetting levels expiring.

Yet, vetting is not infallible in ensuring that unsuitable officers are not employed. The inspectorate emphasised the importance of having progressive values and cultures which should be the norm, so that

individuals are not hesitant to report improper behaviour. It is concerning that people fear being ostracised if they speak out against their peers. This is not the type of apprehension that officers should be concerned with. Officers should ensure that their behaviour aligns with the established WMP values and culture at all times.

The inspectorate made 35 recommendations in this report. However, only 1 recommendation is of relevance to the police and it concerns disclosure powers.

Recommendation 10: By 1 September 2023, chief constables should make sure they are appropriately using their Common Law Police Disclosure powers in circumstances involving employees of fire and rescue services.

The Common Law Police Disclosure Power, allows police forces to pass information to fire and rescue services about their staff. WMP have a notifiable occupation scheme which covers common law disclosure and are in the process of checking if this is still valid and up to date.

Any measures that the force have, to track the number of disclosures through the scheme, including those related to fire and rescue employees are also being checked. The office has been assured that this will be managed in force through the relevant governance board and that updates will be provided on the HMICFRS portal at least quarterly.

Yours faithfully,



Simon Foster

West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner