

Independent panel reports to NFCC with calls to action on culture and inclusion

5 months ago



The [National Fire Chiefs Council \(NFCC\)](#) has published a report from an Independent Challenge and Support Panel, that was established in July 2023 at the request of NFCC, to provide external scrutiny, challenge, support and advice on its culture and inclusion improvement work, including delivery against the NFCC Culture Action Plan.

The report has been published on the NFCC website, together with a letter from the panel Chair, Anthea Sully, and a response to the panel from NFCC Chair, Mark Hardingham, as part of NFCC's commitment to keeping members and partners informed of the continuing work with fire and rescue services (FRSs) towards safe and inclusive places to work.

Reporting back on its findings, the panel emphasised the need for disruptive change to ensure FRSs become more open and inclusive workplaces. The panel's report also highlights the need for sustained focus in the coming years, warning that the scale of the challenge demands courageous leadership willing to break from traditional ways of working.

The panel's report recognises NFCC and FRS leadership in driving improvements and supporting services in tackling culture, inclusion and misconduct challenges. While noting progress, the report says that much more remains to be done, requiring committed and values-driven leadership.

Independent Challenge and Support Panel Chair, Anthea Sully, said: "When we formed this panel 18 months ago, we committed to putting people before systems and institutions, ensuring that victims and those with lived experience were at the heart of our discussions.

"As part of our scrutiny, we have engaged openly with NFCC leadership, Chief Fire Officers, senior leaders

and fire sector partners, as well as hearing testimony from FRS staff. We have also visited three fire and rescue services and seen first-hand the positive leadership and hard work being done to improve culture and inclusion.

“Despite progress, we are clear that further action is still needed to root out racism, misogyny, and other unacceptable behaviours in the workplace. This will require leaders and staff to challenge traditional ways of working and embrace tangible action, going beyond rhetoric. NFCC, Government, and other national FRS bodies, have a key leadership role in driving this change, and we urge that culture and inclusion remain a top priority. Our final report outlines clear calls to action, and we look forward to continuing to see meaningful progress in the years ahead.”

National Fire Chiefs Council Chair, Mark Hardingham, said: “We wish to extend our thanks to the panel for their willingness to challenge and support NFCC in our work to drive improvements in culture and inclusion across the sector. We also want to thank everyone who shared their experiences with the panel, recognising that it cannot always have been easy to do so.

“NFCC fully accepts all the calls to action set out in the report and we are committed to delivering against them in partnership with fire and rescue services and national sector partners.

“While progress has been made by fire and rescue services, and by NFCC against our Culture Action Plan, there is still much to do. Our efforts to improve culture and inclusion must be continually embedded into everything we do. We acknowledge the dedication of those driving positive change in fire and rescue services, but we also recognise that inclusion is not yet felt by everyone, and change is not always happening fast or consistently enough.

“We welcome the report’s recognition of our work and we will incorporate its calls to action into the next phase of the NFCC Culture Action Plan which will be published in May. The public have high levels of trust and confidence in firefighters – an inclusive FRS is about maintaining and improving this still further.”