

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service

Report on historical claims of racism and bullying

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Executive Summary

Report on Historical Claims of Racism and Bullying within Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS)

Introduction and Background

In late 2023, Chief Fire Officer (CFO) Mark Preece commissioned an independent review into historical claims of racism and bullying within Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS), focusing on incidents between 1991 and 2018. *'CFO Mark Preece acknowledged that to continue the transformation of Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service, it is important to look back at the history of the service and learn lessons. This is crucial to ensure the future of the service is as inclusive as it can be and to prevent a recurrence of any previous failings.'* The CFO has previously met personally with the families of two firefighters who used to work in GFRS and made a commitment to review the past. The CFO announced a formal review would take place in August 2023. In October 2023, West Midlands Employers were appointed as the independent party to review historical concerns.

Gloucestershire County Council (GCC), the governing body for GFRS, has a legal duty to ensure that the service operates efficiently and inclusively, and delivers value for money. Inspections by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) highlighted significant failings in promoting values, fairness, and diversity within GFRS, grading these areas as inadequate.

Broader National Context

HMICFRS reports have identified systemic issues across fire services in England. The 2023 report *Values and Culture in Fire and Rescue Services* revealed that racism, misogyny, and homophobia were prevalent in a quarter of fire services. Similarly, the 2024 report *Standards of Behaviour: The Handling of Misconduct in Fire and Rescue Services* highlighted widespread failures in identifying and addressing misconduct. This national context is crucial for understanding the cultural and behavioural challenges faced by GFRS, which struggled with similar issues of discrimination and misconduct.

Methodology

West Midlands Employers (WME), a not-for-profit organisation with expertise in culturally sensitive investigations, conducted the review. Following ACAS guidelines, they interviewed 40 current and former staff members, liaised with a number of others and analysed over 4,500 documents. The review explores historical evidence and allegations of racism and bullying, providing a safe and confidential space for participants and provides practical recommendations for addressing GFRS's failings. The report includes detailed case studies to illustrate systemic issues within the organisation. The review also heard from some former and current firefighters and non-operational staff who had not personally experienced or witnessed racism, but the wider findings did not support their experience.

Key Findings: Historic Institutional Racism and Organisational Failures

- **Historic Institutionalised Racism:** The review found substantial evidence of historic institutionalised racism. Black and ethnic minority firefighters frequently encountered barriers to promotion, unfair treatment, including different or more severe disciplinary measures and overt racism, including racial slurs and derogatory comments. These incidents were often ignored, covered up or inadequately addressed by management, allowing discriminatory behaviours to persist over decades.
- **Watch Culture:** The hierarchical and insular "Watch culture" contributed to exclusionary practices. Minority firefighters were often marginalised and isolated, assigned to teams that exhibited hostile or racist behaviour. This tight-knit, closed structure often hindered integration and allowed racism and bullying to thrive unchecked.
- **Leadership:** During the period under review, GFRS leadership prioritised operational competence over people management and inclusivity. Some leaders tolerated and, in certain cases, perpetuated inappropriate behaviours. There was a lack of accountability in addressing misconduct, which reinforced a culture where racism and bullying were normalised.
- **Lack of Psychological Safety:** Many employees, particularly those from minority backgrounds, felt unsafe, raising concerns due to fears of retaliation. The grievance process was inconsistent and ineffective, leaving those who reported issues feeling unsupported and distrustful of management.

- **Historical Misogyny:** While the scope of the review did not include misogyny, it found that misogynistic behaviour was widespread during the review period, creating a hostile working environment for female employees.

Case Studies: Experiences of Racism and Exclusion

The review features several case studies of individual employees that underscore the extent of racism within GFRS. Examples include persistent racial harassment, including the use of racial slurs and intentional isolation by colleagues, systemic barriers to promotion, victimisation, and a lack of support. These personal accounts provide vivid examples of the systemic failings within GFRS, highlighting the profound impact on individuals' well-being and careers.

Organisational Culture and Climate

- The organisational culture at GFRS, particularly in the 1990s and early 2000s, was extremely hierarchical and driven by a "command and control" ethos. The service's focus on operational capability left little room for considerations of inclusivity or people management. Inappropriate behaviour, such as visible pornographic material in fire stations, was commonplace, and complaints of misconduct were frequently ignored or dismissed. Leadership's reluctance to address racism or bullying created a culture where such behaviours were tolerated and normalised. There have been attempts to address this either by individuals at junior and middle management levels and, at times, by senior leaders, but resistance to change and a lack of support from the wider organisation prevented these efforts from gaining wider long-term traction. From around 2000, there was a national drive for Fire Services across England and Wales to increase the diversity of their workforce. GFRS ran a number of recruitment drives with awareness-raising initiatives and workshops aimed at increasing ethnic minority representation. However, there was a lack of organisational readiness for a diverse workforce and the onboarding and induction experience contained no comparable support. All the focus and energy was placed on attracting diverse candidates and not on creating the infrastructure in the organisation to support them once they arrived.

Recent Progress

More recently, GFRS has taken a planned approach to address these issues, including the introduction of a Workplace Charter aligned with the National Fire Chiefs Council's (NFCC) Core Code of Ethics. The service has also implemented anonymous reporting mechanisms and re-established staff networks to support underrepresented employees. Recent evidence shows that the service now takes affirmative action to challenge and deal with misconduct where behaviour has fallen short of expectations. This has resulted in a number of recent dismissals.

Policies and decisions are now subject to an EQIA approach to embedding good practice in inclusion, and there is a clear commitment to ED & I from the leadership team, which will need to continue to be evidenced in ongoing practice improvements.

Black and Asian firefighters have re-engaged in informal staff network groups since 2020, and there are signs of growing trust in leadership. However, more work is needed to give the group(s) legitimate authority, a clear remit and formal Terms of Reference.

The review also highlighted pockets of persistent change resistance and unacceptable behaviour. While improvements have been made, such as better senior leader engagement, some employees still perceive GFRS as psychologically unsafe, and the pace of progress has been slow.

Recommendations:

1. **Acknowledge Harm:** Recognise the harm caused to Black and minority firefighters, accept past mistakes, and initiate a healing process through public acknowledgement.
2. **Define Diversity and Inclusion Expectations:** Continue to embed the Workplace Charter with clear definitions of inclusivity. Establish a Diversity and Inclusion Improvement Board or Oversight Committee which has clear governance and terms of reference. This group should include minority GFRS and GCC staff members, external D&I employment law expertise, and community members from various backgrounds. They will scrutinise, and address diversity and inclusion issues and hold GCC and GFRS leaders accountable.
3. **Enhance Union Involvement:** Strengthen collaboration with unions to support anti-discrimination efforts and advocate for minority employees.

4. **Promote Diversity Workshops and Conversations:** Develop psychologically safe spaces for open discussions about race and diversity, fostering inclusivity in daily interactions.
5. **Align Ethics with Everyday Practice:** Continue to integrate ethical principles into daily work through workshops and real-life examples, helping staff connect inclusivity with the Core Code of Ethics.
6. **Empower Employee Network Groups (ENGs):** Formally establish network groups with clear Terms of Reference, defined roles in decision-making, and tangible deliverables. Provide time off rota to enable meaningful contributions.
7. **Accountable Leadership:** Set specific diversity performance goals for leaders and hold them accountable for inclusivity, fostering personal leadership development across all levels.
8. **Clarify HR Roles and Responsibilities:** Define clear HR accountabilities through a unified strategy, aligning all HR staff with shared diversity and inclusion objectives.
9. **Comprehensive Development and Mentorship:** Build on mandatory anti-discrimination development activity through action learning, mentorship, and buddy programmes to support cultural change for managers and staff and support new recruits throughout their employee experience.
10. **Expand Mental Health Resources:** Continue to increase awareness and access to mental health support, promoting tools from other organisations to aid those affected by discrimination.
11. **Promote and Continue to Embed Clear Reporting Processes:** Continue to promote reporting mechanisms for grievances, whistleblowing, and misconduct to build confidence in reporting incidents safely.
12. **Enhance Anonymity and Psychological Safety:** Improve measures to support the psychological safety of people reporting the consequences of discrimination. To continue to build trust in leadership and the organisation.
13. **Introduce a Professional Standards Function to ensure fair, consistent and transparent investigations and outcomes.** Investigations need to be carried out by trained, impartial parties, particularly for complex cases that need to be outsourced. Decisions on employee relations cases need to be consistent and include independent scrutiny.

14. Safeguard those current firefighters who have participated in this review from any negative consequences arising from line managers and colleagues.

Conclusion

The West Midlands Employers' review found clear evidence that GFRS was institutionally racist during the period between 1991 and 2018. While GFRS is not institutionally racist today, racism still exists, and the service continues to grapple with the legacy of its past failings across the service.

Although progress is now being made, particularly since 2020, the pace of change has previously been slow, and significant cultural reforms are still needed.

Achieving lasting cultural reform at GFRS will require sustained commitment and intensified efforts. Leaders at every level must prioritise inclusivity, uphold accountability, and focus on creating a safer, more equitable workplace. Meaningful change will demand ongoing dedication, transparency, and a genuine commitment to diversity throughout the organisation.

Introduction and Background Context

In late 2023, Chief Fire Officer Mark Preece commissioned an independent body to review historical claims of racism and bullying at Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS). This followed the CFO's meeting with the families of two former GFRS firefighters, during which he committed to reviewing the past.

The CFO announced a formal review would take place in August 2023, and in October 2023, West Midlands Employers were appointed as the independent party to review historical concerns.

Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) is the governing body of the Fire and Rescue Authority and the county. GCC has a legal duty to ensure that a highly effective and efficient Fire and Rescue Service is provided for the people of Gloucestershire that also delivers value for money.

Gloucestershire County Council fulfils the role of the Fire Authority as prescribed under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, with Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service being part of the Community Safety Directorate. CFO Mark Preece reports directly to the CEO of Gloucestershire County Council, Peter Bungard¹.

The Digital and People Services Directorate, led by Mandy Quayle, provides HR support to GFRS. The EDI lead is also part of Gloucestershire County Council.

Gloucestershire County Council lists treating all people with fairness, compassion and respect as one of its values². Gloucestershire County Council states its values and behaviours are at the very heart of everything they do. They are the basis for how they work and behave, and the plans and services they deliver.

¹ <https://www.goucestershire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/what-we-do-and-how-the-council-is-managed/senior-management-structure/>

² [Our values | Working for Gloucestershire County Council](#)

With GFRS being positioned within Gloucestershire County Council, ultimately, they are accountable for ensuring all its staff are safe, engaged and included.

GFRS is one of 44 Fire and Rescue Services across England. All Fire and rescue services (FRS) are now subject to increased scrutiny. Since July 2017, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) has extended its remit to include inspections of England's fire and rescue services. GFRS was formally inspected in 2019, 2021, and 2023. In the 2023 inspection, HMICFRS³ graded the service across a number of grading categories as adequate, requiring improvement, or inadequate in a number of areas. **Notably, the areas of 'promoting the right values and culture' and 'ensuring fairness and promoting diversity' were graded as inadequate.**

Broader National Context

HMICFRS has also published national reports which provide a broader context for the recommendations included in this report.

Report 1

Value and Culture in Fire and Rescue Services, published in March 2023, focuses on the values and culture of all 44 fire and rescue services (FRSs) in England and draws on the evidence collected through HMICFRS inspections since 2018.

HMICFRS define values as principles or standards of behaviour, and culture as ideas, customs and behaviours. They define 'poor', 'unacceptable' and 'inappropriate' cultures and behaviours as those which have or have the potential to negatively affect others. These behaviours include bullying, harassment and discrimination. The value and culture report focused on the following themes:

- *values and culture, including bullying, harassment and discrimination.*
- *training and skills*

³ <https://hmicGFRS.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/GFRS-assessments/gloucestershire-2023-2025/>

- *fairness and diversity*
- *leadership.*

This spotlight report found that some services had improved their values and culture. However, many still need to do more, as HMICFRS found examples of racist, homophobic and misogynistic behaviour in a quarter of FRSs in England. The report made 35 recommendations which focus on prioritising activities to improve values and culture.

Report 2

Standards of behaviour: The handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services published in August 2024 focuses on examining:

- *the extent to which fire and rescue services are identifying and investigating misconduct.*
- *the effectiveness of misconduct processes and how consistently they are applied.*
- *how confident FRS staff are in raising concerns and in misconduct processes.*
- *the role of fire and rescue services and other organisations in handling misconduct.*

This report made 15 recommendations Standards of behaviour: The handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (justiceinspectories.gov.uk)

West Midlands Employers

This review has been carried out by West Midlands Employers [West Midlands Employers](#) (WME). WME is a not-for-profit Regional Employers Organisation (REO) for the West Midlands. WME works in cooperation with sister REOs, such as South West Employers, where Gloucestershire County Council is a member.

WME is an employment service provider that works with local authorities and public-sector organisations. It offers expert advice, consultancy, and coaching.

WME was asked to undertake an independent review on behalf of GFRS due to its expertise in dealing with complex, diverse and culturally sensitive cases. This work has been delivered by a team of experienced professionals, who can confirm they do not have a conflict of interest in this review.

The Terms of Reference of the Review

These terms of reference have been created by WME following conversations with the GFRS independent review commissioning manager, Chief Fire Officer, Mark Preece, the project commissioning team, current serving and ex-staff members, and their families where appropriate.

The formal terms of reference for this review are as follows:

- To explore historical claims of racism and bullying within Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS), which have not previously been independently reviewed. **The time span for the review is from 1991 to 2018.**
- To invite all relevant stakeholders to participate in independent interviews, allowing a fair and unbiased evidence-gathering procedure.
- To create a psychologically safe and confidential space for all relevant stakeholders to contribute their views and experiences and raise issues and concerns they feel have not previously been heard.
- To enable relevant stakeholders to provide input about their hopes for the review outcomes – (what they would like to see and what they would not like to see, with the caveat that it may not be possible to deliver everything).
- To ask stakeholders how they see the independent review outcomes changing things in the future.
- To review all relevant historical documents and evidence and explore those accusations and allegations which have not already been independently reviewed. (NB. The review will not revisit the outcomes of employment tribunals.)
- To create an independent, objective and anonymised report which provides: presented evidence, with a summary of findings; an overview of the historic organisational culture and climate, identifies the aspects of the culture which led to the failings and makes recommendations to ensure that this cannot happen again.
- The review will be conducted in accordance with the guidance contained in 'Conducting workplace investigations' produced by ACAS and dated June 2019. [conducting-workplace-investigations.pdf \(acas.org.uk\)](http://conducting-workplace-investigations.pdf (acas.org.uk))

- If any related matters, such as sexism come to the WME Review Team’s attention during the course of the review, these will be discussed with the commissioning manager, Chief Fire Officer Mark Preece and referenced in the final report and recommendations.
- When the review has concluded, a copy of the findings and recommendations will be published. The Commissioning Manager, Chief Fire Officer Mark Preece, will engage with relevant stakeholders to discuss the findings and recommendations and agree productive ways to move forward post-review, in line with GFRS’s HMICFRS⁴ obligations.

Our Approach and Methodology

The approach WME has taken during this review has been to:

- Explore historical claims of racism and bullying within GFRS, excluding those which have previously been independently reviewed (as part of employment tribunal submission cases) within the Terms of Reference timeframe.
- Engage with GFRS and those affected (both externally and internally) to gain a deeper understanding of the historical culture and climate, and to investigate unresolved issues that were not appropriately addressed at the time.
- Provide a safe, independent platform for those who feel unheard, allowing them to share their experiences and perspectives.
- Provide practical recommendations which enable the Service to ensure current and future practices are robust and fit for purpose.
- Where possible, **facilitate healing** at both individual and organisational levels by learning from past experiences and fostering understanding.

This review was conducted in accordance with the guidance contained in ‘*Conducting workplace investigations*’ produced by ACAS and dated June 2019, which makes it clear that an employment investigation does not have to find proof beyond all reasonable doubt that the matter took place. The investigator only needs to decide that, based on the balance of probabilities, an incident is more likely to have occurred than not. Throughout the review, we have defined racism, bullying and harassment as:

⁴ <https://hmicGFRS.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/GFRS-assessments/gloucestershire-2023-2025/>

Racism

Racism is defined⁵ as the inability or refusal to recognise the rights, needs, dignity, or value of people of particular races or geographical origins. More widely, the devaluation of various traits of character or intelligence as 'typical' of particular peoples.

Racism can be both **overt, explicitly expressed through conversation, and materially through forms of violence**, and covert in nature, working in more implicit and subtle ways to **disenfranchise people through the restriction of career or life opportunities**⁶. For the purposes of this report, **institutionalised racism** is defined as the systems, policies, practices and procedures throughout the organisation and its culture that have covertly or overtly disadvantaged Black or ethnic minority staff.

Bullying and Harassment⁷

Bullying is unwanted behaviour from a person or group that is either:

- offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting.
- an abuse or misuse of power that undermines, humiliates, or causes physical or emotional harm to someone.

Bullying might:

- be a regular pattern of behaviour or a one-off incident
- happen face-to-face, on social media, in emails or calls
- happen at work or in other work-related situations
- not always be obvious or noticed by others
- making offensive or intimidating comments
- include withholding information so the job cannot be done properly
- include unreasonable or impossible deadlines or workloads
- include overbearing supervision or unjust criticism
- include blocking opportunities or making threats about job security

⁵ <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20111012125231893>

⁶ <https://www.coursesidekick.com/sociology/3260>

⁷ <https://www.acas.org.uk/discrimination-and-the-law/harassment>

Harassment is defined as unwanted conduct that is based on **race, colour, religion, sex (including sexual orientation, gender identity, or pregnancy), national origin, older age (beginning at age 40), disability, or genetic information (including family medical history)** and has the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of people in the workplace or of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

It can be harassment if the behaviour:

- has one of these effects, even if it was not intended
- intended to have one of these effects even if it did not have that effect

Bullying behaviour can be harassment **if it relates to a protected characteristic**. It is possible that serious harassment could also be a hate crime.

During the review process, we engaged with a range of individuals, both retired and serving. We conducted extensive conversations with 40 individuals, while some chose not to participate in the review. We have also liaised with a significant number of others at different times to ascertain or discuss data and understand the broader context of the culture and climate within UK fire and rescue services. Participants included current GFRS and GCC staff, operational firefighters and non-operational green book staff and retired and former GFRS and GCC staff from across the organisation's hierarchy and from all backgrounds, roles and experiences.

The review has focused on the employee life cycle from attraction to recruitment and selection, induction, onboarding development and training, career progression, performance management, and exit from the organisation.

Misogyny was not within the scope of this review, but during the review we were made aware of a significant number of historical examples of acts of misogyny and unacceptable behaviour towards females within GFRS.

Personal testimonies are a significant part of this review and have been used to corroborate findings; however, it is accepted that memories may not be complete or that supporting documentation may not be available. There were, at times, differing recollections of events. Where possible, we have sought to corroborate views to find common ground. **Some individuals wished to remain anonymous, and others were happy to be named. After careful consideration, we have chosen only to name the individuals who gave us permission to feature their employee experiences. All other contributions are anonymised and form part of the broader description of the organisational culture and climate.**

Although the review focused on **the period from 1991 to 2018**, it quickly became apparent during the process that past events are still influencing the present organisational culture and climate. Therefore, we have included comments and evidence reflecting this to enable us to create recommendations that take account of recent issues *and* progress.

The review has also considered findings from the 2016 Alendi Cultural Review and follow-up in 2018 and the Equality Survey conducted in 2020.

Participation in the review was voluntary. Several key persons cited by others did not respond when asked to participate. Others were aware the review was taking place and chose not to participate. WME proactively invited all current staff to participate, and the review process was promoted externally via the GFRS website.

Despite the review's active promotion, it is also possible that some individuals were unaware of it taking place and would have liked to participate but were not known to WME.

The review included desktop research of relevant GFRS and GCC documents, policies, and procedures, where available, as well as published videos and media articles, totalling more than 4,500 resources.

Interviews were conducted in person at locations to suit interviewees to ensure psychological safety and confidentiality. Interviews were also carried out using MS Teams.

The Findings of the Report

The findings are structured into the following two sections:

1. The first part shows case studies of employee experiences from 1991 to 2024. All these employees (or their families) have given us permission to publish these.
2. The second looks at the broader organisational culture and climate and provides a chronological view from the 1990s to the present. This section also provides a summary of the key themes and incorporates evidence from a significant number of anonymised individuals who contributed to the review.

Case studies of Employee Experiences

The following case studies summarise the experiences of several GFRS employees from 1991 to 2024.



Avanos Biney Employee Experience

Avanos sadly took his own life in 2017, aged 49. The information provided is, therefore, a collation of written evidence gathered from his personal archive provided by his family and verbal recollections from family, family friends and colleagues.

Based on the evidence presented to us, we believe that Avanos Biney's employee experience at GFRS can be summarised as follows:

Avanos joined the Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS) on 27 May 1998, serving until 21 October 2001, driven by a strong desire to serve his community and build a fulfilling career. His application highlighted his enthusiasm for teamwork, community service, and the opportunity to engage in varied and meaningful work. Character references described him as loyal, honest, trustworthy, and possessing an infectious sense of humour.

Recruitment and Early Career

- **Positive Evaluations:** During his 12-month and 24-month probation periods, Avanos received high scores and commendations from his supervisors. They noted his good knowledge of equipment and procedures, reliability, and potential to be an asset to the service.

- **Training and Development:** Avanos participated in various training programmes, including fire safety, equal opportunities, fairness and dignity, and bullying and harassment awareness.

Challenges and Adverse Experiences

- **Missed Examinations:** Avanos missed some firefighter written exams, leading to a two-year delay before having the opportunity to retake them after being “barred” from taking the exams without any information provided on the employee file to indicate what the issue was in this scenario.
- **Racism and Harassment:** Avanos informed more senior members of staff that he was unhappy with how he was being treated on the Watch, and he believed members of his Watch were racist. They could not see what he referred to and suggested a change of Watch. Avanos faced numerous instances of racism and bullying from certain colleagues:
 - He was subjected to racial slurs and derogatory comments. For example, in front of Avanos, a colleague referred to a Black individual on the street with a racist remark about having "n****r swagger."
 - Whilst travelling in an appliance, 4 Asian girls were crossing the road a firefighter said, “Go on, wipe them out. It would help Gloucester’s immigration problem”.
 - A fellow Firefighter was handed an equal opportunities paper and his reaction in front of Avanos was, “What a f*****g waste of time.”
 - Avanos discovered the racial slur "n****r" written on his T-shirt after a volleyball game.
 - During a tea break, Avanos sat directly opposite a firefighter reading Firefighter Magazine (Vol 27). When he got to page four and five there was an article on Black firefighters. He looked up at Avanos and said, “F**k’s sake bloody n*****s.” He stared at Avanos for a while, then looked back down as if nothing had happened.
 - Swastikas were placed in Avanos’s belongings, and there was an incident where a colleague attempted to place a note with a swastika into his kit.
- **Isolation and Intimidation:** Avanos experienced being ignored by colleagues, subjected to intimidating stares, and found glass in his shoes. His food was tampered with, and itching powder was placed in his kit and bed.

- **Dangerous Practices:** Avanos was subjected to hazardous situations orchestrated by colleagues:
 - **Platform Ladder Incident:** Avanos was sent up in a fully extended platform ladder that was not safely secured. Colleagues manipulated the ladder to sway and spin, causing him distress and posing a serious safety risk. Avanos recorded this incident, stating, "As you can see, this is their idea of fun, swaying me to and fro. Been up here for about 10 minutes now. Getting rather tedious, also making me feel rather sick." Despite this evidence, no action was taken against those involved.

It should be noted that although Avanos captured this instance on camera, WME has not been provided with any evidence to show that the issue was raised formally through GFRS channels as a grievance, although it was “common knowledge” and had been shown on local TV.

- **Lack of Support from Management:** Despite reporting some incidents to management, Avanos saw little to no action taken against the perpetrators. One colleague was moved to another station, but overall, there was a lack of effective intervention.
- **Impact on Health and Well-being:** Avanos experienced a sustained and deliberate sequence of events, which included racist comments and purposeful overt attempts to ostracise and intimidate him over his three-and-a-half-year employment with GFRS. He described these events as happening with alarming regularity. Comments came from several different individuals including his peers and others who were his superiors.
- Avanos had significant sickness absence during his employment with GFRS. There is no evidence of any concerted effort to examine the underlying issues and no intervention from a personal welfare perspective. The implication from the tone of the emails / referrals to OCH was that Avanos required disciplining for the level of sickness rather than anyone seeking to understand why Avanos may not wish to come in to work.
- The hostile work environment led to significant stress. Avanos described how his time at GFRS was the worst experience of his life and left him feeling extremely depressed

and anxious. He dreaded going into work to the point that he didn't sleep at night and would feel physically sick on arrival at the fire station.

Attempts to Seek Help and Resolution

- **External Support:** Feeling unsupported by management, HR and the FBU within GFRS, Avanos sought advice from outside the service.
- **Formal Complaints:** Avanos wrote a note detailing his experiences, expressing that the behaviour of some personnel was unacceptable and against service policy.
- **Tribunal Claim:** In April 2002, Avanos filed a tribunal application for racial discrimination and victimisation. The claim was dismissed because it was filed beyond the allowable time frame and lacked specific dates and details.

Departure from GFRS

- **Seeking a way out:** Avanos applied to other fire services and received positive references from GFRS management, noting his talents and capabilities.
- **Resignation:** He resigned from GFRS on 24 September 2001 and began working with the Jersey Fire and Rescue Service on 22 October 2001.

Aftermath and Legacy

- **Passing:** Tragically, Avanos took his own life on 10 November 2017, at the age of 49.
- **Family Impact:** His family remember him as gregarious, generous, funny, and selfless, with a strong sense of mischief and humour.
- **Desire for Closure:** Avanos's family sought closure and acknowledgement of the institutionalised issues that contributed to his negative experiences at GFRS.

Key Themes and Findings

1. **Institutionalised Racism and Harassment:** Avanos was subjected to sustained racial harassment and bullying by multiple colleagues over several years.
2. **Lack of Effective Management Response:** Reports of racist incidents were inadequately addressed by GFRS management, with minimal consequences for perpetrators.
3. **Isolation and Mental Health:** The hostile work environment led to significant mental health challenges for Avanos, contributing to high levels of sickness absence.
4. **Inadequate Support Systems:** Avanos did not feel psychologically safe to report incidents formally, and there was a disconnect between HR and operational management in addressing such issues. Over time, because of a lack of consequences for others for any of the things Avanos endured, he became less and less confident in reporting incidents and didn't trust management to deal with issues. He didn't see anyone disciplined as a result of any of the racist abuse and intimidation he suffered. He didn't feel confident formally reporting events to his line manager or more senior managers, his FBU representative, or HR, so he looked outside of the service for advice and support.
5. **Failure of Grievance Procedures:** The internal grievance procedure fell short of a robust and timely process and led Avanos to submit a tribunal claim as he viewed the internal grievance process was not concluded to his satisfaction, and so protracted that it led to a late submission which could not then be properly heard by the Tribunal.
6. **The importance of allies:** Without the support of a small group of allies inside the service, Avanos's time would have been impossible to bear.
7. **Impact on Career Progression:** Delays and barriers in Avanos's career advancement were compounded by the discriminatory environment.

8. **Health and Safety Violations:** Dangerous practices, such as the platform ladder incident, were not appropriately addressed, indicating negligence in ensuring employee safety.

9. **Need for Organisational Change:** The lack of accountability and failure to learn from these incidents indicate institutionalised problems within GFRS at the time.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence, WME have concluded that Avanos was subjected to institutionalised racism during his tenure at GFRS. The incidents he faced were not isolated but part of a broader cultural issue within the organisation. There was a significant failure to address and rectify the harassment, discrimination, and safety violations, and a lack of accountability and sanctions for those responsible, leading to profound professional and, ultimately, personal consequences for Avanos. The case highlights the critical need for effective policies, supportive management, and a culture that actively opposes racism and ensures the well-being and safety of all employees.

Resolution Sought

1. Acknowledgment of Harm

Avanos Biney's family seeks formal recognition from GFRS of the sustained racial harassment, bullying, and dangerous treatment he experienced, which they believe severely impacted his mental health and contributed to his eventual suicide. They call for GFRS to take accountability and look at the implications of diversity and inclusion beyond Avanos's case.

2. Apology and Redress

The family requests a formal apology and appropriate redress for Avanos's mistreatment, as well as recognition of the long-lasting effects his negative experiences had on his life and well-being.

3. Policy Changes and Reforms

Avanos's case points to a need for reforms in grievance procedures, as his family highlighted that complaints Avanos made were inadequately addressed, contributing to a sense of injustice and lack of resolution.

4. Improved Support and Resources for Employees

Avanos felt unsupported by GFRS, particularly by management, the HR department, and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), prompting him to seek external assistance. This indicates the family's call for enhanced mental health support and accessible resources for employees dealing with discrimination.

5. Call for Accountability

The family called for accountability for those who harassed Avanos, stating that GFRS management failed to take action against his perpetrators, which they see as an essential step for preventing similar future incidents.

6. Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion

While there is no specific mention of advocating for mandatory diversity training, the family indicated a general desire for GFRS to address the institutionalised discrimination that Avanos experienced, implying a need for genuine inclusivity efforts.



John James Employee Experience

John sadly passed away in 2019. The information provided is, therefore, a collation of written evidence gathered from his personnel file, documents provided from his personal archive and verbal recollections from family, family friends and colleagues.

Based on the evidence presented to us, we believe that John James's employee experience at GFRS can be summarised as follows:

John James joined the Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS) on 9 May 2001, serving until 22 August 2017, with aspirations to serve his community and build a rewarding career. His application reflected a strong commitment to teamwork, a desire for physically demanding work that gives back to the community, and ambitions for promotion through study. Character references described him as honest, competent, adaptable, and enthusiastic.

Recruitment and Early Career

- **Positive Evaluations:** John successfully passed his probation on 4 June 2003. Supervisors noted his competence, initiative, and ability to work well independently and as part of a team.
- **Training and Development:** John participated in various training programmes and was heavily involved in the GFRS extraction team. He was proactive, displayed traits for future promotion, and was considered a valuable and respected member of his Watch.

Challenges and Adverse Experiences

- **Barriers to Promotion:** Despite his aspirations and efforts, John faced repeated obstacles in advancing his career:
 - He failed his exams for promotion to the rank of leading firefighter multiple times, with little support or feedback to help him improve.
 - His requests for training opportunities, such as the Road Traffic Collision Instructor course, were repeatedly denied.
 - In his personal development reviews (PDRs), John expressed frustration over the lack of opportunities and felt his career progression was hindered without clear justification.
- **Racism and Harassment:** John faced institutionalised racism and discriminatory treatment:
 - He was subjected to unfair scrutiny and disciplinary action over his timekeeping, although other firefighters (including White colleagues) were also late without consequence.
 - Negative rumours and unfounded accusations circulated about him, including baseless insinuations about substance abuse affecting his punctuality.
- **Isolation and Intimidation:** John experienced social ostracism and was excluded by his colleagues:
 - He was ignored during meals and social interactions, leading to feelings of isolation.
 - Management manipulated situations to make him appear unprofessional.
 - Issue of conflating of personal issues (neighbouring fence) and looking for evidence of failure to uphold values
- **Lack of Support:** John sought assistance from the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) but felt inadequately represented:

- He believed the local FBU representative did not support him effectively and discouraged him from filing grievances.
- He relied on external support from trusted individuals outside the immediate union structure.
- **Retaliation for Reporting Misconduct:**
 - John reported a serious incident involving inappropriate and offensive comments made to a female colleague by a superior.
 - Despite asking for the matter to be handled confidentially, the information was not kept private, leading to further ostracism and retaliation.
 - The mishandling of his report increased hostility from colleagues and management, exacerbating the toxicity of his work environment.

Health and Well-being

- **Mental Health Decline:** The prolonged stress and hostile work environment significantly impacted John's mental health:
 - He suffered from anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, and physical symptoms related to stress.
 - Occupational Health assessments noted his perceptions of unfair treatment and the impact on his well-being. Still, no specific action was taken to address the impact of this treatment on his mental health or ability to attend work.
- **Sickness Absence:** John had periods of sickness absence due to stress and work-related injuries:
 - He sustained physical injuries on duty, some of which he believed were not accidental.
 - His absences were not adequately addressed, and no support or interventions were provided to address underlying issues.

- **Impact on Physical Health:** The ongoing stress is believed by John's family to have contributed to a decline in John's physical health, including the development of serious medical conditions.

Attempts to Seek Help and Resolution

- **Formal Grievances:** John filed multiple grievances regarding unfair treatment, discrimination, and breaches of confidentiality:
 - Investigations were often inadequate, delayed, or closed without his consent.
 - Management responses frequently minimised his concerns or failed to take meaningful action.
- **Tribunal Claim:** In November 2013, John filed an Employment Tribunal claim alleging direct race discrimination, harassment, and victimisation:
 - He won his claim of victimisation, with the tribunal criticising GFRS 's handling of his complaints and the treatment he received.
 - Despite the tribunal's findings, John faced continued hostility and lack of support upon his return.
 - John submitted a second tribunal claim but withdrew it due to his ill health.
- **Lack of Effective Management Response:** Senior management failed to address the institutionalised issues:
 - Recommendations from the tribunal were not fully implemented.
 - There was little to no accountability for those who had engaged in discriminatory behaviour.
 - Promised support and reintegration efforts were insufficient or non-existent.

Departure from GFRS

Having been initially dismissed from the service on 24 September 2015, John was re-instated on appeal, although no supporting documentation for either the dismissal or reinstatement has been provided to WME.

- **Termination:** John's employment was terminated on 22 August 2017 due to ill health retirement:
 - Medical assessments concluded he was unfit to return to work, largely due to the stress and anxiety resulting from his experiences at GFRS.
 - Attempts to explore alternative roles or adjustments were made but were unsuccessful.
- **Impact on Career:** John's career progression was significantly hindered, and he left the service feeling unsupported and undervalued.

Aftermath and Legacy

- **Passing:** John tragically passed away in July 2019 at the age of 50, after being diagnosed with brain tumours in 2017.
- **Family Impact:** His family believes that the prolonged stress and hostile work environment contributed to his declining health.

Key Themes and Findings

1. **Institutionalised Racism and Harassment:** John was subjected to sustained racial discrimination and harassment by multiple colleagues and superiors.
2. **Obstruction of Career Advancement:** Despite his qualifications and efforts, John faced unjust barriers to promotion and professional development.
3. **Lack of Effective Management Response:** GFRS management failed to adequately address John's complaints, allowing discriminatory practices to persist.
4. **Isolation and Mental Health:** The hostile work environment severely affected John's mental and physical health.

5. **Inadequate Support Systems:** John did not receive appropriate support from the FBU or occupational health services, exacerbating his sense of isolation.
6. **Retaliation for Reporting Misconduct:** John faced victimisation after reporting inappropriate behaviour, leading to further discrimination.
7. **Failure of Grievance Procedures:** Formal grievances were mishandled, closed prematurely, or failed to result in meaningful action.
8. **Negative Reputation and Smear Campaigns:** John's professional reputation was unjustly tarnished through rumours and unfounded accusations.
9. **Need for Organisational Change:** The lack of accountability and failure to learn from these incidents indicate institutionalised problems within GFRS at the time.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence, WME have concluded that John was subjected to institutionalised racism during his tenure at GFRS. There was a failure to address and rectify the harassment, discrimination, and retaliation he faced. The mishandling of his complaints and the lack of support contributed to severe personal and professional consequences for John, ultimately impacting his health and well-being.

John's case highlights the critical need for effective policies, supportive management, and a culture that opposes racism and supports all employees. It underscores the importance of transparent grievance procedures, accountability for misconduct, and proactive measures to create an inclusive and respectful work environment.

Resolution Sought

1. Acknowledgment of Harm

John's family sought acknowledgement of the institutionalised racism and unfair treatment he experienced at GFRS, which they believe severely impacted his mental and physical health as well as his opportunities for promotions and training.

2. Apology and Redress

His family requested an apology and redress for the negative treatment and prolonged stress he endured, emphasising the damaging effect on his health and career. It is noted that Chief Fire Officer Mark Preece has formally apologised to the family for historical actions. However, the family feels John has been labelled a troublemaker and wishes to see his legacy redressed. John's widow, Sarah James, seeks acknowledgement of the institutionalised issues and a real and meaningful focus from GFRS to change the narrative surrounding John's legacy.

3. Policy Changes and Reforms

The family called for changes to grievance procedures, given John's experience of inadequate and poorly handled complaints. His grievances were often closed without his consent or left unresolved, underscoring the need for fair and transparent procedures. This need for fairness, consistency and transparency extends to the promotion process and career training opportunities.

4. Improved Support and Resources for Employees

Case documents show that John felt unsupported by the Union and management when dealing with workplace issues, suggesting the need for enhanced support resources for employees experiencing discrimination.

5. Call For Accountability

John's family asks for accountability for those involved in the discrimination and harassment he experienced. They highlighted the lack of repercussions for those who engaged in discriminatory behaviour and a failure by management to hold individuals accountable.

6. Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion

John's family asks for more inclusivity and diversity training, and they expressed a desire for GFRS to genuinely seek to create an inclusive culture. John's family emphasised that ethnic groups must play a proactive role in this conversation and have the agency to implement and embed change.

Warren Mann Employee Experience

The information provided is based on verbal recollections from Warren and GFRS colleagues and published press information.

Warren Mann joined GFRS as a part-time firefighter in September 1993 serving until October 1997. His expertise and background in the Air Force made him a valuable asset for the Painswick fire station. However, his experiences at GFRS and within the Painswick community reflect a culture marked by exclusion and hostility, seemingly targeted towards Warren due to his race and status as an outsider in a predominantly White, rural area.

Recruitment and Selection

- **Entry into GFRS:** Warren was recruited during a time when Painswick Station was at risk of closure. Warren's skills were seen as an asset, particularly as an Asian firefighter, which he suggested was perceived as adding diversity that might justify the station remaining operational.
- **Background and Suitability:** Warren's qualifications, including high-level security clearance and advanced skills, made him well-suited for the role. However, he felt from the outset that his acceptance was conditional and that he was never fully embraced by either GFRS or the local community.

Career Advancement

- **Lack of Promotion:** Warren chose not to seek promotion, as he recognised, he was not part of the station's social "in-group" and believed he would not be supported in his career advancement. He noted that while his ideas were not always well-received, they were sometimes co-opted by others.
- **Social Exclusion:** Warren's experience in Painswick reinforced a divide between locals and newcomers. He characterised Painswick village as a closed-off community where individuals were accepted based on long-standing local ties, which he lacked.

Disciplinary Actions

- **No Disciplinary Record:** Warren reported that he was never disciplined, though GFRS was unable to provide any paper or digital records, as Warren's tenure at GFRS pre-dates the digitisation of historical paper records.

Concerns and Grievances

Culture of Abuse

- **Hostile Environment:** Warren described a culture of abuse similar to military-style harassment, with frequent use of racial and sexual slurs, often prefaced with "we can't say this, but..." to justify inappropriate remarks.
- **Targeting of Minorities:** Racial slurs were often directed at minority groups, particularly when in areas with more diverse populations. Senior officers were aware of this behaviour but did not intervene.
- **Disregard for Intellectual Contribution:** Warren felt that his race, intelligence, and skills set him apart in a way that threatened his colleagues, which he believed contributed to a lack of respect and acceptance.

Incident Outside WM's Home

- **Harassment at Home:** After reporting abusive comments to a senior officer, Warren and his family were subjected to harassment outside their home by colleagues. One individual, a known antagonist, acted aggressively, and while some action was taken against the firefighter for abusive behaviour towards the senior officer attending, there was no formal recognition of the impact on Warren or his family.
- **Police Involvement:** Although the police acknowledged the issue, no formal action was taken by GFRS to address the harassment Warren faced, underscoring a lack of institutional response.

Group of Antagonists

- **Ongoing Intimidation:** Warren identified a group of colleagues who led a campaign of intimidation and harassment, targeting him both for his ethnicity and his status as an outsider. Despite awareness among senior officers, no action was taken against these individuals, even after multiple incidents and a successful tribunal claim.

Tribunal and Learnings

- **Successful Tribunal Claim:** Warren successfully claimed racial discrimination against GFRS. The tribunal highlighted systemic issues and identified specific individuals.
- **Absence of Organisational Change:** Despite the tribunal findings, GFRS did not take steps to address the underlying issues or implement policies to prevent recurrence. Warren reported no engagement from HR during his tenure, indicating a lack of institutional support.

Termination

Forced Relocation and End of Career: Following the tribunal, Warren was moved to Gloucester Fire Station and then transitioned to a role at Gloucestershire County Council (GCC), effectively ending his career as a retained firefighter.

Key themes and findings

- **Lack of Career Progression:** Despite his qualifications and skills, Warren refrained from seeking promotions due to an unsupportive and discriminatory environment.
- **Systemic Issues and Organisational Failure:** The consistent harassment Warren faced, alongside the absence of an organisational response, indicates deep-rooted institutionalised racism. The lack of accountability following the tribunal decision suggests a persistent culture of impunity.
- **Institutional Failure to Protect:** Warren's experiences, corroborated by the tribunal, suggest that GFRS failed to protect him from institutionalised racism and harassment, significantly affecting his career and well-being.
- **Failure to Implement Change Post-Tribunal:** GFRS's lack of action following the tribunal is particularly concerning, indicating no meaningful commitment to addressing the identified issues or preventing similar cases in the future.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence, WME concludes that Warren was subjected to institutionalised racism throughout his tenure at GFRS. The absence of proactive measures following the tribunal highlighted a lack of accountability and a lack of appetite at the time to challenge and address racism in the service.

Resolution Sought

Warren did not articulate specific resolutions he sought from this review. However, the content of his testimony highlights systemic failures within GFRS during his tenure.



Leroy Phillipotts Employee Experience

Leroy Phillipotts joined GFRS in May 1991 serving until May 2010, making him the first visibly Black firefighter in the service. He joined following a recommendation from a friend's mother, who had seen a general advert that did not target any specific demographic. Leroy's experiences over his lengthy career reveal a number of instances where his race appeared to influence how he was treated and supported.

Recruitment and Selection

- **Entry and Initial Evaluations:**
 - Leroy received positive references ahead of his appointment, highlighting his reliability and integrity. He described GFRS's "equal opportunities" claim as ironic, noting that he was the first Black firefighter recruited. His early evaluations were favourable, with his supervisors noting his good humour, enthusiasm, and positive integration into the service.
- **Training and Early Development:**
 - Leroy recalled that his 14-week training at Hereford and Worcester Fire Service felt regimented and akin to military-style training. However, he found the experience largely positive. Although he initially failed a promotion exam due to a lack of experience, he attributed this to the challenges of adjusting to the service rather than to specific biases at that point.

Incidents of Concern

- **Barriers to Training and Career Progression:**
 - Leroy encountered difficulties accessing training that he believed would benefit his role, particularly ICT courses. He was denied access to these courses, which were attended by other retained firefighters despite their minimal involvement. He found this refusal demotivating, ultimately deciding to stop requesting training.
 - He felt his potential was overlooked in the long term, as he did not receive support for promotion opportunities. His eventual disinterest in further advancement appeared linked to what he perceived as a lack of encouragement and support from GFRS management.

Disproportionate Disciplinary Actions:

- **Public Arrest and Allegations of Theft:**
 - Leroy was arrested on parade for a suspected theft of £10 from a social fund. The accusations were ultimately dismissed, but the incident left a lasting impact. He was publicly taken from the station in handcuffs, an act Leroy described as humiliating and disproportionate, with an assumption of guilt, especially compared to White colleagues who had faced internal handling for similar incidents. Other firefighters accused of stealing were only required to pay the money back where wrongdoing was identified. In Leroy's case, the subsequent investigation found no money was missing.
- **Failing to Report Sickness**
 - Leroy was formally disciplined for not reporting a sickness absence that followed the death of his sister. He was diagnosed with depression during this period, yet GFRS proceeded with the disciplinary action. This seems overly harsh, and it is noted that GFRS did not consider any mitigating circumstances surrounding his loss.
- **Tolerance of Racist Language and Behaviour:**
 - Leroy admitted to using racist language, including the 'N' word, as a means of coping and "fitting in" with his predominantly White colleagues. He expressed

regret, acknowledging that while he conformed to the environment, it ultimately legitimised offensive behaviour around him. Leroy's use of such language reflects an environment where racist humour and slurs were normalised rather than challenged; a point also corroborated by the experiences of others.

- **Colleague Testimonies on Racial Abuse:**

- Leroy faced racial abuse, which was routinely dismissed as banter. Leroy stated that he tolerated the behaviour due to his background in the armed forces, which had acclimatised him to such treatment. However, over time, he found the lack of formal response from GFRS troubling. This environment appeared permissive of offensive language, and Leroy's participation may have further emboldened others.

Health Issues and Management Response

- **Serious Health Concerns and Extended Sick Leave:**

- Leroy's medical diagnosis led to frequent and extended sickness absences. Although GFRS eventually made adjustments to accommodate his condition, Leroy described an initial period where there was scepticism about his diagnosis despite losing significant weight, and he had to provide additional medical evidence in support of his absence.
- The adjustments provided, which included assigning him to alternative duties, were eventually helpful. However, Leroy believed that his case was handled insensitively and that he was not afforded the same level of understanding as a White firefighter might have received under similar circumstances.

- **Lack of Support for Disability and Redeployment:**

- Over several years, Leroy engaged in a protracted process of medical assessments and redeployment considerations. He was assigned to work on the Equality and Diversity programme but found the lack of union involvement limited the programme's efficacy. Despite recommendations for alternative work roles, GFRS's

handling of his long-term illness and disability retirement lacked urgency, causing prolonged stress.

Observations on GFRS Culture

- **Perception of Bullying and Management Style:**
 - Leroy described the management culture at GFRS as dictatorial, with a reliance on intimidation tactics rather than supportive management. He perceived bullying as a norm, stating that it discouraged minority employees from raising grievances. He believed management training was insufficient, particularly regarding cultural sensitivity and diversity issues, which left him feeling unsupported as a Black firefighter.
- **Concerns Over Lack of Cultural Sensitivity:**

Leroy's departure interview reflected his sense of isolation, particularly due to his perception that GFRS did not understand race issues. He felt this limited his career opportunities and deterred him from advancing. Leroy noted that Black firefighters did not feel safe reporting issues, reinforcing his view that the organisational culture was not inclusive

Key themes and findings:

- **Different treatment**
 - The decision to arrest Leroy for a minor theft accusation suggests a disparity in disciplinary approaches based on race.
- **Normalising Racist language**
 - The use of racial language and slurs highlights a work culture that not only tolerated but seemed to expect such behaviour as a means of fitting in, which may have fostered an environment that discouraged diversity and encouraged conformity.

- **Lack of Support for Health Issues:**
 - Although GFRS did provide some accommodations for Leroy's illness, the initial scepticism from HR, coupled with a lack of timely support, points to an underlying insensitivity towards serious health concerns. Leroy's experience suggests a failure to provide equitable support to Black firefighters facing severe health issues.
- **Cultural Sensitivity and Support Deficiencies:**
 - Leroy's account underscores the need for improved cultural sensitivity and diversity training within GFRS. His reluctance to raise grievances reflects a broader issue: Black firefighters felt discouraged from speaking out, suggesting an organisational culture that failed to recognise and address their unique challenges.

Conclusion

Leroy's testimony and the supporting evidence point to a work environment that did not adequately address or support the specific needs of Black firefighters. His experiences reflect a culture where disparities in treatment, particularly around disciplinary actions, training, and health support, were apparent. Leroy's ultimate departure from GFRS highlights the need for structural reforms to foster a more inclusive workplace, as well as a reconsideration of how the service engages with issues of diversity and equality.

Resolution Sought:

1. Acknowledgment of Harm

Leroy's departure interview reflects his frustrations about being the "token" Black firefighter and the cultural challenges he faced, which significantly affected his well-being and professional experience.

2. Apology and Redress

Leroy expressed a desire for the Review actions to acknowledge and rectify the issues that impacted him and other Black firefighters. He noted that he received a personal apology from the Divisional Officer after his wrongful arrest, but there was no formal organisational response.

3. Policy Changes and Reforms

Leroy advocated for several policy changes, including:

- Improved equality training, specifically to support Black firefighters.
- Revisions to the policy on retained firefighters to enhance recruitment of Black firefighters.
- Greater visibility and promotion of opportunities in Black communities to increase diversity within GFRS.

4. Improved Support and Resources for Employees

Leroy highlighted a lack of accessible support systems during his time, especially during his struggles with health issues. He underscored the importance of support mechanisms like counselling and resources that could assist minority firefighters in addressing workplace challenges.

5. Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion

Leroy expressed a desire for a genuine commitment to diversity within GFRS. He called for increased efforts to recruit Black firefighters, similar to initiatives to increase female representation. He also highlighted the need for proper equality training to create a more inclusive and culturally competent environment.



Errol Westcarr Employee Experience

The information provided is a collation of written evidence gathered from Errol's personnel files, and verbal recollections from Errol and GFRS colleagues.

Errol Westcarr joined GFRS on 10 May 2000, serving until 13 April 2015. He was one of the earliest Black firefighters within the service. While he had an overall positive beginning with good relationships and valued contributions, his experience also included numerous challenges that highlighted issues within the organisation.

Errol's account, supported by testimonies and documented incidents, provides insight into his experience with differential treatment and exclusion, which ultimately impacted his career progression and well-being.

Recruitment and Early Career

- **Positive Start and Acceptance:**
 - Errol had a promising beginning, enjoying his training school experience and forming positive connections. He did not initially notice any overt racism and described training as enjoyable, noting that he formed friendships that have lasted to this day.

- **Successful Probation:**

- He completed his probation with evaluations reflecting him as a reliable and popular member of his Watch. His supervisors consistently described him as “positive, motivated, and well-integrated within the team”.

Challenges and Adverse Experiences

- **Barriers to Career Progression:**

- Despite a positive start, Errol found advancement opportunities limited. He was discouraged by what he perceived as a “glass ceiling” for Black firefighters, which the CFO acknowledged at the time in a meeting with Black and ethnic minority firefighters. This perception led Errol to refrain from actively pursuing promotion, feeling that the organisation’s culture did not support his ambitions.
- He also encountered dismissive and racially charged comments from colleagues, suggesting that his position was attributed to his race rather than his capabilities. This ongoing atmosphere of racism undermined his confidence and affected his career aspirations.

- **Differential Treatment and Racism:**

- Errol noted various instances of subtle racism, including comments from colleagues about his ethnicity and differential treatment by supervisors. At one point, he was discouraged from using equipment. These experiences contributed to his perception of a hostile work environment where he was singled out based on his race.
- Errol encountered a manager who occasionally used the N-word when talking about another colleague, which Errol challenged but felt unable to change. These incidents reinforced his sense of racial discrimination within GFRS.

- **Disciplinary Actions and Double Standards:**
 - Early on, Errol faced disciplinary action for bringing in pornographic material to training school., but this incident appears to reflect an organisational double standard, as similar material, whilst unacceptable, was reportedly common at the time within multiple GFRS stations and across the wider fire service.
 - He was also accused of stealing diesel after borrowing a service vehicle, a practice noted as common among staff. Despite providing evidence of his innocence, he felt that he was unfairly targeted and never received an apology. White colleagues engaging in similar practices did not face equivalent scrutiny.
- **Exclusion:**
 - Errol described instances where he was ostracised and subjected to racially offensive language. For example, a colleague compared him to a “wild animal” while discussing his changing in the back of the fire truck - an analogy he believed would not have been used with White colleagues.
 - These experiences, coupled with knowledge of similar treatment faced by other Black colleagues, reinforced his perception of racism within GFRS.

Health and Well-being

- **Impact of Discrimination on Health:**
 - Errol experienced periods of sickness absence due to an ongoing health condition unrelated to workplace discrimination.
- **Early Retirement**
 - Errol cites that he decided to leave GFRS because of how John James was treated by the Fire Service.

Key Themes and Findings

1. Barriers to Career Progression:

- Despite his capabilities, Errol encountered a “glass ceiling” that hindered his career growth. His perception of a racially motivated barrier discouraged him from seeking advancement.

2. Institutionalised Racism and Discrimination:

- Errol’s experiences reflect a pattern of racial discrimination, including exclusionary remarks and differential treatment. These incidents contributed to a sense of isolation and frustration.

3. Differential Treatment in Disciplinary Actions:

- Errol’s experiences with disciplinary actions reflect a double standard, as similar behaviours by White colleagues did not result in equivalent consequences.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence, WME have concluded that Errol experienced institutionalised racism during his tenure at GFRS. His experiences reflect broader cultural issues within the organisation, where racial discrimination and unequal treatment were not adequately addressed. Errol’s career was impacted by a lack of support. These findings underscore the need for GFRS to implement stronger policies and practices to promote an inclusive and supportive environment for all employees.

Resolution Sought:

1. Policy Changes and Reforms

Errol advocated for reinstating a zero-tolerance policy on discrimination and stressed the importance of reforms in grievance handling. He highlighted his dissatisfaction with the grievance process, calling for improvements to ensure fair and consistent treatment and timely resolution of complaints.

2. Improved Support and Resources for Employees

Errol noted a lack of support from management for Black and ethnic minority staff and the need for all forms of support to be available and accessible to everyone.

3. Call For Accountability

Errol explicitly called for people to be held accountable for their actions and sought consequences for those involved in past discriminatory behaviour.

Lionel McCrea Employee Experience

The information provided is a collation of written evidence gathered from Lionel's personnel files, and verbal recollections from Lionel and current and former GFRS colleagues.

Based on the evidence presented to us, we believe that Lionel's employee experience at GFRS can be summarised as follows:

Lionel McCrea joined GFRS on 26 July 2000 after working for Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service (WFRS). He entered GFRS through a recruitment drive aimed at increasing ethnic minority representation. However, Lionel's experience highlights ongoing racial discrimination and inadequate support that impacted his career progression, mental health, and overall well-being.

Recruitment and Early Career

- **Background and Entry:**
 - Lionel's recruitment to GFRS followed a positive action initiative. He initially hoped for better opportunities at GFRS, having had a difficult start with another fire service; however, his experience soon became marked by discrimination and racial barriers.

Barriers to Career Advancement

- **Promotion Discrimination and Inconsistent Standards:**
 - Lionel found himself facing barriers to advancement. He applied for promotion six times without success, despite performing well in temporary roles and receiving positive evaluations. He noted that other Black colleagues also faced obstacles, reinforcing his perception of institutionalised racism.
 - Despite eventually successfully completing promotional assessments, Lionel faced unreasonable delays for post promotion placement in a permanent role.

- He was asked racially charged questions during an interview concerning his view about whether GFRS were racist (in relation to the John James tribunal). Lionel queried why he was being asked, noting that he didn't believe White applicants would be asked the same question. The questioning highlighted an organisational culture that seemingly targeted Black firefighters.

Discrimination and Harassment

- **Verbal Abuse and Harassment from Colleagues:**
 - Lionel was subjected to ongoing racist abuse from his Watch Manager, who used racial slurs and offensive language, being called a "jungle bunny" and the "N" word, and a "Black Bastard". This officer was known by others to be racist from previous incidents with no intervention from the service. Although this was challenged by a colleague on occasion, GFRS did not address these incidents.
 - Over time, Lionel developed severe stress due to the hostile environment. He reported that the abuse continued until his Watch Manager retired without facing consequences, leaving Lionel feeling that the issues were unresolved and unsupported.
- **The Value of Allies**
 - A Watch manager offered Lionel the opportunity to join his Watch as he became aware that Lionel was suffering racial discrimination. The Watch manager also challenged racist behaviour but received no support from senior management to address the situation. Lionel has cited how crucial this offer of support was. Lionel described having someone acknowledge the reality of what he was experiencing and being there to support his development were, at times, the only things which enabled him to continue. In more recent times, another colleague recognised his potential and challenged why his development and career progression were not being supported in a fair, consistent and transparent way.
- **Institutionalised Racism and Broader Cultural Issues:**
 - Lionel's experiences indicate institutionalised racism within GFRS, where racial abuse and exclusion were tolerated. He described multiple incidents where

derogatory comments were ignored, and colleagues dismissed his complaints as overreactions.

- The abuse from his colleagues impacted his mental health, leaving him feeling isolated and struggling to maintain his well-being.

Impact on Health and Well-being

- **Decline in Mental Health and Long-term Sickness:**

- Lionel endured significant mental health challenges due to ongoing discrimination. He reported periods of depression and anxiety to GFRS, leading to extended sickness absences. During these periods, only a few colleagues reached out, deepening his feelings of isolation.
- Over time, the accumulated stress affected Lionel's physical health, with episodes of weight loss and diabetes exacerbated by the hostile work environment. He described instances of ridicule from some colleagues when he was visibly struggling, underscoring the lack of empathy he encountered.

- **Occupational Health and Lack of Support:**

- Although GFRS eventually arranged extensive counselling for Lionel, he felt this was a delayed and insufficient response. He described feeling like "a shadow of himself" and remarked that the workplace culture had taken a severe toll on his self-esteem and confidence.

Key themes and findings

1. **Institutionalised Racism and Discrimination:**

- Lionel's experiences reveal a consistent pattern of racial discrimination. He encountered significant barriers to career progression, faced harassment from colleagues, and received insufficient support from GFRS management.

2. **Unfair Promotion Practices:**

- Despite meeting promotional requirements, Lionel was consistently held back and subjected to discriminatory questioning during interviews. He was frequently bypassed for promotion in favour of less qualified White colleagues, even after successfully completing necessary assessments.

3. Tolerance of Harassment and Racism:

- GFRS failed to take meaningful action against known incidents of harassment. Colleagues who used racial slurs or made offensive comments were neither disciplined nor held accountable, which fostered a hostile environment for Lionel.

4. Mental Health Impact:

- The ongoing exposure to discrimination and lack of support took a toll on Lionel's mental and physical health. He suffered multiple bouts of sickness and endured extended periods of anxiety and depression, compounded by an unsupportive workplace culture.

5. Inadequate Response to Grievances:

- Incidents involving racial slurs and discrimination were often mishandled or inadequately investigated, reflecting a failure of GFRS's grievance procedures. This lack of accountability allowed a culture of racial discrimination to persist within the organisation.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence, WME concludes that Lionel was subjected to institutionalised racism during his tenure at GFRS. His experiences underscore the significant failures of GFRS to address and rectify discriminatory practices, fostering a work environment that left him unsupported and vulnerable to harassment.

Lionel's case highlights the need for GFRS to continue to focus on creating a genuinely inclusive culture. However, it is also important to acknowledge that, although slow and incremental, there have been some improvements during Lionel's more recent employee experience.

Looking ahead, GFRS needs to go beyond superficial reforms and ensure future efforts focus on holding all individuals accountable for discriminatory behaviour and ensuring all employees have equal opportunities for advancement.

Resolutions Sought

- **Increased Diversity and Support for Black Firefighters:**
 - Lionel emphasised the need for GFRS to understand and address the unique challenges faced by Black firefighters. He advocated for efforts to increase diversity and create a work environment where Black employees feel respected, valued, and supported.
- **Organisational Accountability and Structural Change:**
 - Lionel expressed a desire for genuine organisational change rather than surface-level adjustments. He called for policies that ensure accountability for discriminatory behaviour and promote an inclusive workplace culture. Lionel highlighted the importance of fostering an environment where Black firefighters can thrive without having to overcome additional racial barriers.
- **Comprehensive Training on Diversity and Inclusion:**
 - Lionel also stressed the need for ongoing diversity and inclusion training focused on fostering a respectful environment and understanding the lived experiences of Black firefighters. He recommended that such training include perspectives from Black and minority employees, ensuring that GFRS truly comprehends the institutionalised racism at play.
- **Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion**
 - Lionel expressed a desire for GFRS to understand the impact on Black and minority ethnic members and called for a genuine commitment to diversity, particularly by increasing the recruitment of Black individuals to foster a sense of safety and relatability within the service.

Nathan Lewis Employee Experience

The information provided is a collation of written evidence gathered from Nathan's personnel files, and verbal recollections from Nathan and GFRS colleagues.

Based on the evidence presented to us, we believe that Nathan Lewis's employee experience at GFRS can be summarised as follows:

Nathan Lewis joined Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS) on 9 May 2001 and served until 21 September 2018. He was inspired by a desire to serve the public. His background involved community work, and he expressed a clear vocational intent for public service in his application, noting the appeal of a physically and mentally challenging role.

Recruitment, Selection, and Early Career Development:

- **Recruitment Process:** Nathan was recruited under the GFRS Positive Action initiative aimed at increasing diversity within the service. His references described him as "an outstanding employee" and "well regarded by everyone he comes into contact with," noting his commitment and strong interpersonal skills.
- **Probation and Performance Reviews:** Nathan completed his 12-month and 24-month probation periods with satisfactory evaluations. His Watch Commander noted, "Nathan is a hard-working and focused individual. [He is] aware of his weak areas and continually strives to improve them". Despite demonstrating enthusiasm and potential, Nathan encountered obstacles in his career progression. He failed multiple promotion exams despite increasing his study efforts, which he attributed to the need to "outperform other White colleagues."

Evidence of Institutionalised Racism:

- **Promotion Barriers and Differential Standards:**

Nathan reported feeling held back from promotion and believed he had to work harder than his White colleagues. He felt “pigeonholed” rather than supported in his aspirations. Despite passing assessments for roles he was qualified to fulfil at other stations, Nathan was subjected to what he described as a “lack of structure and knowledge”, which he felt disproportionately impacted Black and female officers. He was asked to retake courses unnecessarily, saying, “I drove an appliance at Station 7, so why would I not be allowed to drive at Station 5?”

- **Sexual Harassment, Retaliation, and Cultural Issues:** Nathan discussed informally with colleagues incidents of sexual harassment by a (White) female Watch Manager, who made inappropriate comments and advances. After he rejected her, an allegation made by her against him was investigated formally but found no case to answer. Nathan felt that the Service dismissed concerns he raised about both her behaviour and the nature of her vexatious complaint against him. Nathan recounted that when he raised the issue with colleagues and management but was told to "let it go" and warned that pursuing the matter would not be "in his best interest," implying that he risked his job and pension if he persisted. Nathan questioned: "How can a person move forward when the problem was not solved?"

Colleagues corroborated his views; one stated that “management did not want to investigate a case that involved a Black firefighter and a White female firefighter.”

- **Perceived Bias in Grievance Handling:** When Nathan brought his concerns forward, he found GFRS unresponsive and felt that his grievances were not taken seriously. For example, his racial discrimination claim in 2007 was not concluded. Nathan perceived that cases involving Black firefighters were often dismissed or minimised.

- **Mishandling of Sickness Absence and Psychological Impact:** Nathan's mental health deteriorated significantly due to workplace stress and discrimination. He took extended sick leave from April to October 2012 and again in 2018, attributing this directly to work-related issues. His appeals to retain full pay were denied, and he felt GFRS's handling of his case exacerbated his stress. Senior management noted at the time, "work may have contributed to Nathan's absence" but contested that it constituted grounds for continuing full pay. This lack of support during his recovery contributed to his declining trust in GFRS.
- **Lack of Transparency and Repeated Subject Access Requests:** Nathan made multiple subject access requests between 2009 and 2019, attempting to obtain records related to his concerns and grievances. He felt that responses were incomplete and delayed, which reinforced his view that the service was not committed to transparency.

Impact on Career Trajectory and Organisational Response:

- **Sabbaticals with Conditions Attached:** In 2014, Nathan was offered a sabbatical with the stipulation that he would agree to drop any outstanding grievances. He ultimately refused to sign a document to this effect (verified by WME), viewing it as a "way to shut me up." Nathan was aware of other colleagues who had taken sabbaticals without similar conditions, which he saw as evidence of unfair treatment.
- **Early Retirement Due to Ongoing Mistrust:** By 2018, Nathan felt he had no choice but to retire early, citing unresolved grievances and perceived discrimination. Senior management acknowledged in his exit interview that Nathan referred to "covert bullying by managers" but was reluctant to provide further details. This, coupled with his comments in the 'Shine a Light' video where he expressed feeling "targeted and held back," underscores the lasting impact that institutionalised racism had on his career and well-being.

Key themes and findings:

Nathan's experience within GFRS exemplifies an institutionalised failure to adequately support Black firefighters, evidenced by the following:

- **Institutionalised Racism and Differential Treatment:** The consistent pattern of experiences, including promotion barriers, ignored grievances, and the conditioning of sabbatical on abandoning claims, reflects an institutionalised culture within GFRS where Black firefighters were treated unfairly.
- **Insufficient Grievance Resolution and Transparency:** The mishandling of Nathan's grievances and concerns points to a lack of commitment to resolving issues related to discrimination, and incomplete responses to subject access requests indicate a lack of organisational transparency.
- **Adverse Impact on Health and Increased Sickness Absence:** Nathan's sickness absence directly correlated with workplace stress, which GFRS acknowledged as potentially work-related. The decision to halve his pay despite these circumstances suggests a lack of sensitivity to the impact that institutionalised racism had on his health.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence, WME concludes that Nathan was subjected to institutionalised racism during his tenure at GFRS. His experiences underscore the significant failures of GFRS to address and rectify discriminatory practices, hold all individuals accountable for discriminatory behaviour, and ensure all employees had equal opportunities for advancement.

The case highlights the critical need for effective policies, consistent practices, supportive management, and a culture that actively opposes racism and ensures the well-being and safety of all employees.

Resolution Sought:

1. Acknowledgment of Harm

Nathan requested formal recognition of the institutionalised racism and harm he endured during his career at GFRS, which significantly affected his mental and physical health.

2. Apology and Redress

He seeks a formal apology and compensation. He believes this would acknowledge and provide restitution for the adverse impacts on his career and well-being.

3. Policy Changes and Reforms

He requested changes to the grievance handling process, emphasising the need for fair and transparent procedures. Nathan's experiences with unresolved grievances and perceived bias in grievance outcomes underscore the necessity for reform to ensure complaints are handled equitably and promptly.

4. Improved Support and Resources for Employees

Nathan described the lack of support systems for minority employees. He felt he lacked sufficient support when raising concerns and believed that accessible resources, such as counselling and external guidance, could have mitigated some of his challenges.

5. Call For Accountability

Nathan recounted incidents where discriminatory behaviour went unpunished. Nathan believes a more rigorous process is needed to address harassment and discrimination to ensure those responsible are held accountable and face appropriate consequences.

6. Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion

Nathan advocates for genuine commitment to inclusivity at GFRS, which would include mandatory training on diversity and cultural sensitivity for all staff. He felt that the lack of cultural competence within GFRS contributed to his negative experiences, and he highlighted the importance of an organisational culture that values diversity.



Claude Elliott Employee Experience

The information provided is a collation of written evidence gathered from Claude's personnel files, and verbal recollections from Claude and GFRS colleagues.

Based on the evidence presented to us, we believe that Claude's employee experience at GFRS can be summarised as follows:

Recruitment and Early Career

- **Background and Entry**
 - Claude Elliott joined Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS) on 2 October 2002 after attending an Open Day with his family. He saw other Black firefighters at the event and was encouraged to apply by serving Black GFRS firefighters.
 - Claude described the recruitment process positively and felt that GFRS was open to diversification. He successfully completed training school, passing all modules. Claude stated that training school was harsh for everybody, as everyone was shouted at. Claude felt his additional life experience (he was 38 years old when he joined) helped him through this period.

- **Initial Career Goals**

- When Claude joined GFRS, his ambition was to work on the fire trucks and be involved in frontline firefighting rather than taking on administrative or desk-based roles. He entered the service with a clear vision of actively engaging in operational duties and being a hands-on firefighter.

Barriers to Career Advancement

- **Lack of Confidence and Development Support**

- During his early career, Claude worked to achieve competency and mostly felt supported. There were some delays, and it took three or more years, but this was partly due to the strike.
- Claude remained on the same Watch for 10 years, until GFRS restructured in 2012. He did not feel confident enough during this time to seek promotion. He did not receive any development support, such as mentoring, and no one encouraged him to pursue higher positions. No one asked him if he had any career development plans or suggested that he ought to apply. This lack of encouragement and practical advice left him unsure how to advance within the service.
- He noted that while GFRS appeared to support diversity, the actual support for career advancement was insufficient, especially for people of colour. In more recent times, Claude has offered support and encouragement to others seeking promotion and feels that if he joined GFRS now when there is more practical support for promotion he might have considered it.

- **Small Workforce Limiting Diversity:**

- Claude acknowledged that GFRS, being a small service, would never have high numbers of minority employees. This contributed to the perception that opportunities for people of colour were limited. Claude felt that the struggles faced by minority employees in advancing their careers were exacerbated by this factor.

Racial Discrimination and Harassment

- **No Formal Complaints or Concerns Raised:**
 - Claude did not raise formal complaints about racial discrimination or harassment. There is no evidence suggesting that he formally attributed his experiences of delayed promotion or career challenges to racial bias.
- **Inconsistent Disciplinary Treatment:**
 - Claude experienced what appeared to be inconsistencies in how lateness was handled. Specifically, he was reprimanded for being a few seconds late to the parade, while White colleagues were not penalised for similar behaviour. There is no evidence that he formally complained about this, but he did ask if this was because of his colour, which the Watch Manager denied. There are no records of this disciplinary action, though this may be because such data was not captured.
- **Concerns and Grievances**
 - Claude reports that he did not feel singled out because of his race but said that if people took against an individual, they would make life difficult for them. It was not possible to say if this was because of skin colour or something else.
 - Colleagues have raised concerns to Claude about racial slurs used about them and also spoke about members of staff openly referring to members of the public using racist terms.

Key themes and findings:

1. Lack of Formal Complaints About Discrimination:

There is no evidence that Claude Elliott formally raised complaints about racial discrimination during his time at GFRS. He observed inconsistencies in treatment but did not take formal action.

2. **Career Advancement Challenges Due to Lack of Support:**

Claude did not feel confident enough to seek promotion early in his career and did not receive encouragement or support, such as mentoring, to guide him towards career advancement.

3. **Concerns About Systemic Issues:**

While Claude did not formally complain about racial issues, he expressed strong views on the need for meaningful, rapid change within GFRS. He believed that while leadership at the top seemed committed to improving diversity, this understanding needed to be implemented more broadly across all levels of the organisation.

4. **Need for Greater Representation and Faster Change:**

Claude advocated for greater representation of people of colour in higher ranks, believing that this would show others that career progression was achievable. He also called for faster and more impactful changes across the organisation to address long-standing issues.

Conclusion

Claude Elliott's experience at GFRS reflects broader challenges for minority employees in a small, largely homogeneous organisation. While he did not raise formal complaints of racial discrimination, he identified key barriers to career progression and was concerned about the future of diversity within the service. His call for faster, more significant change and greater representation of minority employees highlights the need for GFRS to prioritise these issues in its ongoing reform efforts.

Resolutions Sought

- **Increased Representation and Support for Minority Employees**
 - Claude advocated for seeing more people of colour in higher ranks within GFRS, as it would demonstrate that progression is possible and that support is available. He expressed concern that while some Black firefighters had managed to progress, it had been a struggle.
 - Claude also wanted to see a clearer purpose, more proactive sponsorship and stronger commitment to specific goals and actions of the **Black and ethnic minority staff networking group**.
- **Faster, Substantial Change at All Levels**
 - Claude called for "real, quick change" within GFRS, noting that while the top team seemed to take diversity seriously, this commitment needed to filter down to every level of the organisation. He emphasised that it was essential for change to occur on the ground floor, where new employees join, as this is where diversity efforts were most lacking.
- **Ongoing Conversations on Diversity and Inclusion**
 - Claude advocated for diversity, equality, and inclusion to be a constant conversation within GFRS rather than being reduced to an online training package. He argued for funding for the Police Legitimacy Project.
- **Concern About Losing Experienced Black Firefighters**
 - Claude expressed concern that GFRS is losing experienced Black firefighters, leaving those who remain in a weaker position. He worried that without experienced minority employees, GFRS would find itself starting from scratch, losing any progress made on diversity and inclusion.



Obi Selassie Employee Experience

The information provided is a collation of written evidence gathered from Obi's personnel files, and verbal recollections from Obi and GFRS colleagues.

Obi Selassie joined GFRS on 27 September 2004 following a positive action recruitment campaign. Despite initially feeling hopeful due to the supportive pre-recruitment workshops, his career at GFRS has been characterised by repeated challenges and experiences of unequal treatment, which he attributes to institutionalised racism. His experience and the corroborative testimony from colleagues indicate pervasive cultural issues within GFRS that hindered his advancement and undermined his sense of belonging.

Recruitment and Early Career

- **Initial Support and Positive Action Workshops:**
 - Obi participated in positive action workshops designed to encourage minority applicants. These sessions helped him feel prepared and confident for the application process, and he perceived GFRS as a welcoming environment at the time. However, he did not have any personal connections within the service, which left him more reliant on the system for guidance.
- **Training and Disparate Treatment:**
 - Obi found the training environment challenging. He felt singled out by certain instructors and subjected to disproportionate scrutiny, with public corrections and additional assessments that were not imposed on his White colleagues.

- Obi was required to repeat the entire 12-week training programme due to a failed assessment. He reported that other White trainees with lower marks on other cohorts around this time were allowed to continue with only partial re-testing. This experience led him to feel he was being treated unfairly and differently, with his perception reinforced by his peers' contrasting experiences.
- Obi described a sense of hostility from specific instructors, with one stating, "You will never win against me." Obi recounted being continually asked if the job was "really for him," contributing to his feeling of being out of place.

Career Advancement

- **Repeated Barriers to Progression:**
 - Obi found himself at odds with the system from early on. He felt he had to prove himself repeatedly, often requiring multiple attempts to pass assessments that he was failed on minor points which others appeared to complete without incident. Even temporary promotion opportunities were not forthcoming, until the complete lack of promotion of Black and ethnic minority firefighters was challenged by the Chief Fire Officer at the time. Managers have also cited how they had to challenge the negative narrative about Obi when their experience of actually working with Obi had been an extremely positive one. Without the positive feedback and courage to challenge from these allies Obi believes he would still be a firefighter.
- **Promotion and Support:**
 - Obi felt unsupported by his Watch, contrasting his experience with that of other firefighters. Although he achieved Crew Manager and Watch Manager roles eventually, the path was fraught with obstacles. Several managers have corroborated Obi's view that he faced repeated denial of opportunities and was not encouraged to apply for promotion, even when he felt he was ready.

- Upon his promotion to Watch Manager, Obi reported being placed in a role that was neither his preference nor suited to his skills, while others were placed in one of their preferred positions, Obi did not get placed in any of his and was told it would be good for his development. Obi viewed this as another instance of differential treatment, feeling it diminished his achievements and implied he did not deserve his promotion.

Institutionalised Discrimination and Targeted Treatment

- **Hair Discrimination and Cultural Insensitivity:**
 - Obi, a Rastafarian, faced multiple challenges regarding his locs. He was repeatedly questioned about his hair's suitability for the role, with one supervisor reportedly suggesting he might have reconsidered Obi's employment if he had known Obi's hair would grow longer.
 - Despite his hair being accommodated within health and safety regulations, Obi faced an ongoing struggle for acceptance of his religious and cultural identity, which contributed to a sense of exclusion.
- **Workplace Culture and Hostile Environment:**
 - Obi recounted frequent incidents of discriminatory behaviour and double standards. He described a culture where he felt unsupported and isolated. His experiences included instances of overt racial comments and a lack of meaningful support from both his Watch and the broader organisation.
 - Obi was unfairly singled out for minor incidents or procedural issues. For example, he received a disciplinary note for the practice of stand-in which he reported others were allowed to do without consequence. His White colleagues expressed surprise and confusion at some of the treatment he received.

Grievances and Disciplinary Actions

- **Grievances and Unfair Treatment:**
 - Obi's experiences of unfair treatment were exacerbated by the lack of effective grievance processes. When he raised concerns, he felt these were either dismissed or inadequately addressed, further reinforcing the perception that racism was ignored.
 - A particular instance involving a Safe and Well Initiative highlighted the lack of support. Obi's team claimed they were unaware of his communications regarding the project, leading to him being reported to senior leadership. Despite evidence to the contrary, the Watch's account was initially taken at face value, adding to Obi's feelings of mistrust and isolation.

Impact on Obi's Well-being and Professional Development

- **Health and Emotional Impact:**
 - Obi described the prolonged impact of GFRS's working culture on his mental and emotional well-being. He frequently questioned his decision to stay with the service, attributing this primarily to the perceived lack of alternative career options at the time.
 - His struggles with discriminatory treatment, combined with feelings of isolation and cultural misunderstanding, affected his motivation and job satisfaction.
- **Continuous Barriers to Advancement:**
 - Even after obtaining leadership roles, Obi feels his achievements are downplayed or discredited. When he was eventually promoted to Station Manager, he reported that colleagues attributed his success solely to diversity quotas, which he found belittling.

- **Aspirations and Reflections on Service Culture:**

- Despite his disillusionment, Obi remains committed to his career. However, he expressed concerns that racist behaviours within GFRS would persist and prevent meaningful change. He questioned whether the culture would improve, noting that he was relieved when his son, who had once aspired to be a firefighter, chose a different path.

Key Findings

1. **Pattern of Racial Discrimination:**

- Obi's experiences reflect a pattern of racial discrimination within GFRS. He faced disproportionate scrutiny, disparate treatment, and cultural insensitivity throughout his career.

2. **Inadequate Support for Black Firefighters:**

- Obi's testimony highlights a lack of support for Black firefighters, with obstacles to progression and an inconsistent application of policies, leading to feelings of frustration and resignation.

3. **Cultural Insensitivity and Hair Discrimination:**

- GFRS's handling of Obi's religious expression through his locs suggests a lack of cultural competence and respect for diversity, in violation of the Equality Act 2010.

4. **Failure of Grievance Procedures:**

- Obi's attempts to address concerns were met with inadequate responses, indicating a systemic failure in handling grievances and promoting an inclusive workplace culture.

5. **Impact on Well-being:**

- The cumulative effect of discriminatory treatment and lack of support took a toll on Obi's mental and emotional well-being, affecting his long-term career satisfaction.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence, WME concludes that Obi was subjected to institutionalised racism during his tenure at GFRS. His experiences reflect broader issues within the organisation, with a lack of effective responses to complaints of discrimination, a culture of racial insensitivity, and inconsistent disciplinary practices.

However, it is important to acknowledge that, although slow and incremental, there have been some improvements during Obi's more recent tenure. The pace of change remains frustrating, given the immense emotional and mental toll these issues have on individuals.

These findings underscore the need for continued change within GFRS, including improved cultural competence, transparent grievance procedures, and an active commitment to inclusivity. Obi's case demonstrates the importance of accountability and proactive measures to prevent further instances of discrimination, fostering a more supportive and inclusive workplace culture for all employees.

Resolutions Sought:

1. Acknowledgment of Harm

Obi discussed the persistent impact of institutionalised racism and expressed concern over the lack of understanding from senior management. He noted that because leadership does not share the experiences of Black firefighters, the issues he faced were not given the priority they deserved.

2. Apology and Redress

There is no explicit request from Obi for a formal apology or redress for the harm he endured. However, this should be read in the context that Obi believes there is value in calling things out but doubts it will make a difference.

3. Policy Changes and Reforms

Obi expressed scepticism that the culture at GFRS would genuinely improve without a shift in priorities and accountability. He believes that policy changes are insufficient unless accompanied by a commitment to enforce these policies and address the entrenched issues.

4. Improved Support and Resources for Employees

While Obi did not explicitly request additional support resources, his comments about the need for Black firefighters to conform to fit in suggest that he saw a lack of genuine support for minority employees within the culture of GFRS. He pointed to the isolation minority staff can feel, given that institutionalised issues are often not prioritised.

5. Call for Accountability

Obi emphasised the need for accountability, stating that policies only have an impact when individuals are held responsible for their actions. He seeks not only acknowledgement of the challenges faced by Black firefighters but also tangible actions that demonstrate accountability at all levels of the service.

6. Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion

Obi referenced the broader Black Lives Matter movement and described the emotional toll of trying to make others understand his experiences as a Black firefighter. He highlighted that the current culture fails to prioritise inclusivity appropriately, with minority staff often feeling compelled to change themselves to fit in.

Summary of Overall Findings

The key themes of our overall findings can be summarised as follows:

1. **Historical Institutionalised Racism:** Historical racial discrimination against Black and ethnic minority firefighters, largely ignored by management. The application of the systems, policies, practices, and procedures have, covertly or overtly, disadvantaged Black or ethnic minority staff. Although GFRS is not institutionally racist today, racism still exists and GFRS continues to grapple with the legacy of its past failings.
2. **Lack of understanding around Positive Action:** Positive Action was not adequately understood beyond attracting more Black and ethnic minority workers, with some holding the view Black and ethnic firefighters were not appointed based on the applications and competencies but rather down to the colour of their skin.
3. **Inadequate Management Response:** Reports of racism and bullying were not taken seriously, or were sometimes dismissed as over-sensitivity or misunderstanding, resulting in limited or no disciplinary action against perpetrators.
4. **Lack of Formal Apologies or Remedial Actions:** In cases where discrimination was identified, GFRS failed to provide formal apologies or meaningful redress. There was no discernible evidence of remedial actions at an organisational level, and therefore, minority staff felt unheard and not valued.
5. **Lack of Psychological Safety:** A number of people, including most of the Black and ethnic minority staff we spoke to, describe a lack of psychological safety preventing them from reporting issues and worsening fears of isolation. This is still an issue within the service, although there is now evidence that it has improved. Also, complaint processes, which were not perceived as confidential, consistent or fair, have deterred employees from raising grievances.
6. **Flawed Discipline and Grievance Processes:** Historically, discipline and grievance processes and procedures and subsequent investigations were considered poorly and inconsistently executed with no formal quality assurance, leading to a lack of trust among Black and ethnic minority employees.
 - a. **Lack of Investigations Training** – There has been a lack of training and support for inexperienced investigators. Many managers who were asked to conduct investigations once promoted to a managerial rank had received only basic

training. Unless they were self-starters prepared to seek help and support proactively, they were often ill-equipped to do so.

b. **Investigations – Inconsistent Application of the Process:** Investigations have historically received inconsistent support from the unions and HR. At times, HR's role was seen as mostly administrative, with little power or influence, as HR staff were not always listened to. There are examples of some very heavy-handed disciplinaries and some 'no case to answer' examples. Throughout the timeline, there has been a lack of coordination between HR and operational units, which has hindered effective relationships and practice. Overall, this showed a lack of objectivity, independence, and rigour. WME has not reviewed detailed case evidence for cases post-2018, but verbal testimonies demonstrated that there is still a heavy reliance on GFRS managers to carry out investigations.

c. **Investigations - Disregard for Witness Testimonies and Missing Evidence:** Witness accounts supporting victims were often ignored during investigations, and key evidence was not retained.

d. **Investigations - Lack of Confidentiality and Transparency Regarding Reporting Outcomes:** The lack of confidentiality and transparency about complaint outcomes discouraged reporting and trust in the process.

e. **Inconsistent Disciplinary Actions:** Disciplinary measures, such as 'notes to file,' were applied inconsistently, and minority employees often faced different or more severe consequences.

7. **Culture of Impunity:** In the past, a lack of accountability allowed discriminatory behaviours to go unpunished, enabling a hostile environment. The level of accountability has increased with the level of external scrutiny and the gradual professionalisation of leaders and managers.

8. **Mental Health Impact and Lack of Mental Health Support:** The historic hostile work environment and lack of robust wellbeing support contributed to mental health issues like stress, anxiety and depression among affected employees. The organisation's mental health resources were inadequate, particularly for those affected by discrimination.

9. **Harmful Initiation Practices:** A number of staff, regardless of race or gender, although more likely to adversely target and impact minorities, were historically subjected to

initiation rituals which posed physical risks to safety and were designed to humiliate and intimidate staff but were passed off as being in humour and jest.

10. **Lack of organisational learning:** There was little evidence of shared organisational learning at a GFRS or GCC level. There would often be limited or no organisational response internally or externally to public tribunal findings.
11. **Superficial Diversity Initiatives:** Historical diversity efforts were considered tokenistic, focusing only on recruitment or high-profile box-ticking initiatives driven by a national agenda. More recent diversity initiatives are gaining traction but require more proactive senior leadership sponsorship to make a difference.
12. **Insufficient Inclusion Training:** Historically, an absence of training on diversity and anti-racism allowed discrimination to continue unchallenged. A lack of awareness and understanding of cultural differences also meant staff were unprepared to lead and manage a multicultural workforce.
13. **Social Exclusion:** Minority firefighters often felt socially isolated, affecting their sense of workplace belonging.
14. **Cultural Insensitivity:** Colleagues and management frequently disregarded cultural differences, increasing feelings of alienation.
15. **Stereotyping:** Black and Asian firefighters faced harmful stereotypes that negatively influenced their professional evaluations and, to this day, have created a negative organisational narrative.
16. **Normalisation of Bullying and Harassment:** Long-standing norms perpetuated a culture that tolerated bullying and harassment for many staff, and this was exacerbated for Black and ethnic minority staff.
17. **Allies and Mentorship:** Minority firefighters had limited access to mentorship, which hindered their career growth. When allies tried to step in and offer support and mentorship and, in some cases, challenge unfair treatment or unacceptable behaviour, they too met resistance. Only through repeated determined efforts were they able to make a difference. Today, some of these allies have retired, but those who remain are in a variety of roles and continue to promote inclusion, fairness, consistency and transparency.
18. **Discrimination-Related Sickness Absence:** Workplace stress linked to discrimination contributed to high rates of sickness absence among minority employees. A historical lack

of consistent data capture and analysis meant patterns were not identified or explored to look behind the high sickness absence rates.

19. **Barriers to Advancement and Promotion:** Black and Asian firefighters have faced obstacles to promotion and training, including bias in performance reviews, which often hindered their career progression and reinforced stereotypes, highlighting historical institutionalised inequality in career progression. Comments from peers of Black and ethnic minority firefighters suggest Black and ethnic minority firefighters were disadvantaged when it came to promotion as they would often be sidelined and told they were not quite up to the required standard. Peers also refer historically to some openly racist managers who would not have supported the promotion of minority staff, and that would include race and gender. Some managers were recognised as being more proactive at supporting the development of members of their Watch. Others would do nothing to enable the development and mentoring of staff. If you were a Black or ethnic minority firefighter without a network of relationships or knowledge of potential good mentors across the service, and with a line manager who was not proactive in enabling your development, you would be unlikely to be successful in promotion. Since 2020, GFRS has appointed a number of Black and Asian individuals to management roles. Because this didn't happen in the past, there is an informal negative narrative in GFRS that states minority officers are only getting promoted because of their race. This reinforces the divide between minority and non-minority officers.
20. **Promotion Processes:** Although promotion processes have evolved to better account for values-based leadership, more work is still needed to increase trust and confidence in these processes as fair, consistent and transparent. Increasing the amount of external (non-GFRS or GCC) independence in the promotion process would help address this.
21. **Lack of Diversity in Leadership Positions:** The historical absence of minority representation in leadership roles within GFRS contributed to a lack of advocacy and visibility for issues affecting Black and Asian firefighters.
22. **Negative Media Attention and Public Perception:** Issues within GFRS have attracted negative media attention, which has impacted the organisation's public image and raised concerns about its commitment to inclusivity and fairness.
23. **Inappropriate Behaviour –** During the review, WME heard about a range of examples of inappropriate behaviours. **Most inappropriate behaviour** is now challenged and seen to

have consequences. However, there are still instances where staff, including Black and ethnic minority staff, feel that it isn't psychologically safe to challenge, even though senior leaders are consistently stating it is safe to do so. It is not unusual to have this tension in an organisation 'recovering' from systemic failings such as institutionalised racism, and it will take time to rebuild trust and confidence in leaders at all levels.

Examples of historical covert and overt behaviours we heard about are outlined in the table below:

| Historical examples of Inappropriate Behaviour | |
|--|--|
| Covert Behaviour | Overt Behaviour |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-2-1 verbal conversations unprofessional feedback/comments and behaviour • Negative feedback, no constructive support or context • Negative longstanding narrative re: poor performance and capability, but not based on current facts. • Senior manager discussions and actions that actively prevent progression and development rationalised away by referencing high levels of absenteeism and/or using the term 'service need' inappropriately. • Certain staff reported that colleagues would sometimes go entire tours of duty without speaking one word to you. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Known 'bullies' and racist who are operationally effective are not tackled about their behaviour. • New joiners 'warned' by colleagues to keep their heads down and keep away from names individuals. • Known bullies with multiple grievances against them remain in post. • Known bullies get moved to another station. • Conversations in open plan areas which contain inappropriate language and deliberate racial slurs. • Shouting, bawling people out in training in front of everyone • Induction traditions such as the high platform 'spinning' • Putting offensive often racist notes or images into kitbags or lockers |

24. The impact of not addressing bullying and inappropriate behaviour - In the past, senior managers were made aware of the repeated unacceptable behaviours of managers. Still, nothing would be done, and these individuals would continue to be present and often progress further in the ranks despite their behaviour. There were also 'known' bullies who had multiple grievances against them and were not sanctioned. This further reinforced the view that Black and ethnic minority staff could not trust the systems, processes or senior staff. More recently, GFRS has been taking action on reported incidents. There have been several disciplinary sanctions, including a number of dismissals in the last 18 months, which relate to unacceptable behaviour.

The Organisational Culture and Climate at GFRS

Organisational culture combines the shared beliefs, expectations, language, customs, habits and attitudes of employees, with the organisation's underlying values, norms and standards⁸. There is often a gap between the 'official' organisational culture espoused in written documents, policies and procedures and the actual day-to-day lived experiences of those who work in an organisation.

Organisational culture is more than '**just the way we do things around here**'. It is the gap which so often exists between the words people say and the actions they take. It is **the behaviour that you tolerate**, not your words, which determines your true culture⁹ .

The review has explored the overall organisational climate, combining written policies, practices, reports, guidelines, and processes with actual real-life employee experiences throughout the official timeline of the review from 1991 to 2018 and beyond to the present.

It has considered:

1. **The actions taken** – not what is written in policies and processes, but what actually happens.
2. **The behaviours exhibited while taking action** and the behaviours that are tolerated; those that are rewarded and those that are punished.
3. **The emotions people feel** whilst at work, when leaving work, and when thinking about coming into work.
4. **Individual mindset** – a person's way of thinking and the beliefs that shape how they perceive themselves and the world around them. Mindset influences thoughts, feelings, and behaviours in any situation.

⁸ <https://peopleinsight.co.uk/how-can-we-define-organisational-culture/>

⁹ Remote not Distant. Gustavo Razzetti. Liberationist Press 2022.

GFRS Organisational Culture and Climate Overview

Timeline

(1990s - Present)

1990s

- **Leadership:** Leadership in the 1990s was characterised by command and control. GFRS maintained a strict hierarchical structure and was often described as militaristic, with power and influence sitting with a small number of people at the top of the organisation. This was described as a 'Do as I say. You're wrong, I'm right' culture. There were visible differences as there were distinct uniforms for officers and firefighters, reinforcing rank separation. Officers wore white shirts, while firefighters wore navy or black uniforms. All station manager equivalent and upwards were supported by an administrative member of staff.
- **Working environment described as** a time of abundance. Little technology - No computers on stations, few or no firefighters in headquarters (HQ) and a very traditional formal office environment at HQ.
- **Firefighter role** purely focused on Response at this time and therefore personal credibility strongly associated with operational competence. All stations had bars; Watches were large (15-16 people). The majority of firefighters were union members.
- **Disciplinary or grievance activity rarely escalated** above Station Managers. Issues were dealt with locally, and there was an expectation that they would be dealt with locally unless very serious – only then would they come to the attention of officers in headquarters.
- **People Management Capability** - The emphasis within GFRS in the 1990s and early 2000s was on operational competence and leaders with a strong operational track record who would have high credibility with their peers and those they lead. A few leaders combined operational competence with strong leadership skills. Still, many leaders and managers progressed in GFRS solely because of operational competence. They were described as having little or no management training and very few people skills to draw upon. **This created an environment where unacceptable behaviours were**

tolerated and sometimes exhibited by senior leaders. It also meant that if minority firefighters were brave enough to report inappropriate behaviour, it would either be ignored, left on the 'too difficult' pile, or dealt with in an unprofessional way. There were no clear, consistent standards around leadership skills and behaviours.

- **The role of HR** was largely administrative. HR was not seen as influencing decision-making or as part of leadership meetings or conversations.
- **Tolerance of Inappropriate Behaviour:** Pornographic materials were frequently left in the open at fire stations, indicating a lack of professional standards and respect in the workplace.
- **Institutionalised Racism and Discrimination:** Racial slurs and symbols, including swastikas, were used within stations and written on lockers and kit. Sexist language was also common. A list revealed that BNP members were among GFRS's ranks, signalling deeply embedded racial biases. No **Conflict of Interest Policies** existed at this time and there is no record of leaders taking any action to address overt racism.
- **1997 Race discrimination case upheld against GFRS:** Despite the race discrimination case being upheld, there was no discernible organisational response to suggest practical actions and training was put in place to address overt racist behaviours.
- **Bullying and Initiation of Recruits:** New recruits, or probationers, were often subjected to harsh initiation practices and treated in a derogatory way. It was an established norm for the probationer to be the focus of jokes and ridicule, regardless of race or gender. This included spinning on high-rise platforms, a practice that perpetuated a culture of intimidation and bullying. In this environment, minorities or anyone different would be at greater risk of being targeted.
- **Watch Culture in the late 1990s and early 2000s,** firefighters often remained on the same Watch for many years. This created tight-knit groups with strong bonds and a high degree of familiarity. This could make it very difficult for someone new to fit in. Some Watches who openly resisted change were known across the service as 'tough Watches', impenetrable to new joiners - traditional, very hierarchical in rank and time served and not welcoming to new or different members of staff. There were also a small number of 'known' problems on Watches that were not dealt with. This could range from unacceptable behaviour relating to drink problems, mental health issues, bullying or misogyny, such as reluctance to accept female staff into the service.

Early 2000s

- **2003 saw an explicit cultural shift** via the move to a **Tri-service HQ shared with Police and Ambulance service**. Shared service approach – some resistance to change. Reasons behind the change were about exploring how can Fire Services work differently.
- **Introduction of Diversity Policies:** GFRS began implementing policies to promote diversity. However, these policies were primarily symbolic, with little enforcement, and discriminatory behaviours remained prevalent.
- **HR role is becoming more advisory** but still a lot of tactical, admin and pay-based support. Some support of recruitment and selection processes. Some use of low-level manual station-by-station data capture to inform recruitment.
- **Nationally-led positive action recruitment initiatives** –There was a national drive for Fire Services across England and Wales to increase the diversity of their workforce. GFRS ran a number of recruitment drives from 2000 onwards aimed at increasing ethnic minority representation. This led to an over-emphasis on enabling diverse recruitment, through proactive ‘have a go’ campaigns and broad community engagement. The service also ran some positive action workshop sessions to familiarise applicants with the application process – tools, resources and sample tests to increase awareness of what to expect and address fears. These were positively received and did result in more diverse candidates entering the service.
- **Lack of Organisational Readiness for a Diverse Workforce** Once recruited, the onboarding and induction experience contained no comparable support. Without seeing or hearing from anyone who looked like them, had similar life experiences to them, or could empathise with how they may be feeling, new Black and Asian recruits soon started to feel isolated. All the focus and energy was placed on attracting diverse candidates and not on creating the infrastructure in the organisation to support them once they arrived.
- **Weak Misconduct Handling:** Reports of bullying and racist incidents were either ignored or inconsistently addressed, leading to a lack of trust in grievance and misconduct procedures. Formal responses were often ineffective, allowing toxic behaviours to continue unchallenged.

- **Racial Disparity on Disciplinary Action** - Data indicates that minority employees received disproportionately severe penalties compared to White colleagues, pointing to institutionalised racial bias in disciplinary processes.
- **Absence Management:** Lack of data, lack of interrogation of existing data. For example, no one looked behind absence for root causes; no one looked at the sources of support.
- **Historical reports and recommendations not visibly acted upon** – staff did not see any organisational response to discrimination, and this meant it felt like the organisation was allowing issues to persist without intervention.

Mid-2000s to Early 2012

- **National Fire and Rescue Service focus on Race Equality in the Fire Service** which led to many Fire Services such as GFRS implementing race, gender and disability equality schemes. The emphasis was on the scheme and having a plan, but not on embedding actual changes in practice into day-to-day working.
- **Compliance-Focused Diversity Initiatives:** While diversity was promoted as a compliance measure, this did not translate into meaningful change. The culture within some closely-knit teams, or “Watches,” remained exclusionary and resistant to external influence.
- **Watch Culture** – Black and Asian firefighters have often been placed on Watches that were known to be difficult. During the review, virtually everyone we spoke to talked about being ‘lucky’ to get placed on a good/friendly Watch or ‘unlucky’ to be placed on a Watch where peers would say look out for ‘so and so’ or ‘keep your head down’. There were often open conversations about known racists on certain Watches, with advice being given to avoid those individuals. Black and ethnic minority firefighters talked about being ‘naïve’ to feel proud and think they were joining a professional organisation where people would behave professionally, and then being shocked at the unprofessional day-to-day behaviours they experienced in the workplace.
- **Insufficient Management Training** - particularly regarding cultural sensitivity and diversity issues. This sometimes resulted in a lack of confidence and a reluctance to address race-related matters due to concerns about being labelled as racist.
- **Promotional Inequalities** - Minority firefighters facing barriers to promotion, and losing faith and trust in the fairness, consistency and transparency of career progression. Some evidence of conscious bias to a stereotypical view of what a manager looked like.

- **Promotion into People management roles with little support and few positive role models** – Staff were promoted into managerial positions but given no support or development. If the newly promoted Crew or Watch manager was ‘lucky,’ they would have a positive role model to learn from, but often, they had poor role models, who had little people management capability.
- **Inconsistent Leadership Responses**: Some managers attempted to address misconduct, but enforcement was uneven. There were significant gaps in accountability, with personal relationships sometimes shielding individuals from consequences.
- **Closed Mindset/system/processes** – Reluctance to move away from longstanding norms, ways of working and procedure. Everything from how you look to what you eat, what you talk about, where you are from, no room for difference, little tolerance of diversity in any shape, way or form.
- **During 2012 significant organisational structure changes** – new fire stations, smaller Watches. One Station manager split between two sites.
- **Increased pressure to make Financial Savings** – GFRS was regularly required to make savings by GCC throughout this period.

2013-2019

- **In 2013 GFRS Employment Tribunal claim alleging direct race discrimination, harassment, and victimisation.** The case of victimisation is upheld, and the tribunal criticises GFRS’s handling of his complaints and the treatment John James received. Despite the tribunal’s findings, there is no organisational response or learning put in place to ensure this cannot happen again, and staff were actively encouraged not to discuss the case,
- **Pressure to make Financial Savings continues** – Budget cuts and savings targets continue to impact throughout this period.
- **Centralisation of HR into GCC.** The GCC HR approach at this time was described as being advisory but service leadership and management actually make the decisions. By this time HR did not handle employee records, these were maintained by GFRS. HR kept case records and clinical occupational health records. Payroll was handled by the Financial Services Directorate of GCC. The primary role of HR at this time was providing management advice and support. At this point, HR did not have a permanent presence at GFRS HQ. HR was part of the senior leadership team and, therefore, had a voice in

discussions about operational employment matters. HR did offer challenge to leaders, but they were not obliged to adhere to advice.

- **Recruitment** - GFRS has continued to focus on hiring a diverse workforce, but this has continuously failed to guarantee that every employee has the same experience or opportunities in the workplace, as it has not been done in combination with tackling the underlying causes of a lack of inclusion.
- **Increased focus on developing Leadership and People Management Capability** – GFRS recognised that leaders and managers had significant skills gaps in leadership and people management. As a result, there was an increased focus on training and qualifications. Some newly promoted supervisory managers felt unequipped and unsupported to deal with people management. During 2015-2019, there was substantial investment in leadership and people management development via management qualifications and people management qualifications from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. However, some have commented that the focus felt biased toward qualifications and knowledge rather than practical skill development.
- **The establishment of the Inclusive Network Group (ING)** supported GFRS's efforts towards inclusivity and cultural transformation. The ING drove tangible initiatives related to diversity, values development, and recruitment practices, facilitating employee engagement outside the traditional hierarchy. Notably, the ING was described as flourishing whilst having proactive senior leader sponsorship. The group was able to deliver tangible actions and not just be a discussion forum. It was recognised with a regional Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) award, which highlighted the group's role in promoting inclusivity, illustrating how ING's initiatives were beginning to reshape organisational practices at GFRS. Broader organisational leadership changes and staff departures within the group meant it lost momentum and ceased to have an impact.
- **Increased External Scrutiny** Increased scrutiny from HMICFRS via the introduction of formal inspections.
- **Resistance to Change** deeply embedded cultural issues in pockets of GFRS continued to undermine efforts to transform the service and embed its vision, mission, and values. The review reveals that resistance to change has been a persistent issue at GFRS, particularly

in relation to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The continuation of outdated practices evidences this resistance, reluctance to confront racial discrimination, and the recurring practice of transferring, rather than disciplining, individuals accused of misconduct or moving the victims. Such actions highlight an entrenched culture where preserving the status quo has frequently taken precedence over implementing meaningful reforms. Additionally, testimonies from affected firefighters indicate widespread scepticism about GFRS's commitment to genuine change. Previous attempts at reform have often been perceived as superficial or reactive, further eroding trust and reducing the impact of these initiatives.

2020-Present

- **Workplace Charter Development:** In response to critical HMICFRS reports, GFRS, through the **Service Improvement Group Making Us Better (SIGMUB)**, developed the Workplace Charter. This charter incorporated the NFCC Core Code of Ethics, marking the start of a more structured approach to cultural reform.
- **Embedding Core Values:** The Workplace Charter was implemented across the organisation, with plans to incorporate it into daily practices such as staff inductions, appraisals, and ongoing training.
- **Focus on Employee Engagement:** Extensive engagement sessions were conducted to align the Workplace Charter with employee values, demonstrating an attempt to foster a shared vision of workplace culture and inclusivity.
- **Split HR Function** - Some HR roles are now embedded within the Fire service and others operate as part of a central HR function within GCC. There is confusion about the role of HR and specific accountabilities and roles and responsibilities. Some staff commented that HR is not a visible presence within GFRS.
- **Review impact and effectiveness of Training** – GFRS has invested significantly in diversity training. However, the review has not identified any tangible evidence of how this training impacts the culture within the service. Therefore, a more comprehensive review of the impact and effectiveness of training would be advisable.
- **Re-establishment of Staff network groups** was considered a positive step to enable Black and Asian firefighters to voice concerns about discrimination and cultural issues, fostering a sense of community and advocacy. Black and Asian firefighters have re-

engaged in informal staff network groups since 2020, and there is growing trust in leadership; however, more work is needed to give the group(s) legitimate authority and change the perception of these groups as more symbolic than transformative, so their potential to effect sustained cultural shifts is maximised.

- **Anonymous Reporting through Crimestoppers:** GFRS introduced an independent reporting mechanism to protect whistleblowers and enhance confidentiality. This marked a shift towards more robust protections for employees who reported misconduct. However, it should be noted that several staff still feel there is a lack of psychological safety within the organisation.
- **Leadership Pledges and SLT Roadshows:** Senior leaders actively promoted inclusivity through personal pledges and participation in SLT Roadshows, aiming to instil a commitment to cultural change across all levels of GFRS.
- **Some evidence of visible Integration of the Workplace Charter:** GFRS is trying to embed the Workplace Charter as part of the Service's core identity, with visible displays at stations and frequent references in appraisals. This symbolises a sustained commitment to inclusivity.
- **Challenges with Entrenched Watch Culture:** Despite these efforts, pockets of entrenched attitudes within tightly-knit teams remain a barrier to cultural change. Recommendations for rotating staff and further external oversight have been suggested to address these issues.

Key Takeaways:

- The timeline highlights a shift from an exclusionary, discriminatory culture to one showing signs of increasing inclusivity and accountability. However, the deeply rooted traditions of close-knit team cultures continue to pose challenges to sustained progress.
- Leadership's recent efforts to promote transparency and inclusivity represent a positive direction. Nonetheless, persistent scepticism among some employees about the authenticity of these changes indicates that ongoing, visible actions will be required to reinforce trust and build an inclusive workplace.

This provides a snapshot of GFRS's cultural evolution, drawing on a range of documents and verbal recollections. The details underscore the challenges and progress that have characterised GFRS's journey to date.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have emerged from our analysis of the evidence and testimonies in this report. The recommendations are to be applied across the whole of GFRS and GCC where appropriate. During the review we found clear evidence that GFRS was institutionally racist during the period between 1991 and 2018. While GFRS is not institutionally racist today, racism still exists and the service continues to grapple with the legacy of its past failings across the service. These recommendations will help GFRS become a more inclusive workplace and minimise barriers for underrepresented groups. They will also support reduced absenteeism, increased job commitment and improved team collaboration.

Overarching Recommended Approach

- 1. Acknowledging Past Harm** - GFRS must fully recognise and own the serious and enduring harm caused to Black and ethnic minority firefighters by past actions. While GFRS today is not the same organisation, it is crucial to accept the mistakes of the past to move forward with transparency and accountability.
- 2. Changing the Organisational Narrative**
 - **Apologising for past failures** and accepting accountability for resolving the issue are the critical first steps in taking hold of the narrative. This new direction needs to be communicated internally and externally so that staff understand the behaviours that will no longer be tolerated, and the public begin to rethink their perception. Initiatives such as the new Workplace Charter and structural and procedural changes (e.g. whistleblower protection and revamped grievance processes) will reinforce this change, but only if communicated and embedded effectively with all stakeholders.
 - **Improve Public Perception and Rebuild Trust with the Community.** While media relations, social media, and public forum events all play a role in rebuilding trust, they will be seen as PR stunts unless the public sees tangible changes in behaviours and results. Transparency in reporting progress, open and honest communications

campaigns, and inviting external observers will all add substance to initiatives such as open days and outreach projects.

The detailed **eight specific areas of recommendation** below are comprehensive and complex as they are about embedding lasting change.

- 1 **Clarify Definitions and Expectations for Diversity and Inclusion**
 - **Continue to Embed the Workplace Charter** by defining what is meant by an Inclusive workplace. Set out what is expected from all staff and leaders.
 - **Establish a Diversity and Inclusion Improvement Board or Oversight Committee:** Form a D&I committee with clear governance and terms of reference. This group should include minority GFRS and GCC staff members, external D&I employment law expertise, and community members from various backgrounds. They will oversee, scrutinise, and address diversity and inclusion issues and hold GCC and GFRS leaders accountable.
 - **Enhance Union Involvement in Anti-Discrimination Efforts:** Partner with unions to strengthen their support for minority employees and advocate for more robust anti-discrimination measures.
 - **Embed Diversity Initiatives:** Run workshops and events that celebrate cultural diversity and promote empathy, understanding, and cultural competence among staff owned by the whole of GFRS.
 - **Continue to promote open and Impactful Conversations about Race.** Foster environments (Watches, team meetings, training, staff network groups, workshops) that are psychologically safe for all employees to discuss race and diversity. Such conversations will involve working through barriers (i.e. assumptions, attitudes, experiences, emotions, discomfort and fear of making mistakes) that can stifle progress towards a workplace where all employees feel valued, respected, supported and have a sense of belonging.
 - **Continue to Integrate Inclusive Workplace Expectations More Explicitly into the Workplace Charter and Core Code of Ethics.** Ensure all staff understand that inclusivity extends to their day-to-day interactions with colleagues and the communities they serve.

- **Actionable ethical principles** - While GFRS has made some progress, the current Core Code of Ethics implementation lacks depth. These ethical principles should be actionable and visible in everyday practices. GFRS can address this by initiating Watch-based and team-based conversations and workshops that connect the Core Code and Workplace Charter with real-life examples of inclusivity and misconduct.
- **Continuing to focus on establishing employee network groups (ENGs)** that represent various backgrounds and perspectives and have Principal Officer level sponsorship. These groups should be integrated into GFRS's governance framework with defined terms of reference and representation in decision-making processes. This could transform these groups from symbolic entities into valued and empowered advocates for change. For example, embedding network group leaders within key committees would enable them to hold the organisation accountable and influence policy.
 - Staff need time off rota to contribute to these initiatives. This is as important to the welfare of the organisation and its people as mandatory training. Encouraging this participation will reveal areas where employees feel excluded or undervalued, providing actionable insights for leaders.
 - Ensure that the views and thoughts of those not engaged in ENGs are also captured and that staff who are not natural "joiners" also feel they have the opportunity to be heard through more informal channels.

2. Focus on Leadership

- **Accountable Leadership:** GCC and GFRS Leaders should be accountable for leading inclusively and role-modelling inclusive behaviours. They should have clear diversity and inclusion performance objectives and be reviewed against them by a **Diversity and Inclusion Improvement Board OR Oversight Committee**. While some senior GFRS leaders are recognised for being proactive in this area, this is not consistent across all leaders and managers. Senior officers should frequently and openly discuss the importance of inclusion and the steps being taken to address failures. Leaders could periodically host sessions to discuss recent issues (while respecting confidentiality) and continue the adoption of personal pledges during leadership forums and SLT Roadshows.

- **Continue Leadership development:** Some GFRS managers have attended leadership development programmes, obtained Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) qualifications and received coaching and mentoring. Greater distribution of these skills across the service would support more widespread behavioural change. Tools such as 360 feedback and engagement surveys are needed to ensure the development is embedded and results in the required behaviours.

3. **Provide Clarity of the Role of HR (GCC and GFRS)**

- Over the timeline of this review, HR has, at times, been embedded in the Fire Service and at others centralised within GCC. There have also been times when Fire has created specific roles to support the delivery of People-focused initiatives such as recruitment and selection and organisational development.
- Greater clarity is needed to avoid confusion and ensure there are clear accountabilities. All those in HR roles need to work together as one team aligned around a shared people strategy, with accountabilities defined and recorded.
- A first step would be a whole team workshop to agree how the recommendations in this report will be delivered. Many of them require HR input and will rely on clarity and consistency regarding governance of policies and procedures and around data capture, sharing, analysis and reporting.

4 **Development, Mentoring and Buddying**

- **Mandatory Anti-Discrimination and Inclusion Development:** Review the effectiveness of previous development initiatives and further improve ongoing development on anti-racism, unconscious bias, and cultural sensitivity for all employees, with annual refreshers.
- **Continue to Equip Managers with the Skills and Confidence to Lead through Cultural Change** – Leading through cultural and behavioural change is hard, particularly when there are high levels of change resistance. Managers will need to be supported through change mentoring, workshops and skills transfer.
- **Mentorship Program for Minority Employees:** Develop a mentorship programme focused on supporting the career progression of minority employees, providing guidance on skills and networking.

- **Buddy Programme for all New Recruits** – embed a buddy programme focusing on helping new joiners navigate the service, build a network of support and relationships, and identify the formal and informal sources of support.

5. **Expand Mental Health Resources**

Improve awareness and access to mental health support, particularly for those affected by workplace discrimination, ensuring confidential and comprehensive care.

- Promote the range of support resources available in GFRS and GCC.
- Identify additional tools and good practice from other fire services, external organisations and professional bodies.

6. **Increase Psychological Safety and Clarify Reporting Channels & Processes**

GFRS needs clear and accessible reporting mechanisms and educational sessions on how to use them. Staff often misunderstand the differences between grievances, whistleblowing, and misconduct complaints. A campaign that explains these distinctions and when and how to use each process will make staff feel more confident about reporting incidents.

- **Enhancing Anonymity and Protection for those Reporting Issues:**
GFRS Black and ethnic minority staff and other staff have said that the organisation does not feel psychologically safe. They cite fear of retaliation as a significant barrier to reporting. GFRS could introduce enhanced confidentiality measures, such as secure digital platforms for anonymous reporting, and publicly commit to protecting those who report incidents. The increased demonstration of actions having consequences, as evidenced by the recent dismissals for gross misconduct, sends a clear message that unacceptable behaviour is no longer tolerated. This will help continue to rebuild trust and confidence in leadership.

7. Policy Changes and Reform

- Continue to evaluate whether GFRS and GCC policies are fit for purpose. Simplify and rationalise policies in line with current best practice. Consider these in the context of operational decision-making processes. It is essential to ensure that, just as with any other critical factor, race-related implications are consistently evaluated and applied. This includes assessing the potential impact on Black and minority communities, staff, and the overall environment in which the organisation operates.
- **Continue Management Training re Policies:** GFRS managers need to play a more pivotal role in translating policies into practice. In GFRS, managers could receive training in areas such as recognising and addressing unconscious bias, managing conflict, and supporting employee welfare. These skills would enable managers to handle reports of misconduct consistently and fairly and prevent negative behaviours from escalating. This is especially crucial in the GFRS's Watch-based structure, where small group dynamics can either reinforce or undermine inclusive practices.
- **Embedding Independence and Inclusivity into Recruitment, Selection and Promotion Policies** - GFRS has increased representation, particularly among female firefighters, suggesting that targeted recruitment efforts can yield positive results. Looking ahead, GFRS can build on this progress by ensuring transparency and inclusivity in all stages of recruitment, selection and promotion. In particular:
 - **Increased Independence in Recruitment and Promotion** – Ensure views from outside the service are represented on recruitment and promotion interview panels. Individuals from another Fire Service or specialists in recruitment, and independent of the fire service, could improve trust and credibility in recruitment and promotions processes.
 - **Continue Embedding Values-based Selection Criteria** and promoting an understanding of positive action as a tool for equity rather than preferential treatment.
 - **Continue to Communicate the Promotion and Career Progression Criteria:** Ensure that promotion criteria are clear, consistent, and readily accessible to prevent bias and support equitable career growth.

- **Introduce a Dedicated Professional Standards Function**

By setting up a **professional standards function** dedicated to investigating misconduct and co-ordinating the entire misconduct process. GFRS can ensure that investigations are – and can be evidenced as – impartial and inclusive. This function should be sensitive to issues around discrimination, bullying, and harassment. They should be empowered to provide support to all parties involved and **have independent scrutiny via the Diversity and Inclusion Improvement Board or Oversight Committee**.

- **Consistent Application of Misconduct Policies** Periodic audits and organisational sharing of anonymised key performance indicators could verify that policies are being applied consistently.

- **Data-led/Evidence-based** - In the past, issues such as a lack of promotion of Black and ethnic minority firefighters or negative behavioural patterns across Watches were not spotted. Tracking data on misconduct, recurrence, outcomes, and processing times would highlight trends and institutionalised issues. Insights from this data could then guide targeted interventions and the allocation of resources.

- **Transparency in Disciplinary Actions:** Build on the Workplace Charter by reporting disciplinary breaches and actions. For example, GFRS has dismissed several staff for unacceptable behaviour in the last 18 months. By sharing this information, the organisation demonstrates that individuals will be held accountable for discriminatory behaviour.

- **Regular Monitoring and Feedback on Inclusivity:** GFRS needs to continue assessing employee engagement and inclusivity efforts, using feedback mechanisms to gauge staff perceptions of inclusivity and misconduct. By collecting data on employee experiences, GFRS can identify trends, detect areas where policies may not be preventing misconduct, and adjust its approach as necessary.
- **Consider monitoring on the Risk register** - By integrating race matters into the risk register, organisations can foster an environment that prioritises diversity, minimises risks, and promotes a culture of inclusion and equality.

8. Shared Learning and Organisational Development

- **Developing a Framework for Lessons Learned:** For GFRS employees to heal, leaders need to reinforce a culture of continuous improvement by sharing lessons learned across the organisation. GFRS could create a framework for anonymised case studies illustrating successes and challenges in behaviour, leadership and misconduct.
- Like many other fire services, GFRS has embedded operational learning review processes such as critical incident debriefs. The same principles can be applied to leadership and behavioural issues. Sharing case studies during team briefings or through internal communications can embed lessons in the organisation's culture and create a new, more future-focused narrative. This, over time, will encourage proactive discussions on preventing future issues.