

Fire Minister Brandon Lewis' Speech to Reform: A Review

Introduction

After reading the Fire Ministers speech on the Fire and Rescue Service and its apparent need for reformation, I feel I no longer have any choice but to respond, albeit in my own small and limited way. I can no longer sit by and watch as these ideologues pick apart my country, it's services and the people working within them to suit an ideological goal, driven primarily due to their own cowardice and inability to stand up for what is right.

What you will find below is a narrower take on the speech, as the majority i.e. pensions or procurement are outside my research scope, the aspect I have honed in on affects men and boys directly. I hope as you read you will see just how pandering Brandon Lewis is, and the need to combat certain reforms as soon and as much as possible. Throughout you will see reference to the Thomas Review, which I have refuted and attached as **Appendix I** alongside this paper.

The Speech

While most of the speech is outside my scope of research, culture and equality is not. Brandon Lewis is either naïve, ignorant, pandering or all three. He references the Thomas Review and begins to touch upon bullying and harassment and how the goal is a diverse working environment. While innocuous on its own, when referenced with the Thomas report (Appendix I Section 1.4) the curtains are thrown open on this statement.

In the Thomas Review itself, the reviewer is unable to reconcile the claimed bullying and harassment numbers with actual cases of bullying and harassment. When applying an independent third party survey the numbers dropped from 40% to 16% of fire fighters experiencing this. While any number above 0 is unacceptable, that is not a statistically insignificant drop in percentage.

Secondly he throws out the statement that the "services culture must change to accept women and ethnic minorities". Based on the Thomas Review itself, my own conclusions and in fact its own conclusion:

1. While bullying and harassment do occur, they most likely occur much lower in numbers than reported to Adrian Thomas.
2. A significant proportion (possibly a large majority) were more about being unhappy or viewing management attitudes as bullying rather than actually being bullied.
3. There was no link made, excluding the non-substantiated baseless assertion of sexism and racism with no evidence, that bullying, harassment and the culture of the service is in any way directly linked to its demographic make up.
4. There was no link made, directly or indirectly, with any evidence, that the fire service actively rejects women and minorities.

Based off of this knowledge, I cannot see how the Fire Minister can get away with making such statements when these conclusions were not even evidenced in the report he refers to. I have no doubt there have been some incidents of sexism and racism, but there is no evidenced based link that it is the reason for a culture that reject anyone

who is a woman and/or an ethnic minority. It is as if Brandon Lewis has a predetermined goal in mind and evidence does not matter.

He proceeds on to state that a workforce should represent the community it serves. As stated in the refutation of the Thomas review, why? There is no known evidence saying a more diverse workforce functions any more efficiently than a near homogenous one. This equality of outcome attitude is very Marxist indeed. Should not a workforce be made up of those whom want to actually be there and dedicate their lives to the services irrespective of demographics?

Finally Brandon Lewis strips of the mask by pointing out that the workforce is "96% white, 95% male". If the Fire and Rescue service was 96% black and 95% female, no one would utter a single word. In the Thomas Review there was no evidence presented to link demographics with any negative culture in the service. This is mainly an attempt to poison the well and make false equivocations. In this instance, even though no evidence is presented to substantiate it, the claim is seemingly the service has problems, the service is mostly white and male, and therefore the problems are because of white males. At least, that is an interpretation based upon the following statements:

"A culture shift is needed. Action is needed on career progression, inclusive working practices and recruitment. Progression through the service has to improve."

There we have it, the ugly face of this reform revealed. It is quite literally a statement calling for the discrimination in favour of women and ethnic minorities based upon gender and race. Based on the Thomas Report and the Fire Ministers statement, I can only assume they no longer care about fair and open competition anymore, equality of outcome trumps equality of opportunity based on lawful "Positive Action".

As a result of Positive Action in the Police Force the Fire Minister states there are "5 times the proportion of female police officers in policing than female fire fighters and that "police joiners from a BME background was over 12% last year". But what does this actually mean?

As far as I can see or find through research, absolutely nothing. There are no available reports or data suggesting the police force is now somehow more efficient or has led to positive change by discriminating in its recruitment process. All that seems to have happened is a Marxist idea of equality of outcome over opportunity has been utilized, thereby directly discriminating in favour of some and by necessity, indirectly discriminating against someone else, based upon no evidence at all, as shown by the Thomas Report.

But, just because there is no evidence does not mean that can stop them as "one in four recruits to the Met Pol were non-white" due to "determined action... using attraction strategies and redesigned recruitment practices". In other words, recruitment practices that allow for legal discrimination in favour of anyone who is not white and male.

This is topped off by probably the most thinly veiled threat I have ever read by Lewis stating "look hard at how you recruit and who you recruit". How can a Member of Parliament literally demand discrimination? Of course, because the implications are it is only men who will be the victims of it. After all, through "lawful Positive Action", racism and sexism is legal, so long as it is in favour of women or minorities and against men.

But how does all this tie into men and boys? Well, if you examine the end of the Thomas Report, you will find a recommendation for unconscious bias training because, based on no evidence whatsoever, apparently now being too male is a big problem in today's workforce. Then to hammer this home, the horrific recommendation of forcing these reforms and unconscious bias training into the cadet schemes and the minds of children.

Conclusion

This section of the speech and the Thomas Review are nothing but hatchet jobs. Based upon no evidence, with nothing but ideological assertions, Brandon Lewis will attempt to insert reforms because the Fire Service is too white, too male, and that is a big problem. So the best way to correct this is to discriminate through legal discrimination or "Positive Action", roll out unconscious bias training and effectively brainwash children in the cadet schemes. These ideas must be fought tooth and nail, and Adrian Thomas and Brandon Lewis should be ashamed of themselves, however, I think we all know they won't be.

Appendix I

Independent Review of the Conditions of Service for Fire and Rescue Staff in England 2015 by Adrian Thomas: A Refutation

Introduction

Recently the Fire Minister Brandon Lewis MP gave a speech on the Fire Service. In his speech he references the Thomas Report 2015 as the bedrock of his own recommendations. In said report, most of which is outside of my scope of research, he makes some very concerning accusations in terms of culture and equality, especially in relation to men and boys.

This small report is a refutation to the Thomas Report 2015 to accompany the refutation of the Fire Ministers Speech. You will find that many accusations are at worst, baseless, and at best, grasping. Furthermore I would also like to remind the reader that the adage “The burden of proof is on the claimant” holds true here. Each section is crucial to the next and where Adrian Thomas and Brandon Lewis are making claims, it is up to them to substantiate such claims and provide evidence. A lack of which, means, to quote the late Christopher Hitchens “That which can be asserted without evidence, can be dismissed without evidence”.

Independent Review of the F&RS, Section 1.3: Culture and Trust

According to the Thomas 2015 many places visited had an “aggressive resistance to change” pg.23 and that “extremely combative language (the language of conflict – fight, strike, defend, slash, cut, stitch-up- and the fruitier versions” pg. 23 were used in conversations. Despite the myriad of different usages these words have depending on the context, any person will tell you being able to swear in front of your boss and not get sacked shows and incredible high degree of trust.

Furthermore, using allegedly combative language is not an indication of any intention. So unless there are any evidentiary reasons as to why Thomas 2015 feels it relevant to make a connection between change, aggressive language and conflict, such a connection is a suspect one.

Continuing Thomas 2015 reflects that he witnessed high levels of both trust and respect for management teams (pg. 23) while noting anger aimed toward the local authorities and the government. It is mentioned that the degrees of trust and respect varies across fire and rescue service authorities. That some have it in good places others not so much so.

Further Thomas 2015 asks why “the practices that generated trust aren’t being rolled out” pg. 23. Indicating, at least from outside reading into it, that there are practices already in place that generate trust and respect between colleagues and management, but not in every authority. Seemingly such practices have not yet been properly identified and brought to our attention.

So to conclude this small section, we have a suspect connection between change and alleged aggressive and combative usages of wording. This, without any evidentiary reason, is simply poisoning the well. Then statements that there are authorities with practices that generate trust and respect, they simply have not yet

been formally identified and if possible, rolled out as mandatory practice across authorities. While this may seem rather unnecessary to point out, it will become pointedly clear why the refutation of this section becomes of the utmost necessity during the refutation of the Fire Minister's speech.

Independent Review of the F&RS, Section 1.4: Bullying and Harassment

Firstly allow me to make a small concession. I am in no way labouring under the delusion that bullying and harassment do not exist. Indeed, I am willing to bet the (albeit small) remaining amount of money in my bank account on the fact that it occurs. However, with that acknowledged, we can now proceed with a sceptical approach without being held back with speculation about potential biases.

Upon reviewing such instances Thomas 2015 points out that while authorities "were able to cite individual" cases pg. 24, he was unable to reconcile "the number of people claiming to have been bullied or harassed with the number of actual complaints submitted" pg. 24, making this at best a speculative exercise and difficult subject to definitively pin down.

According to a survey Thomas 2015 carried out along side a survey performed by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), the numbers were claimed to be in the range of 40%, amounting to an enormous 16,000 potential fire fighters. But, actual formal complaints amount "to single figures in each authority" pg. 24. So the unreliability of these surveys and statistics as a representative sample is quite apparent. But if one insists they can be used, albeit tentatively, as a gauge for the potential range of actual complaints.

Additionally UNISON submitted a much lower figure of 16% purportedly having either witnessed or experienced harassment (Thomas 2015 pg 25). According to my calculations off of numbers provided in the Thomas report, this equates to approximately 6400 fire fighters, while anything above 0 is unacceptable, it is not single figures and it most certainly is not 16000. I think that 16% would be, until more accurate findings become available, a good starting point statistically.

Following this Thomas 2015 then makes a recommendation that makes me think he has taken his eye off of the ball and it has flown clear over his head. Stating an "extremely wide definition of bullying and harassment is needed" pg. 25 is quite an error. As there are already legal definitions of harassment in Law (Some of which should be repealed, but I digress) having such an all encompassing or extreme definition can cause more harm than good by collecting complaints that would not, legally, fall under either category, as you will see momentarily.

Further to this Thomas 2015 has stated that bullying and harassment can be a daily occurrence. He mentions this and states he has also received complaints from "a delegation of female fire fighters" pg 25. As he has not up until now mentioned gender as statistically significant in any way, I can only assume, unless further evidence is made publicly available, that this is a clear attempt at poisoning the well (which will become significant in the next section).

As mentioned above in the criticism of Thomas 2015's recommendation for an extreme definition of bullying and harassment, he then goes on to prove my point by alluding to the fact that, in his estimation "a significant proportion... of the 40 percent is unrelated to genuine bullying and harassment but rather unhappiness with

relationships” (pg 25) and that viewing management instruction as “bullying behaviour” (pg 25) was likely. This should surely be the final proverbial nail for such a recommendation, when the one whom recommends it then refutes it himself?

This means, from an outside reader perspective at least, that the practices mentioned in the refutation of Section 1.3: Culture and Trust above indicating high levels of respect and trust are primarily what needs to be identified and rolled out across the authorities. An extreme all encompassing definition, which by Thomas 2015’s own admission in the previous paragraph would equate unhappiness and perceived management instruction to bullying and harassment, is even more absurd.

Knowing this then, it strikes me as rather odd that the recommendation Thomas 2015 comes up with is as follows:

“...employee representatives together with special interest groups representing women and black and minority ethnic fire fighters should publish a memorandum of understanding as to how people will be treated” pg 26.

At no point in the entire section has gender or race even been remotely alluded to as a significant factor in bullying and harassment. The only mention of women were in fact in the unnecessary reflection on a delegation of female fire fighters which, if was a cause for concern, would surely have been stressed at that point if it was so significant a factor. Similarly at no time has race ever been presented as a potentially significant factor in bullying and harassment.

This leads me to believe that there is evidence that has not been presented and as such an incomplete picture is present, such evidence has been deliberately withheld leaving a speculative incomplete picture or potentially poisoning the well, or there is no such evidence and the purpose is to both poison the well for a future section and insert a particular political view. Remember before moving on, at no point has the demographic make up of the Fire and Rescue Service been implicated as a significant factor in the culture and trust, or in bullying and harassment.

Independent Review of the F&RS: Section 1.5 Equality

Right from the off Thomas 2015 states that despite an enormous amount of activity around equality, there has been “small in-roads made in making the fire and rescue service representative of the population it serves” pg 26. My responses to this are firstly, so what? There is no evidence a representative service (fire and rescue or otherwise) outperforms in any way a service that is homogenous. I very much doubt that the person whom if being rescued from a fire or road side accident for example really cares who rescues them so long as they get out safely.

Secondly, this is a very politically pointed statement. Based off of the previous poisoning the well attempts and now such a blatant ideological assertion, one can only assume that Adrian Thomas has a particular political ideology that is somewhat biasing his views. One cannot say for certain but we will see as we continue.

Thomas 2015 then makes the assertion:

*“... failure to attract a diverse workforce and **possibly** the existence of sexist, racist and **possibly** homophobic bullying causing some (albeit small numbers)*

to leave that service is the root cause behind the lack of growth in the diversity ratios.” pg 27.

Please note that the emboldening of the word possibly was done by me to make a very cogent point. At no time in the previous sections did gender, race or even sexuality come into the frame as a significant factor. This is why I believe Thomas 2015 uses the term “possibly”, as it would seem that Thomas 2015 does not have statistical evidence to back up such a claim. As demonstrated in his own words “...[about sexuality statistics] these were not put to me during the data gathering” pg 26. While I accept homophobia exists, these statements lead me to conclude that in this instance, this is nothing more than a politically motivated, ideologically driven and speculative claim with no basis or supporting evidence, and therefore will be dismissed accordingly.

Following this Thomas 2015 asserts that “clear sexist bullying is still a feature of the service” pg 27. While as stated similarly above, I accept sexism exists, but to make such a claim without providing any supportive evidence or mentioning it in the actual section dedicated to the presentation of said evidence, I cannot see any motive beyond being politically and ideologically driven.

Continuing on Thomas 2015 asserts:

“...a change in culture and an acceptance that women, ethnic minorities together with all groups that make up the diversity of the working population have a place in the fire and rescues service.” pg 27.

There has been no demonstration that there is a culture that rejects women or minorities in way, shape or form. This is another unsubstantiated claim bordering on the ideological. Furthermore, no one has a place by right on the fire and rescue service, the best candidates through application, competition and determination should be the only people who have a place on the fire and rescues service.

He then states that such acceptance needs to extend to “evaluation and suitability for promotion” pg 27. Clearly a politically and ideologically driven statement if ever I’ve seen one. While not openly, but subtly suggesting women and minorities are being held back because of gender and race, and so the solution is to discriminate based on gender and race. This is; need I remind you Mr Thomas, illegal.

The following statement leaves me in no doubt as to the intentions of the author, that alleged actions by employees within the fire service are not “necessarily deliberate action taken by an individual but rather... an unconscious bias” pg 27 (refer to Appendix I Supplementary for definition). Essentially speaking, employees are not deliberately sexist, racist and homophobic, they just have unconscious biases that they don’t know about that attributes to it. The concept of unconscious bias is speculative at best and is not as yet recognized outside of those who practice within the sociological fields.

So the solution to this Thomas 2015 states is that “unconscious bias training should be rolled out across the workforce” pg 27. Based on assertions, that he previously and so far has provided no evidence for except for minor attempts to poison the well, Thomas 2015 has reached such an outlandish conclusion. I am in no doubt now that Thomas 2015 is driven both politically and ideologically to deliberately find, irrespective of evidence, an infection of sexism, racism and

homophobia and present this sugar pill of unconscious bias training as the cure. As for lack of a better term, although one has never been more apt, essentially, fire fighters are now unknowingly guilty of thought crime, or rather, unthought crime, as one does not know he/she is allegedly doing it.

Thomas 2015 then presents this wonderful piece cognitive dissonance:

“If culture is right and recruitment and promotion aspects are fair then selection and progression will be on talent and ability alone and the percentages will eventually change” pg 28.

Firstly, there is nothing wrong based on the report (excluding baseless assertions and poisoning the well attempts), with the culture except varying practices across authorities. Secondly, recruitment and promotional aspects cannot be fair by definition if one is forced to discriminate in favour of someone, and there by necessity against someone else, based on gender or race or both. Selection cannot be on talent and ability alone if characteristics such as gender and race have to be factored in.

At no time has the demographic make up of the organisation ever been presented as a significant factor. This is a purely politically driven ideological viewpoint, all Thomas 2015 would have to do is demonstrate his point, but until such evidence becomes available, I refuse to just take his word for it.

Coming to a close, Thomas 2015 then has the audacity to recommend an insidious approach to diversity:

“One section of the fire and rescue service that has a higher deliberate turnover of individuals (the cadet schemes) and these could be deployed in support of greater future equality in the service.” pg 28.

This is a step far over the line, while one can try to influence the service with this baseless ideological nonsense, enforcing such nonsensical and unsupported views onto children is a step too far. This should be fought tooth and nail until extreme justifications are made and verified. He even continues with “more research should be directed at how the cadet scheme could be utilized to widen the diversity of the service...” pg28. No, it should not, children are not your tools to further your political ideology.

Conclusion

If you have stuck with me to end I hope you will now see why refuting these sections are so important. This report, in terms of culture and in the name of “equality”, is nothing more that politically motivated, ideologically driven drivel. Until such time as evidence is produced to justify the aforementioned baseless assertions throughout this paper, these people, whom ever Adrian Thomas and Fire Minister Brandon Lewis are pandering to, should not only stay away from the service, but stay even further from your children.

Appendix I – Supplementary Information

Unconscious Bias

Implicit bias that affects ones judgements of people and situations that the person is not aware of; and cannot be discovered through introspection.