

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE: 14 FEBRUARY 2017
REPORT OF: CHIEF FIRE OFFICER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE
AUTHOR: MATTHEW MAGUIRE

SUBJECT: EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION
STRATEGY 2017-2020

Purpose of Report

1. This report sets out the background to the Authority's approach to equality and diversity and seeks approval for a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan 2017-2020.
2. This is the Authority's fourth equalities strategy and highlights its strong and proud track record of championing the equality, diversity and inclusion agenda, both within the fire and rescue sector and more widely. The most recent strategy expired at the end of 2016 and therefore, a new strategy is required.

Recommended: That

[1] the strategy be considered and approved.

Background

3. Members of the Authority approved the three previous versions of the equalities strategy. The last strategy, which covered the period 2014-16 was approved by the Policy Committee at its meeting on 27 November 2013. Members of the Performance and Overview Committee monitor progress against the Strategy and action plan and receive updates twice a year, as well as approving the annual equality monitoring report.
4. The Service achieved the Excellent rating of the Fire and Rescue Equality Framework in September 2012. This involved three days of external peer assessment which saw four external peers interviewing employees, Elected Members, partners and community groups.
5. Under the Fire Reform Programme, recently announced by the Government, it is likely that the Framework will change and be subsumed into the statutory inspection regime that is to be introduced. The Authority is committed to piloting any new inspection regime after the announcement of the reforms prompted the organisation to defer a planned equality re-accreditation process.

Information

6. The Authority's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy is a key corporate document, setting out the organisation's principles and approach to equality and acting as a basis for all external accreditation.
7. The new Strategy sets out how the Authority will respond to a number of future challenges and proposed Government reforms, as well as the findings of the independent review into fire service culture and conditions of service undertaken by Adrian Thomas. It also incorporates details of how the Authority will respond to the findings of the biennial staff satisfaction surveys and other audits, such as the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index.
8. This latest Strategy also has a stronger focus on inclusion and going beyond the letter of the law to champion equality in its broadest sense and include everyone, not just those covered by the nine protected characteristics under the Equality Act.
9. The Strategy also covers areas such as roles and responsibilities, the legal framework, and demographic information. The detail of the Authority's approach is set out across six themed areas, which are;
 - Understanding our communities
 - A diverse workforce
 - Engaged and supported people
 - Inclusive services
 - Our broader network
 - Monitoring performance and evaluation
10. The Action Plan – also attached, sets out a timetable of proposals and initiatives which will allow the Authority to continue to meet its objectives as set out under each of the themed areas within the Strategy. The Action Plan will be updated annually, throughout the life of the Strategy.
11. The strategy makes reference to the fact that in the future, many of the resources referred to will be contained within the joint teams with the staff employed by Chief Constable as a result of the Blue Light Collaboration (BLC). However, while some structures and processes may change as a result of BLC the Strategy clearly sets out the Authority's minimum expectations in terms of the delivery of equality initiatives and activity.

Financial Implications

12. Costs associated with delivering the Strategy can be met from within the existing corporate Equality and Inclusion budget, including costs associated with any re-accreditation or new inspection processes

introduced through the Fire Reform Programme. Future training requirements may require additional funding, possibly through budget bids.

Legal Implications

13. The Strategy outlines how the Fire Authority will fulfil the legal obligations which flow from the provisions of the Equality Act and associated legislation, including the additional general and specific requirements contained in the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Equality and Diversity Implications

14. The Strategy has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment and any resulting issues have been recorded and incorporated. The Strategy sets out how the framework for ensuring equality issues are identified and managed will be delivered across the Authority.

Environmental Implications

15. There are no environmental issues arising from the production or delivery of the Strategy.

**CONTACT: JOANNE SMITH, FIRE SERVICE HQ, WINSFORD
TEL [01606] 868804**

BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE