



Making Cheshire Safer



Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

2017 – 2020



EXCELLENT FIRE &
RESCUE
SERVICE
EQUALITY
FRAMEWORK



Cheshire Fire Authority

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2017-2020

Foreword – Making the case for equality, diversity and inclusion

Cheshire Fire Authority has a strong and proud track record of championing the equality agenda within the fire and rescue sector, but also more widely. In the coming years, Cheshire Fire Authority intends to build upon and cement its reputation as a diversity leader.

As the Chair of Cheshire Fire Authority, I am proud of the leadership that Members have provided on equality – something that is so vital for setting the cultural tone for the organisation. I am also grateful to the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive and the many individuals across Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service for their relentless commitment to delivering an open culture and an inclusive, engaging service for all of the communities we serve.

Progress around equality, diversity and inclusion should never be taken for granted or presumed to be embedded, so this Strategy is deliberately ambitious and challenging, aiming to drive the Authority forward in the coming years and deliver improvements to equality across the board.

Given the challenges we continue to face locally, as a sector and more widely – not least the need to ensure we have the most diverse and capable workforce, fit to serve the communities of Cheshire - this must be a group effort, harnessing our collective resources, values and efforts.

This strategy sets out how we will deliver that vision and ensure that all of our people achieve their full potential as we continue to provide the most effective fire and rescue service to those who need it.

Cllr Bob Rudd

Chair, Cheshire Fire Authority

Introduction

Cheshire Fire Authority is the publically accountable body responsible for the delivery of an efficient and effective fire and rescue service to the communities of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington.

The Fire Authority is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion – providing a comprehensive operational service that protects the communities and infrastructure of Cheshire, particularly those from marginalised and vulnerable communities as well as aiming to be an employer of choice which takes steps to ensure it treats all its employees and volunteers fairly.

During the life of previous equality strategies, the organisation made significant progress in developing and promoting its inclusive approach, including;

- Becoming the first combined fire and rescue authority to achieve the Excellent standard in the fire and rescue service equality framework, in 2012
- Maintaining a top 50 place in Stonewall's annual Workplace Equality Index every year since 2013 – and achieving a top ten place, by coming 8th and being the highest placed emergency service in 2017
- Obtaining the Disability Confident Employer accreditation following the replacement of the Two Ticks scheme
- Becoming a Mind Blue Light Programme-supporting organisation, training a cohort of Mind Champions and rolling out training to managers
- Hosting the 2015 Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA) annual general meeting and conference
- Investing in young people and taking on a first cohort of firefighter and community safety Apprentices
- Providing a well developed suite of equality e-learning training modules, including one dealing with unconscious bias, coupled with in-person equality training for new starters.
- Working in partnership with Cheshire West and Chester Council and Cheshire Constabulary to organise a number of successful and well-attended LGBT events in 2016.
- Hosting a seminar, 'The Fire and Rescue Service: Taking pride to another level', in November 2016 to promote LGBT inclusion across the fire and rescue service.
- Undertaking a major programme of positive action to recruit more women and those from diverse backgrounds, as part of the Authority's first recruitment of Wholetime firefighters in seven years.

The legal framework and our public duty

Cheshire Fire Authority is clear that diversity isn't just about the Equality Act or nine protected characteristics. It is about ensuring that everybody feels included and is able to give their all. However, the legal drivers and legislative framework provide an important backdrop for the delivery of equality, diversity and inclusion objectives.

The Equality Act 2010 is the main relevant piece of legislation outlining a series of duties designed to protect employees and service users against discrimination. These are supplemented by the Public Sector Equality Duty ('PSED'). Under the PSED, the Authority must have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

There are also specific duties under the PSED. These require the Authority to: publish relevant information demonstrating its compliance with the equality duty; and to set itself specific, measurable equality objectives.

The Fire Authority will ensure compliance with the general and specific equality duties through the publication of this Strategy, and accompanying action plan - which will be updated annually during the life of the Strategy - and through the publication of comprehensive equality monitoring data, on an annual basis.

The Authority is determined to go beyond the letter of the law and ensure an ambitious programme for achieving an equal, diverse and inclusive fire and rescue service is put in place and delivered.

A picture of Cheshire

Cheshire consists of four unitary Councils: Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington. Combined, the population of Cheshire is just over one million: Cheshire East has the largest population, with Halton having the smallest. Over the next fifteen years, the population of Cheshire is predicted to rise by approximately 60,000.

Cheshire covers approximately 919 square miles, with a strategic crossroads in the national motorway infrastructure, including the M6, M56, M53 and M62 – as well as having the UK's third largest airport at Manchester, as well as Liverpool Airport on its borders.

Cheshire is an area of diversity, both socially and economically. Cheshire comprises areas of affluence, together with areas of multiple deprivation in each of the four council areas. There are also large rural expanses, areas of heavy industry and a number of urban areas. There are currently 440,000 households with an average of 2.33 people per household. The average age of residents is 40.4 years. Approximately 20% of Cheshire's residents are aged over 65, whereas the proportion of residents under 24 is falling.

According to the most recent Census, Cheshire's population is predominantly made up of White British residents, who account for 96.9% of the population. After Christianity, the second most popular religion is Islam, although 22% of residents indicate they do not have a religion.

Although there are no official figures, estimates suggest that approximately 200 residents identify as transgender and between 52,176 and 73,047 residents identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB). This has been calculated using Government assumptions that suggest between 5-7% of the population identify as LGB.

In terms of disability, approximately 19% of Cheshire residents are living with a long term health problem or disability, which impacts on their ability to carry out day-to-day activities.

The national and local context

The move of national fire policy from the Department for Communities and Local Government back to the Home Office at the start of 2016, saw the start of a major new drive to reform the sector in a number of areas, notably cultural change and improving workforce diversity.

The Government's view has been shaped by the findings of an independent review carried out into workplace culture and terms and conditions, by Adrian Thomas, completed in February 2015 and published in November 2016. This report also built on the findings of previous reviews from the likes of the former Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor, Sir Ken Knight, and others before him.

The Government will use these findings to drive a programme of change in the sector, focussed on a lack of workforce diversity – as well as taking forward the issues identified in the independent cultural review of Essex Fire and Rescue Service, including measures to address accusations of bullying, improved staff engagement, fair pay and remuneration, and the negotiation of new duty and working systems.

Locally, the Fire Authority continues to pursue a programme of Blue Light Collaboration with Cheshire Constabulary that will see the majority of its support staff transfer to the employment of the Chief Constable and operate from a joint police and fire headquarters at Clemonds Hey, during 2016 and 2017.

This transfer of fire and rescue service staff is likely to have a tangible impact on the processes, culture and workforce make-up of the fire and rescue service and will pose a number of challenges to the delivery of equality outcomes, not least through the effective outsourcing of key departments, such as HR – impacting recruitment, policy development etc.

The Fire Authority is clear that this Strategy sets out expectations around its commitment to equality excellence that need to be fulfilled.

Diversity includes everyone - Our vision and core values

Equality diversity and inclusion sit at the heart of everything Cheshire Fire Authority does and underpin its approach to delivering an excellent emergency service and as an employer.

This is not a simple, box-ticking exercise or restricted to the nine protected characteristics, as listed under the Equality Act – the Authority believes in and defines equality in its widest sense, enabling all of its people to be themselves and removing barriers to services, creating opportunities and safer communities.

Committed to Equality – Cheshire Fire Authority will ensure fair and equitable access to all of its services, wherever they are needed – whether by staff, volunteers or members of the community

Committed to Diversity – Cheshire Fire Authority will recognise and embrace difference, within its workforce and among those who live, work and travel through the county

Committed to Inclusion – Cheshire Fire Authority will welcome and celebrate diversity within the community and aim to be an employer of choice, creating an environment where everyone can develop their talents, prosper and succeed

Equality, diversity and inclusion run as a golden thread through the Authority's vision, mission, objectives, values and strategies, down through departmental and individual plans. This is something that has contributed significantly to the progress made by the organisation in improving the safety of local people, developing its services and people and maintaining equality as a priority.

Vision

A Cheshire where there are no deaths, injuries or damage from fires or other emergencies

Mission

To help create safer communities, to rescue people and protect economic, environmental and community interests

Objectives

The objectives can be found in full in *Planning for a Safer Cheshire*, the Authority's five year strategy. However the key areas are captured in three sections:

- Protecting our communities and reducing local risks
- Responding promptly and effectively to emergencies
- Developing an excellent organisation, accountable to our communities

Core values

The Authority's suite of Core Values were developed in conjunction with staff and have been reviewed regularly in light of any changes to national terms and

conditions and following feedback from internal staff surveys. However they remain widely well understood and fit for purpose. They are:

- Putting our customers first
- Promoting equality and diversity
- Working together
- Aiming for excellence
- Developing and respecting our people
- Delivering our promises

All of the values have a key role to play in helping the Authority to take its equality, diversity and inclusion agenda forward.

Roles, responsibilities and resources

Unlike many bodies, Cheshire Fire Authority has maintained dedicated resources to ensure the prioritisation and coordination of equality, diversity and inclusion throughout the financial downturn and during the squeeze on public spending.

Leadership, which is critical to the development of an open workplace culture must be promoted at all levels of the Authority, from the Fire Authority to frontline staff. Therefore, it is critical that everyone within the organisation is aware of their individual responsibilities in promoting equality, diversity and inclusion and ensuring it is mainstreamed into day to day processes. Below is a summary of the various roles within the organisation and accompanying responsibilities.

The Fire Authority and Members

Leadership, which is vital for setting the cultural tone of an organisation, comes from the top – with the Chair of the Fire Authority keen to ensure that equality runs as a golden thread throughout all of the Authority's strategies, plans and objectives. The Authority has appointed two dedicated member equality leads, to provide political leadership, advice and support. However, all Members have a responsibility for challenging, championing and approving the equality work undertaken, as well as acting as figureheads for key projects.

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive provides leadership through the Policy Approval Group and the Service Management Team and takes overall responsibility for the implementation of this Strategy, ensuring the availability of resources and that core values and staff behaviours reflect and reinforce equality, diversity and inclusion priorities.

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive also chairs the Service's main equality board and ensures issues are aired in an open and inclusive environment.

The Equality and Inclusion Team

The Equality and Inclusion team comprise the Head of Policy and Inclusion and the Equality and Inclusion Officer – the team reports directly to the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive and is responsible for developing the equality strategy and the detail of various equality and inclusion initiatives, as well as coordinating the work of a number of relevant departments and individuals. The team also manages the Equality Impact Assessment framework, coordinates staff network groups, contributes to programmes and projects, undertakes engagement with community groups and key individuals and completes external benchmarking processes and audits.

Heads of Departments

With the support of the Equality and Inclusion Officer, Heads of Department are responsible for the co-ordination and strategic management of this Strategy. They must ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion objectives feature in all the

corporate, departmental and individual action plans of the organisation and that monitoring and evaluation are planned into the process.

Managers

Managers and all employees with supervisory responsibilities have a local responsibility for implementing and promoting this Strategy. They ensure that employees and partners are adequately informed, trained and supported to ensure that their duties are carried out effectively.

Staff, trade unions, staff network groups and volunteers,

All of this comes in addition to the most important element of all, the individual commitment of our staff and volunteers who are critical to the delivery of equality objectives and maintaining a positive, open culture.

Individuals across the organisation have a vital role to play in driving equality forward, including those who volunteer and take part in staff network groups and our cohort of LGBT allies, those who work for representative bodies, youth champions, equality impact assessment champions and Mind Blue Light champions.

The trade unions also have a vital role and a responsibility in the implementation of this policy and work in close partnership with managers and the Equality and Inclusion Officer. Appropriate learning and development opportunities are offered to improve understanding of the issues involved and all staff appraisals reflect individual and team responsibilities for equality and diversity.

Partners, contractors and suppliers

Collectively, our partners, contractors and suppliers are vital to maintaining a robust approach to equality, diversity and inclusion. Their behaviours and values can support or undermine the organisation's equality approach whether directly, or by association with its brand.

For this reason it is vital that the Authority maintains a clear understanding of the wide network of organisations and companies that make up its partners, suppliers and contractors and there are robust mechanisms in place to ensure its high standards are shared, promoted and enforced. The Authority asks that all of its partners and suppliers support and evidence this approach.

The Equality Steering Group

The Equality Steering Group is chaired by the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive and attended by the Authority's Equality Member Champions, as well as members of the Service Management Team (or their representatives). All departments and shift systems are represented on the Group, as well as the trade unions representatives, staff network groups and others representing those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

The Group, which was previously known as the Equality Task Group, was re-established following a workshop held in 2015 to gather views. The Group meets quarterly and the new format ensures it is able to champion and promote equality, diversity and inclusion throughout the Service – linking into key programmes, projects and initiatives. Every other meeting of the Group incorporates an expanded workshop to consider broader equality related issues and host guest speakers.

Delivering our approach

To deliver against the challenges and ambitions set out in the sections above, this Strategy is comprehensive and covers all aspects of the Authority's work. The Strategy is divided into the following themes, which are then supported by specific actions and a detailed action plan. The action plan will be updated annually to reflect changing priorities.

- 1. Understanding our communities**
- 2. A diverse workforce**
- 3. Engaged and supported people**
- 4. Inclusive services**
- 5. Our broader network**
- 6. Monitoring performance and evaluation**

Our approach

Understanding our communities

Aim

The Fire and Rescue Sector is unlike the rest of the public sector in that it does not have specific service users as the public will generally only need the service when an emergency arises. To understand the causes of potential fire and rescue risks so that prevention messages and initiatives are made relevant to the needs of the community, Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service needs to acquire and use information about the makeup of local communities. Further, the Service needs to understand the views of these diverse communities and how their needs impact on the Service's policies and practices to ensure that its work is fit for purpose.

How

Key actions include:

- Expanding and improving the collection and quality of equality monitoring data;
- Improving demographic data to better understand how communities are changing, and what new communities are emerging;
- Ensuring a robust approach to public consultation and monitoring outcomes to understand the views, experiences and impact on at risk, vulnerable and minority communities; and
- Ensuring Equality Impact Assessments are carried out in relation to all of the Service's policies and practices and that the views of diverse communities are fully considered as part of these assessments.

A diverse workforce

Aim

To recognise, understand and respond to the needs of all communities it is essential that the Service recruits, develops, supports and retains a workforce which better reflects the diversity of the communities it serves – and the wider population. Furthermore, a diverse workforce with an open culture has been shown to be more productive, by enabling people to be themselves while at work and bringing new ideas and innovation to the table. As such, the Service is committed to increasing the diversity of its workforce at all levels, including volunteers and those involved in youth activities.

How

Key actions include:

- Putting in place robust recruitment targets, processes, and criteria to ensure the Service has a diverse and exceptional workforce;
- Delivering a programme of positive action programmes and role awareness in good time before any recruitment campaigns for operational roles;
- Providing appropriate support for employees from diverse backgrounds to encourage retention and promotion;
- Increasing awareness of apprenticeships, cadets and schemes for young people among diverse communities; and
- Reaching out to diverse communities to encourage volunteering and engagement.

Engaged and supported people

Aim

It is only by engaging and supporting its people that the Service can succeed in its equality, diversity and inclusion objectives. The Service understands that staff from diverse groups and with different needs may face challenges and barriers not experienced by others. This is not limited to those with protected characteristics but may apply to any employee at any time in their career. As such, the Service is committed to putting in place procedures and practices which ensure that employees are fully included and involved in the Service's work.

How

Key actions include:

- Carrying out staff surveys on a regular basis and analysing results according to diverse characteristics. Putting in place programmes of action as a consequence of these surveys;
- Consulting staff on the Service's key projects and proposals, including the annual IRMP and responding accordingly;
- The Service recognises the benefit of role models and support networks for employees. As such, the Service is committed to profiling key role models and providing networks for staff to benefit from each other's experience and to feed into Service delivery;
- Promoting and developing sources of support available to employees to help them overcome any barriers;
- Carrying out a full review of mechanisms to address concerns around bullying and harassment; and
- Promoting awards and nominations throughout the year for staff who have shown exceptional commitment to the Service.

Inclusive Services

Aim

As referred to earlier, the Service recognises that any individual or section of the community may need to access it at any given time. Similarly, the Service recognises that its workforce needs to be fully included in and engaged with its work for it to be able to achieve its objectives. As such, the Service must ensure that both its internal and external policies and practices are fully inclusive of and accessible by all sections of the community and workforce. The Service is committed to removing barriers that may prevent communities and staff from accessing it.

How

Key actions include:

- Carrying out robust and meaningful Equality Impact Assessments in relation to all of its internal and external policies, projects and practices to ensure that actual and potential impacts on the community and the workforce are properly and appropriately addressed;
- Ensuring that the Service's communication channels are fully accessible by all diverse groups, including those with disabilities and those with English as a second language;
- Promoting its commitment to equality and diversity throughout the procurement process and in its relationships with its suppliers; and
- Engaging with BME communities to promote specific fire safety advice for BME-owned businesses.

Our broader network

Aim

The Service does not operate in a vacuum and it is only by working with partners and stakeholders that the Service can properly deliver on its commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. This includes working in collaboration not only with other fire and rescue services, but also with local and national partners. The Service aims to be a key player in driving forward partnerships that will further its commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. Furthermore, the Service recognises the need to engage with external equality accreditation schemes in order to confidently benchmark the work it is carrying out against the best performing organisations, including those outside of the fire and rescue service.

How

Key actions include:

- Continuing to play a leading role in the CFOA/NFCC Equality & Inclusion Practitioners group and in regional equality practitioners groups;
- Proactively engaging with local partners, including businesses, public sector organisations and community and voluntary groups to advance equality priorities; and
- Continuing to work with external benchmarking organisations, most notably Stonewall, Disability Confident and the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework, to ensure that the Service is a leader in equality, diversity and inclusion.

Monitoring performance and progress

The Fire Authority is keen to ensure that the equality, diversity and inclusion work it undertakes is effectively performance managed. As such, the Service made a decision that the Equality Steering Group chaired by the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive would have responsibility for ensuring the successful implementation, monitoring and review of this Strategy and any accompanying Action Plan. There is a standing item on all Equality Steering Group agendas to review progress against this Strategy and action plan.

A report is also completed every six months to highlight progress to the Fire Authority's Performance and Overview Committee. The report is prepared by the Equality and Inclusion Officer.

All Service strategies and plans will have clear and consistent equality actions and objectives contained within them. All business cases must be accompanied by an explanation of how they impact on equality objectives and PIDS must be accompanied by Equality Impact Assessments setting out actual or hypothetical impacts on under-represented groups and others. Individual appraisals will be completed annually for each member of staff which will include an assessment of: performance against agreed annual objectives; employee wellbeing; and a commitment to core values and creating a positive workplace culture.

As a result of these monitoring actions, the Service aims to ensure that its commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion runs as a golden thread throughout the whole organisation.

Equality Action Plan

Action	Responsibility	Completion Date
Understanding our communities		
Provide a clear directive from the CFO and CE that equality monitoring data is to be collected in all areas of employment and service delivery	CFO and CE with Equality & Inclusion	February 2017
Review and refresh the categories of equality monitoring data that are collected to ensure that all characteristics are measured as appropriate	Business Intelligence with Equality & Inclusion	Ongoing
Ensure that at least the same extent and quality of equality monitoring data can be captured following transfer of systems and staff to Cheshire Constabulary	HR with Equality & Inclusion	October 2017
Update demographic information by working with intelligence teams in local partners, such as CWRIC	Business Intelligence with Equality & Inclusion	April 2017
Ensure public consultations are promoted to and accessible by all under-represented community groups	Consultation with Equality & Inclusion	Ongoing
A diverse workforce		
Provide unconscious bias training for all employees, including those with recruitment responsibilities	Learning and development with Equality & Inclusion	January 2017
Develop an attraction policy relevant to all roles	HR with Equality & Inclusion	May 2017
Regularly review entry criteria and recruitment processes for all roles	HR with Equality & Inclusion	Ongoing
Develop recruitment targets for underrepresented groups	HR with Equality & Inclusion	June 2017 and as required thereafter

Put in place positive action campaigns for apprenticeship, whole-time firefighter, volunteers and cadet opportunities	HR and prevention with Equality & Inclusion	February 2017 and as required thereafter
Ensure that all internal development programmes explicitly refer to inclusion and address barriers which may be faced by under-represented groups	Learning and development with Equality & Inclusion	Ongoing
Develop mentoring programmes specifically designed to support those from under-represented groups	Learning and development with Equality & Inclusion	December 2017
Develop a campaign to raise the awareness of the role of a firefighter among Cheshire's communities.	HR and communications with Equality & Inclusion	August 2017
Engaged and supported people		
Develop a programme of 'Equali-tea' bulletin articles and actions	Equality & Inclusion	Ongoing
Develop and launch a cultural training package to be delivered to all operational staff	Equality & Inclusion	Jan – April 2017
Launch a women's support network	Equality & Inclusion with female operational staff	March 2017
Develop and roll out training on family friendly entitlements	MH with HR	April 2017
Develop and re-launch straight allies directory and refresh information around Firepride	Firepride with Equality & Inclusion	April 2017
Develop the role of mental health champions	Health, Safety & Wellbeing with Equality & Inclusion	May 2017
Provide mental health training to operational managers and mental health champions	Health, Safety & Wellbeing and learning and development with	March – April 2017

	Equality & Inclusion	
Engage volunteers, including Safety Central rangers, in staff networks,	Prevention with Equality & Inclusion	Ongoing
Provide a mechanism for staff networks to review major policies and procedures outside of the usual consultation system	Network groups with Equality & Inclusion	Ongoing
Develop role model videos to showcase diverse range of operational and support staff	Equality & Inclusion with FBU	June 2017
Ensure results of all staff surveys capture experiences of staff from under-represented groups and can be analysed accordingly	Communications with Equality & Inclusion	Ongoing
Develop action plans to address any issues or opportunities arising out of staff surveys	Communications with Equality & Inclusion	Ongoing
Improve and promote staff support and wellbeing channels and mechanisms	Health, Safety & Wellbeing and HR with Equality & Inclusion	December 2017
Provide training and support systems to under-represented groups to help them progress	Learning and development with Equality & Inclusion	Ongoing
Report on the gender pay gap to Equality Steering Group	HR with Equality & Inclusion	April 2017
Encourage all cadet units to sign the Stonewall anti-bullying pledge	Prevention with Equality & Inclusion	April 2018
Provide interactive equality and diversity training to cadets	Prevention with Equality & Inclusion	April 2018
Inclusive Services		
Include equality aims and objectives in all service delivery plans	Service delivery with Equality & Inclusion	April 2017

Refresh suite of generic EIAs	Equality & Inclusion	April 2017
Develop robust and measurable corporate Equality Performance Indicators	Equality & Inclusion	April 2017
Ensure website and document accessibility	Communications with Equality & Inclusion	Ongoing
Audit and review language line and translation services	Equality & Inclusion	June 2017
Understand how equality fits into national research and development and procurement hubs and frameworks	Procurement with Equality & Inclusion	May 2017
Our Broader Network		
Ensure partnerships policy and group capture equality issues	Prevention with Equality & Inclusion	Ongoing
Deliver equality training to outsourced providers including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cleaners; • Catering staff; • NWFC; • AgeUK; and • Cheshire Police 	Procurement, learning and development with Equality & Inclusion	December 2017
Establish procedure for contractors to take in event of an equality breach	Procurement with Equality & Inclusion	April 2017
Prominently feed into the consultation on the development of the Equality Framework for Fire and Rescue Services	Equality & Inclusion	March 2017
Maintain Top 10 Position in Stonewall Workplace Equality Index	Firepride with Equality & Inclusion	Annually in January
Become a Disability Confident Leader	HR with Equality & Inclusion	September 2017

Develop and maintain a central list of community groups for engagement and consultation purposes	Equality & Inclusion	Ongoing
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