

# CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

**MEETING OF:** PERFORMANCE AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE  
**DATE:** 7<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2022  
**REPORT OF:** HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT  
**AUTHOR:** BENJI EVANS

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**SUBJECT:** EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION  
ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22

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## Purpose of Report

1. To provide an overview of key equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) developments within the Service and to highlight upcoming work and priorities.

## Recommended:

[1] that Members note the report.

## Background

2. Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's employees are its most valuable asset and in order to continue to deliver an excellent emergency service to communities, EDI is recognised as a significant business imperative.
3. One of the Service's core values is to 'be inclusive', meaning it strives to create an environment and a culture where all staff can thrive and achieve their full potential.
4. Under the Equality Act 2010, the Service has a duty to eliminate discrimination; advance equality of opportunity; and foster good relations between different groups (this is known as the "public sector equality duty").
5. To meet these requirements, the Authority approved a new EDI Strategy for the period 2021-2024. Delivery of the Strategy is captured within an action plan which is monitored on a quarterly basis by the Equality Steering Group (ESG). The ESG is chaired by the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, who holds overall responsibility for overseeing EDI in the Service.
6. This report provides a summary of the work undertaken by the Service's EDI function during 2021/22. Since February 2022, this function has sat within the Communications and Engagement Department, which transferred back into the organisation after a period of shared provision with Cheshire Police under the Blue Light Collaboration programme.

## **Key Accomplishments**

### **Promoting LGBT+ Inclusion**

7. In February 2022, the Service achieved second place in the Stonewall Top 100 Workplace Equality Index (WEI), its highest ever ranking. It also retained its position as the UK's most inclusive emergency service and top North West employer for LGBT+ inclusion, for the seventh consecutive year. The outcome was especially positive because the Service was marked against the challenging new benchmarking criteria which Stonewall introduced for the 2022 Index.
8. In May 2022, Stonewall provided feedback on the Service's (WEI) submission. This information has helped inform planning ahead of the next submission on 20 September 2022.
9. The Service has restarted its community engagement following the hiatus caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, including engaging with EDI groups and communities. One example is working closely with Chester Aid for the Homeless. A disproportionate number of homeless people are LGBT+ and through partner agencies, we have connected with this 'at risk' group, tailored our safety advice and referred LGBT+ people to specific services relevant to their needs.

### **Improving diversity in the workforce**

10. Over the last year, there has been a slight increase of LGBT+ staff working in the service, including at senior level. One year ago, the number of staff identifying as LGBT+ was 3.2% and this has now increased to 3.5%.
11. The Service continues to make incremental progress regarding increasing the number of women in the organisation. It uses a range of targeted measures to recruit women as part of its positive action work, which aims to tackle the under-representation of certain groups within the workforce. For example, recruitment events were organised to target female sports teams during our previous recruitment campaign. Measures such as these have helped increase female representation from 18.8% to 20.2% of the workforce in the past year.
12. However, there are five fewer females in operational roles (9.1% of operational roles) compared to last year (9.3%). However, the number of female firefighters has increased by 50% since 2018, when only 6% of operational roles were held by women.
13. The Service has seen a slight increase in ethnic diversity amongst its staff. Non-White British staff now make up 4.7% of the workforce, compared to 4.3% in 2021. Although more improvement is needed, there has been a sustained incremental increase in recent years. A targeted social media campaign was developed for the most recent round of wholetime firefighter recruitment, which helped to attract 149 non-White British applicants, equating to 7.6% of the total applicants. According to 2011 Census data, only 3.1% of the Cheshire population was from an ethnic minority background (2021 Census data is due later this year).

14. Recruiting staff with disabilities into the fire and rescue sector is an ongoing challenge. People often 'deselect' themselves based on assumptions about the role of a firefighter and other roles in the service. Currently 3.4% of the Service's employees declare a disability, which is a slight increase on 2.9% last year. This increase is a combination of recruiting people with a disability and existing staff disclosing a change in circumstances often related to a diagnosis of dyslexia or a long-term health condition.

### **Strengthening staff networks**

15. Staff networks continue to play an important role in raising awareness of EDI issues and supporting the development of their members. The Covid-19 pandemic led to a pause in staff network activity. The Head of Communications and Engagement is currently working with networks and undertaking research to understand their priorities and consider the ongoing support that they need in order to make them sustainable.
16. The Limitless Women's Network has progressed work around menopause, maternity and women's health. The network made valuable contributions to positive action activity and influenced the development of a new Domestic Abuse Policy.
17. The Race Equality and Cultural Heritage (REACH) Network has represented the Service at various meetings and conferences to share best practice and help inform the review and development of policies. The network is leading work to plan for the national AFSA Winter Conference which is being hosted by the Service and will take place at Chester Racecourse on 23 and 24 November 2022.
18. The Neurodiversity Network was able to host its first 'in person' meeting in May 2022 following several virtual gatherings. In June 2022, the network appointed Claire Moores (Prevention) and Paul Leigh (Service Delivery) as co-chairs and terms of reference were approved. Initial priorities are to broaden its membership and support the Service's ongoing review of support provision for neurodivergent staff throughout the entire employee lifecycle.
19. In January 2022, Firepride members and the EDI Advisor organised and hosted the third 'Proud to Provide' conference. The focus of the conference was again intersectionality and multiple identities. Over 200 delegates attended the online event to hear a range of high-profile speakers including Lady Phyll, co-founder of UK Black Pride, Nancy Kelly, CEO of Stonewall, Sarah Jones, Sally Probert-Hill and journalist Ben Hunt. The feedback confirmed that the event was a resounding success.
20. The Service entered its second year as members of the Business Disability Forum (BDF). Membership has enabled the Service to access subject matter experts, resources, toolkits, training, and networking opportunities. Over the next year, the intention is to benchmark current practices against the BDF 'Disability Smart' criteria. The long-term objective is for the Service to become a Disability Confident 'Leader', which is the highest level to be recognised under the Disability Confident Scheme.

21. Work continues to develop a parenting network group. Staff are also exploring the feasibility of a network for ex-armed forces personnel.

### **Raising EDI awareness**

22. During 2021/22, the Service has continued to raise awareness of all key equality campaigns, with visible demonstrations of support for Pride Month in June, Black History Month in October, LGBT History Month in February and International Women's Day in March. Major religious and cultural celebrations and observances are also marked to raise awareness and engage with communities. A key element of this awareness raising is the embedding of key safety messages within communications activity.
23. Various communications, training workshops and resources were uploaded onto the staff intranet and website enabling staff to access key information and educational material. Social media platforms have also been used to promote key messages to the wider community.

### **Policy Development**

24. As part of the equality analysis, when developing or reviewing policies, staff networks and other groups, such as the wellbeing community, are encouraged to provide feedback to inform the new or amended policy.
25. During the year the Service developed a Domestic Abuse Policy which comprehensively covers different both direct and indirect abuse. The Firepride network was able to provide insight which ensured LGBT+ people were represented and included within the policy. Various guidance documents have also been updated, including 'Trans Guidance' and the Service's 'LGBT+ allies' booklet.
26. The EDI Advisor and staff networks contributed to a review of the Service's provision of toilet facilities. The review was conducted using a survey and focus group approach, with findings provided to the Service and trade unions.
27. Positive steps have been made to assist staff accessing dyslexia screening and support. Previously, staff could access initial screening via the Fire Brigade Union. However, this is no longer available. Staff can now access the 'Do-It' profiler, a more comprehensive screening tool that produces a report which offers support strategies for staff and suggests reasonable adjustments that may be implemented.

### **EDI education and training**

28. During the year 34 more staff have completed Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) training. This essential training ensures staff work together to meet the public sector equality duty, enabling staff to mitigate EDI risks that may be associated with projects and identify relevant measures to reduce or eliminate risk.
29. In total, 137 staff across all levels and departments have completed EIA training. The training has already made a positive impact with staff feeling better equipped to complete EIAs, leading to increased awareness of EDI risks, the development of inclusive policies and events and better service delivery.

30. Bespoke EDI training has been delivered to the Protection team as part of a development day in July. Unconscious bias training enabled staff to raise self-awareness of cultural barriers and considerations when engaging with people of different backgrounds in a business setting. A workshop on Language Line provided an update of relevant interpretation and translation services which may be required during inspections.

### **Engaging with EDI partners**

31. The Service has engaged with EDI bodies to better understand at risk groups and foster support for positive action events. These include ForFutures, who support the homeless, LGBTQ+ charities the Proud Trust and Mermaids, Chester Pride, Women in the Fire Service and Cheshire Football Association regarding their offer to women and girls.
32. The Service also engaged with various sports teams ahead of the latest wholetime recruitment campaign, including Crewe Alexandra Women's Football Club and Warrington Wolves Women's Rugby team. The Service has sponsored the training kit of Warrington Wolves Women to further promote recruitment opportunities amongst prospective female applicants.

### **Contributing towards national EDI issues**

33. The EDI Advisor has been an active member of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) EDI working group. He has contributed to the review of various draft 'Equality of Access to Services and Employment' papers, which provide insight, advice, and best practice to all 45 fire and rescue services across the UK.
34. The EDI Advisor has been part of a working group organised by AFSA (on behalf of the NFCC) to review the barriers to recruitment and inclusion in the workplace concerning current breathing apparatus guidelines. The review informed a briefing document which AFSA presented to the Fire Minister in May 2022. AFSA is awaiting a response.

### **Future Priorities**

35. The Service will recruit a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Advisor.
36. Any potential implications on the Service's EDI work from the fire reform White Paper will be reviewed as outcomes from the White Paper consultation are released.
37. The Neurodiversity Network will progress its work by establishing various working groups to specific focus on different neurodiverse themes such as dyslexia dyspraxia, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) and autism. The intersection and overlap of different neurodivergence will also be considered.
38. The REACH network aims to recruit new members and build capacity to support and deliver a successful AFSA Winter Conference in November; as well as supporting campaigns to mark Race Equality Week, National Windrush Day, South Asian Heritage Month and Black History Month.

39. The Service will continue to progress its work around LGBT+ inclusion and will submit its evidence base for next year's Stonewall WEI in September. The aim is to remain in the top 10 most inclusive employers in the UK.
40. The Service's fourth Proud to Provide Conference is scheduled for June 2023. Planning will continue to secure a list of high-profile speakers and promote the event to prospective attendees.
41. The Limitless staff network will be supported to further progress its work around maternity, menopause and new areas of work surrounding women's health, e.g. polycystic ovary syndrome.

### **Financial Implications**

42. The EDI function has a small, dedicated budget. Specific funds have been allocated for staff networks, events and other workstreams, such as dyslexia screening and the purchase of assistive technologies.

### **Legal Implications**

43. Activities referenced within this report support compliance with the applicable provisions of the Equality Act 2010.

### **Equality and Diversity Implications**

44. This report relates to equality and diversity matters.

### **Environmental Implications**

45. Environmental considerations will be taken into account when procuring promotional products to support EDI engagement and events.

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