

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: **PERFORMANCE AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE**
DATE: **1ST MARCH 2023**
REPORT OF: **HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT**
AUTHOR: **ROSIE SAXON**

SUBJECT: **EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION**
SIX MONTH UPDATE

Purpose of Report

1. To provide an overview of progress towards the objectives set out in the Service's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy 2021-24 and to highlight upcoming work and priorities.

Recommended that:

- [1] Members note the report.
- [2] Members approve the proposal that EDI progress and performance is reported to the Performance and Overview Committee once a year, in the form of a single annual report each September.

Background

2. Under the Equality Act 2010, Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service has a duty to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different groups (this imperative is known as the Public Sector Equality Duty). In addition, one of the Service's four core values is to 'be inclusive' acting fairly, with integrity, respect and without prejudice.
3. To achieve these objectives, the Authority approved an EDI Strategy for the period 2021-24. Delivery of the Strategy is co-ordinated by the EDI Advisor and monitored on a quarterly basis by the Equality Steering Group, chaired by the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive.
4. Currently the Performance and Overview Committee considers an EDI annual report each September and a six-monthly update in March. To bring reporting in line with other activities, it is proposed that this should be the last six-monthly update and that the Committee receive an annual report once a year in September. The annual report would be reformatted to include greater detail and analysis of progress towards the Authority's three-year EDI strategy.

5. Progress to date during 2022/23 is set out on the following pages under the strategy's four key themes: our organisation, our people, our partners and our communities. 2022/23 EDI highlights so far.

Our organisation

6. The latest workforce statistics for the period ending Q2 2022/23 were presented to the Equality Steering Group on 24 January 2023. The headlines were as follows:
 - Of 866 staff in service at the end of September 2022, 20.4% (117) were female compared to 19% a year earlier. This small increase was driven by the proportion of female operational colleagues increasing from 9.3% to 9.8% and the re-establishment of the in-house Communications and Engagement Department. According to the latest Home Office data, Cheshire ranks 7th out of 45 fire and rescue services for the percentage of female firefighters in post and has seen the largest five-year increase in female firefighters outside England's three large metropolitan services.
 - Thirty-nine (4.5%) members of staff were of an ethnic background other than White British, one individual less than the year earlier.
 - The percentage of staff disclosing a disability remained the same at 3.3%.
 - Around 80% of staff now feel able to disclose their sexual orientation, with 4.2% (36) identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual. This is 1.4% (11) more than the previous year.

Work is underway to analyse these figures against recently published 2021 Census data, to help inform future attraction and recruitment activity.

7. All UK employers with more than 250 staff are required to publish the average earnings of male and female staff. The Service's latest Gender Pay Gap Report, published at the end of March 2022, showed this gap increased from 16.56% in 2020 to 19.62% in 2021. While typical of the fire and rescue sector and lower than the 24.6% gap in 2019, it reinforces the continuing need to attract women into higher-salary operational and senior roles.
8. All major project and policy developments must be underpinned by an equality impact assessment (EIA) to minimise the risk of adverse impact on particular groups of people. To assist managers in this process, the EIA template and supporting guidance has been simplified. An audit of existing EIAs is underway, to ensure they are quality assured and documented consistently, and regularly reviewed.
9. A review of the accreditations and memberships by which the Service benchmarks its EDI performance against peers and latest good practice was presented to the Equality Steering Group in January 2023. It was agreed that membership of Stonewall would not be renewed for the year ahead, creating

capacity to explore accreditation with an organisation with a broader EDI remit such as Inclusive Companies. In addition, the Service will be undertaking a self-assessment against the National Fire Chiefs Council's EDI Model of Maturity.

10. The Service successfully recruited a new EDI Advisor in November 2022 following the resignation of her predecessor in the summer. The new postholder has experience in corporate planning, criminal justice and women's rights.

Our people

11. Ahead of the next round of wholetime firefighter recruitment, two 'taster days' were organised on 14 and 16 January 2023 to enable prospective applicants from underrepresented backgrounds to learn more about the recruitment process. Sixty-three people attended, of whom 22% were women, 13% were from diverse ethnic backgrounds and 8% were LGBT+. Thirty people signed up for a buddy, to offer ongoing advice, encouragement and support.
12. The new network for staff who have an interest in neurodiversity has now been named Divergence and has two co-chairs and draft terms of reference. In 2023/24 the group will be supported to develop the Service's first Neurodiversity Policy, with supporting guidance and training materials.
13. As part of his masters' studies the Head of Communications and Engagement completed a research project into the motivations and barriers to participating in the four EDI staff networks (Divergence, Firepride, Limitless and Reach). Recommendations to be implemented in the coming months include: finding new ways to release staff to attend meetings and events; supporting the networks to define clear objectives; having a clear role description and term of office for network co-chairs; and assigning a senior sponsor to each network.
14. International Women's Day takes place on 8 March 2023. Owing to His Majesty's Inspectorate for Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Services inspection activity that week and possible industrial action, Limitless is planning a themed breakfast or lunch for members and allies rather than its normal half-day conference.

Our partners

15. Six female operational and non-operational colleagues attended the Women in the Fire Service weekend at the Fire Service College on 20-22 June 2022. The annual event provides opportunities to network and develop leadership skills. A cohort is being identified to attend the 2023 event on 9-11 June.
16. The Service hosted the 2022 Asian Fire Services Association (AFSA) Winter Conference and Awards at Chester Racecourse on 23-24 November. The event attracted more than 200 delegates from across the fire and rescue sector and speakers including former crown prosecutor Nazir Afzal OBE and disability rights campaigner Amo Raju. Reach members Selina Blain and Anant Patel won this year's Champions of Diversity Award in recognition of their work to

establish the network. Feedback was universally positive, with delegates praising the organisation of the event and, in particular, the opening presentation from Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive Alex Waller.

17. Three female colleagues from the Protection Team attended the Institute of Fire Engineers' Women in Fire Engineering Conference in Hampshire on 9 February.
18. Discussions are underway with EDI colleagues and LGBT+ network leads at North Wales, Merseyside, Greater Manchester and Lancashire fire and rescue services about the feasibility of establishing a regional LGBT+ staff network and closer collaboration at 2023 pride events.

Our communities

19. On May 14 2022 prevention staff and the EDI Advisor attended an event at Chester Town Hall to celebrate Polish culture and to unveil a refurbished memorial to World War II Polish airmen. Safety literature in Polish was provided to guests, as well as information about recruitment opportunities.
20. During the summer of 2022 the Service attended LGBT+ pride events in Chester, Ellesmere Port, Runcorn, Crewe, Congleton, Macclesfield, Nantwich, Sandbach and Manchester. The smaller events enable local crews to engage with their communities on ways to stay safe and about on-call recruitment, while Chester and Manchester prides provide opportunities to promote recruitment to thousands of people. Planning for the 2023 pride season is underway.
21. Members of the Reach network attended the Warrington Mela, organised by the Warrington Ethnic Communities Association, on 14 August to engage a diverse range of attendees about the work of the fire and rescue service.
22. Chester Fire Station once again supported Chester Women's Aid to mark White Ribbon Day on 6 December, raising awareness of domestic abuse by suspending a giant white ribbon from an aerial ladder platform in Chester city centre.

Financial Implications

23. The EDI function has a dedicated budget to support campaigns and awareness-raising activity, the running of staff networks, attendance at conferences and events, membership of benchmarking organisations and the provision of assessments and workplace adjustments. This budget is reviewed annually.

Legal Implications

24. Activities referenced within this report support compliance with the applicable provisions of the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Equality and Diversity Implications

25. This report relates to equality, diversity and inclusion matters.

Environmental Implications

26. The Service will continue to take into account environmental considerations when planning EDI engagement activity and procuring goods and services to support them.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE