

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: PERFORMANCE AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE
DATE: 20TH SEPTEMBER 2023
REPORT OF: HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT
AUTHOR: ROSIE SAXON

SUBJECT: EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION
ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23

Purpose of Report

1. The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Annual Report provides an update on progress towards the Service's equalities aims and objectives during 2022/23 under its 2021-2024 EDI Strategy.

Recommended: That

- [1] Members note the report.

Background

2. Traditionally, the Service has produced an annual equality monitoring annual report for Cheshire Fire Authority's Performance and Overview Committee each September. The Committee has also received a six-monthly update every March. These have taken the form of management papers, summarising activity and key data.
3. Members agreed in March 2023 that they will now receive a single annual report. At their request, this has been redesigned and reformatted to bring to life the wide range of EDI work undertaken by the Service over the past 12 months. For that reason, it is now entitled the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report,

Information

4. The following section provides some key highlights from the report, under the four headings of the EDI Strategy: Our Organisation, Our People, Our Communities and Our Partners. It also summarises objectives for the year ahead.

Our Organisation and Our People

5. In response to feedback from fire staff, who are predominantly women, and HMICFRS recommendations, a Wider Horizons development package has

been developed for non-operational colleagues. This showcases the 100+ 'green book' roles in the Service and career development guidance to enable people to progress between teams and departments.

6. The Limitless women's network now has a dedicated slot in the Step In and Step Up leadership development programmes. The aim is to help build the confidence of female participants and raise awareness of some of the challenges women might experience in a male-dominated workplace.
7. More women than ever before now work for the Service and the number of female firefighters or fire officers stands at its highest ever. This is in spite of the overall number of operational staff decreasing slightly, principally as a result of on-call staff leaving the Service. The Service's success in recruiting operational women is bettered in percentage terms only by the three large English metropolitan fire and rescue services.
8. A wholetime firefighter recruitment campaign in early 2023 attracted large numbers of female applicants, despite the overall number of applications falling to 829 from almost 2,000 in 2021. As a result, across the next two cohorts of new recruits, women will outnumber men for the first time ever. The Service looks forward to welcoming 13 female and 10 male trainees in September 2023 and April 2024. Their numbers will be counted in future workforce reports.
9. The 2021/22 Gender Pay Gap Report, published on 30 March 2023, showed continued progress in reducing the disparity between average pay for men and women in the Service. The gap has fallen to 18.9% compared with 19.6% the year before and 24.6% four years ago. The report, available to read on the Service's website, shows an encouraging increase in the number of women in higher pay quartiles.

Our Communities and Our Partners

10. The Service was proud to host the 2022 Asian Fire Services Association (AFSA) Winter Conference at Chester Racecourse. Attracting more than 200 delegates from across the UK fire and rescue service, the event featured speeches and presentations from Nazir Afzal, former Chief Prosecutor for the North West, and disability rights activist Amo Raju among others. REACH co-chairs Selina Blain and Anant Patel received awards for their work to champion inclusion in the sector.
11. In February 2023, the Service achieved fifth place in the Stonewall Top 100 Workplace Equality Index (WEI). Although this was a fall of three places from the previous year, the Service retained its position as the UK's most LGBT+ inclusive emergency service and top North West employer for LGBT+ inclusion. It was the second most inclusive public sector organisation in the country.

12. 2022 marked the 10th year of Chester Pride, a festival which the Service co-founded alongside other public and third sector partners. Over the past decade it has grown to become the biggest LGBT+ celebration in the county, providing an excellent opportunity to promote fire and rescue service careers. These were showcased in the pride programme through a new 'one team, many superpowers' campaign, in return for continued sponsorship of the event by the Service.

Future activity

13. As the current EDI Strategy concludes in 2024, work will begin to refresh this strategy to align with the objectives within the new Community Risk Management Plan 2024-2028. For the final year of the current strategy, there are several priorities to focus on, including:
 - Developing the Service's first Neurodiversity, Disability and Reasonable Adjustments Policy, together with supporting guidance for colleagues;
 - Finalising simplified guidance and resources for colleagues undertaking EIAs on new projects and policies, and creating a single, easy-to-navigate repository where completed EIAs can be viewed and updated; and
 - Entering the Inclusive Employers' (Top 50 Companies) benchmarking scheme and renewing Level 2 Disability Confident Employer status, with a view to working towards Level 3 'leader' status longer-term.

Financial Implications

14. Equality, diversity and inclusion activities undertaken by the Service are supported by a dedicated budget within the communications and engagement cost centre.

Legal Implications

15. The publication of the equality monitoring report demonstrates openness and transparency as required under the public sector duty within the Equality Act 2010.

Equality and Diversity Implications

16. The report concerns equality and diversity matters.

Environmental Implications

17. To minimise environmental impact, it is proposed to publish the annual monitoring report digitally through the Service's website and intranet.

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