



# Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report 2022/23



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# Introduction

Traditionally, Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service has produced an equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) 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, and are publicly available in the Authority's meeting archive at [cheshirefire.gov.uk](https://cheshirefire.gov.uk).

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. Once approved by the Performance and Overview Committee, this public-facing document will be available to read in a more prominent location on the website and promoted through the Service's communications channels. This strengthens openness and transparency, an obligation of the Equality Act (2010) public sector duty.

The Service's current EDI Strategy was published in 2021 and runs until the end of 2023/24. This new-look annual report provides an update on progress towards its aims and objectives during 2022/23, the penultimate year of the Strategy's lifespan.

During the last 12 months the Service has continued to make good progress against all four themes of the EDI Strategy, which are illustrated on the following page. On the subsequent pages the work undertaken by colleagues across the organisation is summarised under each theme, demonstrating the breadth of commitment to EDI and the Service's core value to 'be inclusive'. Where data is available to show evidence of progress, it has been referenced in the relevant section.



## A reminder of our EDI Strategy

The four themes of the Strategy reflect the Service's EDI responsibilities as an employer, a provider of vital services to the community, a trusted partner and as an organisation recognised as one of the most forward-thinking champions of inclusion in its sector. They were defined and agreed by colleagues, staff networks, Members and trade union colleagues, all of whom are represented on the Equality Steering Group which meets quarterly to drive forward the Strategy.



## Challenges and opportunities in 2022/23

- Significant media and stakeholder focus on the culture of fire and rescue services following the publication of a review into discriminatory behaviour at London Fire Brigade and allegations of misconduct in several other services.
- Pay dispute affecting members of the Fire Brigades Union, with the potential to impact organisational culture had it resulted in industrial action.
- Third routine inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS), which included a review of certain equality impact assessments (EIAs) and conversations with staff inclusion networks.
- Organisational changes including the appointments of a new Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive and a new EDI Advisor, and the re-establishment of in-house communications and human resources departments.
- The integration of EDI into the new Head of Communications and Engagement's portfolio in early 2022 and the appointment of a new EDI Advisor in November 2023.



## Our organisation

**Aim:** to make inclusivity second nature. Leaders, managers and Members will lead by example, encouraging colleagues to be role models and champion EDI issues that matter to them. Policies, systems and processes will not disregard individuals' or groups' specific needs.

### Objectives:

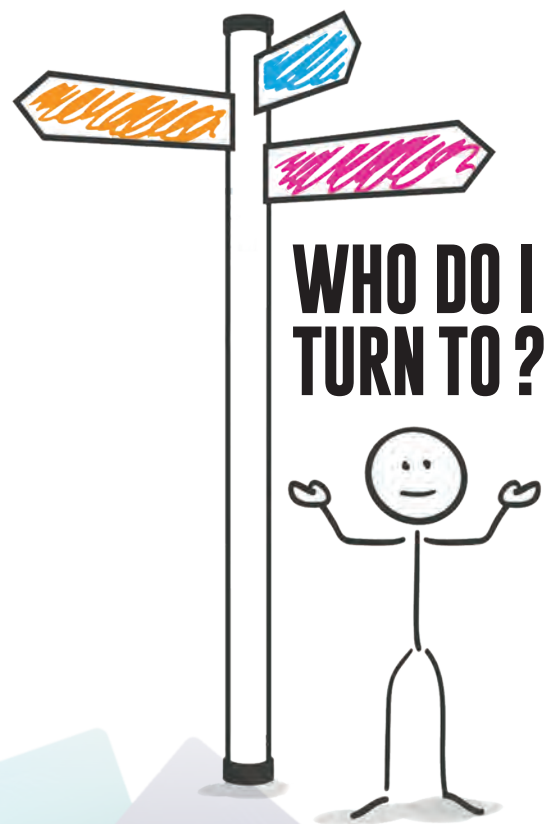
- Embed EDI in **leadership development**
- Ensure senior leaders, managers and Members are **visible EDI champions**
- Maintain an **ongoing dialogue** around EDI
- Monitor uptake in **EDI training and development** activities
- Enforce a **zero-tolerance approach** to bullying, harassment and discrimination
- Monitor **suppliers' commitment** to EDI
- **Design and adapt buildings** to be inclusive

### Progress this year

- 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.
- 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.
- While the majority of colleagues completed EDI e-learning, average completion rates across the five mandatory packages fell to 78.6% compared with 86.6% at the same point (Q4) in 2021/22. Work is underway to review why some people might be less engaged with this type of learning and to look at consolidating modules where possible.



- The National Fire Chiefs Council's (NFCC's) Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services, with its principle of 'equality, diversity and inclusion', is now promoted alongside the Service's own Core Values. Workshops on the Code were held for all fire staff and a mandatory e-learning module was created for all colleagues, to reinforce the behaviours and attitudes that contribute to a safe and inclusive workplace culture.
- The wide range of advice, support and information available to colleagues experiencing difficulties inside or outside work have been promoted for a number of years through the Service's 'Who Do I Turn To?' campaign. This was reinvigorated during 2022/23 following the publication of the London Fire Brigade Cultural Review.
- Construction of a new Crewe Community Fire Station began, replacing the outdated station which had limited facilities for female firefighters and members of the public with disabilities, wishing to use the community rooms. The new station, due for completion in October 2023, will feature improved changing facilities and individual washrooms for firefighters and a Changing Places WC in the community space.
- Courteous and respectful use of changing rooms and toilet facilities was promoted in a campaign developed in consultation with operational staff and representative bodies.





## Our people

**Aim:** to become an employer of choice and attract, recruit and retain the very best talent. The workforce will represent Cheshire's diverse communities and staff will feel safe, valued and able to be themselves. They will feel supported to reach their full potential.

### Objectives:

- Be creative and innovative in the approach to **positive action recruitment**
- Monitor **workforce demographic data** to target recruitment at underrepresented groups
- **Review policies and procedures** to reinforce a safe and inclusive culture
- Develop mechanisms for people to **make suggestions or report concerns**
- **Educate colleagues** to better understand EDI issues
- Promote **mentoring, reverse mentoring and coaching**
- Develop **staff networks and equality champions**

### Progress this year

The workforce continues to become ever more diverse, with small but steady increases in representation among most minority groups.

The table on page 8 provides a snapshot of information, with more detailed data available in the latest [EDI monitoring update](#) from March 2023.



	2021/22	2022/23	Change
Total staff in Service	848	861	+13
Total women in Service	190 (22.4%)	200 (23.2%)	+10 (+0.8%)
Total firefighters and officers	670	663	-7
Female firefighters and officers	61 (7.2%)	69 (10.4%)	+8 (3.2%)
Total fire staff	178	198	+20
Female fire staff	129 (72.4%)	131 (66.1%)	+2 (-6.3%)
Colleagues from minority ethnic communities	40 (4.7%)	39 (4.5%)	-1 (-0.2%)
Colleagues stating a religion other than Christian	36 (4.2%)	35 (4.1%)	-1 (-0.1%)
Colleagues declaring a disability	29 (3.4%)	34 (3.9%)	+5 (+0.5%)
Lesbian, gay or bisexual colleagues*	30 (3.5%)	38 (4.4%)	+4 (+0.9%)

\*Trans (T) colleagues are not included in this category, which refers to sexual orientation and not gender identity. The number of trans staff in the Service is too small to disclose.

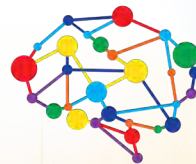
- More women than ever before work for the Service and the number of female firefighters or fire officers stands at its highest ever. This is in spite of the overall number of operational staff decreasing slightly, principally as a result of on-call staff leaving the Service. The Service's success in recruiting operational women is bettered in percentage terms only by the three large English metropolitan fire and rescue services.
- 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.
- Positive action activity to support underrepresented groups through the recruitment process included engaging women and ethnically diverse applicants who missed out on roles in the last recruitment process, two taster days at the Training Centre in Winsford attracting 60 people and buddying and mentorship from 30 existing firefighters.





- The return of the communications and human resources teams to the Service helped boost overall numbers of women in fire staff roles. This in turn will have a positive impact on reducing the gender pay gap, which for 2022/23 will be reported later in the year.
- 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.
- Ethnic minority or minority religious representation remains static and slightly below that of the Cheshire population in general according to newly published Census data. The REACH (race, ethnicity and cultural heritage) staff inclusion network continues to lead work to engage diverse community groups through positive action.
- There was an increase in the number of colleagues declaring a disability. The launch of the new Divergence inclusion network for neurodiverse colleagues and the development of the Service's first neurodiversity, disability and reasonable adjustments policy this year are therefore timely.

- The Service continues to be an employer of choice for LGB people. Furthermore, more colleagues than ever before (81.8%) feel comfortable declaring their sexual orientation on the workforce system. A number of new recruits have become involved in the well-established Firepride staff inclusion network.
- The Head of Communications and Engagement completed masters research on motivations and barriers to engaging in staff networks. Work towards the recommendations has begun, including redefining the Service's expectations of the networks' purpose, appointing senior sponsors for each network, clearer role descriptions for network co-chairs and making meetings and events more accessible.
- All four networks continued to regain momentum following the pause caused by the pandemic. Divergence ran its first formal meetings for colleagues and agreed terms of reference. Firepride worked with fire stations to fly rainbow flags during LGBT History Month and to attend eight local pride events across Cheshire. Limitless ran another successful International Women's Day event and continued to raise awareness of issues such as menopause. REACH helped the Service celebrate religious and cultural festivals including Eid al-Fitr and Black History Month.



Divergence







## Our communities

**Aim:** To ensure everyone receives the very best service and their needs are understood. Frontline colleagues will understand how EDI impacts their work and carry out their duties with respect, empathy and compassion. A person-centred approach to prevention will keep children, young people and adults at risk safe. Protection teams will know how EDI impacts technical fire safety.

### Objectives:

- **Consult and engage** a diverse range of people when developing plans
- **Communicate** in ways that connect with all communities
- Undertake **data-led risk and analysis** to target our services
- Consider the longer-term impact of **Covid-19** on risk
- Consider the EDI implications from **Grenfell Tower and the Fire Reform Programme**
- Develop **function-specific EDI guidance** to enable colleagues to understand how it affects their role
- Be visible **EDI champions and role models** in the community

### Progress this year

- The way in which Safe and Well visits, the Service's flagship community safety intervention, are targeted was refined to include not only people over the age of 65 who are most at risk of fire in the home, but also younger adults who live alone or have young families. Addresses for firefighters and prevention colleagues to visit are identified through increasingly sophisticated risk analysis, taking into account age, health, disability and socio-economic status.
- The Prevention Team has engaged adults and children who have relocated to Cheshire from Afghanistan and Ukraine about keeping safe at home and on the roads. This included running a special safety event at Safety Central, the Service's life skills education centre.

- The Service monitors participation in its children and young people's programmes, which in 2022/23 restarted in full following the pandemic. While the majority of participants were boys and young men, who are statistically most at risk of accidental injury, nearly half of Respect participants and a quarter of fire cadets are girls and young women. They have been highlighted as the potential firefighters and fire staff of the future. Over a third of Prince's Trust team members are female and nearly six in 10 young people completing the programme declared some form of disability. The number of children and young people from minority ethnic backgrounds taking part in all three programmes is broadly representative of the local population.
- The way in which the Prince's Trust Team Programme is delivered continues to be adapted to the learning needs of its young people, who include those with neurodiverse conditions and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. This year several teams also received LGBT+ awareness training as the programme continues to see ever-increasing diversity of gender identity and sexual orientation among its participants.
- In May the Chief Fire Officer, prevention team and EDI Advisor attended a special cultural event at Chester Town Hall to commemorate World War II Polish airmen. This provided an opportunity to engage with the local Polish community and hand out Polish language fire safety materials.
- The Service remains a keen supporter of the White Ribbon Campaign, aimed at raising awareness of violence perpetrated by men against women and girls. Chester Fire Station's Blue Watch once again suspended a giant ribbon in the city centre to mark White Ribbon Day in November and support Chester Women's Aid with fundraising.
- Firefighter Abi Van-Loon from Limitless took part in Storyhouse Women, an event organised by the Chester-based arts centre to showcase female role models in professions stereotypically undertaken by men.
- REACH represented the Service at the Warrington Mela, a colourful celebration of Hindu culture held in September. Safety literature and information about career opportunities was given out to festivalgoers. REACH also visited a number of non-Christian places of worship throughout the county during the year.
- Michelle Davis and her colleagues from Warrington Fire Station supported the Warrington Wolves Women's Rugby team in April, utilising the Positive Action Toolkit which had recently been produced. They attended a number of the women's games, as well as the Fire Service Sevens competition, which they presented the trophy for at the final game later in the year.







## Our partners

**Aim:** To develop a broad network of active, meaningful partnerships to engage with marginalised groups and understand their needs. The Service will share experiences with other fire and rescue services and public organisations and seek out examples of notable practice elsewhere.

## Objectives:

- Develop relationships with **new and emerging specialist EDI groups**
- Undertake **external benchmarking** to ensure best practice is followed
- **Organise events** to provide learning opportunities for staff, partners and the community
- Be active and influential members of the **National Fire Chiefs Council's EDI network**
- Work with partners to **target safety messages and promote vacancies**

## Progress this year

- The Service was proud to host the 2022 Asian Fire Services Association (AFSA) Winter Conference at Chester Racecourse. Attracting more than 200 delegates from Fire and Rescue Services across the UK, 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.
- 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.



- 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.
- Four female firefighters and two fire staff took part in the annual Women in the Fire Service (WFS) Development Weekend at the Fire Service College. This provided an opportunity to network with other women from across the sector, hone operational skills and develop confidence and resilience. The Service also supported WFS’s fundraising walk in Snowdonia later in the year.
- The independent cultural review of London Fire Brigade, led by Nazir Afzal and published the day after the AFSA Winter Conference, and a national review by HMICFRS published in March generated a series of recommendations underlining the importance of a strategic commitment to EDI. In response, the Service produced a combined action plan to review its own performance in relation to culture and inclusion, to be progressed during 2023/24.
- The NFCC published a new EDI Model of Maturity, a tool to enable fire and rescue services to evaluate their capacity and capability to foster a safe and inclusive culture. An initial self-assessment by a small stakeholder group was undertaken and areas of improvement will be considered in the development of the next EDI strategy.





# Looking forward

The coming year, 2023/24, is not only the final year of this EDI Strategy, but also the final year of the Service's current Integrated Risk Management Plan 2021-24. This provides an exciting opportunity to develop the next EDI strategy in tandem with the new Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) for 2024-28, for the first time. The aim will be to agree over the coming months refreshed EDI objectives that directly support the delivery of CRMP projects, particularly those relating to prevention, protection and workplace culture.

In addition, work will continue towards outstanding objectives from this Strategy, 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
- 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
- pausing participation in the Stonewall WEI to enable a **newly reinvigorated Firepride network** to re-establish itself and properly consider recommendations from the last WEI assessment
- implementing outstanding recommendations from the 2022 research into staff networks by **producing and agreeing a new handbook for chairs, members and senior sponsors**
- **revitalising positive action engagement in the community**, with a refresh of the Service's mobile recruitment pod and each fire station being set an objective to run at least one taster event with diverse community groups
- **reviewing the latest census data** to compare and contrast representation in the workforce with the local population, to help set recruitment objectives and better target specific communities.

# One team, many **SUPERPOWERS**



**SAVING LIVES    CHANGING LIVES    PROTECTING LIVES**

