

# CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

**MEETING OF:** PERFORMANCE AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE  
**DATE:** 11<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2024  
**REPORT OF:** HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT  
**AUTHOR:** ROSIE SAXON

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**SUBJECT:** EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION  
ANNUAL REPORT 2023/2024

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## Purpose of Report

1. The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Annual Report provides an update on progress during 2023/24 towards its 2021-2024 EDI Strategy.

## Recommended:

- [1] that Members note the report and approve it for publication on the Service's website.

## Background

2. This is the second EDI annual report to be produced after Members agreed in March 2023 to receive a single report once a year rather than six monthly. It is formatted in way that enables the reader to easily reference work against the four themes of the current EDI Strategy. We are currently in the final year of this strategy and will be developing new EDI objectives in the coming months.

## Information

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

### **Our Organisation and Our People**

4. In response to feedback from fire staff, who are predominantly women, and HMICFRS recommendations, a Wider Horizons development package was launched for non-operational colleagues. This was identified as 'innovative practice' by HMICFRS.
5. 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 English fire and rescue services.

6. 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 outnumbered men for the first time ever. The Service welcomed 10 female and seven male trainees in September 2023 and April 2024.
7. The 2022/23 Gender Pay Gap Report, published March 2024, showed continued progress in reducing the disparity between average pay for men and women in the Service. The gap has more than halved to 8.57% compared with 18.9% the year before and 24.6% in 2019. 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**

8. On-call Crew Manager Tom Ladds attended the Warrington Guru Nanak Guwdara Sikh temple alongside the EDI Advisor and one of the co-chairs of the REACH network to deliver a first aid demonstration and engage with the community. Safety issues and barriers to recruitment for the attendees at the temple were discussed positively.
9. The Service applied to join the Top 50 Inclusive Employers Index, a prestigious benchmark that represents all strands of diversity and inclusion and is run by the well-recognised organisation, Inclusive Companies, based in Liverpool. The Service placed 50<sup>th</sup> in the list, which is an achievement to have been in the top 50 of over 200 applicants in the first year of applying, and also gives room to move up the list in the future.

### **Future activity**

10. For the final year of the current EDI strategy, there are several priorities to focus on, including:
  - Publishing the Service's first Workplace Adjustments Policy, together with supporting guidance for colleagues;
  - Finalising simplified guidance and resources for colleagues undertaking EIAs on new projects and policies, in line with the NFCC EIA Toolkit. Offering training in completing EIAs and creating a single, easy-to-navigate repository where completed EIAs can be viewed and updated; and
  - 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.

## **Financial Implications**

11. EDI activities undertaken by the Service are supported by a dedicated budget within the communications and engagement cost centre.

## **Legal Implications**

12. The publication of the EDI Annual Report demonstrates openness and transparency as required under the public sector duty within the Equality Act 2010.

## **Equality and Diversity Implications**

13. The report concerns equality and diversity matters.

## **Environmental Implications**

14. 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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