

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: PERFORMANCE AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE
DATE: 28TH FEBRUARY 2018
REPORT OF: DIRECTOR OF TRANSFORMATION
AUTHOR: MELANIE HOCKENHULL

SUBJECT: EQUALITY AND INCLUSION UPDATE
REVIEW

Purpose of Report

1. To provide an overview of key equality and inclusion developments within the Service, and the recent progress made against the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan.

Recommended: That

- [1] Members note the progress to date and highlight any issues for further discussion or clarification.

Background

2. Under the Equality Act 2010, public sector organisations including Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service have a duty to: eliminate discrimination; advance equality of opportunity; and foster good relations between different groups (“public sector equality duty”).
3. In order to fulfill the public sector equality duty, the Service currently has in place an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (‘the Strategy’) for the period 2017-2020. The Strategy includes an associated Equality Action Plan, which will be updated annually in April and approved by the Service’s Equality Steering Group.
4. The purpose of the Strategy is to provide strategic direction and a set of clear and challenging aims for the Service to ensure progress is made. The Strategy incorporates the wider notion of inclusion to welcome and celebrate diversity within the community. It also aims for the Service to be an employer of choice. The Action Plan sets out the actions, targets and timescales required to meet the objectives in the Strategy.
5. Progress against the Action Plan is continuous and is monitored on a Quarterly basis at the Equality Steering Group, which is chaired by the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive who holds overall responsibility for overseeing equality, diversity and inclusion in the Service.
6. The Action Plan also takes into account aspects of the Fire Reform programme, and specifically the Home Office’s continual reference to the

lack of diversity in the operational workforces of fire and rescue services. The Action Plan strives to assist the Service to attract a broader range of staff, and ensure that its operational workforce in particular reflects the local community so that it can capitalise on the benefits of a more diverse workforce.

Update and Information

Addressing disproportionately in the workforce

7. In 2018, the Service will embark upon its third round of wholetime recruitment in as many years. In order to increase diversity in new recruits, the Service has established a Positive Action Working Group responsible to the Equality Steering Group. This Group is tasked to promote positive action campaigns (as permitted under the Equality Act 2010) across the Service and ensure that appropriate support is given to stations and departments to deliver events and campaigns. Particular aspects to note include: an earlier start to positive action campaigns to increase the probability of attracting a more diverse cohort of applicants; development of fitness plans and activities to support all applicants but particularly women to achieve the required fitness standards; and a detailed toolkit with communications resources to support stations in delivering events.
8. When running a wholetime recruitment campaign, fire and rescue services often restrict applicants to a postcode that is within the boundary that they cover. A conscious decision not to do this has been made within Cheshire to try to attract a more diverse pool of applicants. This has generated results but this also comes with the challenge of retention.
9. In order not only to attract, but retain diverse recruits, the importance of effective onboarding and support in the early stages of employment has to be recognised and as such the Service has put a lot of effort into ensuring that members of under-represented groups are adequately supported on joining the Service. Examples of the support provided include the continued introduction of staff network groups which are available to all staff but specifically to members from under-represented groups as follows: Firepride and Firepride Allies are well established; Limitless, the Service's women's network, was established in 2017; and the Service is also well linked into the Asian Fire Service Association, a national network for black and minority ethnic (BAME) members of staff. Mentors, coaches and buddies are also available for all members of staff, with explicit recognition that employees from under-represented groups can benefit from support in this respect from members of the same group.
10. The Service recently took the decision to enhance its maternity and adoption pay provisions, which should in particular support the attraction and retention of female members of staff as it provides the best

maternity provision across the fire sector. This was approved by the Fire Authority in September 2017.

11. Finally, the Service recognises the importance of ensuring that under-represented groups are able to progress. As such, the Service takes care to ensure that training and development programmes are deliberately inclusive of under-represented groups and that promotion processes are fair and objective.

Stonewall Workplace Equality Index

12. In January, it was announced that the Service had achieved 4th position in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index, which is used by employers to assess their achievements and progress on LGBT inclusion in the workplace. Over 400 employers entered the Index this year from a range of public and private industries.
13. This is a superb achievement and is the highest ranking the Service has achieved since it has participated in the Index. This achievement represents a jump from 8th place in 2017, and makes the Service both the top performing emergency service and North West employer. The aim is to build on this success throughout the year.
14. February marks LGBT History Month and for the first year rainbow flags will be flown from the majority of fire stations, signaling an overt commitment to LGBT inclusion.

Staff Survey

15. The results of the recent staff survey, which has previously been reported to Members at Staffing Committee, show encouraging signs as regards equality, diversity and inclusion. The overall engagement score on equality and diversity is 72%, the same score as in the previous staff survey in 2015.
16. In respect of reported instances of bullying and harassment the staff survey showed a reduction of 2% from the last staff survey with a total of 12% of respondents stating that they had experienced some form of inappropriate conduct. As there are typically very low numbers of formal dignity at work complaints over the course of a year, these types of complaints, which can often be based on perception, can be quite hard to quantify and resolve. The Service is however in the process of reviewing the reporting options available to staff in respect of bullying and harassment, with a view to launching a high profile communications and awareness campaign and the introduction of a first contact scheme during 2018.
17. Given the significant changes and challenges that the Service has encountered over the course of the last few years, it is recognised that staff engagement is an important aspect of building and maintaining a fair, transparent and inclusive culture. With this in mind the approach to

reviewing the staff survey and the development of actions and solutions for this year was changed to ensure that all staff had the opportunity to discuss survey results and become more involved in the development of proposals and actions.

Equality and Diversity Recruitment Review

18. Merseyside Internal Audit Agency (MIAA) have recently completed an audit concerned with Equality and Diversity: Recruitment, which is on the agenda for the same meeting. Overall, the review is positive and the Service will take confidence from it.

Next Steps

19. The following provides an update on a key piece of upcoming work relating to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Recue Services ('HMICFRS')

20. It is expected that equality, diversity and inclusion will run as a key theme throughout the inspection and there will also be a specific emphasis within the People section that relates directly to how well the organisation ensures that fairness and diversity prevails across all of its activities, policies and processes. In preparation for the inspection which is expected in the summer of 2018, the Transformation team and the Equality and Inclusion Officer specifically are collating a wide range of evidence to highlight and demonstrate that equality and inclusion is embedded within the culture of the organisation. Work is ongoing and Members will be updated as appropriate.
21. Members may recall that the Service had intended to be re-accredited under the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework ("the Framework") in November 2016. The Framework is currently being reviewed and given the above developments, the decision was taken to focus on preparing well for HMICFRS rather than seeking re-accreditation under the Framework. The Framework however continues to be used as an internal benchmarking tool.

Financial Implications

22. It is not envisaged that any of the above activities currently underway will have significant financial impacts. Any costs associated with delivery, such as holding events and planning campaigns, should be covered by departmental budgets.

Legal Implications

23. As referred to in the 'Background' section, the above activities will help evidence the Service's commitment to the Equality Act 2010, and in particular to the public sector equality duty.

Equality and Diversity Implications

24. Equality and diversity implications have been discussed throughout the main body of the report.

Environmental Implications

25. None envisaged.