

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: PERFORMANCE AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE
DATE: 27TH FEBRUARY 2019
REPORT OF: DIRECTOR OF TRANSFORMATION
AUTHOR: MELANIE HOCKENHULL

SUBJECT: EQUALITY AND INCLUSION UPDATE

Purpose of Report

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

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 is 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 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. At the January 2019 meeting of the Equality Steering Group, significant time was taken to review the Action Plan and ensure actions were being appropriately managed and progressed.

6. The purpose of this report is not to go through each action in the Action Plan in turn, but instead to provide an overview of key projects in 2018 and 2019 to date, and highlight important future work.

Update and Information

Stonewall Workplace Equality Index

7. In January 2019, it was announced that the Service had achieved 3rd position in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index 2019. This Index is used by employers to assess their achievements and progress on LGBT inclusion in the workplace and in service delivery. Over 400 employers entered the Index this year from a range of public and private industries.
8. This the highest ranking the Service has achieved since it has participated in the Index. This achievement represents an improvement from 4th place in 2018, and makes the Service not only the top performing emergency service but also the top performing public sector employer. The aim is to build on this success throughout the year.
9. February marks LGBT History Month and for the second consecutive year, rainbow flags will be flown not just from Sadler Road, but also from the majority of fire stations. This signals an overt commitment to LGBT inclusion to the Service's local communities.

Addressing disproportionality in the workforce

10. In 2018, the Service completed its third consecutive round of wholetime recruitment, with new recruits starting with the Service in January 2019. A significant amount of work had taken place in advance of this recruitment process to encourage applications from under-represented groups, with the aim of increasing the diversity of the new recruits. This work was progressed and monitored through the Positive Action Working Group, which was chaired by the Equality and Inclusion Officer and was responsible to the Equality Steering Group. Members were drawn from across the Service and the Joint Corporate Services, including: Transformation; Service Delivery; Human Resources; and Corporate Communications. As such, the Service was able to provide a joined up approach to positive action work.
11. Resulting campaigns and activities included: working with local community groups and attending community events to raise awareness of wholetime opportunities amongst under-represented groups; arranging taster days and fitness session on stations, which were promoted specifically to under-represented groups; and promoting the Service's buddying scheme to encourage diverse applicants to talk to current firefighters about the application process and working for the Service.
12. As a result of this work, the Service has seen an increase in the diversity of its new recruits, with a particular increase in women. A full breakdown

of equality monitoring for the wholetime recruitment campaign will be reported as normal to the August meeting of this committee.

13. The Service aims to build on the success of this work in future recruitment campaigns.
14. As reported last year, the Service continues to carry out effective onboarding and support for under-represented groups as they join the Service. Staff network groups continue to be an important part of this process. In particular, work is underway to strengthen Limitless, the Service's women's network. WM Hannah Caulfield has recently taken over as the Service's women's champion and chair of Limitless and is working hard to strengthen the Service's support for women, including: arranging a training and development day for female staff on International Women's Day; developing mentoring and buddying opportunities; and arranging regular networking events.
15. 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.

White Ribbon Accreditation

16. In January 2019, the Service became a White Ribbon accredited organisation. This accreditation scheme aims to tackle domestic abuse and recognises that public sector organisations can achieve more than individuals can alone when it comes to tackling domestic violence. Becoming accredited means that the Service can effectively marshal resources and build on existing projects and initiatives to challenge domestic abuse and make a genuine difference. To do so, the Service has developed an action plan, which is overseen by the Equality Steering Group.
17. The Service will use this accreditation to tackle domestic abuse in all its forms, not just against women. As such, the Service is also supporting Open the Door Cheshire, a campaign designed to signpost all victims of domestic abuse to the appropriate support.
18. On 24th November 2018, otherwise known as White Ribbon day, the Service emphatically showed its intention to supporting the White Ribbon campaign by displaying a 60-foot white ribbon from an aerial ladder platform. This was in conjunction with a local community group, Chester Women's Aid, and helped raise awareness of the issue of domestic abuse.

Who Do I Turn To?

19. In November 2018, the Service launched its '*Who Do I Turn To?*' campaign to reinforce and remind staff of the support available to them

in the event that they experience concerns or worries at work. The launch coincided with national anti-bullying week, which ran from 12-16 November 2018. There is currently a dedicated section on the Service's intranet signposting employees to support around three areas: promoting health and wellbeing; taking care of personal safety; and reporting inappropriate conduct. This has been supplemented by campaign posters on all sites and messages on employee communication channels.

20. The campaign was launched first and foremost because it is the right thing to do, but it also helps address an action arising out of the 2017 staff engagement corporate action plan. In support of the campaign, the Service is currently providing Dignity at Work training to non-operational support staff managers and to operational managers to ensure that they are equipped to recognise and take the appropriate action regarding dignity at work issues.

Next Steps

21. The following provides an update on key pieces of upcoming work relating to equality, diversity and inclusion.

HMICFRS

22. Members will be aware of the Service's inspection report from HMICFRS. Section 3 of the report, which considered how well the service looks after its people, included analysis of how the Service ensured fairness and promoted diversity. The Service received an area for improvement in this section, specifically in relation to: how well leaders act on and make changes as a result of feedback from staff; and how communications between staff and senior managers can be improved. The Service is currently developing plans to address this area for improvement.

Recruitment communications campaign

23. As detailed above, one of the priorities for the Service is to increase the diversity of its workforce. The Service has a long term aspiration that 50% of new recruits will be women. In order to achieve this aspiration, the Service is developing an innovative communications campaign to encourage under-represented groups, particularly women and members of BAME and LGBT communities, to join the Service.
24. In order to best address delivery of this campaign, the Service has engaged an external communications company. Initial designs have been developed and the Service is committed to working with staff networks specifically and employees more widely to ensure the campaign is forward-thinking and will attract members of under-represented groups.

25. In addition, members will be aware that the Service has taken the decision to expand the current partnership arrangements with Warrington Wolves Foundation to include sponsorship of Warrington Wolves' rugby league open Age Women's, Girls under 16's, Girls under 14's and Girls under 12's Teams. This unique initiative compliments the Service's long term aspiration of encouraging women to join the organisation.
26. The Service's cap badge logo will also appear on the playing jerseys of the Physical Disability RL Team, the Learning Difficulties RL team and the Wheelchair RL Team. Again, this demonstrates the Service's commitment to promoting diversity and inclusion across Cheshire.

Financial Implications

27. There will be costs associated with the recruitment communications campaign, which will be suitably addressed and incorporated into appropriate budgets. It is not envisaged that any of the other 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

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

Equality and Diversity Implications

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

Environmental Implications

30. None envisaged.