

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: PERFORMANCE AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE
DATE: 26TH FEBRUARY 2020
REPORT OF: DIRECTOR OF TRANSFORMATION
AUTHOR: BENJI EVANS

SUBJECT: EQUALITY, DIVERSITY 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. A new strategy will be developed for the period 2021-2024 and will be submitted for review and approval to Members at a Fire Authority meeting later this year. The purpose of the Strategy will be to provide strategic direction and a set of clear and challenging aims for the Service to ensure continued progress. The Strategy will also incorporate the wider notion of inclusion to welcome and celebrate diversity within the community and to establish Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service as an employer of choice.
5. Progress against the Action Plan for the current Strategy has been 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 2020 meeting of the Equality Steering Group, significant time was taken to review the Action Plan and ensure actions were being appropriately managed and progressed.

Key Areas of Focus and Accomplishments over last 6 Months

Stonewall Workplace Equality Index

6. In January 2020, the Service learned that it had secured the position of 3rd in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index 2019 for the second consecutive year. This remains the highest ranking that the Service has achieved since participating in the index.
7. Stonewall have advised that the Service's overall score was higher this year and that significant progress was evident. The position in the index however remained the same.
8. On the strength of the Stonewall result, the Service continues to be the top performing emergency service for the 5th consecutive year, the top performing employer in the North West region for the 2nd year. This year the Service was also included in the Top Trans employer list.
9. Every year Stonewall also recognises individuals for their personal contributions and commitment to LGBT inclusion in the workplace. The Service was proud to learn that Mark Cashin, Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, was awarded the 'Top Performing Leader' for the North West Region. This is a genuine reflection of Mark's personal commitment as a leader and highlights the importance of senior sponsorship.
10. The Service's work around LGBT inclusion and its investment in Stonewall has delivered tangible improvements. There has been an overall increase in the number of staff identifying as LGBT from 2.9% to 3.1% currently. Within the Service there has also been a reduction in the number of staff who are unwilling to declare their sexual orientation. A year ago 21.7% chose not to declare whereas the current percentage is 19.4%.

HMICFRS

11. Following feedback from the HMICFRS and a "requires improvement" rating in the area of ensuring fairness and promoting diversity, a lot of work has been focused in this area. This has been specifically in relation to how leaders act on making changes as a result of staff feedback and how communications between staff and managers can be improved.
12. In response to this the Service has engaged more directly with staff and sought comprehensive feedback from staff using various methods. A communications survey was undertaken to understand how staff wanted to communicate and the Service undertook another service wide staff

engagement survey in Summer 2019. Senior staff have also engaged with all staff through a programme of visits which has ensured that either a Brigade Manager and/or a member of the service management team has visited every station, watch and department. Visibility has improved significantly and staff have welcomed the opportunity to meet face to face and provide direct feedback.

13. Feedback and subsequent actions are logged and reviewed by SMT and “you said we did” style communications have been published in the Green and Alert magazines to keep staff updated. Recently the second cohort of the Staff Engagement Forum was also launched which a cross section of staff from all departments to voice any concerns, share positive ideas and feedback directly to the Chief Fire Officer on a monthly basis.
14. Relevant actions have been logged on a HMICFRS Action Plan which will form part of the evidence to demonstrate progress and improvements in the forthcoming HMICFRS inspection.

Addressing disproportionality in the workforce

15. Work has continued over the last six months to encourage applications from under-represented groups, with the aim of increasing the diversity within our workforce. The focus on operational recruitment over the last six months has been on call and the Positive Action Working Group has continued to meet to develop strategies and share ideas.
16. The main areas of the Positive Action Working Group’s focus have been:
 - working with local community groups and attending community events to raise awareness of career opportunities amongst under-represented groups;
 - meeting with key representatives in education, visiting schools/colleges, arranging taster days on stations, which were approaches used to specifically target under-represented groups.
 - Promoting the Service’s buddying scheme to encourage diverse applicants to talk to current firefighters about the application process and working for the Service.
17. Further progress has also been made in respect of the 50/50 campaign which is designed specifically to highlight opportunities for under-represented groups. The poster campaign is now complete (See Appendix A) and plans are underway to use some of these graphics on service vehicles specifically the recruitment pod.
18. As a result of this work, the Service continues to see a gradual increase in the diversity of its new recruits, with a particular increase in women. Female staff make up 18.7% of the workforce which is an increase from

16.9% one year ago. We have seen a 1.1% increase in female staff working in operational positions from 6.2% to 7.3% in the past year. Females working in non-operational position has also increased by 2.5% from 59.1% to 61.6% in the past year. A full breakdown of equality monitoring data is available.

19. The Service has not seen a sufficient change with regards to staff from a BAME background. Our workforce has remained 1.8% BAME over the past year. We have seen a slight reduction in White British staff from 93.3% from 93.5%, although this is a result of people not stating any particular category. There is certainly a need for positive action with regards to BAME.
20. This month marks LGBT History Month and for the second consecutive year, rainbow flags are being flown not just from Sadler Road, but also from the fire stations. This signals an overt commitment to LGBT inclusion to the Service's local communities.

Staff Network Groups

21. The Limitless group has played a key role in raising awareness of gender related topics, organising events and creating a platform for female staff to voice suggestions that can help improve the Service. The membership has grown over the last six months and there appears to be a genuine sense of purpose and mutual support. Recent activities include a personal development event in December that was facilitated by the Director of Transformation. This event was very well attended and was followed by the first Limitless Christmas social event. The network is working hard to strengthen the Service's support for women, developing mentoring and buddying opportunities; visiting schools/colleges and arranging regular networking opportunities.
22. The Service has recently renewed its membership with the national 'Women in the Fire Service UK' and a female firefighter has been nominated to attend national network events as the Service's Women's Champion. This enables the Service to access training resources, guidance documents and best practice regarding gender equality.
23. The Service attended six pride events last Summer. This included attendance at all five pride events in Cheshire, namely Chester, Nantwich, Crewe, Congleton and Macclesfield. Like previous years, we attended the large scale pride event in Manchester. Each event enabled the Service to engage with thousands of community members and showcased our support to LGBT people.
24. The FirePride network also organised and hosted a "Proud to Provide" conference in June 2019 at the Storeyhouse in Chester. This event was supported by Stonewall and very well attended by approximately 100 delegates from a range of local organisations, other FRS, Home Office and other emergency service partners. The keynote speaker was Ruth

Hunt from Stonewall and the feedback from the event was overwhelmingly positive.

25. Work is underway to develop a men's network within the Service. This is to encourage men to talk and support each other with a particular emphasis on mental health which ties in closely with the inclusion agenda in respect of disability. Currently a similar network exists with Warrington Wolves called "Off-load" which is designed to enable men to speak about their feelings and mental health issues in a safe and confidential environment. The development of the men's network is being spearheaded by the Service's Mental Health and Wellbeing Advisor.

Policy Development

26. The Service has recently developed a 'Menopause' policy which has helped raise awareness of how the Menopause and the associated symptoms can affect all staff directly or indirectly.
27. The Paternity policy has been reviewed to extend the offering. A working group was established to ensure that relevant stakeholders from within the Service were given the opportunity to help shape the proposals. This policy is due to launch within the service in March.

White Ribbon & Domestic Violence Support

28. Last year, the Service became a White Ribbon accredited organisation to help tackle domestic abuse. In November the Service emphatically showed its support by having a visible presence on White Ribbon day in Chester by displaying a 60-foot white ribbon from an aerial platform.
29. At the White Ribbon event the Chief Fire Officer also pledged his support for the "He for She" campaign which is an international initiative that encourages males to support their female colleagues in the workplace.

Priorities for next 6 Months

HMICFRS

30. The Inspectors will be revisiting the Service for a discovery week in March 2020 and our official inspection will take place in April 2020. Prior to the formal inspection the Service's HMICFRS Liaison Officer will meet with the Equality and Inclusion Officer for a comprehensive briefing on the Service's approach to being an inclusive and welcoming employer and service provider.

Recruitment communications and Attraction Strategy

31. A microsite will be designed for the 50/50 campaign which will become the landing page for the section of the website that relates to operational recruitment. The microsite will have the same look and feel of the poster

campaign which will challenge stereotypes of a traditional firefighter. The microsite will also highlight the tangible benefits of working for the Service.

32. Further work will be done to expand the sponsorship agreements currently in place in respect of female recruitment. Currently the Service sponsors ladies' rugby teams at Warrington Wolves, Widnes Vikings and University of Chester. The partnership arrangements being explored are with Warrington Wolves' open age women's, girls under 16's, girls under 14's and girls under 12's Teams.
33. The Service's cap badge logo will also appear on the playing jerseys of the physical disability team, the learning disability team and the club's wheelchair rugby team.
34. All partnerships have enabled the Service to gain additional exposure which has helped the Service target female audiences and other underrepresented groups.

EDI Education and Training Review

35. The service will be reviewing the current EDI training offer and explore whether the training packages are still fit for purpose.
36. For the coming year, it has been agreed that the Service will continue to use an external education supplier to provide E-Learning packages that staff can access remotely. Although the online method provides flexibility, the Equality and Inclusion Officer will also develop bespoke equality training that will be delivered to staff face-to-face.

Staff Networks

37. In addition to the proposed man's network, discussions have started which explore the possibility of developing two further staff networks within the Service; one network to support staff with a disability and/or long term health condition; and a second network with a BAME focus. The benefit of the additional networks is to create a platform to bring staff with an interest in the specific areas of equality and inclusion. Through these networks, we are able to critically review all aspects of our work and identify practical ways we can promote inclusion for people from underrepresented groups.
38. The Limitless network will be hosting a 'Each for Equal' Conference on Friday 6th March 2020 to celebrate International Women's Day. This will provide a valuable platform to launch the new menopause policy and to explore the theme of the menopause in more detail.
39. Plans are being made to host a second "Proud to Provide" conference at Chester Storeyhouse in June 2020. Themes and speakers are currently under review, but the event aims to support internal staff members and also attract some external partners.

Equality Impact Assessments (EIA)

40. The service has conducted various Equality Impact Assessment as part of the proposals outlined in the draft Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). The EIA have enabled the service to consider and assess all equality and inclusion factors that may emerge as a result of the proposed plans or changes. Other EIA will be conducted with various departments in the coming months to ensure our current practices are purposeful and inclusive to the communities we serve.
41. Consideration is being given to broadening the scope of future EIA's to incorporate wider impacts such as wellbeing.

Financial Implications

42. During the 2019 budget bidding process, a successful pitch was made for the EDI function to have a dedicated budget within the Transformation department. Previously all non salary related funding was combined in a budget held by the Joint Communications Department. The new arrangement will promote more ownership and better budget monitoring.

Legal Implications

43. 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

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

Environmental Implications

45. The Service is currently undertaking some modernisation work to four of its fire and rescue stations, so Equality Impact Assessments have been conducted for each site to highlight all equality and inclusion considerations that will benefit all stakeholders.

Appendix A – 50/50 campaign posters