

# CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

**MEETING OF:** PERFORMANCE AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE  
**DATE:** 2<sup>ND</sup> SEPTEMBER 2020  
**REPORT OF:** DIRECTOR OF TRANSFORMATION  
**AUTHOR:** BENJI EVANS

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**SUBJECT:** EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ANNUAL  
REPORT 2019-20

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## Purpose of Report

1. To provide an overview of key equality, diversity and inclusion developments within the Service and to highlight upcoming work.

## Recommended: That

- [1] members note the report 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.
4. A new strategy will be developed for the period 2021-2024 and will be submitted for review and approval to Members in Spring 2021. 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 is made. 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 previous Action Plan is monitored on a quarterly basis at each 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. The new action plan will be presented to the Equality Steering Group in October 2020 and this will include some standing items which will be transferred from the previous action plan.

## Key Accomplishments over last 6 Months

### Stonewall Workplace Equality Index

6. In February 2020, the Service learned that it had retained the rank of third in the Stonewall Top 100 Employers list for the second year running. CFRS is also the UK's most inclusive emergency service and Top NW employer in terms LGBT for the fifth year running. At the Stonewall awards in February the Service also achieved other recognition in respect of the Fire Pride network and support to Trans employees. Mark Cashin, CFO also received the award of North West Senior Champion of the Year.
7. In April 2020, the service was reassigned a new account manager from Stonewall – Ruby Wong, and an introductory meeting was organised between the account manager, the CFO, the Director of Transformation and the E&I Officer. The E&I Officer has since had monthly meetings with Ruby and other colleagues at Stonewall to access the latest information and webinars that have replaced physical conferences that have been cancelled due to the COVID pandemic.
8. In May 2020, Stonewall announced that following feedback, and in response to the challenges presented by the lockdown restrictions, the 2020 Stonewall Workplace Equality Index had been deferred for 12 months. In July, the service received the new WEI criteria for 2021 and work has now commenced to capture new evidence for the extended 2021 submission.
9. The Service's work around LGBTQ+ inclusion and its investment in Stonewall has continued to deliver tangible improvements. Since the previous meeting, there has been a further increase in the number of staff identifying as LGBT from 3.1% to 3.3% compared to last year. The service has also seen 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 19.7%.
10. This is evidence that all the positive work around LGBTQ+ inclusion continues to help our aspiration of supporting LGBTQ+ staff within the Service whilst reinforcing public perception that we are a welcoming and inclusive employer.

### Addressing disproportionality in the workforce

11. 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. Although the focus on operational recruitment over the last six months has been in respect of on call, the Positive Action Working Group have continued to meet to develop strategies and new ideas.
12. The main focus of the Positive Action Working Group has been on developing campaigns and activities in respect of:
  - 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, working specifically with charities to target under-represented groups;
  - review and identify new platforms which the service promotes careers and volunteering opportunities to target under-represented groups and the general public;
  - Promoting the Service's buddying scheme to encourage diverse applicants to talk to current firefighters about the application process and working for the Service.
13. As a result of our positive action 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 19.0% of the workforce, which has increased from 16.9% one year ago. We have seen a 1.3% increase in female staff working in operational positions from 6.4% to 7.7% in the past year. Females working in non-operational positions has increased by 2.5% from 59.1% to 61.6% in the past year. A full breakdown of equality monitoring data is available.
14. The Service has seen a slight decrease in the number of BAME staff, which is currently 4.1% from 4.4% this time last year. BAME staff in operational roles has decreased from 5.1% this time last year to 4.6%. However, the number of BAME staff in non-operational roles has increased from 1.7% to 2.2% in the past year. Staff identifying as White British has remained at 93.3% in the past year.

Based on the most recent equality monitoring data, there is a need for further positive action work to address the underrepresentation of both female and BAME staff in the workforce.

### Staff Network Groups

15. Staff network groups have continued to play an important role in recent months. The service has now developed a BAME staff network and the group held their first meeting one week before the COVID-19 lockdown occurred. Two candidates volunteered to be the joint chairs of the new network – one operational male and one non-operational female, both with many years of experience with the service. Both have also been advocates and active representatives for CFRS at many of the national events organised by ASFA.
16. The BAME network held a specific focus group to discuss #BlackLivesMatter and they have already started to discuss initial plans for events around Black History Month and other key awareness days and celebrations.
17. The Limitless group have been very active during the reporting period. The group met at Penketh Station in January and key themes were covered including Menopause, International Women's Day, mentoring & buddying, positive action, appearance policy, hygiene packs for service vehicles and social events.
18. The Limitless group played a key role in organising the International Women's Day event at Sadler Road site in March which showcased the valuable

contribution that women make across various departments and levels within the organisation. The focus of the event which was branded #EachForEqual was on Women's Health and the Menopause. Topics also included historic challenges for women in the fire and rescue service, mental health and imposter syndrome, menopause through the eyes of both males with and females and the Director of Transformation, the service's most senior female, provided an insight to her journey and career to date. The event was well received and was also very well attended by male colleagues to demonstrate their support.

19. During the COVID-19 lockdown, The Limitless group have supported each other and maintained regular contact via email and a dedicated What's App. More recently, the group organised several socially distanced 'walk and talk' meetings at rural locations in Cheshire to create a platform for staff to come together, socialise, support each other and catch up.
20. The Service had originally planned to organise a "Proud to Provide II" conference in June at the Storeyhouse in Chester. This event had to be cancelled due to COVID-19, but a virtual conference has now been planned for Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2020. The focus of the conference will be intersectionality and multiple identities. A range of high profile speakers have been carefully selected to provide insight and perspective.

#### Visibility and Awareness Days

21. During the reporting period, the service has increased LGBTQ+ visibility and increased awareness surrounding cultural and religious celebrations and festivals. The service was active during LGBT History Month, flying rainbow flags on stations and at HQ. The website and social media have been used to promote support and the Service have ensured that they have remained visible (prior to the pandemic), at LGBT events with key partners including Manchester Metropolitan University, University of Chester and Warrington Town Council.
22. The service has actively promoted all LGBT visibility days during the reporting period including Trans Visibility (February), Lesbian Visibility (March), IDAHoBiT & Pansexual Visibility (May) and Non-Binary People's Day (July).
23. The service has actively increased awareness of various religious and cultural celebrations, acknowledgements and campaigns including Passover, Ramadan, Eid, Vaisakhi/Baisakhi, Dhamma, National Windrush Day and #BlackLivesMatter. The increased awareness ties in with our approach to promote diversity and inclusion amongst our workforce and wider community.
24. The service has worked closely with local partners to raise awareness of various disability-focused themes to include Downs Syndrome Awareness Week, Learning Disability Awareness Week and Deafblind Awareness Week. For each awareness theme, educational resources have been developed to enable staff to gain knowledge that will enhance their ability to support community members with differing needs.
25. June 1<sup>st</sup> marked the start of the 2020 Pride season but as a result of the pandemic all of the local pride events were cancelled. The Service ensured that it maintained momentum however, by remaining visible in its support of its

LGBTQ+ staff and communities via social media, flying rainbow flags and engaging with staff via Firepride breakfasts and using internal communication channels to promote LGBTQ+ inclusion. Some station open day events were also used to promote LGBTQ+, particularly in areas where there would have been a local pride event – i.e. Crewe, Chester, Macclesfield, and Northwich.

### Policy Development

26. The Service launched the new 'Menopause' policy in March at the #EachForEqual International Women's Day event. This has received excellent feedback and has helped raise awareness of how the Menopause and the associated symptoms can affect all staff directly or indirectly.
27. The Paternity policy was relaunched in late Spring 2020. This has increased the provision for time off and affords more flexibility in terms of time off to accompany partners to ante-natal appointments. This policy update, which was developed in conjunction with the representative bodies has been well received.

### EDI Education and Training Review

28. The service has recently reviewed the EDI training offering which has highlighted a need to update some materials and develop new training resources. The initial priorities revolve around the creation of a new bespoke Unconscious Bias training package and a menopause awareness product that will accompany the new policy. Training will be offered via face-to-face delivery (when permitted and practicable) coupled with e-learning packages to widen access and flexibility.

### Equality Impact Assessments (EIA)

29. The service has conducted many Equality Impact Assessments during the reporting period. These include:
  - EIAs for all of the IRMP proposals pre approval for review during the consultation period.
  - EIAs in respect of the programme of modernisation with specific emphasis on four specific fire stations: Runcorn; Birchwood; Middlewich and Sandbach. This particular project provided an excellent opportunity to create case studies to highlight best practice. Case studies are very useful to include in our EDI training, showcase best practice to HMIC inspectors and to submit as part of future accreditations and benchmarking.
  - EIA's to highlight and consider risks to equality interest groups in relation to COVID-19. Multiple EIA's were completed in March to consider potential impact on the workforce in relation to changes to duty systems and an EIA was produced to consider the impact of partnership work with the NHS and potential transportation of deceased persons.

Work is ongoing in respect of developing EIAs to assess the impact of COVID-19 on the Service's workforce and communities and the information will be instrumental in the ongoing develop of the Service's recovery plans.

### Developing Community Partnerships

30. Although COVID-19 has restricted access to physically meet key community partners, every effort has been made to develop and maintain new relationships through telephone, email, and Skype technology.
31. Through the IRMP consultation process the service has also established relationships with new partners and is continuing to build networks through the construction of the community focused EIA. To date the Equality & Inclusion Officer has reached out to over 100 community partners.
32. In late Spring the service launched a colouring competition as a way of engaging with equality interest groups and in particular young people with a disability. This attracted positive engagement from groups across the county and at the appropriate time, winners and finalists will be invited to their local station to receive a certificate.
33. The Service has also invested time in attending a careers event for young people with learning disabilities at Petty Pool in Northwich and post Covid-19, a commitment has been made to explore short term work experience opportunities for these young people.

### Recruitment Communications and Attraction Strategy

34. Work is ongoing to expand the sponsorship agreements currently in place in respect of female recruitment. In addition to current sponsorship arrangements, with Warrington Wolves and Widnes Vikings, the service is also sponsoring the women's rugby team at the University of Chester. An initial expression of interest has also been made to the Service from the Crewe Alexander women's football team who are keen to promote future career opportunities.
35. Partnerships such as these have enabled the Service to gain additional exposure that has helped the Service target female audiences and other underrepresented groups.

### **Priorities for Next 6 Months**

36. The following provides an update on key pieces of upcoming work relating to equality, diversity and inclusion.
37. The vision for reform within the Home Office revolves around Professionalism, People and Governance and within this is a strong emphasis around Ethics. It is expected that over the coming months, we will gain more insight in relation to this vision. In the meantime, we need to continue to ensure that we remain open to the wider sections of the community, and understand how our networks and senior leaders can continue to be the ethical role models for change and maintaining an open and inclusive culture.

## COVID-19 Recovery Planning

38. The recent thematic staff survey will provide a valuable source of information to help identify risks and develop plans in respect of the Service's recovery plans. As with all staff surveys a specific EDI analysis will be undertaken on the results to identify any particular trends and/or concerns that will inform our recovery plans.
39. The COVID-19 EIA has ensured that risks are considered from an internal and external perspective. Extensive analysis has already been taken in respect of the national NFCC EIA and this has prompted CFRS to extend its local EIA to beyond the normal under-represented groups to incorporate wider factors such as geography, marital and civil status, and socio-economic status. The findings of the EIA and associated impacts will also be inform the services recovery planning process.
40. During the COVID-19 HMICFRS inspection, it will be important to demonstrate that we have taken an ethical and sensitive approach to our recovery planning and can demonstrate that we factored in all of the EDI considerations.

## Staff Networks

41. To maintain the momentum behind the networks there will be a renewed emphasis on the need to have strong Ally's and to maintain a regular programme of events. A Firepride event focused around the LGBT Ally's Programme has been scheduled to take place in August and a Women's Health event has been provisionally planned for September with Breast Cancer being a key focus.
42. There has been recent interest expressed in relation to establishing a disability staff network that would incorporate issues such as neurodiversity which are of importance to an increasing number of people. The Service is also looking at ways in which it can raise awareness and provide a higher level of support to staff with dyslexia.
43. Over the coming months a lot of work will be put into raising the profile of the BAME network and a host of events are being planned for October across all stations and departments to recognise Black History Month.

## #BlackLivesMatter (#BLM)

44. The #BLM campaign has put a strong emphasis on the need for the Service to be able to demonstrate what is happening from a BAME perspective and how we are able to meet the needs of the BAME community in respect of response, protection and prevention. This is an area of great focus currently within The Home Office and is likely to be a topic for scrutiny in future inspections.
45. The recent launch of the new BAME network will be instrumental in supporting this, but at the same time there needs to be an onus on allies to educate themselves on race and culture rather than it being fed back from staff who are BAME.

## Equality Impact Assessments (EIA)

46. As the planning for the delivery of the IRMP continues, it is essential that EIAs remain under review and are developed to highlight actual and potential risks to the different equality interest groups in Cheshire. EIAs will also inform staff and help mitigate, reduce and remove risks that are identified.

## Positive Action

47. In order to diversify leadership teams, the Service needs to explore what is legally and ethically permitted in respect of applying positive action to promotion processes. It is understood that under section 159 of the Equality Act 2010, this can be applied but this has not been something that the Service has previously considered or acted upon and nationally there is some nervousness around this. Work has been commissioned to research and understand the viability of applying positive action to promotion processes in addition to recruitment processes. Once the position is understood this will be tabled for discussion at a future Equality Steering Group.

## Preparation for Stonewall 2021 Submission

48. Inevitably, work will continue to ensure that CFRS remains committed to the fair and equal treatment of LGBTQ+ staff and communities. The feedback from the 2019 submission will continue to be reviewed with necessary improvements and changes being implemented to fill gaps. For example, our service will focus on intersectionality and minority identities over the next 18 months. Awareness will be raised through media campaigns, visibility days, training, educational resources, events and conferences.

## **Financial Implications**

49. During the 2019 budget bidding process, a 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 enable the Service to engage in a wider range of activities, campaigns and projects.

## **Legal Implications**

50. 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**

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

## **Environmental Implications**

52. None

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