

# CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

**MEETING OF:** PERFORMANCE AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE  
**DATE:** 24<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2021  
**AUTHOR:** DIRECTOR OF TRANSFORMATION  
BENJI EVANS

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**SUBJECT:** EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION 6-MONTH  
UPDATE REPORT 2020/21

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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. Underpinning this strategy is an action plan that is monitored on a quarterly basis at each Equality Steering Group. The Equality Steering Group is chaired by the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive who holds overall responsibility for overseeing equality, diversity and inclusion within the Service.
4. A new strategy is in the process of being developed for the period 2021-2024 which will be submitted for review and approval by Members at the Fire Authority meeting in April 2021. The Strategy will 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. Once approved, a new action plan will also be developed and presented to the Equality Steering Group for monitoring and progressing.

## Progress over last 6 Months

### Stonewall Workplace Equality Index

6. Following the deferral of the 2020 Stonewall submission, the Service has now received information relating to the 2021 Stonewall Workplace Equality Index submission. In recent years the Stonewall criteria has remained relatively static which has enabled the Service to demonstrate continued progress against the key themes and maintain its position in the top 5.
7. The criteria for the 2021 submission contains emphasis on some new areas which include intersectionality, bi-sexuality, pansexuality and gender identity. Whilst we will be able to present evidence to demonstrate progress in these areas, the new criteria may present a slight challenge as work is ongoing and still being developed. To assist with the Service's understanding of the new criteria, the EDI Officer has been working closely with the Service's designated Stonewall Account Manager to discuss the work currently in progress and to prepare our submission evidence.
8. The Service's work around LGBT+ inclusion and its investment in Stonewall has continued to deliver some tangible improvements. Although there has been a slight decrease in the number of staff identifying as LGBT from 3.3% to 3.1% in recent months due to two LGB staff members leaving the service, the service have continued to see an increase in the number of staff disclosing their sexual orientation. A year ago, 21.7% chose not to declare, which reduced to 19.7% in September 2020 and it has since reduced further to 19%. This demonstrates we are continuing to breakdown barriers and stigma attached to sexuality where staff feel included and comfortable to disclose.

### Proud to Provide II Conference: '*LGBT, Intersectionality and Multiple Identity*'

9. In anticipation of Stonewall's new emphasis on intersectionality, the Service chose this as the theme for its second "Proud to Provide" conference, which was held as a virtual event in November 2020.
10. The response to this year's event was very strong and attracted 240 delegates from over 160 different organisations from across all areas of the UK. Attendees were mainly from Fire and Rescue Services, public sector organisations, charities and the voluntary sector.
11. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive and the Service received many plaudits for hosting such an ambitious event with a range of very high profile and high calibre speakers. These included Lord Michael Cashman, founder of Stonewall and peer within the House of Lords, Claire Summerskill, comedian and LGBT+ Activist, and Reverend Sarah Wilson, transgender priest and professional speaker.
12. Following the success of this event and the previous Proud to Provide event held in 2019 at the Chester Storeyhouse theatre, the Service is making plans for a third event to be held in the Autumn of 2021 – hopefully as a face to face event rather than virtual.

## Addressing disproportionality in the workforce

13. 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. Despite the limitations of the pandemic the focus has remained on the on-call recruitment and the Positive Action Working Group and On-call Recruitment Team have continued to meet to develop strategies and approaches to attract new talent.
14. The recent focus of the Positive Action Working Group has been on reviewing and identifying new platforms where the service can promote careers with a particular focus on targeting under-represented groups as well as the general public. For example, the service have approached existing partners (i.e. Chester Pride) to explore the possibility of advertising CFRS vacancies on their social media platforms and websites which would help target a specific audience.
15. Discussions have also been ongoing to expand the sponsorship agreements currently in place in respect of female recruitment although progress has been slow due to the pandemic. A couple of informal agreements are now in place relating to the following:
  - a) Sale Sharks rugby bootcamps to be launched during 2021 in Cheshire based secondary schools. CFRS have been approached to sponsor bibs with CFRS logo on and this opportunity will be used to promote apprenticeship and work experience opportunities and the cadet programme.
  - b) Hosting female fitness programmes operated by the Sale Sharks on CFRS premises at the appropriate time when restrictions are lifted. By involving the PTI and female operational staff, this will provide an opportunity to promote career opportunities to potential female applicants.
  - c) Sponsorship of Crewe Alexander women's football team. This has not progressed due to the team temporarily disbanding during the pandemic
16. Through 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 have been maintained since the previous report in September. We have seen a 1.3% increase in female staff working in operational positions from 7.7% to 8.1% in the past six months. Although, females working in non-operational positions has decreased slightly from 61.6% to 60.5% in the past six months. A full breakdown of equality monitoring data is available.
17. The number of BAME staff, which is currently 4.2% remains the same as six months ago. There has however, been some encouraging progress in recruitment during this period as 5% of applicants have come from people of a BAME background. This demonstrates that despite the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, the Service's positive action work is reaching and attracting applicants from different ethnic groups.

## Staff Network Groups

18. During the last six months and despite the limitations of face to face contact, the staff network groups have all stepped up admirably to provide an additional source of support for staff during very challenging times.
19. The service's new BAME Staff Network has seen increased membership and greater participation in national ASFA meetings and events. The network also played a key role in supporting the EDI Officer in the development of a wide and varied programme of events during Black History Month in October. These included webinars and virtual workshops delivered by local partners and universities, and a range of black history virtual events relating to music, literature, sport, food and culture. Against a backdrop of the #Blacklivesmatter campaign, these virtual events were well attended and positively received and the campaign which ran throughout the entire month of October was deemed a success.
20. Following the 2020 launch of the new Menopause Policy, the Limitless network identified the need for a Menopause Awareness Day, menopause champions for mentoring & buddying, and the development of some related initiatives such as hygiene packs for female staff. Through the COVID-19 pandemic, the Limitless group have supported each other and maintained regular contact via email and a dedicated What's App group. The group have continued to meet for socially distanced 'walk and talk' meetings at rural locations in Cheshire to create a platform for staff to come out of isolation, socialise, support each other and catch up.
21. The Service has also recently linked in with a Crewe based charity called Motherwell who offer support to single parents, and women who have experienced trauma before, during, and/or after childbirth. The charity has a forum called FlourisHER that offers support, training and information on a range of women's topics, which may benefit female members of staff within the Service and fathers or parents who have encountered challenge or trauma associated with childbirth and parenting. The Service will also be using this platform to advertise Princes Trust programme opportunities.
22. Firepride, the service's LGBT Staff Network have continued to meet virtually throughout the pandemic. Members have been involved with the construction of several workshops which focused on Bi Visibility and how covid-19 has disproportionately affected LGBT+ people. The quarterly Firepride breakfasts, albeit without the food, have also continued to take place via Skype to maintain contact and to provide collective support.

## Visibility and Awareness Days

23. During the last reporting period there have been a range of equality campaigns that have been promoted and supported mainly using virtual platforms and social media. Marketing materials and flags have also been updated to ensure that all campaigns and awareness events have strong impact and visibility.

24. Recent events and campaigns include

- September - Bi Visibility Day  
Trans Rights are Human Rights Campaign
- October - Black History Month  
National Coming Out and Intersex Awareness Day  
Dyslexia Awareness Week  
Menopause Awareness Day  
World Mental Health Day
- November - Trans Awareness Week  
White Ribbon Day
- December - Diwali and Rainbow Laces
- January - World Religion Day
- February - LGBT History Month

25. Whilst social media was the main vehicle for raising awareness around these events, the Service did mark White Ribbon Day with a socially distanced event at Powey Lane. Under normal circumstances, the ALP with the white ribbon attached would be placed in a city or town centre to attract crowds. As this was not appropriate this year, the ALP was erected at Powey Lane with the white ribbon and a small number of officers attended to mark the occasion and to show support via photographs which were posted on the services website and social media accounts.

#### Policy Development

26. The Service has made improvements to various policies and supporting documents during the reporting period. Updates and changes have been made to the service's Trans Policy to provide additional guidance around terminology and information around intersectionality. A separate guidance document has also been produced which provides more detail and information as to how staff can provide meaningful support and become more effective allies to their trans colleagues. This will help promote inclusion for people with different gender identities and expressions.
27. The Equality and Diversity Policy has also been updated to incorporate reference to neurodiversity. The focus in this area for CFRS will largely be around dyslexia but further work is planned to identify how the Service support a range of other neurodiverse conditions.

#### EDI Education and Training Review

28. The service has continued to review the EDI training offering. One of the new products developed was a bespoke Unconscious Bias training package. Two sessions have been delivered to Members of the Fire Authority in October and November. A further session as been organised for Fire Authority members in February to accommodate those who were unable to attend in 2020. Following positive feedback the intention is that this training will be rolled out to all staff from February 2021.

29. A menopause awareness training package was developed in November 2020 to accompany the Menopause policy that was launched in March 2020. One training session was delivered to menopause champions in December and further sessions are planned in 2021.
30. The intention is that training delivery for both courses will be offered through face-to-face (when permitted and practicable), coupled with virtual sessions will help to widen access. E-learning packages will be developed to provide refresher training and this will help to widen access and offer flexibility as staff are likely to be encouraged to work remotely where possible .

#### Equality Impact Assessments (EIA)

31. A new EIA template was introduced during the reference period. This was accompanied by an EIA management guidance document which outlined the steps of undertaking an EIA and provided a completed example. It is intended that this guidance will help to improve the consistency and quality of the EIA assessments and associated documentation.
32. The service has conducted many Equality Impact Assessments during the reporting period but the main emphasis has been around the pandemic and understanding the risks that were being presented to each department from both an internal and external perspective. On this occasion the Service chose to extend the EIA assessment 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 was instrumental in informing aspects of the service's recovery planning process.

#### Developing Community Partnerships

33. Although COVID-19 has restricted access to physically meet with key community partners, every effort has been made to develop new and maintain existing relationships through traditional communication (i.e. telephone, email) and virtual technology.
34. To date, the Equality & Inclusion Officer has connected with over 120 local partners, which enable the service to understand equality issues and develop communication pathways to promote key safety messages and recruitment.

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

#### HMICFRS

35. The vision for reform within the Home Office revolves around Professionalism, People and Governance and within this is a strong emphasis around Ethics, Diversity and Inclusion. This has translated into a new section within the 2021 HMICFRS inspection programme where scrutiny will be applied against the following criteria:

### How well does the FRS ensure fairness and diversity?

- How well do leaders seek feedback and challenge from all parts of the workforce?
  - How well does the FRS identify and resolve workforce concerns?
  - How well does the FRS identify and address potential disproportionality in recruitment, retention and progression?
  - How well does the FRS promote equality and diversity to ensure fair and open opportunities for all?
36. CFRS will be subject to its second full inspection during February and March 2021 and evidence will be submitted and discussed to ensure that the extensive work that the service has done in this area is showcased appropriately.

### Staff Networks

37. 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. Various Firepride events are being planned to focus around the services LGBT Ally's Programme and different LGBT visibility days have been scheduled to take place over the next six months. Examples include Trans Awareness Day, Lesbian Visibility, IDAHOBiT and Pan Visibility Day plus others.
38. There has been recent interest expressed in relation to establishing a disability based staff network that would incorporate themes such as neurodiversity, which are of importance to an increasing number of people.
39. Over the coming months the service will continue to focus on race equality themes in conjunction with the BAME Staff Network. A specific training package will be developed over the next six months to focus on current race related issues to include #BlackLivesMatter, lack of BAME representation in the FRS sector, cultural awareness and heritage. This new provision will be launched in Summer 2021 with the intention that it will be a mandatory module that all staff will complete. Ideally the timeframe for completion would be October which will coincide with Black History Month.
40. The service will put a strong emphasis on how it can widen access and improve engagement with BAME communities in respect of recruitment, protection and prevention work streams. Work will continue with AFSA and other FRS to identify best practice.
41. The service also intends to build on two race related campaigns that were both introduced for the first time in 2020; namely, Gypsy, Roma, Traveller (GRT) History Month in June and South Asian Heritage Month in July. The service will be working with various external partners and local organisations to celebrate GRT and South Asian communities and their heritage during these months.
42. The Limitless Network will be hosting International Women's Day on 8 March 2020. This will be a virtual event that will use the same technology that was used for the Proud to Provide event. The theme of the event will be "Courage to Challenge" and a number of external female speakers have been secured to

share inspiring stories associated with courage and challenge from their own career journeys and experiences.

#### Equality Impact Assessments (EIA)

43. The E&I Officer will be attending EIA training delivered by the NFCC. Any new knowledge and best practice will help inform our internal approach and any updates will be shared with CFRS colleagues through EIA training workshops. This approach ensures CFRS are adopting best practice.

#### Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy 2021-2024

44. The revised strategy will be submitted for Fire Authority Approval in April 2021. After which time an action plan will be developed in conjunction with members of the Equality Steering Group and monitored thereafter on a quarterly basis.

#### Neurodiversity Review

45. During 2021 a review is planned to understand how the Service manages neurodiversity in terms of identification, diagnosis and support. The service will initially focus on dyslexia with the view of focussing on other neurodiverse conditions later in the year and throughout 2022.
46. Within this review consideration will be given to the benefits of participating in a benchmarking process for our work around disability. This will be similar to how we access and work with Stonewall to improve our LGBT+ inclusion work. Initial thoughts are that an accreditation offered by the Business Disability Forum (BDF) would enable us to critically review and update our current systems, resources, policies, processes and practices. The BDF support organisations to achieve their level 3 'Leader' Status in the government's Disability Confident Scheme. We recently retained our level 2 status, but we strive to achieve the level 3, which is the highest standard and demonstrates inclusion for people with a disability. A business case will be presented to the Equality Steering Group in late Spring to progress this work.

#### Positive Action

47. In order to diversify leadership teams, the E&I Officer has been commissioned to research and understand the viability of applying positive action to promotion processes in addition to recruitment processes. This is permissible under Section 159 of the Equality Act but not widely applied across the fire sector. Once the position is understood this will be tabled for discussion at a future Equality Steering Group meeting.

#### Preparation for Stonewall 2021 Submission

48. Inevitably, work has continued to ensure that CFRS remains committed to the fair and equal treatment of LGBT+ staff and communities. The feedback from the 2019 submission has helped the service develop a series of actions and work is already underway to prepare the submission for later in the year.

49. In support of this and to provide recent evidence, the Service will continue to actively celebrate and raise awareness all LGBT visibility days during the next six months including LGBT History Month and Trans Visibility (February), Lesbian Visibility Week (March), IDAHoBiT & Pansexual Visibility (May) and Pride Month in June.

### **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. The only consideration related to the current plans for EDI surround the purchasing of resources that can be issued to community members at pride and local community events. As a service, we have previously issued plastic resources and we wish to refrain from purchasing non-recyclable projects as far as is practicable in the future.

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