

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: PERFORMANCE AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE
DATE: 8 SEPTEMBER 2021
REPORT OF: DIRECTOR OF TRANSFORMATION
AUTHOR: BENJI EVANS

SUBJECT: EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ANNUAL
REPORT 2020-21

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. Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's employees are our most valuable asset and in order to continue to deliver an excellent emergency service to our communities, we recognise equality, diversity and inclusion as a significant business imperative.
3. Being inclusive is also one of the Service's core values and we constantly strive to create an environment and a culture where all of our people are able to thrive and achieve their full potential.
4. Under the Equality Act 2010, the Service also has a duty to: eliminate discrimination; advance equality of opportunity; and foster good relations between different groups ("public sector equality duty").
5. In order to fulfill this public sector equality duty, the Service currently has in place an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy ('the Strategy') for the period 2017-2020. A new strategy for the period 2021-2024 will be submitted for review and approval to Members in Autumn 2021.
6. Delivery of the strategy is captured within a comprehensive action plan which is monitored on a quarterly basis by the Equality Steering Group (ESG). The ESG is chaired by the Chief Fire Officer who holds overall responsibility for overseeing equality, diversity and inclusion in the Service.
7. This report provides a summary and highlights the progress over the last 12 months.

Key Accomplishments

Stonewall Workplace Equality Index

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 was to be deferred for 12 months. The Service are currently positioned 3rd in the Stonewall Top 100 and the UK's most inclusive emergency service and Top North West employer in terms LGBT+ inclusion for the sixth year running.
9. 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. However in July 2020, Stonewall changed its emphasis to focus on new areas including intersectionality and multiple and minority identities, communication methodology plus additional questions in all eight sections of the criteria.
10. Having undertaken a gap analysis against the new criteria, the EDI Officer has worked closely with the Service's designated Stonewall Account Manager to discuss the work currently in progress and to close any identified gaps in order to prepare effectively for this year's submission which is due in October 2021.
11. The Service has also started to develop new projects which are helping to improve community engagement with local LGBT+ people, especially with people deemed 'at risk' in terms of various safety indicators. An example of this is working closely with Chester Aid for the Homeless to communicate key safety messages whilst also providing advice to where LGBT+ people living on the streets are able to access support.
12. Over the last year the Service's work around LGBT+ inclusion and its investment in Stonewall has continued to deliver tangible improvements. One year ago, the number of staff identifying as LGBT was 3.1% which has now increased to 3.2%. The service has also seen a reduction in the number of staff who are unwilling to declare their sexual orientation. A year ago, 19.7% chose not to declare, whereas the current percentage is 18.7% which shows more people are confident and happy to share their sexual orientation with the service.
13. This is evidence that all the positive work around LGBT+ inclusion continues to help our aspiration of supporting LGBT+ staff within the Service whilst reinforcing public perception that we are a welcoming and inclusive employer.

Addressing disproportionality in the workforce

14. Despite the onset of the national pandemic work has continued to develop positive action and creative recruitment campaigns to encourage applications from under-represented groups, with the aim of increasing the diversity within our workforce.
15. Although progress is incremental, the outcome of positive action work over the last two years has seen an additional 23 females recruited into the Service. This accounts for an overall increase in the female employee population from 17% to

19%. Over the last year we have seen a specific increase in female staff working in operational positions from 7.7% to 9.3%. A specific highlight in this regard was the recruitment of two females onto the 2020 High Potential Development Scheme. They were selected from an initial applicant pool of over 40 applicants, and a shortlisted group of 10, 4 of whom were female.

16. Against the backdrop of Black Lives Matter during this reporting period a key area of focus for the Positive Action Group has been around developing new partnership with community groups, charities, sports teams and places of worship to help target individuals and groups of people currently under-represented in our workforce and volunteers; One example of excellent partnership working is a collaboration between staff, Cheshire Football Association and a faith based organisation in Chester. This collaboration to organise football related competitions in the future. We intend on planning these events to coincide with key religious and cultural celebrations which organically attract large crowds of people together, thus creating a platform where our staff can engage with different ethnic groups and the wider community to promote key safety messages, youth provision, careers advice, and volunteering.
17. Despite the Service seeing a slight decrease in the number of BAME staff during the last reporting period, during this financial year the Service has recruited more staff from different ethnic backgrounds and has seen an increase from 4.1% to 4.3% in its BAME workforce. With 5% of applicants coming from people of BAME heritage, 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.
18. Recruiting staff with disabilities into the Fire and Rescue Service is an ongoing challenge because quite often people deselect themselves based on assumptions about the role of a firefighter and what adjustments can be made. Currently the Service only has 2.9% of its workforce with a declared disability which has reduced slightly from the previous year which showed a representation of 3.2%.
19. It is expected however that with a number of hidden disabilities such as dyslexia and dyspraxia, the actual number of staff with a disability is much higher. In order to identify this and to remove any stigma about declaring a disability, it is intended that the new EDI Strategy will have a specific focus on disability, especially people who are neurodiverse.

Staff Networks

20. Staff network groups continue to play an important role and despite the limitations of face to face contact throughout the pandemic, they have all stepped up to provide support for staff during very challenging times.
21. The service's BAME Staff Network has seen increased membership and greater participation in national ASFA meetings and events. The BAME network held educational workshops during February to celebrate Race Equality Week and the network have met on a quarterly basis. Awareness of the network is increasing as a result of the production of monthly newsletters

and the Service has recently been approached to host the national ASFA conference in 2022.

22. The Limitless network have been very active during the year and during the entire pandemic, has continued to meet as a network, support each other and maintained regular contact via email and a dedicated What's App.
23. Key deliverables from the network this year have seen the progression of work around menopause, maternity and return to work support, mentoring and buddying. New policies have evolved and training has been provided to create new initiatives such as Menopause champions to support staff. One particular project has also seen the Service trial new ecofriendly products to enhance the accessibility and quality of hygiene packs on station and in all service vehicles.
24. The Limitless group played a key role in organising the International Women's Day event which was a virtual event this year. This year's theme was #Choose to Challenge with the focus on the importance of challenging inappropriate behaviour, championing gender equality and speaking up as a way of improving working conditions for women. The event was hosted by the two highest ranking female staff members and included a number of quality external speakers. Notably the event was also very well attended by male colleagues who demonstrated their continued support.
25. In November, the Service organised and hosted its second "Proud to Provide" conference. The focus of the conference was intersectionality and multiple identities and over 250 delegates attended the online event to hear from a range of high profile speakers which included Lord Michael Cashman, MP Charlotte Nicholls, Sarah Jones, comedian Clare Summerskill and the CEO's of two equality charities. The feedback from the event was very positive and due to its popularity and purpose, the Service has taken the decision to make "Proud to Provide" an annual event.

Visibility and Awareness Days

26. During the reporting period, the service has continued to increase LGBT+ visibility and awareness surrounding various cultural and religious celebrations. The service was again active during LGBT+ History Month, flying rainbow flags on stations and at HQ. Articles, statements of support, training workshops and resources uploaded onto the staff intranet and website have enabled staff to access key information and education. Social media platforms have also been used to good effect to promote key messages to our wider community.
27. 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). External guest speakers were arranged to talk at our Firepride Breakfasts for Trans Visibility and Non-Binary People Day.
28. The service has continued to increase awareness around all major religious and cultural celebrations and observances including Passover, Ramadan, Eid, Vaisakhi/Baisakhi, Dhamma, Buddha Day, Chinese New Year and National Windrush Day. As well as providing educational opportunities for staff, key

safety messages have been promoted to the wider community to help reduce risk of fire and injury to people when marking their respective celebrations with open fire, candles, fireworks, lanterns, and fire crackers.

29. The service has worked closely with partners to raise awareness of different disability related themes including Dyslexia and Dyspraxia Awareness, Neurodiversity Awareness, Downs Syndrome Awareness Week, Learning Disability Awareness Week and Deafblind Awareness Week. Each awareness theme provided insight to each disability with, educational resources uploaded onto the staff intranet. This focus has enable staff to gain wider knowledge that will enhance their ability to support colleagues with a disability and also provide a more inclusive service to community members with differing needs.
30. June 1st marked the start of the 2021 Pride season, but like 2020, all but two local pride events were cancelled. The Service provided support through supportive statements in the media and social media coverage. During the pride season, the Service also increased visibility by flying rainbow flags at all stations and HQ.
31. Crews from the locations that would normally have hosted a physical Pride event also offered support via social media.

Policy Development and Review

32. The Service has continued to develop its networks and review policies to ensure they are family friendly and attractive to prospective applicants. Examples of this include the review and development of a new Equality Impact Assessment template and guidance to ensure policies do not inadvertently discriminate.
33. During the year the Service also developed a new Menopause Policy and work has been commissioned to ensure all welfare facilities are appropriate and gender specific issues such as menstruation are understood and supported in the workplace.
34. Following feedback from staff and in acknowledgement of the need to introduce new ways of working following the pandemic, the Service also introduced a new Agile working policy. This offers staff the ability to work remotely from home and in many cases achieve a better work/life balance. Other factors that have been considered in the development of this policy include health and safety, wellbeing, social isolation and continued access to support and supervision.

EDI Education and Training

35. During 2020, various e-learning modules were updated and the Service launched new e-learning packages focusing on Unconscious Bias and Stress Awareness. Updated versions of Dyslexia Awareness were also made available and a revised course on Safeguarding was launched which covers overarching themes such as modern slavery, race, and sexual orientation.
36. Bespoke Equality Impact Assessment training workshops were developed in February 2020 and have since been rolled out and delivered to 91 staff across all levels and departments. The interactive training covered the Service's legal

responsibilities and duties, definitions and terminology of equality, diversity and inclusion in the context of Fire and Rescue Services. Various case studies enabled staff to explore the broad considerations required to show due regard for different protected characteristics, but how the Service need to document and evidence how they are mitigating any risk identified.

37. The Service also launched various guidance documents including 'How to Support Colleagues during Ramadan' and 'LGBT+ allies booklet'.

Maintaining and Developing New Partnerships

38. Although COVID-19 has continued to restrict the ability to physically meet people, the Service has maintained its relationship with key partners and networks including fire specific networks, working groups, community and voluntary sector. The Service has also made the most of networking forums to reconnect with partners as well as developing new partnerships. For example, we have connected with the Warrington Disability Partnership and Cheshire Healthwatch to connect with more people with a disability and/or a long term health condition. We have utilised the power of social media, virtual technologies and traditional methods of email and telephone to connect with our partners.
39. As part of the Positive Action work, new connections have been made with various equality interest groups and charities that will enable the service to reach out to people 'at risk' in terms of promoting key safety messages, but also groups of people that are currently underrepresented in our workforce. Examples include Active Cheshire who we are in the process of developing a community project to support local girls and women to participate in physical activity using our facilities – this will create an ideal platform to communicate key safety messages, but also to promote careers, volunteering and youth provision.
40. Based on the success of working closely with women's rugby teams previously, the Services are in the early stages of working with Crewe Alexander Ladies Football Club to use football as a way of connecting with local girls and women. Other sports will be explored in conjunction with Chester University.
41. The Service have also held some initial discussion with Sale Sharks about partnering them to develop a primary school initiative which will widen access to children in Cheshire East with a specific focus on deprivation and some focus on race and gender equality.

Neurodiversity Project

42. The Service have continued to develop this area of work and a new dyslexia assessment tool has been sourced which has been designed specifically for the fire and rescue sector. This will enable managers to better support staff and to identify the most appropriate adjustments where required.
43. The Dyslexia awareness e-learning has been updated and the Service is in the initial stages of completing the British Dyslexia Accredited Workplace Assessor Programme. This educational programme will support the Service's Equality

and Inclusion Officer who will be able to conduct workplace assessments to make more informed and professional judgements to what adjustments will benefit staff.

44. The Service have also become corporate members of the Business Disability Forum (BDF). This new membership will enable the service to benchmark against the BDF 'equality standard' which exceeds the criteria to become a Disability Confident Leader which is the highest accreditation the government offer. It also provides access to resources, information and toolkits which will enable us to improve our offer of support to staff with any type of disability.

Contributing towards the national agenda

45. As part of our involvement with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) EDI working group, The Services Equality and Inclusion Officer was co-author of a paper called 'Equality of Access to Services and Employment' which focused on Gypsy and Travellers (G&T). The paper provides insight to the various considerations given when engaging with G&T communities in terms of barriers and challenges they traditionally experience and how to effectively communicate with this section of the community. The paper is part of series which will provide insight, advice and best practice to all 45 fire and rescue services across the UK.
46. Other work conducted as part of the NFCC EDI working group includes 'recruitment' and 'positive action' which helps the Service to meet professionals across the county which enable us to identify best practice and access new methods of working which can be later cascaded internally to colleagues.

Recruitment Communications and Attraction Strategy

47. As a Service, we are maximising our partners to help us promote our careers and vacancies to the wider community with particular emphasis on reaching out to people underrepresented in our workforce. For example, Chester Pride now send out monthly posts to promote our jobs, volunteering and youth provision as way of targeting LGBT+ people.
48. Operational staff across the Service have been completing mapping exercises to identify equality interest groups to help us target girls and women, people with a disability, people from different ethnic backgrounds and people who identify as LGBT+. This exercise will also help identify parents and people who live alone for the purpose of promoting safety messages, but we intent to use this intelligence to target our marketing and recruitment.

COVID-19 Recovery Planning and Road Map

49. In 2020, the Service conducted a thematic staff survey which provided a valuable source of information to help identify risks which aided the way we planned and developed the recovery plans. As with all staff surveys a specific EDI analysis was undertaken to assess the results exploring trends and/or concerns.

50. The COVID-19 EIA produced in 2020 was reviewed and updated at various points in time to reflect the dynamic situation. The EIA ensured that risks have been considered from an internal and external perspective. The findings of the EIA and associated impacts will also be inform the services recovery planning process.
51. During the COVID-19 HMICFRS inspection, the Service was able to demonstrate that they adopted an ethical and sensitive approach to our recovery planning where due regard has been take in respect of EDI.

Priorities for Next 6 Months

52. The following provides an update on key pieces of upcoming work relating to equality, diversity and inclusion.
53. The anticipated white paper for reform is expected to revolve around Professionalism, People and Governance and within this it is likely that there will be a strong emphasis around Ethics. Over the coming months, we will continue to gain more insight in relation to the detail but in the meantime, the Service will consider how its networks and senior leaders can be continue to be recognised as ethical role models for change and inclusion.
54. To maintain the momentum behind the networks, there will be further emphasis on the need to have strong Ally's and to maintain a regular Programme of events. The Firepride network have previously gained some success with their LGBT+ Ally's Programme, so similar work is planned to promote 'champions' during in October around work streams such as Neurodiversity, Black History Month and Menopause Awareness Week.
55. A new neurodiversity network will be launched in September 2021. This will incorporate a Dyslexia Working Group to bring staff from various departments together to provide feedback, offer suggestions and collectively help the Service progress this important area of work.
56. The BAME network are intending to rebrand themselves with a new name and logo in the coming months. Events are also being planned to increase awareness during cultural and race related campaigns such as South Asian Heritage Month in July and Black History Month in October.
57. One year on from the #BLM campaign, the Service and the BAME network will be exploring issues surrounding racism in society and the ongoing challenges black people face. It will also consider how we can recruit more BAME staff, build further connections with different ethnic groups through community engagement and liaison with partner organisations, educational institutions and local businesses.
58. The 50/50 campaign will be relaunched in autumn 2021 to coincide with the upcoming apprentice recruitment campaign. The images associated with the campaign will be visible on the website and materials will be circulated to promote the Service's commitment to providing an open and welcoming culture.

59. In October 2021, the Service will submit the Stonewall submission based on the new criteria with an expected result in February 2022. The new criteria has challenged the Service, but will ultimately improve everything we do across policies, the way we support staff, and the way we engage with LGBT+ people in our community.
60. The Service's third Proud to Provide Conference will be held as a physical event in January 2022. It is expected that with a range of high profile guests and an effective publicity campaign this event will attract a lot of interest. The event will be held in Chester.
61. Work has been commissioned for the Limitless Group in conjunction with the EDI Officer to look at welfare facilities and issues relating to menstruation and endometriosis. This is to ensure that the Service understands how these issues may impact staff in the course of their work and what can be done to provide and access greater support.

Financial Implications

62. The EDI function has its own budget but a budget bid will be put forward for consideration in 2021 to secure the necessary funding to extend the work around Neurodiversity and Dyslexia screening. This will be in the region of £5-7k.

Legal Implications

63. 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

64. Due to the nature of this report, equality and diversity implications have been considered and discussed throughout the main body of the report.

Environmental Implications

65. None.

**CONTACT: DONNA LINTON, GOVERNANCE AND CORPORATE PLANNING
MANAGER TEL [01606] 868804**