



COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY

16 JULY 2019

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION GROUP UPDATE

REPORT OF EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION CHAMPION

Purpose of Report

1. To provide members with an overview of the work carried out by the Service's Equality Diversity and Inclusion Group (EDIG).

Background

2. As part of the approach to developing the Authority's services and improving engagement with stakeholders, the Authority has sought to 'champion' particular areas of work through the Combined Fire Authority (CFA) Member Champion roles.
3. The Member Champion roles provide the Service with an opportunity to work closely with individual members to help develop the services provided and to engage with local communities, staff, councillors and other stakeholders through a closely aligned officer and member relationship.
4. Since appointment to the Equality and Diversity Member Champion role, Councillor Batey has been supported by Assistant Chief Fire Officer: Service Support in her capacity as strategic lead for the development of equality, diversity and inclusion across the organisation.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group

5. Councillor Batey is a standing member of the EDIG, which exists to drive the integration of equality and diversity principles into everyday activity across County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS).
6. The EDIG meets on a quarterly basis and is comprised of representatives from across the organisation, including staff representative bodies.
7. Within the EDIG there are nominated Champions supported by Service Leadership Team (SLT) Champions for each of the nine protected characteristics described within the Equality Act 2010 as follows:
 - Age
 - Disability
 - Gender Reassignment
 - Marriage and Civil Partnership
 - Pregnancy and Maternity
 - Race
 - Religion or Belief

- Sex
- Sexual Orientation

Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework (FRSEF)

8. The Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework (FRSEF) was revised in 2017 in response to a number of significant developments including the Fire Service Reform Programme, the establishment of a Fire Inspectorate (HMICFRS) and the work of the National Joint Council (NJC) led Inclusive Fire Service Group.
9. The FRSEF intends to help fire and rescue services:
 - Deliver the best possible services to their communities and those who are most vulnerable or at risk;
 - Employ a workforce that reflects the changing role of Services and the diversity of the area they are serving;
 - Provide equality of opportunity for all staff and demonstrate due regard for and the value of difference and;
 - Ensure that all staff are treated with dignity and respect and have a workplace which is free from harassment and bullying.
10. The framework has five priority areas of action and performance:
 - Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment;
 - Community knowledge and engagement;
 - Effective service delivery;
 - Employment conditions, health and wellbeing;
 - Recruitment, training and progression.
11. County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS) has implemented an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy aligned to the FRSEF which sets our strategic intention from 2018 until 2022.
12. The EDI Working Group is a subgroup of the EDIG and is responsible for delivering the objectives of the strategy action plan.

Action Plan Progress

13. The actions listed below are now complete and enrich the quality of EDI within the Service:
 - Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) have been completed for our premises to help us ensure that they are inclusive to both our staff and our communities;
 - The value our suppliers place on EDI is examined during our procurement processes;
 - All policies, procedures and strategic documents have EIA completed prior to publication;
 - Policies and procedures are reviewed to ensure that they are legislatively compliant and current in terms of language used;
 - We actively promote and celebrate key EDI dates both internally and externally;
 - Our website has a dedicated EDI section which is accessible by our communities and identifies the key individuals within the Service who are dedicated to promoting EDI;
 - In line with our statutory duty we publish our public sector equality duty and enable access to previous reports via our dedicated website page;

- We continue to submit to and strive for improvement on the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index (WEI) ranking 174th in the 2019 listings which was an improvement of 80 places from our 2018 position;
 - We have built and continue to grow strong relationships with Durham Pride Rainbow Alliance, Darlington ARQ and Darlington Young People of Pride (YPOP) and we continue to offer both practical, personal and visual support to the Pride events in Durham and Darlington. We also support the Pride events in Newcastle and Sunderland alongside Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service;
 - The Chief Fire Officer, as Sexual Orientation Champion, attended Durham Pride along with staff from across the organisation and delivered a speech promoting the Service's commitment to EDI;
 - We have successfully introduced two cohorts of Firefighter (FF) Apprentices achieving a 50:50 gender split at the commencement of each cohort. The apprentice programme has provided the Service with an opportunity to increase the diversity and lower the average age of the workforce as well as assisting in cultural change;
 - The Service has achieved Disability Confident Employer status. Disability Confident is a scheme that is designed to help organisations recruit and retain disabled people and people with health conditions for their skills and talent;
 - We continue to review and have improved our recruitment processes, introducing staff panels on all internal promotion processes.
 - A Gender Network has been established with membership of personnel from across the organisation.
14. In addition to the action plan, the EDIG has developed an information site for employees which acts as a single point of reference and resource for EDI documents, advice, news, events, networks, training and contacts.
 15. Safe and wellbeing visits conducted by operational crews incorporate the age and disability strands of equality, enabling us to identify vulnerable members of our community and make referrals to appropriate partner agencies.
 16. The EDIG has trained a total of fifteen 'Dignity at Work Advisors' whose role is to act as a point of contact for confidential advice and support in relation to bullying, harassment and all aspects of dignity at work.
 17. All supervisory and middle managers across the Service completed an Inclusive Leadership Programme which included the achievement of a Level 2 qualification in EDI. All staff have received unconscious bias training.
 18. The Service was recognised recently at the CIPD Awards North East for its work with the Armed Forces resettlement programmes which help injured and or wounded soldiers gain meaningful employment at the end of their service. One association day has been successfully completed resulting in interest from armed forces personnel joining our on-call stations. Further association days are planned later this year. This initiative is an innovative approach to positive action to try and recruit personnel from underrepresented groups into the fire and rescue service.
 19. The Service has introduced a Trauma Support Team who are a voluntary team of staff specifically trained to offer trauma support to colleagues and watches involved in critical incidents. The team offer confidential, practical, emotional and social support at times of work related crisis in the form of group or individual trauma support sessions in the days and weeks following the event.

20. The Service supported three members of staff to attend the Women in the Fire Service Development weekend 'Celebrating difference, improving delivery' in June at the Fire Service College.

Next Steps

21. The EDIG have committed to explore and understand autism and where necessary review and adapt policy to ensure that the Service is autism aware and equip our staff to be able to actively support colleagues who have autistic traits. The support and advice of Councillor Batey has been invaluable in helping the EDIG identify and develop links which will help us achieve this objective.
22. Following the improvement in 2018 of CDDFRS' ranking in the Stonewall WEI, the EDIG is working through an action plan in preparation for the next submission in September 2019. The action plan which includes training is designed to further embed awareness of LGBT issues throughout the organisation and improve our position on the Index.
23. We will continue to review our recruitment processes to ensure we understand why our communities may not always consider the fire and rescue service as an employer of choice and enable us to target our positive action activity effectively.

Recommendation

Members are requested to **note** the content of the report.

Cllr Alison Batey, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Champion