



**Safest People, Safest Places**

## **Combined Fire Authority**

**21 September 2020**

### **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group Update**

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#### **Report of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Champion**

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##### **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 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, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Member Champion role, Councillor Batey has been supported by the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) in her capacity as strategic lead for the development of EDI across the organisation.

##### **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group Update**

5. County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS) has an EDI Strategy and action plan. The EDIG monitors progress against the action plan.
6. At the Authority meeting in March it was reported that in collaboration with Durham University Business School (DUBS), our third culture survey was due to be launched in May 2020, however due to COVID-19 and the impact this has had on resources within DUBS this has been delayed until Spring 2021. The survey gathers responses from

staff on the impact of workplace factors on employees, in particular perceptions of fairness and how this affects service delivery to the public. The aim of the survey is to ascertain how key measures used have changed since the last survey in 2018 and to investigate factors that are having an impact on our staff and which were identified in Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) report, to identify priorities for action. with the aim of increasing the understanding of the results to enable the implementation of targeted improvements.

7. In addition, it was reported that training on the appraisal process was to be delivered to all personnel in a leadership capacity at the Leadership Forums in March. Due to COVID-19 the Leadership Forums were delayed, however, to ensure our continued engagement and the communication of key messages to staff, the Leadership Forums were delivered virtually. The appraisal training was redesigned and delivered virtually to provide leaders with the skills to conduct an honest and robust appraisal which will help develop a positive culture in line with our expected values and behaviours.
8. Following the Service's move towards recovery from the COVID-19 response phase, the Recovery Coordination Group was established to lead the transition of the Service to its 'new normal'. An Equality Analysis was conducted on our recovery plan to ensure any equality issues identified could be addressed when the plan was implemented. As a result of the analysis, the Service will provide health and wellbeing advice, support services and Occupational Health reviews to address any detrimental impact COVID-19 has had on their wellbeing and mental health.
9. At the last meeting of the EDIG in June, a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) session was delivered by the Religion and Belief Champion to refresh the knowledge and understanding of the members, this session was circulated across the Service to enhance the knowledge and understanding of all staff.
10. The Service produced a video which was communicated via social media to support International Womens Day on 8 March. The theme for this year's campaign was entitled 'Each for Equal' which highlighted that an equal world is an enabled world.
11. The Gender champion attended a national conference which celebrated and explored women leading the way in 'Making a Difference' in society and the workplace. The conference specifically included a session on 'Period Power' which provided alternative feminine hygiene provision samples, these are being reviewed by our operational staff to identify whether they will enhance our current provision.
12. Members of the EDIG attended the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Black Lives Matter conference hosted by the Asian Fire Services Association (AFSA) which discussed the response of the FRS regarding recent events. The Service communicated a message of support to all staff in response to Black Lives Matters. The BAME champions will assist in the development of a positive action strategy to assist the Service in the recruitment, retention and progression of staff with protected characteristics.
13. To demonstrate the Service as an inclusive and supportive organisation and employer, the Service promoted awareness of key dates for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) and Gender Reassignment community via social media which

included the Stonewall Riot Anniversary, Lesbian Visibility Day, International Transgender Day, Zero Discrimination Day, International Non-binary Day and International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHoBiT).

14. The Service supported 'Pride' month in June although the local 'Pride' events were cancelled due to COVID-19. Staff including members of the Service Leadership Team (SLT), LGBT and Gender Reassignment champions produced a video explaining what 'Pride' meant to them which was used at the virtual 'Pride' event in Darlington in August.
15. Young People of Pride (YPOP) is a social support group in Darlington for young LGBT people. The LGBT champion attends this group to enhance the community-based support provided by the Service as well as promoting the Service as an employer of choice to underrepresented groups.
16. Due to COVID-19, there will not be a Stonewall Workplace Equality Index (WEI) published this year, however the Service will continue to strive for improvement and in the support provided in the sexual orientation and gender reassignment strands of equality which we aim to reflect in an improved position on the WEI following our next submission.
17. The Religion and Belief champion attends meetings of the County Durham Interfaith Network and has developed a Service Interfaith Network to provide support to all staff whether they are of faith or not. The group works with faith communities, inter faith organisations, educators and others to increase understanding and cooperation between people of different faiths and to widen staff and public awareness of the distinctive religious traditions within the UK.
18. The Service is working in conjunction with the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) Union Learning Fund to promote the Heat Illness Prevention Awareness (HIPA) training programme developed by the University of Brighton with a specific focus on our female firefighters. The aim of the programme is to educate all members of the Service on the similarities and differences in thermoregulation and heat tolerance between sexes but importantly it explains the female specific issues with thermoregulation during certain menstrual cycle phases and into menopause.

## **Recommendation**

19. Members are requested to:
  - a) **Note** the content of the report.

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