



**Safest People, Safest Places**

## **Combined Fire Authority**

**16 March 2021**

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

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## **Report of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Member 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 September, it was reported that in collaboration with Durham University Business School (DUBS), the launch of our third culture survey had been delayed due to COVID-19 and the impact this had on resources within DUBS. Planning

meetings have since taken place and the third survey will be launched in April 2021 with the results expected in the Summer. 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.

7. As reported to Members at the Authority meeting in February, the Service was inspected by HMICFRS in November 2020 on its response to the COVID-19 pandemic with its findings reported to the Service in January 2021. The report identified one area specific to the diversity and wellbeing of our staff from which the Service could learn lessons. The report stated that 'more could have been done to identify and address the specific needs of staff members most at risk from COVID-19, including those from a black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) background and those with underlying health problems'. To enable the Service to address individual needs, the Service Race Champion personally contacted our BAME employees to ascertain if they required additional support. All staff have been asked to complete a COVID-19 risk assessment tool to assist in the risk identification process. All staff identified as being at an increased risk from COVID-19 will be contacted to discuss any additional support interventions needed and where required an appropriate individual risk assessment put in place.
8. Members of the EDIG responded to the consultation published by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) seeking views on the draft Code of Ethics Fire Standard and Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services (England). The production of this new core code is in response to the recommendation made by HMICFRS that "By December 2020, the NFCC, with the Local Government Association, should produce a code of ethics for fire and rescue services." Publication is now expected in March 2021.
9. The EDIG provided responses to consultations on:
  - Equality of Access to Services and Employment for the LGBT Communities;
  - Equality of Access to Services and actions to see us an employer of choice for Black Communities;
  - Equality of Access to Services and Employment for Neurodiversity.

As a public service focused on excellent service to our customers, we need to ensure equality of access to our services for every person and those in temporary residence or transit through County Durham and Darlington. Equality of access means actively seeking to engage these groups who may be unaware or choosing not to access services from us and other public sector providers. Publication of these documents is expected in the Spring.

10. The Fire Standards and Equal Access documents will be applicable to all FRS in England. It is anticipated that as the documents are produced, HMICFRS will integrate them into its inspection framework and judgement criteria and the Service will need to assess its position to ensure alignment.
11. The Public-Sector Equality Duty (PSED) is a legal duty under the Equality Act 2010 and requires public authorities to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, to advance equality of opportunities and foster good relations. To demonstrate compliance with the PSED, public authorities are required to publish an annual report, attached as Appendix A. The report details both Service and employee data to show how as a fire and

rescue service we take protected characteristics into account in all we do, including decision making, employment and the services we provide to the public. Data and information has been collated for the period 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2020 and enables customers, staff, and our regulators to assess our equality performance.

12. Eight firefighter (FF) apprentices commenced their journey on our award-winning FF Apprenticeship Programme on 11 January 2021. This was the fourth cohort of FF apprentices welcomed to the Service, consisting of 5 male and 3 female apprentices. The programme continues to assist the Service in its drive to increase the diversity of the operational workforce. In 2020, 5.7% of our operational workforce was female which was an increase from 4.8% in 2019.
13. National Apprenticeship Week commenced on 8 February 2021. The Service celebrated the diversity of opportunity and development the apprenticeships have afforded our staff and the Service and utilised the opportunity to further promote the FF Apprenticeship Programme via our social media platforms.
14. The Service through its Gender Network achieved White Ribbon UK accreditation in November 2020. White Ribbon's aim is to end male violence against women by engaging with men and boys to make a stand against violence. The Service's campaign to raise awareness, educate and bring about change was officially launched on 25 November 2020 with 16 days of action against domestic violence.
15. Members of the EDIG undertook the #15 Mile Challenge in November 2020 to support the SANDS charity. SANDS is the leading stillbirth and neonatal death charity in the UK, it exists to reduce the number of babies dying and to ensure that anyone affected by the death of a baby receives the best possible care and support. The challenge was organised by the Pregnancy and Maternity Champion with £465 raised for the charity.
16. The Service continues to proactively promote awareness and campaigns across all strands of equality via its internal and external communication channels. The aim of the communication is to increase staff awareness of the diversity of our communities and to highlight the Service as an inclusive public service and employer of choice. Awareness and campaigns have included Black History Month, Dyslexia Week, Diwali, Chinese New Year and Transgender Awareness Week to name a few. The Chief Fire Officer as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Champion recorded a very personal video discussing his own and family's experience with his transgender son. The Communications Team in conjunction with our Technical Services Centre have designed our 'Pride appliance' which will be used at public events in support of our LGBT community, this was launched in February 2021 in recognition of LGBT History month.

## **Recommendation**

17. Members are requested to:
  - a. **note** the contents of the report.

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