



Safest People, Safest Places

Human Resources Committee

27 September 2024

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Update

Report of Director of Emergency Response

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Combined Fire Authority (CFA) HR Committee with an update on County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service's (CDDFRS) ongoing efforts in Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). It details recent activities and events, including PRIDE participation, and offers insights into the progress and challenges of the current EDI strategy. Additionally, the report covers the role of the EDI Group, recent developments in external EDI engagements, and plans for the new EDI strategy, aimed at advancing the Service's commitment to fostering an inclusive environment and reflecting the diverse communities it serves.

2. Background

- 2.1. CDDFRS has long recognised the importance of promoting EDI within its workforce and the communities it serves. As a public service organisation, CDDFRS is committed to fostering an inclusive environment where all individuals, regardless of their background, can feel valued, respected, and supported.
- 2.2. In line with national priorities and legislative requirements, including the Equality Act 2010, the Service has a specific EDI strategy which is designed to ensure that EDI is embedded across all areas of its operations, from recruitment and retention to service delivery and community engagement. The strategy also seeks to improve representation and create an environment that actively challenges discrimination, promotes understanding, and celebrates diversity.
- 2.3. Over the years, CDDFRS has taken proactive steps to raise awareness and understanding of EDI issues. This includes supporting external events such as PRIDE, and other community-focused initiatives aimed at strengthening relationships with underrepresented groups.
- 2.4. Additionally, the Service's EDI Group plays a critical role in driving forward these efforts, ensuring continuous progress and accountability in achieving the organisation's EDI objectives. Through these initiatives, CDDFRS is dedicated to not only meeting its legal obligations but also to becoming a leader in inclusivity, reflecting the diverse communities it serves and ensuring equal opportunities for all its employees.

3. EDI Events

- 3.1. Earlier this year, CDDFRS actively participated in all formal PRIDE events across the Service area, showcasing its ongoing dedication to promoting EDI both within the Service and across the communities which we serve.
- 3.2. On May 28th, CDDFRS supported Durham PRIDE, with a number of staff members in attendance. A significant highlight of the event was the inclusion of the Service's Aerial Ladder Platform (ALP) in the PRIDE march, a visible symbol of the Service's solidarity with the LGBT community. Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) Keith Carruthers further reinforced this commitment by delivering an impactful opening speech on the main stage, emphasising CDDFRS's dedication to fostering an inclusive environment for both employees and the public.
- 3.3. Following this, on June 10th, Bishop Auckland hosted its inaugural PRIDE event, and CDDFRS was proud to offer its support through the presence of local fire crews. This marked a key moment for the town and for the Service, as the event symbolised a growing recognition of the importance of inclusivity within smaller, local communities. The participation of CDDFRS staff highlighted the Service's commitment to supporting EDI initiatives, irrespective of the event's size or location.
- 3.4. The Service's involvement continued throughout the summer. On July 22nd, Group Manager (GM) Justin Parry represented CDDFRS at Northern PRIDE in Newcastle, further extending the Service's regional engagement. His presence at this significant event demonstrated the continued effort by senior leadership to engage with and support diverse communities in the Northeast.
- 3.5. Most recently, on August 12th, CDDFRS attended Darlington PRIDE. Chief Fire Officer (CFO) Steve Helps, GM Justin Parry, and Community Safety Team Leader Sarah Litt all took part in the event, showcasing the Service's unified approach to promoting diversity and inclusion at the highest levels of leadership. Their involvement reinforced CDDFRS's ongoing commitment to creating a positive and inclusive atmosphere both within the Service and in the communities they serve.

4. EDI Group Update

- 4.1. Within CDDFRS, the EDI efforts are managed through two distinct groups: the Full EDI Group and the EDI Working Group. The Full EDI Group meets quarterly to provide strategic oversight, review progress, and address major EDI issues. Meanwhile, the EDI Working Group convenes monthly to drive the implementation of specific initiatives and address immediate operational concerns.
- 4.2. The latest Full EDI meeting, held on June 27th, focused on several key priorities. The Terms of Reference (TOR) were updated to enhance clarity and governance, aligning the committee's work with current EDI priorities. The meeting also included a review of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) EDI toolkits to assess their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.
- 4.3. Additionally, action plans and equality strands were reviewed to ensure alignment with EDI objectives and assess progress. Significant actions included relocating the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) to the EDI site for easier access, circulating the maturity model progress report, and planning a good practice visit to Amazon for insights into EDI practices.

4.4. The meeting addressed enhancements to the cadet program to increase inclusivity, refined communication strategies for EDI initiatives, and discussed developing pamphlets to raise staff awareness of cultural and religious practices. These efforts are intended to foster a more inclusive environment and advance the Service's EDI agenda.

5. External EDI Meetings

5.1. CDDFRS is a proud member of the North East Equality Rainbow Alliance (NEERA), a regional network dedicated to promoting EDI across the North East. NEERA meetings primarily focused on sharing and celebrating best practices among member organisations, fostering a collaborative approach to advancing EDI across the region.

5.2. Additionally, NEERA recently celebrated the rescinding of Regulation 28, a controversial policy that previously permitted discriminatory practices in certain sectors. The removal of this regulation marks a significant victory for EDI advocates and reinforces the region's commitment to upholding inclusive values.

5.3. NEERA is also set to host the inaugural NEERA Conference in 2024, titled "Change for Good." The conference, scheduled for October, will serve as a vital platform to address ongoing challenges related to hate crimes, discrimination, and inequality in the region. It aims to bring together community members in a show of solidarity and commitment to fostering an inclusive and welcoming North East.

5.4. Representatives from CDDFRS will be attending the event, further demonstrating the Service's dedication to promoting EDI and supporting regional initiatives.

6. EDI Strategy Update

6.1. The current EDI strategy, titled "Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022 – 2025," is approaching its conclusion. This strategy was primarily based on the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) Equality Framework and the NFCC EDI Strategy 2017-2022. It has been supported by an action plan which is in its final stages of completion and covered five key areas, which are:

- Leadership, Partnership and Services.
- Effective Service Delivery.
- Communications, Knowledge, and Engagement.
- Employment, Health and Wellbeing.
- Recruitment, Training, and Selection.

6.2. In preparation for developing a new EDI strategy, an EDI strategy workshop was conducted on September 12th. The intention is for the new strategy to align closely with the NFCC Maturity Model for EDI. Maturity models serve as best practice frameworks that assist Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) in evaluating their current practices and identifying potential future steps.

6.3. The NFCC Maturity Model consists of four levels of maturity that each FRS is assessed against, with the goal of progressing through these levels. For EDI, the levels are:

- Level 1 – Legislatively and Policy Compliant.
- Level 2 – Valuing Diversity.
- Level 3 – Integrating Inclusion.
- Level 4 – Leading from the Front.

- 6.4. In June 2023, the EDI Working Group collaborated with Jo Hardy, NFCC Implementation Liaison Manager, to complete the NFCC EDI self-assessment. The feedback received in September 2023 indicated that CDDFRS was graded at Level 2 – Valuing Diversity.
- 6.5. The goal for the new EDI strategy is to advance CDDFRS from Level 2 to Level 3 – Integrating Inclusion. The workshop facilitated focus groups to refine the future structure of the EDI group, approve the alignment of the EDI strategy with the NFCC Maturity Model, agree on EDI priority areas and actions, and document existing successes while identifying opportunities for improvement.
- 6.6. The workshop was highly successful, exemplifying a strategy developed collaboratively with input from those it serves.

7. Summary

- 7.1. The report aims to update the CFA HR Committee on the progress of CDDFRS in EDI. It highlights recent EDI events, including PRIDE activities and other initiatives to promote inclusivity, as well as updates on the EDI strategy and the work of the EDI Group.
- 7.2. CDDFRS is dedicated to fostering an inclusive environment and has actively participated in PRIDE events across its service area, showcasing its commitment to diversity and community support. This involvement included significant participation in Durham PRIDE, Bishop Auckland's inaugural PRIDE, Northern PRIDE in Newcastle, and Darlington PRIDE.
- 7.3. The EDI efforts are managed through two groups: the Full EDI Group, which meets quarterly for strategic oversight, and the EDI Working Group, which meets monthly to implement specific initiatives. Recent activities included updating the Terms of Reference, reviewing the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) EDI toolkits, and planning a good practice visit to Amazon.
- 7.4. CDDFRS is also a member of the NEERA, which recently celebrated the removal of Regulation 28 and will host the "Change for Good" conference in 2024. CDDFRS will participate in this event to further its regional EDI commitment.
- 7.5. The current EDI strategy, which is based on the CFA and NFCC frameworks and has nearly completed its action plan, is nearing its end. A workshop on September 12th aimed to develop a new EDI strategy aligned with the NFCC Maturity Model. The goal is to progress from Level 2 – Valuing Diversity to Level 3 – Integrating Inclusion. The workshop successfully addressed the future structure of the EDI group, aligned priorities, and identified areas for improvement, reflecting a collaborative approach to enhancing the strategy.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1. Members are requested to:
 - (a) **Note** and **comment** the content of the report.