



Safest People, Safest Places

Human Resources Committee

20 February 2025

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan

Report of Head of Community Risk Management

Purpose of Report

1. This report provides assurance to members of the Combined Fire Authority (CFA) Human Resources (HR) Committee that County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS) is fully committed to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), with a strong emphasis on continuous improvement. It introduces the newly developed EDI Strategy and supporting Action Plan.

Scope

2. This report focuses solely on the CDDFRS EDI Strategy 2025–2028 and its supporting Action Plan.

Background

3. EDI is fundamental to fostering an inclusive, supportive, and high-performing workplace. Research consistently shows that diverse teams enhance organisational performance, leading to better decision-making, increased innovation, and stronger outcomes. A workforce that reflects the communities it serves builds public trust, strengthens team cohesion, and improves resilience in high-pressure situations.

4. Despite some progress, workforce diversity within the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) remains a challenge. As of March 2024, only 5.4% of firefighters in England identified as belonging to an ethnic minority group, compared to 26% of the general population. Women accounted for just 8% of operational roles, underscoring the need for greater representation.
5. Recognising the need for improvement at both national and local levels, CDDFRS has developed a comprehensive EDI Strategy that reflects its strong commitment to inclusivity. This Strategy, supported by a detailed Action Plan, was developed using the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Maturity Model self-assessment tool.
6. The NFCC's self-assessment tool is an electronic questionnaire designed to provide a balanced and unbiased evaluation of an organisation's EDI maturity. It is completed by a diverse group of employees, ensuring a broad and representative assessment.
7. In June 2023, Jo Hardy, NFCC Implementation Liaison Manager, attended the CDDFRS EDI Group meeting to provide an overview of the NFCC EDI Maturity Model. During this session, CDDFRS completed the NFCC EDI self-assessment, consisting of 48 questions aligned to four levels of maturity.
8. By September 2023, the CDDFRS EDI Working Group received the self-assessment results, which graded CDDFRS at Level 2 – Valuing Diversity overall.
9. The new EDI Strategy and Action Plan are designed to advance CDDFRS from Level 2 – Valuing Diversity to Level 3 – Integrating Inclusion.

The New EDI Strategy

10. The new EDI Strategy is designed to be engaging, visually dynamic, and immersive, ensuring it resonates with a wider audience. By integrating striking visuals, accessible language, and clear, measurable goals, it aims to inspire not only understanding but also active engagement from stakeholders at all levels.
11. The CDDFRS EDI Strategy 2025–2028 provides insights into:
 - The Chief Fire Officer's (CFO) vision
 - Relevant EDI legislation
 - The communities we serve
 - Our values and ethical principles
 - EDI governance within CDDFRS
 - Our people

- The five key priorities of the Strategy
12. These five key priorities were developed to address gaps identified in the NFCC Maturity Model gap analysis, where CDDFRS did not achieve the desired scores.

The EDI Action Plan

13. The new EDI Action Plan serves as a roadmap for improvement, outlining the steps CDDFRS must take to advance its EDI maturity.
14. Developed using insights from the NFCC Maturity Model self-assessment, the plan's wording and specific actions were shaped collaboratively by the EDI Group. Each action was carefully designed to address identified areas for improvement. This inclusive approach fosters ownership and accountability among those responsible for implementation. With clear, targeted actions, the plan is structured to drive meaningful progress.
15. Once fully implemented, CDDFRS intends to invite the NFCC to conduct a follow-up self-assessment. This will enable the Service to measure progress, identify further opportunities for growth, and assess its advancement toward a more inclusive and equitable Fire and Rescue Service (FRS).

Summary

16. The CDDFRS EDI Strategy 2025–2028 reaffirm the Service's commitment to EDI, with a strong focus on continuous improvement. The Strategy aims to foster an inclusive, high-performing workplace, recognising that diverse teams drive better decision-making, innovation, and resilience.
17. However, workforce diversity within the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) remains a challenge. In response, CDDFRS has developed a comprehensive supporting Action Plan informed by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Maturity Model self-assessment.
18. Following an NFCC-led self-assessment in June 2023, CDDFRS was graded at Level 2 – Valuing Diversity. The new Strategy and Action Plan establish clear, actionable steps to progress to Level 3 – Integrating Inclusion.
19. The Strategy outlines five key priorities designed to address gaps identified in the NFCC Maturity Model, while the Action Plan provides a structured roadmap for improvement. Once fully implemented, CDDFRS plans to invite the NFCC for

a follow-up assessment to measure progress, further refine its approach, and continue working towards a more inclusive and equitable fire service.

Recommendations

20. Members are requested to:

- **Note** the contents of the report.