

Equality and Diversity Steering Group Update

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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1 Purpose of Report

This report provides a summary of the work of the Equality and Diversity Steering Group from October 2016 to October 2017.

2 Recommendations

The Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

3 Background

The remit of the Equality and Diversity Steering Group is:

- To improve the services we provide to the wider Shropshire community
- To promote community cohesion and anti-discrimination with people living and working in Shropshire, including issues of rural access, social isolation and income inequality
- To initiate, facilitate, monitor and evaluate projects to improve the wellbeing of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) employees
- To promote excellence in equality and diversity practice throughout the organisation
- To maintain organisational focus and ensure strategic priorities for Equality and Diversity in the organisation and the communities we serve
- To ensure that the SFRS culture encourages employees and service users to be valued and accepted as individuals
- To provide leadership, strategic direction, development and resources to ensure progression of our Equality Framework and Single Equality Scheme.

4 Main Areas of Work

The Steering Group oversees the work within the Service since October 2016 to September 2017, major elements of which are summarised below.

Positive action campaigns

As part of the Service's positive action programme to encourage people from underrepresented groups to apply for posts the Steering Group has facilitated 5 positive action events for Women's taster events since the last report to Members.

- Albrighton Fire Station 12 November 2016
- Telford Central Fire Station 7 December 2016
- Bridgnorth Fire Station 18 March 2017
- Oswestry Fire Station 17 June 2017
- Market Drayton Fire Station 16 September 2017
- 2 promotional coffee mornings in Bridgnorth and Minsterley.

Currently work is ongoing to run taster sessions in advance of wholetime firefighter recruitment being planned for 2018.

Reasonable Adjustments

The reasonable adjustments programme has continued, most of the work is with dyslexic operational employees, providing personal tuition, specialist equipment and peer support as appropriate. The costs are met in part by Access to work. The programme continues to be highly effective in enabling employees to carry out their roles with increased confidence and effectiveness.

Case load

- 14 current cases
- 3 new cases since last steering group.
- 3 support programmes completed / closed since last steering group.

To support people with dyslexia the Service now prints on cream headed paper not white and is currently investigating whether the usage of the dyslexia font would be beneficial.

Hate Crime reporting

Work is ongoing to review the usage of Service vehicles to further advertise the anti-hate crime message.

The Service recently took part in a questionnaire carried out by Fairness, Respect, Equality Shropshire (FRESH) to review the hate crime reporting centres model in which the Service participates. This questionnaire covered;

- Location of centres
- Usage of centres
- Training of front line staff in awareness

The Service understands the reporting centre model is likely to be reviewed nationally and is awaiting the resulting report.

Mind

The Service signed up to the Mind, Time to Change pledge in February 2016. This is about helping and supporting people with mental health problems.

Mind delivered the Blue Light Programme to provide mental health support for emergency services staff and volunteers from ambulance, fire, police and search and rescue services across England and Wales.

The Service continues to support the Blue Light pledge. There is a link to the Mind website accessible to staff on the intranet and mental health features prominently on the newly created Service Health and Wellbeing plan.

The Service participated in the Mind “Time to Talk day” in February 2017.

SAFARI (South Asian Fire Attitude Research Initiative)

The Equality and Diversity team met with new operational managers, to discuss the safari report and update the action plan.

Safe Places

Safe places are a short term safe place for vulnerable people who feel threatened. A number of businesses in Shropshire have already signed up to become a ‘safe place’. The Steering Group supports this and work is ongoing to introduce this into the Service.

Disability Confident Scheme

The Disability Confident Scheme aims to help employers make the most of the opportunities provided by employing disabled people. It is voluntary and has been developed by employers and disabled people’s representatives.

The Disability Confident Scheme has 3 levels that have been designed to support organisations on their Disability Confident journey. This scheme replaces the 2 ticks’ symbol that we have worked towards previously. An organisation must complete each level before moving on to the next.

SFRS has currently achieved Level 1 and the Service attended a meeting at Job Centre Plus in June and undertook and completed the Disability Confident self-assessment, which stated that SFRS are taking all of the core actions to be a Disability Confident employer. SFRS are offering at least one action to get the right people for the organisation and at least one action to keep and develop our people.

In continuing our Disability Confident journey, the Service is ensuring that disabled people and those with long term health conditions have the opportunities to fulfil their potential and realise their aspirations.

Officers are now in the process of setting up meetings to explore how to reach to the next level, Level 3.

Dementia Action Plan

The Service, alongside the other emergency services within the area, have signed up to the Dementia Action Alliance. This is the Alliance for organisations across England to connect, share best practice and take action on dementia.

It currently (as of October 2017) has 6,369 members and 341 local alliances.

Dementia awareness training sessions were completed for operational staff during 2016.

Single Equality Scheme Action Plan.

Progress on monitoring equality and diversity policies and actions has been monitored through the single equality scheme action plan and this will be updated at the next Steering group in January 2018.

Member Champion

Councillor Kuldip Sahota has been appointed as the new Equality and Diversity Member Champion for SFRS. Councillor. Sahota is a Telford & Wrekin Councillor.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer

As a result of long term absence in the Equality and Diversity Team the Service has appointed a temporary Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer.

Muhammad Younis has been seconded from his role in the Community Fire Safety, as a Bi-Lingual Community Fire Safety Advocate to work in E&D for up to a year.

Equality and Diversity external activities and events

Among other groups and events the Service actively supports / attends:

- Asian Fire Service Association conference (AFSA membership)
- Dyslexia Awards evening- SFRS came in top 3 for “best employer”
- Dyslexia Open day and networking evenings
- Your future your choice (local schools)
- National Festival of LGBT history
- Flying the Rainbow flag for International day against homophobia, LGBT history month and the rainbow film festival.
- Rainbow Film Festival (Sponsorship)
- FREsh (Fairness, Respect, Equality Shropshire Ltd Membership)
- FREsh cultural diversity day
- Women in the Fire Service (Membership)
- Annual Multi faith and cultural year planner issued to all stations.

At the last Steering group the decision was made to review and potentially re-join and be a Stonewall Diversity Champion. This will be done in 2018.

National Inclusive Fire Service Group

A national group led by the National Joint Council (NJC) (circular NJC/8/17) has been undertaking a comprehensive piece of work engaging directly with fire and rescue services and their employees to consider equality, diversity, cultural and behavioural issues with the purpose of developing improvement strategies which could be supported across the board and used at local level to deliver improvement.

The Group, which is independently chaired has employer and employee representation from the NJC and representation from the National Fire Chiefs Council, the Fire Officers Association and the Retained Firefighters Union. It has also engaged with special interest groups such as Stonewall, Asian Fire Service Association, Women in the Fire Service, and Women in the Police Service, FBU Women's, BME and LGBT groups, Unison, GMB etc.

A report has been produced by the Group, including improvement strategies. Each Fire and Rescue Service has been asked to consider the strategies suggested and how they can be taken forward in each service.

This report and subsequent response will be taken to the next Steering Group meeting and will be reported on at the following Standards and Human Resources Committee meeting.

5 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

6 Legal Comment

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

7 Initial Impact Assessment

This report contains merely statements of fact / historical data. An Initial Impact Assessment is not, therefore, required.

8 Appendices

There are no appendices attached to this report.

9 Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report.