

# An inclusive service

The twenty-first century fire  
and rescue service



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# Introduction

As the lead members of the Local Government Association's Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC), we are proud to be a part of the fire and rescue sector. Our service is respected by the public and welcomed into their homes. We have an enviable record in fire prevention – one that many public services could learn from – and our pride in our service is widely shared by our fellow politicians on fire and rescue authorities across the country and among all our staff.

There is little doubt, therefore, that for all of us in the fire and rescue sector, the Fire Minister's speech to the Asian Fire Service Association last November made difficult reading. The Minister did not pull his punches, calling the lack of diversity revealed by the latest operational statistics 'woeful... shockingly and embarrassingly bad'.<sup>1</sup> Of course, we can point to the financial pressures that have hampered the recruitment of a more diverse workforce, but ethnic minorities make up just 3.8 per cent of firefighters while only 5 per cent are women.<sup>2</sup> The picture in other parts of the service is better, but it is noticeable that there has been little change during the past five years as recruitment has dropped off.

The Minister is right to say that this is unacceptable.

It is also detrimental to our service. The public respect us, but too many of them do not see us as potential employers. We are denying ourselves access to an enormous pool of talent, at a time when the service we

provide is changing in significant ways. No business would expect to thrive by doing this and nor can we. The old clichés that 'women can't carry people out of burning buildings' or certain ethnic groups 'don't want to be firefighters' are no longer acceptable and must be challenged.

The financial barrier to recruitment is lifting – not fully, and, as we show in this document, not to the extent sometimes envisaged in Whitehall – but it is lifting. Most fire and rescue services expect to recruit new firefighters in the next five years. As our case studies show, fire and rescue services are already working to meet the challenge of recruiting a representative workforce, but even innovative approaches to recruitment can only achieve so much. A change of culture and perception is required if our efforts are to meet a receptive audience of potential recruits. Action on diversity should not be confined to recruitment at entry level. We need to open ourselves to the wealth of external talent available to fill senior posts and to making the most of the talent we already have by ensuring diversity in promotion and development. We need to be and to be seen as an inclusive workplace.

We have an opportunity to change both the demographics of the workforce and the perception of our work. It is an opportunity we have to take.

The Local Government Association (LGA) is determined to work with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), the Home Office and our other partners to do so.

The Inclusive Fire Service Group has been working to this end for nearly two years already and fire and rescue authorities around the country have been pursuing

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/brandon-lewiss-speech-to-the-asian-fire-service-association>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/563118/fire-rescue-operational-statistics-201516-hosb1216.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/563118/fire-rescue-operational-statistics-201516-hosb1216.pdf)

the inclusivity agenda – a few examples of the many initiatives involved are included here. We need to significantly increase the rate of change however and together with the NFCC, Asian Fire Service Association (ASFA), Women in the Fire Service, quiltbag, Stonewall and trade unions, we signed the recent Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) setting out principles around our approach to diversity and a list of actions which we are now pursuing. The effect of these actions will be monitored and the MoU reviewed to ensure we are delivering effectively.

This document is aimed at everyone with an interest in our sector but in particular at members of fire and rescue authorities. It has three aims:

- to provide an opportunity for those representing female, ethnic minority and LGBT firefighters set out some of the problems that they believe the fire and rescue service needs to address
- to suggest some of the practical steps that can and are being taken to improve diversity and which members will want to consider in the context of their own authorities
- to pose some questions that fire and rescue authority (FRA) members may usefully ask of their service and themselves.

We do not claim by any means to have all the answers in this document. However, it is a starting point and we intend to continue collating ideas and sharing best practice through a diversity web community.

We hope you will find this document of practical help, but the actions fire and rescue services need to take will vary from place to place. If our services are to reflect their communities, they will not all look the same any more than our communities do. Some approaches will work better in some places than in others and it will not always be clear what will work best where, until we try. Nevertheless a few key themes stand out:

- **We need to change the culture of the service.** This is not about setting targets, we need to create an inclusive culture – one which values individuals for the abilities they bring, not tick-box tokenism.
- **We need to alter the perception of our service so the public can see our profession in its modern form.** Firefighting is now a relatively small part of what we do, but it has a completely disproportionate impact on how we are perceived. We need to radically challenge this – possibly through a national campaign – if we are to attract the right workforce to deliver what we actually do.
- **We need to learn from other sectors, but we also need to learn from each other.** We need to share our ideas, our successes and our failures so we can all learn from them. We must not let our pride in our individual services stand in the way of this.
- **As the political leadership of the fire service we must be the change we want to see.** We need to use our oversight to ensure our service delivers on diversity but we also need to exemplify inclusive leadership in the way we treat each other and the way we talk about our work.

The changes in culture and perception that are necessary if we are to achieve a more representative service, fit well with the changes that our service has undergone in recent years and which will continue in the future. We are increasingly a prevention service, and it is not only fires that we prevent. For example drowning now accounts for more deaths in the UK than house fires and there is a clear need for action to reduce this through education.

It is not only fire prevention which takes us into people's homes, schools and communities, but looking at those broader risks to people's safety in their own homes. Home safety visits have expanded to become safe and well visits in many areas, providing a more holistic approach towards safety in the home, going beyond fire risk and looking at a range of other issues like falls prevention, or alcohol use.

Many fire and rescue services are working in partnership with health colleagues, with other emergency services and with local authorities on a range of issues from modern slavery to co-responding with the ambulance service.

Our preventative role is already eroding the division between 'frontline' and 'support' staff. Every role in the fire service contributes to prevention. We can expect to see other changes in the future too. Different approaches will work for different services but the existing distinction between wholetime and retained firefighters may not characterise the fire and rescue service of the future. The development of apprenticeships also offer possibilities, both in terms of careers in the service and in achieving a more representative demographic within the workforce. Indeed the service for which we are responsible may not be seen, further into this century, as a fire and rescue service but as one whose primary function is community safety and harm prevention. We will always be there when the public need us, but the popular image of the firefighter, already a misrepresentation, is likely to feel increasingly outdated as the twenty-first century moves on. There are many aspects to this change, this publication focusses on recruiting, retaining and developing a more diverse workforce, but that aspect of modernisation does not exist in a vacuum – it is part of a wider transformation that has been underway for some time.

These are significant challenges, but they are exciting ones too. We have an opportunity to deliver real change which will in turn improve what is already an excellent service. We want the twenty first century firefighter to be perceived as just as likely to be a woman as a man, free of racial and identity stereotypes, as likely to be visiting schools to provide fire safety advice as running into a burning building – a respected member of their community, with the skills and expertise to protect that community in numerous ways.

The MoU on equality, diversity, behaviours and organisational culture in the fire and rescue service can be found here:

<http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/12157/Diversity+MoU+30+January+2017.pdf/cb4ac612-4ab6-45d6-8db7-b98c3e3924ea>

**Councillor Jeremy Hilton**

Chair, LGA Fire Services Management Committee

**Councillor Philip Howson**

Vice Chair, LGA Fire Services Management Committee

**Councillor David Acton**

Deputy Chair, LGA Fire Services Management Committee

**Councillor Rebecca Knox**

Deputy Chair, LGA Fire Services Management Committee

# The future pattern of recruitment

The Home Office has made increasing the diversity of the firefighter workforce a key priority in their fire reform programme, suggesting that the ageing workforce would present opportunities to fulfil this ambition. The Local Government Association (LGA) conducted research in November and December 2016 to establish when the opportunity to recruit would exist in practice and to understand the services' recruitment ambitions.

## The survey

The survey was sent to chief fire officers (CFOs) and chief executives of fire and rescue authorities (FRAs), and respondents were asked a number of questions about wholetime and retained recruitment as well as any recruitment initiatives to increase diversity they were putting in place. The survey was conducted in England and we had responses from 40 fire and rescue services, giving us a response rate of 89 per cent.

## The results

The majority of respondents, 90 per cent, anticipated that their service would be externally recruiting wholetime firefighters during the five years following the survey. Recruitment was expected to happen throughout the five year period, but 2017/18 and 2018/19 were the years where recruitment was most commonly expected to take place.

**Although about a third of firefighters are expected to retire in the next five years, on average respondents expected to replace 14 per cent of their existing wholetime firefighter workforce over the next five years.**

External retained recruitment was expected throughout the next five years by 93 per cent of respondents, with 2017/18 the likely peak. The average proportion of their existing retained firefighter workforce that these 32 authorities expected to be replacing over five years was 27 per cent. However there was a significant variation: 22 per cent of fire and rescue services expected to replace 1-10 per cent of their retained firefighters; whilst one estimated that they would have to replace 100 per cent.

We also asked about any recruitment initiatives being put in place to achieve an increasingly diverse firefighter workforce (more representative of females and people from black and ethnic minority groups or the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community in both retained and wholetime recruitment). Eighty per cent of respondents said that they planned to put recruitment initiatives to encourage diversity in place, whilst 15 per cent said that they were considering doing this. Examples given of recruitment initiatives included outreach and targeted work to improve diversity, engaging with young people from underrepresented groups, running taster sessions for specific underrepresented groups, using social media for targeted advertising, and offering help with the recruitment process.

All respondents were then asked whether they monitor recruitment progress, from application to accepted offer of employment, in order to establish drop-out rates from females, black and ethnic minority groups or the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender candidates. Just under half of respondents (48 per cent – 19 respondents) said that they monitor recruitment progress for all

of the groups mentioned in the question, with a further 28 per cent (11 respondents) monitoring some of the groups.

Whilst it is great news that 80 per cent of FRSs are undertaking recruitment initiatives to achieve an increasingly diverse workforce, this needs to be accompanied with monitoring to identify any trends for particular societal groups and to ensure that appropriate support is provided to applicants at the right point in the process. **Without knowing why candidates with different backgrounds drop out or don't pass then we cannot effectively address any barriers within the process which prevent a candidates performing to the best of their abilities.**

This detailed approach to diverse recruitment, while important, is only part of the picture. Research conducted for the London Fire Brigade found that:

Women looked for many qualities in a potential role, these often overlapped with the role of a woman firefighter. However, there is an overall lack of awareness of the firefighter role which often results in women creating perceived barriers

As this suggests **we are potentially missing out on high quality recruits due to the way firefighter role is perceived and need to consider how we can address that perception.** This is an issue the LGA will consider going forward and we hope that thinking will be informed by the experience and views of individual services.

A similar issue may well arise from perceptions – and the reality - about the culture of the fire and rescue service. These are more difficult issues to address. Cultural change cannot happen overnight. Elsewhere in this publication we look at some of the measures, such as unconscious bias training and inclusive leadership that can help effect that change and the work the Inclusive Fire Service group is already doing.

Monitoring statistics on exit interviews, grievance and disciplinary statistics and progression processes in a similar manner to that outlined above for recruitment, can help to quantify cultural factors which may impact on the attractiveness of the service to potential recruits.

### **Conclusion**

Recruitment is happening for both retained and wholetime firefighters over the next five years. For wholetime this will be particularly over the next two years. However, the opportunities for recruitment posed by an ageing workforce do not appear to be large scale for wholetime recruitment, though the picture is more mixed on retained recruitment. This makes it all the more important to take what opportunities we do have to recruit a more representative firefighter workforce.

The LGA survey can be found here: [http://www.local.gov.uk/research-pay-and-workforce/-/journal\\_content/56/10180/8195648/ARTICLE](http://www.local.gov.uk/research-pay-and-workforce/-/journal_content/56/10180/8195648/ARTICLE)

For a more detailed discussion of the issues affecting recruitment, including an example of detailed monitoring of recruitment stages, see the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority's (LFEPA): Firefighter Recruitment – Outcome of 2015 and 2016 Campaigns and Proposals for 2017:

<http://moderngov.london-fire.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=5790>

For Future Thinking's report on why women are reluctant to apply to join the London Fire Brigade see:

<http://moderngov.london-fire.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=5777>



The LGA survey of chief fire officers and chief executives asked respondents to provide any further comments on recruitment and diversity in the fire and rescue service. Eighteen respondents (45 per cent) provided comments.

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- Several respondents suggested that there should be a nationally driven campaign to help ensure that the service is viewed as a career of choice by a wider group of people, and increase awareness of the modern role of a firefighter.
- Some highlighted the fact that retained firefighters need to live within a short distance of their station. For some, this catchment area is made up of predominantly white British people, which impacts on their ability to recruit an increasingly diverse workforce.
- One respondent stated that they will be looking to undertake their new recruitment through the new apprenticeship scheme currently under development nationally, which was not covered by this survey.
- Finally, a range of practical suggestions were made, including:
  - offering flexible contracts, which may differ from the traditional whole-time and retained employment arrangements
  - developing a greater understanding of why individuals are not attracted to the service (for example is pay an issue?)
  - rethinking the idea that every firefighter needs to be able to do every job
  - creating schemes that support development such a supported two tier entry, managed promotion and active talent management
  - providing advice on what is positive discrimination if all delegates reach a standard
  - considering whether the national standards for fitness are appropriate for new recruits or whether they should that be a target to achieve as a probationer.

# Retained duty system reform

Reform of the retained duty system (RDS) is one of the developments that could assist the recruitment and retention of a more diverse workforce.

The Chief Fire Officer's Association's (CFOA) strategic working group on the RDS is working closely with the Home Office to drive forward improvements to the retained duty system in a bid to improve recruitment, retention and resilience. This work will continue when CFOA becomes the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC).

The strategic group contains representatives from the Home Office, Local Government Association (LGA), Fire Brigades Union (FBU), the Retained Firefighters Union (RFU), the Fire Officers Association (FOA), CFOA, England Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The group is chaired by a Chief Fire Officer (CFO of Derbyshire FRS) and is supported by a practitioner group that is producing some excellent information and evidence to support changes.

In addition the CFOA retained duty system communities information sharing platform has blossomed with much more usage of the portal and some great examples of information exchange across the UK.

The CFOA retained duty system working group is focussing on:

- **Workforce** Pooling of knowledge on the various contracts and approached to the RDS system in use across the UK identifying innovation and good practice beyond the grey book.
- **Branding** Addressing the issue of identity of the RDS to prospective employees, their primary employers and the wider public to ensure that the message is clear that this

can be a job for all and the role of a modern firefighter is now much wider than the traditional perception.

- **Traction** Identifying the methods that can be employed to 'make the changes stick', predominantly through identifying qualitative and quantitative KPIs for the inspectorate to consider in any new inspection process.
- **Medical Response** This is linked to the current National Joint Council (NJC) for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services trials and concerns the positive effect of engagement in medical response on RDS units for morale, recruitment and retention. The Practitioners group are actively seeking evidence to support this aim through the CFOA Communities network.

Further work is planned to discuss potential indicators and inspection key lines of inquiry that could be considered by the future fire inspectorate when reporting on how fire and rescue services manage RDS in future inspections.

In spring 2017 research will be carried out by the Home Office 'Insight' team into the barriers to retained recruitment. This research will in turn feed into the solutions for branding work and translate into marketing tools that can be used nationally to raise public and outside employer awareness of the retained model and its benefits. The practitioner group will be able to sign post the Insight team to groups including; employees, ex-employees, primary employers of RDS Staff, and primary employers who no longer employ RDS staff.

This is the first time that a government department has invested in this kind of research and it is a welcome source of support.

# National Fire and Rescue People Strategy

Following publication of Adrian Thomas' independent review of the conditions of service for fire and rescue staff<sup>3</sup> at the beginning of November 2016, the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) is producing a people strategy for the fire and rescue service.

This offers not only a response to the recommendations in the Thomas Review but also to those in Sir Ken Knight's 'Facing the Future' report<sup>4</sup>. It also offers a response to the main drivers for change in the service over the next five years arising from the significant changes that fire and rescue has seen over the last decade as the number of fires have decreased, and collaboration with a range of partners means the fire and rescue service now provides aspects of social care, education and wider community safety.

**It is NFCC's intention that every fire and rescue service either amends the strategy to produce their own local strategy, or ensures the main themes and principles are echoed in their own strategy.**

The strategy will identify six key areas of work:

1. To strengthen leadership and line management to support organisational change and improved community outcomes. NFCC is looking to develop a Leadership and Management Development Strategy. As part of this strategy there will be common development modules which will be common and relevant to all managers and development support available to all managers at a given level. The aim is to maximise the opportunities presented by information technology so that much of the programme is available by e-learning. Where possible joint modules will be developed with the police and ambulance service.
2. To develop cultural values and behaviours that make the service a great place to work for all our people. NFCC will support individual services so they can use the levers available to them to become better places to work for all, people are encouraged to have a voice and offer constructive challenge, and trust is promoted by accepting mistakes can be made but people can still succeed.
3. To develop ways of working that are able to respond to the services' needs. NFCC will look to offer reward and recognition to attract the best, demonstrate leadership by providing clarity on pay, make the service more adaptable and flexible by moving from fixed duty systems to contract systems that help create a more flexible response so firefighter availability is linked to the planned work load while also providing response cover, continuous improvement of recruitment and selection, on-going support for the retained duty system, and work with the National Joint Council for local authority fire and rescue services to ensure reforms are introduced effectively.
4. To provide excellent training and education to ensure continuous improvement of services to the public. NFCC will create a shared platform for learning, facilitate effective learning across the service, develop professional skills, facilitate the development of good IT and data skills, and support implementation of National Operational Guidance.

3 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/conditions-of-service-for-fire-and-rescue-staff-independent-review>

4 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/facing-the-future>

5. To continue to support the health and wellbeing of all our people. NFCC will help services create wellbeing programmes that suit their needs, ensure firefighter safety underpins all the workforce work the fire and rescue service does, help individual services reduce reported stress and post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of work, provide training for managers on how to reduce the stress associated with change, and support family friendly processes and work patterns.
6. To strengthen our ability to provide good service by diversifying our staff and creating a fair & equal place to work. NFCC will encourage all individual services to put in place the policies and procedures to ensure that future recruitment is inclusive and fair, create better help and support for those at risk

These six areas will help deliver the common goals and principles set out in the strategy. These include making the fire and rescue service an employer of choice, ensuring that firefighter safety and the safety of all the services' people are important, a focus on good communications, support for wellbeing and attacking the stigma about mental illness, a more open career path that allows talent to rise to the most senior roles, making the service open and accountable to the public it serves, and increasing the diversity of the workforce. Action plans are set out in the strategy for each of these six areas, with the intention that the action plans can be refreshed on a regular basis.

# Innovation in diversity – leading the way through positive action

## Wholetime firefighter recruitment in Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service 2016

Striving for inclusivity is at the core of Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service's equality journey. The last three years have seen the service completely transform how it delivers its strategic aims and especially how it draws on the knowledge and skills of its diverse workforce to achieve these aims. A recent recruitment drive for wholetime firefighters, the first in over seven years, presented a truly generational opportunity to encourage under-represented female and ethnic minority applicants. There was a clear recognition that to serve a varying population, we require an extraordinary workforce.

Changing the dynamics of an institution historically dominated by white males was never going to happen overnight. Challenging the many misconceptions that modern fire and rescue services had 'little to offer' by way of opportunity for women, or ethnic minorities and building trust would require a genuine 'hands on' approach; the best advertisement required the involvement of experienced individuals and partnerships that not only reflected their communities but were recognised by them.

This communication strategy moved away from temporary 'tokenistic' gestures traditionally associated with equality and recruitment campaigns. In addition, to ensure we attracted those most likely to have an intimate interest in the area and the communities they would serve, a decision was made to limit applications to within twenty miles of Gloucestershire's borders.

Recognising that traditional generic adverts and anaemic publicity with little or no preparatory work would fail, the project team utilised a dynamic strategy which applied the following five principles.

- A closely networked campaign design that utilised skills in the workforce that clearly understood specific community dynamics and matching target audience needs.
- Direct community-based campaigning to secure credibility and shared campaign work. Face-to-face contact to develop trust and two-way engagement.
- Visible media and publicity resources that directly and genuinely reflected the target community. Not relying on traditionally generic passive campaigning of 'one size fits all'.
- Utilising technology and the broad spectrum of available media in a timely, relatable and relevant way. Well thought-out targeted penetration utilising the 'community telegraph', internet and social media, attempting to keep people engaged and informed throughout.
- Reviewing, sharing and learning from previous practice including maintaining ongoing relationships with important community references. Avoiding tokenistic, short term campaigns.

A programme of direct engagement established relationships well before any recruitment drive through meeting mosque leaders, local councillors, LGBT representatives, sports facilities, schools, community groups, and even fast food outlets.

These important community references not only added credibility to the campaign but actually helped to promote it.

A set of frequently asked questions (FAQs) were carefully drafted to answer any concerns on how the service actively welcomed cultural and religious diversity. The FAQs addressed common misconceptions around height, fitness and strength while explaining that considerations around keeping beards, fasting, prayers, dreadlocks etc. were managed entirely within the context of maintaining firefighter safety.

The campaign utilised the full spectrum of available media including community radio, leaflets, posters and social media in a targeted and intelligent way. Advertising to a range of women's organisations and groups took place through social media. Face-to-face contact was followed by 'have a go days' and an opportunity to register for automatic email updates.

Displayable printed publicity material that could be adapted for social media was specially designed to visually reflect black, Asian and ethnic minority (BAME) communities. Valuable local community radio exposure generated through a live interview was followed by adverts produced by an experienced black crew manager.

The campaign resulted in some significant success in attracting applications from BAME communities with the proportion of minority applicants (5.1 per cent) only marginally less than the county's overall population of 6.2 per cent.

Female interest though considerable, identified a disappointing discrepancy between translating the many expressions of interest into actual applications (10 per cent). A review is currently underway to better understand and identify the reasons why women who demonstrated strong early interest did not actually go on to apply. Additional learning considerations included potentially adopting a longer lead-in time to increase receptivity through greater preparatory work.

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service recognises that its transition into a 21st century fire and rescue service will be influenced greatly by the dynamism and diversity of its workforce. Changing and challenging negative long held traditions at every level continues to progress, with initiatives ranging from a service-wide independent cultural review to unconscious bias training. Even the service's core values have been re-developed through the Employee Network Group; an innovative partnership between senior managers, support staff and firefighters. This recruitment campaign which was neither expensive or resource hungry, will hopefully see a new generation of firefighters moving into a culture where development will be based on talent; retention will be supported through mental and wellbeing policies and most importantly communities will be served by individuals that actually reflect and understand them.

*\*Sources – House of Commons Briefing Paper June 2016, Fire Operational Statistics 2015/16 and Gloucestershire Census figures 2011.*

# Equality and Human Rights Commission

Modern public services need to reflect the people they serve. This is about fairness and attracting and recruiting from the broadest pool of talent; and it is about making sure that public bodies like fire and rescue services understand and respond to the different needs of the people they protect and come into contact with.<sup>5</sup>

The Equality Act 2010 prohibits employers and service providers from discriminating against their employees or customers for reasons relating to a protected characteristic. Protected characteristics are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation
- marriage and civil partnership.<sup>6</sup>

The Equalities Act introduced the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), under which fire and rescue services must have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination
- advance equality of opportunity
- foster good relations

<sup>5</sup> See for example the research for the NHS by Roger Kline (2014) at: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/edc7-0514.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Marriage and civil partnership is also a protected characteristic, but only in relation to eliminating discrimination in employment.

The PSED (public sector equality duty) is a 'General Duty' and provides FRAs with a framework for considering equality across their employment of staff, the services they provide and the decisions they take.

Public bodies in England have two additional specific duties, requiring them:

- to publish one or more equality objectives
- to annually publish equality information to demonstrate compliance with the equality duty.

A third duty on gender pay gaps is due to be introduced in 2017.

The types of information that English public bodies may want to collect and publish can be found on page four of the Government's quick start guide to the specific duties: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/85049/specific-duties.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/85049/specific-duties.pdf)

In Wales, the three fire and rescue services have more prescriptive specific duties.

You can read about these here: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/guides-psed-wales>

It is essential that fire and rescue services continue to take action to identify and address any under-representation that they may have in their workforce, in different roles and at every level of seniority. Sometimes this is about challenging assumptions and stereotypes about what people can and cannot do.

**The Act allows employers to take positive steps to improve work opportunities for people with, or who share a protected characteristic if, for example, their representation in the composition of the workforce is disproportionately low.**

This is called 'positive action'. Examples of 'positive action' would include stating in job advertisements that applications from individuals with a particular protected characteristic are welcome. It would also include providing training and mentoring to black, Asian or ethnic minority (BAME) staff, for example, if they were under-represented at a senior level within the organisation.

However, a job should always be offered on the basis of merit to the best candidate and it would usually be unlawful discrimination to restrict applications to people with, or who share, a particular protected characteristic.

For more information on positive action and recruitment and promotion, please see here: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/what-equality-law-means-you-employer-training-development-promotion-and>

For more information on the Equalities Act for employers please see here: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/equality-act-guidance>

For more information for service providers please see here. <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/equality-act-2010-summary-guidance-services-public-functions-and-associations>

For further information on the key equality and human rights challenges facing Britain, please refer to our series of Is Britain Fairer? reports here: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/britain-fairer>



# Case studies

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## West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service

In June 2016, West Midlands Fire Service advertised an opportunity to join our Strategic Enabling Team (SET) in a 12 month development role. SET oversee the shape and direction of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service, and ensure that we're meeting our legal responsibilities.

Three employees expressed an interest in this role and when reviewing interview paperwork it was evident that each applicant performed equally and it was not possible to identify a higher performer.

When considering the profile of this pool, all were male. Two were white British, and one was mixed white and black Caribbean.

Section 159 of the Equality Act provides that where an employer 'reasonably believes' that a candidate with a protected characteristic suffers a 'disadvantage or are underrepresented' in the workplace they can afford that person 'more favourable treatment in relation to recruitment' than someone without that characteristic. When considering the profile of our strategic enablers it is clear that ethnic minority employees are underrepresented at this level. Only two members of SET describe themselves as being from an ethnic minority group.

Section 159<sup>7</sup> stipulates that the employer must determine that the candidate is 'as qualified' as another. It is evident that all three applicants were of 'equal merit' in their overall ability, competence and professional experience.

The decision was taken to offer the development opportunity to the ethnic minority employee, but it was clear that the offer had been made based upon his merit, performance and potential.

Whilst we do not advocate a routine policy of treating protected groups more favourably, the action of enacting Section 159 in this particular circumstance was viewed as a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim, and we will use positive action in this context in a tie-breaker situation.

When using Section 159, selection must be on merit therefore candidates will not be considered as equal where another has exceeded during the selection process. In reality therefore, we will rarely find ourselves in this situation. We took a rare opportunity to fully demonstrate our commitment to diversity in a very real and tangible way.

The decision to use Section 159 was clearly communicated to the three applicants as well as the wider workforce.

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## Positive Action, Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service

Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service have 27 operational fire stations of which 24 provide an on-call service. Of our operational workforce, 48 per cent are retained and 52 per cent wholetime. Between 2000 and 2013 only one wholetime recruitment campaign was carried out resulting in 12 firefighter appointments. Wholetime recruitment campaigns have been held annually between 2014 and 2016.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/159>

There is a historical and present need to diversify our workforce. The number of women operational staff has been under 5 per cent and black and ethnic minority people are under-represented in all parts of the service – operational and support. The proportion of staff who identify as gay is also negligible. In 2009 we did a piece of work to understand the problem better and to try some activities for encouraging more diversity. From that work we identified:

- short term pre-recruitment positive action need to be balanced with long-term strategies
- all staff need to understand positive action as a principle and be involved in those activities
- we face the same challenges as many organisations and there is no 'one solution'. We need to be prepared to experiment, try out a range of activities and not be disheartened at failures, but learn from them
- care needs to be taken to ensure good relations between under-represented groups and the majority are maintained and anything that appears to be tokenism is avoided
- this work needs to be resourced, mainstreamed and sustained whether recruitment is happening or not.

We developed a positive action strategy with a wide range of activities to help us focus on long-term and short-term outcome.,

### **Positive action in wholetime recruitment**

In preparation for a wholetime recruitment campaign in Feb 2015, a media and social media campaign plan was developed which included:

- running three half-day, 'have a go' sessions, one just for women reporters to encourage feature articles and one aimed specifically at women
- using paid for advertising on social media for the first time to target women including a video on YouTube.

- profiling a number of firefighters on our website including women and staff who identify as BAME.
- holding information sessions in community centres where there is ethnic and cultural diversity
- poster campaign promoting firefighting in cities and towns with highest ethnic diversity and in places where women go
- advertising through Women in the Fire Service and Asian Fire Service Association Networks
- advertising in LGBT magazine 'Fynetimes'.

Four women reporters took part in the 'have a go' session resulting in a good range of print and broadcast media coverage. In total, 42 people attended the 'have a go' sessions, of which 47 per cent were women. The Facebook advert targeting women to promote the 'have a go' event reached 20,770 women in six days and resulted in 368 clicks to our website.

A total of 221 applications were received, of which 13 per cent were women (compared to 7 per cent in 2014); 6 per cent identified as being of black or ethnic minority group (compared to 4 per cent in 2014); 5 per cent requested reasonable adjustments; and 3 per cent identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB). Of the successful recruits, 29 per cent were women and 10 per cent identify as BAME. This is the highest percentage of both women and BAME we have ever had in one intake.

The above was repeated for the 2016 campaign and although the proportion of women attending a 'have a go' session was higher than in 2015, the statistical outcomes were not quite so good (10 per cent applications were from women; 3 per cent BAME and 2 per cent LGB; 2 per cent requested reasonable adjustments.) It was acknowledged that there was a lot less time to prepare than was ideal and the overall number of applications was down by 35 which may have impacted diversity.

### **Positive action in on-call recruitment**

There is an ongoing commitment to recruit retained firefighters who are able to respond to emergency calls within a five minute travel time from their local fire station. A different approach is needed in attracting on-call applicants as it is an ongoing process and the areas where we can draw from are restricted and not always ethnically diverse. The following has taken place over the last few years:

- An information brochure was produced featuring on-call firefighters to try and reduce firefighter stereotypes.
- Posters and postcards were introduced featuring photos of women and men in both their primary roles and their on-call roles.
- A move was made away from specifically mentioning the more traditional backgrounds a candidate might come from such as mechanic, engineer, builder etc.
- A dedicated on-call Recruitment Officer was appointed whose role is to co ordinate station activities and liaise with the central recruitment team, whilst raising the profile of on-call firefighters within the community. This has included looking at different ways to reach underrepresented groups.
- Information evenings for potential candidates are held regularly and we encourage women and men on-call firefighters to attend those.

This resulted in a significant increase in applications (122 applicants in 2012 to 248 in 2013) and an increase in the numbers of female applicants from nine to 17. Appointments of women to on-call operational roles have increased as well and in the last three years this amounted to seven compared to three in the previous three years.

Ethnic diversity in applicants has increased from 4 per cent in 2012/13 to 7 per cent in 2015/16. However this is not matched by success in selection. Further analysis has shown a range of reasons why BAME applicants do not fare well through the process but it is clear that a reasonably high proportion of those who do not have English

as a first language fail the written tests or do not attend this part of the process.

### **Other activities include:**

- Developed and delivered training on positive action for staff.
- Ensured assessment and selection panels comprise male and female managers, suitably trained and from all parts of the organisation.
- Did some introductory 'unconscious bias' training with assessment and selection staff.
- Attend selected career events at schools and colleges – particularly in most diverse areas, to promote different careers within fire and rescue service. Members of the equality network often attend to ensure diversity in our Service is 'visible'.
- Produced a 'Careers at Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service' booklet featuring a wide range of roles and individuals.
- In partnership with police, we held quarterly two hour 'Insight to Blue Light' sessions to inform people about employment opportunities and roles in emergency services. These are aimed specifically at people from BAME backgrounds.
- Built knowledge and commitment to positive action into station assurance visits to ensure staff understand why this is important.
- Rolling out aspirations and providing support for operational Watches and on-call stations to engage with BAME communities.
- Following research into why women may not choose to develop in service, introduced a six month development programme for all staff in non-managerial roles. Selection is by application and informal interview. The gender split for the 2016 cohort has been broadly 50/50 in applications and selection. Of those from the 2015 cohort, 79 per cent achieved a promotion following this development programme. 50 per cent of the women in this first cohort achieved a promotion following it.

# Fire Brigades Union

Fire and rescue services (FRS) that are diverse and reflective of the communities that fund them is a common objective of both the service employers and the representative bodies.

For two decades the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) have had equality sections representing women, black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) members. The sections are made up of officials democratically elected by members of their respective minority groups. Policy and direction is decided through annual general meetings where minority members submit resolutions on what they see as the priorities for advancing equality for their group. Each section has a national committee consisting of a chair, secretary and one representative from each region, the committees meet four times a year. Each equality section also facilitates an annual three day education event that is open to their minority members to attend.

The strength of the FBU equality sections lies with their ability to empathise with the issues that their members face. As a result of national structures being in place a wealth of experience of the issues and an understanding of the barriers has been gained. Through regular structured meetings members are able to bring forward concerns where they feel the service is failing and also share experience on where the service is doing good work that may benefit in other brigades. The FBU equality sections also work closely with each other. Needs of each section members may differ but inclusion is about the need to recognise and respect and value difference.

Equality section officials seek to work with fire service employers to advance equality and diversity and in some cases this has been problematic where poor industrial relations have been in place. Experience has shown that the greatest advances in diversity have been achieved through joint working and engagement with equality section officials and the leadership in the service. This used to include an annual meeting with the Fire Minister where each section would have the opportunity to bring three issues they felt were important to their members, however these meetings ceased in 2011. FBU equality sections believe there is an important message to be sent out in terms of commitment to equality and diversity and that must start at the very top of the industry at ministerial level.

Equality section officials can often find it difficult to secure time off to attend meetings and perform the work they are committed to. Services often fail to recognise the benefit of the work that these officials are trying to do and the inability to attend meetings can obstruct progress being made. Also where section officials don't feel valued and supported by their services they are less likely to continue to contribute to equality and diversity and retention of the skills and knowledge of those officials could be lost. Services need to move forward from equality and diversity being a nice to have to a position of recognition that publicly funded services must be reflective of those who pay for them.

Austerity and cuts to the service has presented challenges in improving the diverse make-up of the workforce with many services reducing recruitment. However, we are now seeing more services engaging in recruitment. Some services are seeking to target their recruitment but this should be handled with caution. Some services are stating that they are particularly keen to receive applications from women and BAME potential employees. Recruitment should be about inclusion and improving reflection of the workforce's make-up and therefore recruitment, if targeted, should be aimed at underrepresented groups that form the communities they serve. There is a role for targets but there is also a danger of creating a hierarchy of equality if one minority is seen to be favoured above another.

In order to make progress in making the service inclusive we need to recognise the current assets that the service has. The people who know the issues best are those who already work within the service and the FBU equality sections have a wealth of skill and knowledge to give back to the service. Joint working between employers and the rep bodies on an issue that we share common goals not only makes sense but presents the best opportunity for progress to be achieved.

# ‘Let’s not reinvent the wheel’ – what can we learn from policing?

**“Policing has shown that improvements can be made as the rate of police joiners from a BAME background was over 12 per cent in 2015 to 2016 and as high as one in 4 new recruits in the Metropolitan Police serving as it does a multicultural metropolis. This is the result of determined action across police forces, using targeted attraction strategies and redesigned recruitment practices, and the sector leadership of the College of Policing which has published advice on the use of lawful positive action, as well as case studies from forces showing what can be achieved.”**

## **Brandon Lewis, Fire Minister, speech to Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA) Conference November 2016**

The College of Policing was established three years ago to be a world-class professional body, equipping its members with the skills and knowledge to prevent crime, protect the public and secure public trust. The college sets professional standards that inform the inspection regime of police services.

In 2015 the college conducted a leadership review of the police service, which sought to challenge a command and control approach to leadership, the police’s existing macho image and an approach to diversity which sought merely to comply with legislation. Instead the college sought to promote to a model based on cultural change, treating people as individuals valued for the diverse qualities they can bring to the service.

The evidence collected for the review suggested that ‘diverse teams are stronger and more successful when they accept and encourage differing perspectives, enable people to be authentic and bring positive attitudes and external influences to their professional life’.

The review defines leadership as ‘not the sole preserve of those in high-ranking roles, but a capability that is necessary and can be developed at every level’.

The review’s comment that ‘at the individual level, everyone working in policing needs leadership attributes to be successful in their role’ is equally true of the fire and rescue service. Leadership qualities are as important at the watch, and crew level as they are at senior levels. These requirements extend too, to the political leaders of the service.

The Review’s first recommendation is that:

### **Existing police leaders should influence and drive the required culture change by demonstrating their own commitment.**

Other recommendations included:

- Advertise all vacancies for recruitment and promotion nationally. To ensure the widest pool of capable and suitably qualified candidates.
- All assessments for recruitment, selection, or promotion should reflect and promote the principles set out in the College’s Code of Ethics: accountability, integrity, openness, fairness, leadership, respect, honesty, objectivity and selflessness.
- Provide a structure of entry, exit and re-entry points to allow career flexibility.

- Create a new model of leadership and management training and development which is accessible to all within policing.

The review has allowed the police to have a necessary conversation about diversity. That conversation is already underway in the fire service but needs to be at the forefront of thinking about recruitment, standards and culture.

Examples of actions the police have taken to increase recruitment diversity range from changes to the physical fitness test, to using values-based recruitment to increase applications from and appointments of under-represented groups on specialist firearms units (traditionally a largely male preserve).

As the review concluded, **‘harnessing the benefits of diversity in communities and workplaces is both one of the greatest opportunities and one of the greatest challenges facing the UK.’**

In attempting to meet this challenge and take the opportunity the fire and rescue service needs to take every opportunity to learn from businesses and services. The police is an obvious example, but members will also want to consider what local businesses and organisations may be able to offer in terms of experience in this field. In striving to represent our communities, we can learn from them and seek their assistance.

For further information, the leadership pages of the college’s website can be found here: <http://www.college.police.uk/What-we-do/Development/Promotion/the-leadership-review/Pages/The-Leadership-Review.aspx>

## Examples of police action on diverse recruitment – West Mercia measures

The police have to create an action plan on diverse recruitment following the leadership review. West Mercia police’s action plan covers a range of issues from attraction of candidates through to retention and progression.

### **Attraction:**

- Recruitment Events – held regularly in the community, targeting areas with a high black and ethnic minority density.
- Advertising through BAME media.
- Utilising serving BAME officers as visible role models.
- University links – with a high BAME population to attract high calibre BAME applicants.
- Maintaining contact with unsuccessful candidates – a register of unsuccessful candidates should be recorded so that contact can be maintained to monitor interest in further opportunities.

### **Recruitment:**

- Workshops held to provide support and guidance to applicants on the ‘sift’, application, assessment and interview stages of the recruitment process.
- Workshops to be targeted at individuals who have expressed an interest in a career in the police and to those that are already in the recruitment process.
- Budd/mentoring scheme offering BAME applicants a buddy/mentor who they can contact for any further support and guidance throughout the recruitment process.

- Vetting procedure to be brought forward to the beginning of the recruitment process.
- Vetting panel to be put in place to review and consider borderline cases.
- College of Policing pre-vetting tool to be implemented as part of the recruitment site
- Pre-entry Qualifications – applicants without suitable pre-entry qualifications to be made aware of the Certificate in Knowledge of Policing (CKP) qualification.
- Applicants without suitable qualifications to also be made aware of the benefits of roles as Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and special constables and targeted recruitment of these roles to be carried out as above.
- Constructive feedback to be provided to all applicants to identify areas for development.
- Positive Action Practical Advice College of Policing (PAPA) document to be used as a guidance tool for the implementation and monitoring of all proposed positive action initiatives.
- Recording Process – a recording process will need to be in place where the success rates for each stage of the recruitment process can be monitored for ‘protected characteristics’
- Awards – apply for Race for Opportunity, Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion (enei) and Recruiting Diverse Talent awards to achieve formal recognition for being an employer committed to an ethnically diverse workforce.

#### **Retention:**

- Exit interviews for BAME officers and staff to be carried out face-to-face with senior manager and human resources (HR) representative/Minority Support Network (MSN) representative.
- Face-to-face interviews to help identify any underlying issues and barriers faced.
- Buddy/mentoring scheme – all BAME officers and staff joining Warwickshire and West Mercia Police to be made aware of the buddy/mentoring network at induction and also through MSN.
- Officers/staff to be advised to request a buddy/mentor through a positive action email
- Communication strategy – to be developed to showcase good practice to the organisation through the intranet. This should highlight the importance of the BAME programme and provide regular updates on progress of the action plan.
- Intranet site for the MSN to be developed.
- Review of leaver reasons – to be reviewed on an annual basis to identify any disparity in the reasons for leaving between BAME and white leavers.
- Misconduct/discipline/grievance – review the proportion of BAME/white officers and staff subject to misconduct/discipline/grievance procedures. This will identify any disparity in the proportions and also help to identify any underlying issues.
- Wellbeing Board – MSN representative to form part of the Wellbeing Board. This board looks at sickness and staff welfare issues across the alliance. A MSN representative on the board will allow any underlying issues and concerns to be raised at a strategic level.



**Progression:**

- Review selection process – review each stage of the selection process for specialist posts to establish any adverse impact and to highlight any areas where there needs to be more effort and action through positive action measures.
- Identifying barriers – holding focus groups with BAME officers within specialist posts to identify any internal barriers which may be apparent and need to be addressed – this could be supported through internal networks and wider contacts.
- Advise Support Networks when specific adverts have been placed (eg firearms) to promote opportunities to underrepresented groups.
- Awareness days – holding awareness days for specialist posts to generate interest.
- Implement National Police Promotion Framework (NPPF) – implement the new NPPF and embed the values articulated in the principles from the Code of Ethics within the process to ensure fairness and transparency.
- Review Promotion Process – review success rates at each stage of the promotion process to identify any adverse impact and to highlight any areas where there needs to be more effort and action through positive action measures.
- Develop an evaluation and feedback process for officers/staff who are unsuccessful at interview.
- Unconscious bias training – research training courses on unconscious bias. Utilise this training to establish how unconscious bias can be reduced in selection processes for promotion/specialist.
- Mentoring network – mentoring network to be developed to offer coaching and mentoring throughout the alliance with a high representation of mentors from BAME backgrounds.
- Review of personal development review process to be completed to identify how it can be used to match opportunities to individuals needs and aspirations.
- Centralised approach for the allocation of development opportunities such as acting, attachments and secondments to ensure fairness and transparency.
- Development plans – template and guidance to be provided on their use.
- Talent management scheme – researched and proposals put forward.
- Shadowing of the next rank to be formalised as a development tool. This could be incorporated into development plans for officers seeking promotion.
- Leadership Courses – updates to be provided to BAME officers on the course dates and application process for the Releasing and Realising Potential courses.
- Awareness sessions held for the fast track programme.
- Progression questionnaire to be designed regarding the progression of BAME officers and staff. This will aim to identify those officers/staff seeking promotion or seeking to specialise.
- Senior leaders to take responsibility for supporting and developing individuals from underrepresented groups. Consideration for this to be included as a PDR objectives.

**Evaluation:**

- Evaluation process is identified within the delivery plan which measures successes against initiatives conducted.

# Diane Dunlevey, Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA) Chair and Yasmin Bukhari, AFSA General Secretary

## 'It's more than just targets it's also about culture, inclusion and accountability.'

The fire and rescue service, similar to other large public sector employers, has a long history of undertaking positive action measures. Positive action has been enshrined in the Equality Act 2010 and is an option for employers wishing to address an imbalance in their workplace in terms of workforce diversity. The experience of the fire and rescue service indicates the need to address three key areas:

- investing in long-term diverse positive action interventions
- addressing culture
- adopting the concept of inclusive leadership and accountability to ensure that positive action is understood across the organisation, is effective and is business as usual.

The Prime Minister, Theresa May, in her previous role as Home Secretary, last year criticised the fire and rescue service for a firefighter workforce that was 96 per cent white, 95 per cent male and allowing a 'culture of bullying and harassment' in some parts of England and Wales. She reiterated that the lack of diversity, the existence of what she described as a toxic and corrosive culture in some parts of the service and a lack of accountability made necessary a programme of reform that was as "radical and ambitious as I have delivered in policing since 2010".<sup>8</sup>

Most recently, the Prime Minister ordered a review into how ethnic minorities and white working class people are treated by public services such as the NHS, schools, police and the courts. The audit is aimed at highlighting racial and socio-economic disparities and showing how outcomes differ due to background, class, gender and income. The Prime Minister said the findings would "shine a light on injustices"

### **Positive action**

A number of fire and rescue services have undertaken positive action. London Fire Brigade (LFB) for example have implemented a number of positive action programs since 2000. Programs such as:

- open days specifically for women and BAME
- targeted development and graduate entry scheme
- mentoring and coaching
- apprenticeships schemes and young offenders program
- local intervention fire education scheme
- community engagement.

Other fire services have undertaken similar interventions

Most of the staff hired from under-represented groups have come into the service as a result of Positive Action programs

Nevertheless the LFB workforce does not yet fully reflect the diversity of London, with operational staff consisting of just 7 per cent women and just over 12 per cent black and ethnic minority firefighters. It has recently agreed to work towards increasing the

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/may/24/theresa-may-accuses-fire-and-rescue-services-failings-diversity-accountability-bullying-reform>

number of women trainees to 18 per cent and the number of black ethnic minority fire-fighters to 25 per cent.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service has an overwhelmingly male workforce (only 4 per cent of firefighters are female), which over time had led to the emergence of a “macho culture”. This also made it difficult for gay employees to be open about their sexual orientation in the workplace. The organisation undertook certain positive action strategies designed to address the culture of the organisation. In 2011, they entered Stonewall’s Workplace Equality Index and decided to form a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) employee network and network members were trained in appraising draft policies and identifying potential equality risks. Two years on, Fire Pride now fully embedded in organisation and making an impact and the organisation has moved up Stonewall Index rankings to 54. As one of the judges concluded this was ‘a difficult issue in a macho culture’. They secured commitment, put in place an effective framework and achieved culture change.

Despite progress a common complaint is that positive action initiatives are short-term and often teams and initiatives are disbanded. Therefore positive action needs to be a driver in the organisation’s talent management strategy; it must be seen as an approach to organisational development and creatively managing diverse talent; this requires long-term investment.

In addition our experience indicates the need for inclusive leadership and accountability. This means positive action measures and targets signed off at a senior management level, and published in the public domain, with key targets across gender, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation.

A good example is the NHS Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) introduced to improve equality across the NHS. The WRES requires organisations to demonstrate

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.mfb.vic.gov.au/media/docs/Report\\_on\\_Positive\\_Action\\_Programs\\_in\\_UK\\_Fire\\_Police\\_and\\_Ambulance\\_Services-3e545a93-82c6-46b9-949d-be78406ad6d8-0.pdf](http://www.mfb.vic.gov.au/media/docs/Report_on_Positive_Action_Programs_in_UK_Fire_Police_and_Ambulance_Services-3e545a93-82c6-46b9-949d-be78406ad6d8-0.pdf)

progress against a number of indicators. There are nine metrics. Four of the metrics are specifically on workforce data and four of the metrics are based on data derived from the national NHS Staff Survey indicators. The staff survey information is used to highlight any differences between the experience and treatment of white staff and black and ethnic minority staff in the NHS. The final metric requires provider organisations to ensure that their boards are broadly representative of the communities they serve. This has allowed real accountability. In particular holding the organisation to account for the delivery of positive action measures and seeking assurance that the systems of control are robust and reliable. This also requires inclusive leaders characterised by all members of the organisation recognising that they play a leadership role at various points of the positive action journey and help create a supportive, respectful, warm and enabling culture as well as meeting agreed targets.

Fire and rescue services have a strong commitment to and experience of undertaking positive action. What we know is that where there is strong emphasis on long-term investment in creative positive action interventions, targets and leadership, organisations are likely to see more success in their endeavours. The importance of culture, leadership and accountability and of creating positive environments for positive action and diversity and inclusion to flourish cannot be underestimated.

We recommend that the senior leaders of the fire and rescue services take responsibility for meeting the challenge of positive action and workforce diversity. It will take concentration, long-term investment, vigour and persistence to ensure that positive action is, over time, effective and sustained. Now is the moment to begin.

For further information, the NHS WRES can be found here:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/about/equality/equality-hub/equality-standard/>

# Denise Keating, Chief Executive, Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion (enei)

As part of their focus on diversity an increasing number of private sector organisations are now moving away from traditional leadership models and behaviours and adopting an inclusive leadership style. In 2016 the Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion (enei) published research conducted by Buckinghamshire New University which identified the competencies required of an inclusive leader and defined inclusive leadership as:

‘Leaders who are aware of their own biases and preferences, actively seek out and consider different views and perspectives to inform better decision-making. They see diverse talent as a source of competitive advantage and inspire diverse people to drive organisational and individual performance towards a shared vision.’

For the fire and rescue service, as in any organisation, leadership behaviours are critical to not only recruitment but retention and engagement of employees. The Thomas Review<sup>10</sup> highlighted issues of bullying and harassment and also unhappiness with management relationships as a major issue in individual fire and rescue services across England.

Fire and rescue authority members occupy a privileged position from which to mandate change in the demographic composition of frontline firefighting. The current lack of diversity across England’s fire and rescue services (the Thomas Review found that only 4.3 per cent of firefighters were female and 3.7 per cent were from a ethnic minority background) is incontrovertible and makes positive action in recruitment programs easily justifiable under the Equality Act 2010.

Fire and rescue authority members need to be confident in holding chief fire officers (CFOs) to account around diversity and recruitment and insist on proper targets and measurement of fire and rescue service composition. Crucially, this means understanding both the implication and application of the positive action provisions in the Equality Act 2010, as well as being resolute in their support of such initiatives and the reasoning behind them in the face of adverse public and media reaction.

A common excuse for low diversity in organisations is a shortage of diverse applicants. A simple and easy way to increase applications from a diverse range of candidates is to target recruitment advertisements where a greater range of people will see them; for instance in community centres, at train stations or in publications targeted at specific groups. How organisations are recruiting is integral to who they attract and recruit.

Whilst these actions will help fire and rescue services increase the intake of diverse recruits, retaining this diverse workforce and positioning the fire and rescue service as an inclusive and welcoming employer will require significant cultural change. Frontline firefighters interact predominantly with their line managers at crew, watch and station level, which is why inclusive leadership behaviours and a commitment to diversity must be enforced throughout the organisation and not end once outside of headquarters.

<sup>10</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/conditions-of-service-for-fire-and-rescue-staff-independent-review](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/conditions-of-service-for-fire-and-rescue-staff-independent-review)

An organisation facing very similar challenges to the fire and rescue service is the British Army, who have seen encouraging initial results through overt and visible commitments to quality and diversity from the top levels of the command structure, with a commissioned officer assigned responsibility for equality and diversity in each unit.

It is clear that the success of the fire and rescue service's realignment towards fire prevention and community engagement following the Bain Review<sup>11</sup> will be dependent on reaching the most at risk demographics.

A diverse workforce is the only way that the fire and rescue service will obtain the cultural skills to engage with the increasingly diverse communities they serve, however this represents a huge internal culture challenge in order to build a working environment that rids itself of the white male banter which pervades many watches and stations. Leaders at all levels must change their behaviours if this is to be achieved, and fire and rescue authorities must be committed to holding their fire and rescue services to account.

enei is the UK's leading employer network covering all aspects of equality and inclusion issues in the workplace. We work with our Members to achieve and promote best practice in equality and inclusion in the workplace. We focus on delivering high quality practical advice, products and services to our Members, including research and campaigning, best practice and guidance, employer led events, specialist training and consultancy support services.

Website: [www.enei.org.uk](http://www.enei.org.uk)

ACAS has produced a useful explanation of how positive action works in practice: [www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/d/8/Equality-and-discrimination-understand-the-basics.pdf](http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/d/8/Equality-and-discrimination-understand-the-basics.pdf), pages 22-24

The Government Equalities Office has also produced a practical guide: [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/85015/positive-action-practical-guide.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/85015/positive-action-practical-guide.pdf)

The enei/Bucks New University publication *Inclusive Leadership... driving performance through diversity!* Is available via enei's website: [www.enei.org.uk/publications.php/769/inclusive-leadership...-driving-performance-through-diversity-executive-summary?id=769](http://www.enei.org.uk/publications.php/769/inclusive-leadership...-driving-performance-through-diversity-executive-summary?id=769)

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<sup>11</sup> <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.communities.gov.uk/fire/firesafety/future/>

# Stonewall

The most recent Fire Service Operational Statistics Bulletin told us a lot about the diversity of fire and rescue staff – or did it? While it clearly provided some insight into the percentage of firefighters who are women (5 per cent<sup>12</sup> compared to 51 per cent of the general population) and told us that just 3.8<sup>13</sup> per cent of firefighters are from an minority ethnic group (compared to 13<sup>14</sup> per cent of the population), the bulletin failed to give us an accurate picture of fire service workers that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT). Fifty-four per cent of fire and rescue services failed to collect this data, with reasons ranging from a lack of responses, to a high proportion of ‘not stated’ entries and lack of qualitative responses. The bulletin therefore relies on ‘experimental statistics’ in order to provide any information about the service’s lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) workforce – this results in significant quality limitations on the data and a lack of consistent information, meaning we simply do not know how many firefighters identify as LGBT.

Stonewall works with a large number of emergency services on our Diversity Champions programme. Through this work, we know that a lack of data on LGBT staff and service users is unfortunately just the beginning of a number of issues which contribute to a culture in the service which

is yet to succeed in creating a truly inclusive environment for all staff, not just those who are LGBT. For example, the 2016 Stonewall Workplace Equality Index found that of the emergency services which participated, just one third of services were monitoring sexual orientation when running staff satisfaction surveys with their workforce. This means that two thirds of services do not have an accurate picture of whether their lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) staff are happier or unhappier than non-LGB staff, and that’s before they even consider the experiences of their transgender staff.

We found in our most recent staff survey of the sector<sup>15</sup> that 72 per cent of staff would feel confident to report bullying and harassment based on their sexual orientation, with 64 per cent of staff feeling confident to report bullying and harassment based on their transgender status. However, the likelihood that they will be able to report to a staff member that has had tailored training to deal with homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying and harassment is just 47 per cent.<sup>16</sup> This is particularly concerning, especially when we consider the consequences of not training staff on dealing with LGBT issues at work: discrimination, ‘banter’, unconscious bias and a lack of understanding of the remit and impact of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia at work all contribute to an environment that excludes and ostracises LGBT people.

12 [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/563118/fire-rescue-operational-statistics-201516-hosb1216.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/563118/fire-rescue-operational-statistics-201516-hosb1216.pdf)

13 [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/563118/fire-rescue-operational-statistics-201516-hosb1216.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/563118/fire-rescue-operational-statistics-201516-hosb1216.pdf)

14 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/2011censusanalysisethnicityandreligionofthenonukbornpopulationinenglandandwales/2015-06-18>

15 See Stonewall Workplace Equality Index staff feedback survey, 60,506 responses, 2016 [https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/top\\_100\\_employers\\_2016.pdf](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/top_100_employers_2016.pdf)

16 Stonewall Workplace Equality Index, 2016

We know that organisations that support LGBT equality and create an environment where staff are able to be themselves see improvements in staff productivity, teamwork and are better able to compete for talented employees.<sup>17</sup> Individuals that work in open, diverse and inclusive environments have higher levels of motivation, higher levels of satisfaction and are more likely to go beyond their formal remit and make a contribution to the culture of the organisation they work for. This means that firefighters working in services committed to developing inclusion are much more likely to help create the change and culture shift that the sector needs. We also know that there is a clear business case to create an inclusive environment and that this doesn't just benefit LGBT staff, but all staff in the Service.

In order to effectively embed change in the fire and rescue service's culture and to ensure that services are achieving an inclusive and welcoming environment for LGBT staff, it is important to not only consider solutions in isolation, but to take a strategic approach that covers a range of areas: creating effective and meaningful policies, embedding high quality training that is targeted to key groups of staff, developing staff LGBT network groups, empowering all staff (not just LGBT staff) and equipping them with confidence to discuss LGBT issues, and effectively monitoring the workforce and any initiatives undertaken. In addition, the service as a whole needs to tackle the systematic barriers which we know LGBT people face – perceptions of discrimination by public services and a historically 'macho' culture all contribute to LGBT people feeling like the fire service may not necessarily be a safe or welcoming place for them to work.

The fire and rescue service as a whole is well placed to advance LGBT inclusion. Their community engagement, youth work and cadet schemes in particular provide a wealth of opportunities to promote diversity and it is crucial that services foster good practice and maintain the momentum of their work towards

equality and inclusion. At Stonewall we know that people perform better when they can be themselves, and we continue to work towards a world where everyone is accepted without exception. We encourage all fire and rescue services to do the same.

For more information on the Stonewall workplace diversity champions programme see:

[www.stonewall.org.uk/get-involved/workplace/diversity-champions-programme](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/get-involved/workplace/diversity-champions-programme)

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.open-for-business.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Brunswick\\_Open\\_for\\_Business\\_full.pdf](https://www.open-for-business.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Brunswick_Open_for_Business_full.pdf)

The Thomas Review<sup>18</sup> describes the work still to be done to improve the culture and trust between employees within the fire and rescue service, including addressing concerns around bullying and harassment. The review also identifies the challenge of developing a diverse and representative workforce and recommends rolling-out ‘unconscious bias’ training across the service.

But what is unconscious bias? How can it help the fire and rescue service? This short article addresses these questions and ends with some useful tips and ideas for fire services interested in pursuing this further.

### **What is unconscious bias?**

According to a group of psychologists working in America, the human brain is designed to make quick decisions that draw on a variety of assumptions and experiences without us even being consciously aware that it is doing so. We all have these ‘biases’, ways of thinking and behaviour, which are part of who we are. Much of this comes from our socialisation processes, our upbringing, our culture, our friends, media and so on. These all influence how we interpret the world we live in and how we understand what we see around us. For example, we tend to like people like ‘us’ and associate with them more. However, having a preference for our own ‘kind’ can also result in giving them favour and as a consequence and liking other groups less. We might not be aware of this type of favoritism, it is often automatic, unconscious and unintended. These thinking patterns can mean that we can be dismissive of people who don’t present the attributes we admire and endorse. This can have negative

consequences in areas like decision making, where we might assume that because someone ‘doesn’t fit’ they also don’t have the skills or capability to do the job.

### **How can responding to unconscious bias help?**

Unconscious bias training has been growing in popularity as a way to address these negative consequences of bias. Training can help individuals to recognise their biases and also has the potential to help people positively work to address their biases. This is challenging because bias is constantly reinforced around us, and unconscious bias, as the name suggests is difficult to spot. Yet, the potential rewards for the fire and rescue service are huge. For example, the Thomas Review refers to the impact of bullying and harassment in the service and how it is often explained away as ‘banter’ and part of the watch culture. It refers to failed efforts to attract, retain and promote a diverse workforce. The review also refers to divides between different professions within the service, and the way in which people can feel excluded and disenfranchised as a result. These are all topics that could be explored further through unconscious bias training.

Unconscious bias training is not a magic bullet which will cure all the ills of discriminatory behaviour. If organisations are really serious about helping individuals to address bias, they have to be accountable for the change that they want to see. They also have to provide ongoing support after bias training so people can work to identify and reduce bias in their work – one off training is rarely effective. In short, individual responsibility for change,

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/conditions-of-service-for-fire-and-rescue-staff-independent-review>



must go hand in hand with organisational responsibility to change, otherwise there's little point.

### **Improving the effectiveness of unconscious bias training**

- Bias training is varied. Deliverers do different things under this heading – make sure you understand what you are commissioning.
- One off training (no matter how good it is) still needs reinforcing/support/opportunities for participants to talk about how they can use what they've learnt in their day-to-day work.
- Other interventions to reduce discrimination (eg blind recruitment, positive action, soft and hard targets and accountability at senior levels) can work in tandem with unconscious bias training to increase its effectiveness.
- There is a growing evidence base of what works – so get good advice about what else you should be doing (we're happy to help: [brap@brap.org.uk](mailto:brap@brap.org.uk))
- If you are unsure of what to commission, what results you can expect or how to sustain them – then don't be surprised if bias training doesn't work for you.

brap is a charity providing support on equalities training, consultancy and community engagement issues.

For more about unconscious bias (sometimes called 'implicit bias') click on the links below:

Video about bias: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SLg3IHsm2bE>

Article about bias: <http://www.brap.org.uk/about-us/blog/550-joy-warmington-and-roger-kline-unconscious-bias-silver-bullet-or-just-a-useful-tool>

A range of tests to explore implicit bias can be found here: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

# Nicky Thurston, National Fire Chief's Council (NFCC) Diversity Co-lead

## **Diversity is a reality – inclusion is a choice.**

The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) has signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on equality, diversity, behaviours and organisational culture in the fire and rescue service and is committed to its principles, commitments and actions.

Inclusion cannot be tackled by 'quick fixes', the starting point needs to be a strong set of values that the workforce identify with and hold true.

The fire and rescue service (FRS) has a responsibility to pursue its goals in a way that maximises quality, effectiveness, sustainability and ethics. Diversity and inclusion is a necessary aspect of this aim, and the FRS needs to make a conscious choice to uphold inclusion and use their power to effect positive change on society. There is no stick, only the collective carrot, inclusion is of benefit of all.

As leaders, we have the power to change things but we can do this more effectively by enabling each person within the FRS to give their best.

We are proud to serve society - we have a clear social purpose, but how well do the public understand today's FRS? The FRS is a brand to be trusted and we utilise this status, to allow us into people's homes and their lives with outstanding results in driving down fire related risk.

Awareness of our own self-identity and understanding our own unconscious bias is an essential starting point in developing cross-cultural awareness, but it is not a 'silver bullet'. Understanding how we perceive ourselves and others is key to unconscious bias training but simply undertaking

unconscious bias training is not an end in itself, and should not be seen as enabling people to avoid tackling the issues it identifies.

As leaders it is our business to ensure our workforce have the skills our work demands. The fire and rescue workforce needs to be good at communicating with a wide variety of people, empathetic, customer focused, resilient, adaptable and emotionally intelligent. We need to get the best people for the job. The world is changing, the portfolio of skills needed by a firefighter is not constant, but evolving. Seeking a workforce with a diversity of experience and perspective – by fully exploring the diversity in our communities and encouraging applications from those who may have an outdated view of the fire and rescue service – is how we do that most effectively.

Each FRS is a microcosm of the world we live in and whilst we may be influenced by society, we also have the power to shape it. We need to have the imagination to be the change that we want to see whatever our role in the FRS.

So, what do we do? Firstly, we take the opportunity to be honest. We must be brave enough to recognise our organisational shortcomings, but at the same time be clear about the mindset and culture we desire. Otherwise we run the risk of replicating social inequalities and pitfalls, repeating history and allowing the prevailing power structure to dictate how things are done.

The NFCC's National People Strategy 2017 – 2022 has as one its key strategies 'Strengthen our ability to provide an excellent service by diversifying our staff, promoting inclusion and creating a fair & equal place to work'. This must be central to all the FRS does, not

a bolt on, not based on a political rhetoric or philosophy that is not shared by all. We do this by capturing the imagination of our workforce; developing a movement of change from within.

Systems and processes need to be aligned with the strategy, so that employees can speak up. Self-regulation, our sense of civic responsibility, compliance and principled behaviour will empower staff to be part of something they believe in, can defend and progress.

Notwithstanding the need for personal freedom, everyone needs to know that regardless of their position, capability or popularity that they will be excluded if they demonstrate words or actions that do not confirm to the desired culture of the future. There is no room for maintaining the status quo.

We need to work together with patience and courage, to minimise bias and unfairness at individual and systemic levels, to challenge our own cultural assumptions. We need to work together to foster cross cultural competence to build greater empathy and cooperation. We need to work together to proactively create an environment that is effective, ethical, and inclusive.

Useful resources:

A precis of the journey of the FRS over the last few years: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ptm6kJJ8zal>

Also this is Google approach to making unconscious bias conscious: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=NW5s\\_-NI3JE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NW5s_-NI3JE)

The Harvard Implicit Bias test: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

Inspiring the Future – redraw the balance: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=qv8VZVP5csA&t=23s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qv8VZVP5csA&t=23s)

# London's inclusion strategy

## **A 10-year vision to make the London Fire Brigade the most diverse and inclusive in the world.**

London Fire Brigade has always sought a diverse and inclusive workforce, but despite the rich diversity of the capital, it hasn't been easy to achieve. In 2016, we developed a new and ambitious 10-year Inclusion Strategy: 'Safer Together' – an unashamedly ambitious design to realise our vision.

The London Fire and Civil Defence Authority approved the first equality strategy for London Fire Brigade in 1996 – 14 years before the 2010 Equality Act. It was good for its time and heralded a range of 'firsts', including our first policy for transgender colleagues; our first deputy assistant commissioner from a black and ethnic minority (BAME) community; and our first woman as an Assistant Commissioner, and latterly as director and then Commissioner. That last 'first' was me, and while I don't normally like talking about myself, I have been very proud to be part of the change that the brigade has been going through in recent decades.

Our new strategy will drive the brigade past these 'firsts' and into a place where it's expected to see women; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT); black, Asian and ethnic minority colleagues; and disabled colleagues in our top jobs. But the strategy is not just about under-represented groups, as important as they are. It is about everybody. We must consider an ageing workforce; we should be more aware than ever before about mental health and wellbeing.

Critically, this does not mean lowering our standards. The job is changing rapidly. There are new living environments that seek new fire safety expertise; there are new social pressures that present new engagement challenges for public services; and we have new collaboration opportunities with other sectors -such as Health -that allow us to use our skills to save more lives.

**We've called the strategy 'Safer Together' as we agree with our colleagues in the military: teams are safer, happier and more operationally effective when their members are able to be their authentic selves at work. That means feeling comfortable to be 'out' in front of your colleagues. It means not having to tolerate 'banter' that is simply thinly disguised sexism. It means not having to suffer against the unconscious bias of a workforce that never needed to adapt and change to welcome diversity. We've known about these needs since that first strategy in 1996, but we have not done well enough in meeting them. Now we must.**

Our unashamedly ambitious strategy openly discusses these important issues and sets a high standard that is expected of a profession held in high esteem by the public. We will nurture an inclusive culture by tackling unconscious bias, fostering professionalism, and helping our managers to manage. We will give additional support and recognition to our colleagues that dedicate time to help themselves in our growing support groups. We will work with our diverse communities to make them safe from fire, and to market opportunities to work with us. We will lead from the front, showing the UK fire and rescue service political and professional leadership by actively, visibly and ambitiously leading this important agenda. It will be an exciting decade of delivery.

# The Inclusive Fire Service Group

The Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG) was set up by the National Joint Council (NJC) for local authority fire and rescue services as part of its continuing commitment to consider equality, diversity, and behavioural issues within the fire and rescue service. It brings together a diversity and depth of expertise to address this important and challenging issue.

The group is chaired by the Independent Chair of the NJC, Linda Dickens, and other interested parties such as the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA), Fire Officers Association (FOA) and Retained Firefighters Union accepted invitations to be involved. The group has also engaged with wider groups such as Stonewall, MIND, Women in the Police Service, Asian Fire Service Association, Women in the Fire Service, the FBU's women, black, Asian and ethnic minority (BAME) and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) committees, and other trade unions (Unison and GMB Union).

The group was charged with assessing the current position and identifying any recurring themes. Then to identify guidance in relation to any strategies that could be used at local level to further encourage improvement. In doing so the group will explore a number of key indicators, issues and trends, including those listed below:

- low levels of female and BAME representation across the uniformed workforce
- proportionally low levels of female and BAME progression through the roles
- bullying and harassment issues
- lack of available data on LGBT uniformed personnel

- encouraging management commitment to consistently instigate and promote equality and diversity initiatives
- levels of grievance/discipline cases involving women and BAME uniformed employees.

Early discussion also identified potential problems with use of social media. The group has undertaken a survey of fire and rescue services to get an overview of where FRSs are with regards to their equality and diversity policies; where they sit on the FRS Equality Framework spectrum; which policies and initiatives fire and rescue services (FRSs) have in place (for example social media policies); any internal support mechanisms; and identification of any cultural or behavioural trends relating to grievance cases and formal level disciplinary cases. The group also drew upon the NJC's regular Workforce Survey for information such as numbers employed in each role and within that the proportion of female, BAME and LGBT employees, age, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

It became evident in analysing data from the cultural and behaviour survey that the process was hampered by inconsistency across fire and rescue services in the way information was collected, recorded and monitored. Accordingly the IFSG is currently developing guidance for fire and rescue services in order to facilitate that consistency for the future. This will be fundamental to services identifying themes at local level and acting upon the information in order to make improvements, but also to inform the IFSG as it moves into more of a national monitoring role once its improvement strategies have been issued. That will include adapting the

strategies when necessary and developing new strategies as differing issues emerge.

The IFSG identified a number of ways to explore and learn from the experience of employees directly, believing this approach will produce more meaningful and productive results than 'top down' prescription:

Focus groups for female, BAME and LGBT groups were held in January and February 2017. Participants were randomly selected by LGA Research from a list of those FRS employees who had indicated an interest.

A survey of all employees, including support staff to explore employee experiences of the service as an inclusive place to work. Whilst some questions will be restricted to those who have identified themselves as female, BAME or LGBT, given the cultural issues in general, other questions will apply more widely. Importantly, of interest also are their views on securing improvements in the future.

Engagement with Equality and Diversity staff working in fire and rescue services as well as local union representatives through four regional workshops in order to draw upon their rich vein of experience not just about the current situation but also importantly on attaining improvements.

Engagement with chief fire officers (CFOs) through two workshops in order to explore their views on what has worked in the past, what hasn't and most importantly exploring what commitments that group could make on actions to secure future improvements.

**Building upon information received from all sources, the IFSG will develop and publish relevant and effective strategies for improvement at local level, which will be periodically monitored to assess impact and to adapt as necessary.**

The guidance on personal use of social media policies developed by the group can be found here:

[www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/11687/Social+media+guidance+-+circ+-+final+-+complete.pdf/1500185e-84fe-4395-9c5c-ac5f594910fe](http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/11687/Social+media+guidance+-+circ+-+final+-+complete.pdf/1500185e-84fe-4395-9c5c-ac5f594910fe)

The IFSG report, can be found here:

[www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/7734367/workforce+-+fire+and+rescue+services+joint+circulars+-+Fire+Circular+NJC+6-16/e6eab5ee-750a-4d6d-9b7d-d18ecb13eb24](http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/7734367/workforce+-+fire+and+rescue+services+joint+circulars+-+Fire+Circular+NJC+6-16/e6eab5ee-750a-4d6d-9b7d-d18ecb13eb24)

Since 2010, the Equality Act has been in place to support the improvement of workplaces for employees and service delivery for communities, yet even legislation has not been able to change the culture or the visible diversity of the UK fire and rescue service (FRS).

This will only change when the 'culture and public perception' of the service nationally is removed, this historical hierarchical institutional male orientated image that has long existed, must be changed.

Leadership and visibly changing the way we promote equality, diversity and inclusion are fundamental to change. Nationally and throughout all services we need to have one simple key message to promote inclusion and the freedom of self-expression within all fire and rescue services.

This is not as simple as recruiting more people who are identified in legislation as within the protected characteristics. That is a good step, but needs to be combined with the change of the institutional mind set. The FRS may attempt to undertake positive action and initiatives to recruit a more diverse workforce, but if the culture of the service is not to truly want inclusion, we will see those who join either fitting in by changing themselves or becoming excluded and isolated within themselves.

To recruit, employ and retain a socially-reflective workforce will take time, but the move to change the way we recruit, for example apprentices, will mean many new employees who will have been fortunate to grow and be educated in a much more diverse and equality driven society. However, it is not good enough to think this will lead to

a workforce that understands sufficiently the needs of the changing diverse community of the future especially if the new recruits are moulded to 'fit in' with the old culture.

Achieving a truly reflective and fit-for-purpose workforce can be helped where there are national support groups, particularly where they create and provide guidance documents based on best practice that seeks to future-proof society.

Research, business reports and financial statistics continue to endorse the fact that people and teams perform better when they are supported (not managed) with engaging and inclusive leadership, and where people are empowered to truly be and express themselves. This does not mean employing individuals who are less effective or efficient, quite the reverse. It means providing a safe, open and healthy environment for people to self-actualise in.

It is interesting to note that when we talk about a commitment to diversity, even in our own Home Office Service Returns, we have lesbian and gay as one classification, transgender and non-binary people are not classified at all and in the 2016 returns, nearly 50 per cent of the workforce has not stated their sexual orientation. This could be because their chosen identity is not recognised, or they feel they cannot be open about who they are in the workplace.

We consulted with our corporate members and the key headline issues which continue to be voiced from our equality professionals are:

- 'The culture' – sexist, racist and homophobic bullying and harassment will deter exactly the people we want to recruit.

- The lack of support at a senior leadership level for equality, diversity and inclusion (ED&I) as it waves in and out of 'fashion'. This does not portray an inclusive organisation. ED&I needs to be a strategic priority as it should transcend everything we do.
- The removal of ED&I professionals and the transfer of their responsibilities to human resources departments compounds the concept amongst service managers that ED&I is just a fad.
- Facilities on stations in many cases are not conducive to personal privacy, for example binary toilets and communal sleeping on station.
- There is a distinct lack of real management of issues when they arise, often due to competency and confidence of managers to do the right thing. Proper HR training and support signposting needs to be in place to ensure managers can get things right.
- Station stagnation – in many services firefighters are not moved around stations so they do not gain exposure to a variety of people's differences.
- A national and government drive to change the perception of the role of a firefighter is needed. The media continue to portray the role around a male, macho, sexist, operationally focussed, snooker-playing culture. This could not be further from the truth, but will continue to affect recruitment unless the media help to change this image.
- There are some great services and organisations working towards a more inclusive workplace. It is essential to identify these good practices and share them so we can all learn and move forward together and change the way we are perceived and in time change the diversity of our workforce.

quiltbag, which is part of the wider public service gender and sexual self-identity consortium, will continue to support the UK fire and rescue service to improve inclusion and in particular for people who identify with a gender or sexual self-identify from across the ever expanding wider spectrum.

<http://www.lgbtconsortium.org.uk/directory/quiltbag>



# Kathryn Billing, Flexi Duty Officer, Cornwall Fire, Rescue and Community Safety Service

I am a flexi-duty officer in Cornwall Fire, Rescue and Community Safety Service; I am currently working within the People team, which is supported by our Corporate Human Resources team. I am also the Community Engagement Equality Diversity (CEED) Strategic Lead for sexual orientation and gender self-identify.

Cornwall Fire, Rescue and Community Safety Service gained the excellent level of the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework. How is it possible a service with the least ratio of operational women to men is excellent in equality and inclusion?

Put simply, our service does not look at what you are, but at who you are. If you are passionate, committed and respectful, that's all we see. We want to understand how to expand the inclusion bubble of our organisation to include you, by understanding your needs, experiences, perspective and how you want to shape your role and service.

A key aspect of our outlook is that our service doesn't just have operational firefighters; we are all community health, safety and wellbeing advocates who help the community to live independently, reduce risk and improve community resilience.

National barriers to inclusion include duty systems, conditions of service, and doing roles outside of national rolemaps, among others. In Cornwall these don't exist; as a unitary council authority we are fully integrated into our council and green and grey book conditioned officers work within integrated teams of which fire is an integral, but small, part.

Our work with the other blue light services is built on relationships as often our resources have meant we have to work together.

We are not perfect and this has taken and does take lots of time, learning, talking and difficult and challenging conversations - and not everyone will have them. We do have elected member and senior leadership commitment. That is not a piece of paper saying 'equality pledge' or a list which sits somewhere; it is people who say and do the right things, challenge and try to make things right by doing their best and learning too.

Inclusion is not about statistics, men, women, black and ethnic minority and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT); inclusion is a verb which everyone can achieve. How can we tangibly see inclusion working when we have no statistics? It is easy to say quite crudely, 'We have women in our service so we must be inclusive', but while numbers are easy to measure, compare and report, inclusion is more than numbers.

Inclusion will look different for every organisation – demographics, risk profiles, infrastructures are all different. What should be consistent is the 'feel of an organisation' do people say this is a great place to work, are they passionate, do they feel valued and value each other, are they creative?

Our service doesn't have an equality professional; we have all needed to make inclusion part of what we do. Initially we had a strategy explaining CEED. We mainstreamed CEED and linked it to competencies, promotional assessments, case studies for management practices, community engagement work and linked it to objectives within everyone's personal development reviews (PDRs).

We also have 'CEED Champions' who provide strategic direction and support for the protected characteristics. These are useful for targeted events and where the service needs to focus on an area for a particular reason.

The 'Equality Framework' is a great quality assurance tool which does help embed inclusion. The LGA have supported us to document our commitments and how to ensure they are embedded in everything we do. We did go through a phase of saying 'It's so embedded we don't mention it' However, it is important to remember to say what you are doing so people can understand why and how. The advantage of public statements is that they sparks debate, hit peoples values and conscious and unconscious bias and helps an organisation challenge itself and move forward.

We have become a more community-focussed health, safety and wellbeing service, more integrated with the council, positive in our written commitments to challenge inappropriate behaviour. We engage with diverse groups, open our stations to the community, support our firefighters to change and come up with the initiatives to work with at risk people and help them understand why different does not mean weak and unprofessional it means exciting and something new.

In Cornwall we intend to maintain a culture which wants to learn, welcome change and understand difference to help include people into the service and also to help the community.

# Dany Cotton, London Fire Commissioner and Chair of Women in the Fire Service

When I arrived on my first day as a London firefighter in 1988, the officer in charge told me that he didn't agree with women being in the fire service and that three men on the watch had already requested a transfer because they didn't want to work with a woman. As the only woman on my watch, I felt I was being judged the entire time. I didn't want to make any mistakes and felt like I was working twice as hard as the others because I wanted to prove them wrong.

Thankfully attitudes towards women in the service have changed enormously since I joined. The number of women firefighters has been growing in London for over 30 years and having worked my way through the ranks, I became the first woman Commissioner in the Brigade's 150 year history on 1 January this year. When the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, published details of the pay gap between men and women working within the Greater London Authority's 'functional bodies' last year, London Fire Brigade was the only member with no gender pay gap among operational staff.

But while attitudes have changed and major milestones have been reached, the number of women becoming firefighters has not evolved at the same rate. Yes, the number of women operational staff in London has more than quadrupled since 2000 but this still only accounts for just under seven per cent of our operational workforce – some way short of our medium-term target of 18 per cent.

We know from the six recruitment campaigns we've run in London since 2008, the percentage of applications from women has hovered at around ten per cent, so a key challenge is to encourage more women to

apply. We also know that there is an overall lack of awareness of the firefighter role which can result in women simply not realising what a great job it is or having perceived barriers to joining. There is still something of a perception among women that they cannot be firefighters – it is still seen as a typically male job and though the term 'fireman' still bristles, unacceptably in 2017 its use persists.

This perception is not the only deterrent to applying. We commissioned research to get a better understanding of the barriers for women to becoming a firefighter including the external influences on women's career paths, what women look for in a role, as well as attitudes to the role. It found that pay is an important factor when considering a job particularly among women over the age of 25, while a viable, long-term career path was an important factor for those who are at an earlier stage of their career. Another key finding was that our application process was something of a turn-off.

So what are we doing about it? We've started doing more targeted advertising to encourage women into the service, for example taking additional steps in the most recent recruitment campaigns to specifically target women including adverts in the Facebook newsfeed of women aged 18-40 in London who were interested in fitness and sports which require a great deal of upper body strength. This appears to have been effective with analysis showing the highest percentage of women applicants over these campaign periods. We also go to places like women's rugby clubs because this job attracts people who are team players and are physically fit. We also know that open days hosted at fire stations were important in solidifying the decision of

women firefighters to join the brigade – our consultation on the London Safety Plan is considering how we can do more to open up our stations so that the local community can find out more about what we do. I also want to look at what more London Fire Brigade can do to demystify the role, how we can promote the role and how we can improve the application process.

In recent years, we've really focused on making equality and inclusion an everyday part of what we do and in June 2016 we agreed an ambitious 10 year inclusion strategy called 'Safer Together', which includes our ambition to recruit and retain, but importantly to also develop and promote a diverse workforce.

Significant progress has been made since I became a firefighter, but there remain key challenges. I didn't sign up to be a trailblazer for others, but part of my role as London's first woman commissioner will be a 'myth-buster' to show young girls thinking about their careers and women what a great role this is, and that they are just as capable of being firefighters as men.

# Local Government Association's equality and diversity improvement work

The Local Government Association (LGA) provides a range of advice and support on equalities and diversity to fire and rescue services through its sector led improvement offer. The offer includes the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework (FRSEF), the Equality Peer Challenge, the LGA webpages with good practice case studies; the Equality Community of Practice (CoP) via the Knowledge Hub platform, as well as other publications. The LGA's Workforce team can also offer bespoke consultancy and equality audits. The LGA works closely with the Chief Fire Officers Organisation (CFOA) to ensure that its improvement offer on equality continues to meet the needs of the sector, and will continue to do so when CFOA becomes the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC).

## **Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework and Peer Challenge**

The Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework was jointly developed by CFOA and the LGA in 2009. It recognises and addresses equality and diversity objectives that are a priority for the fire and rescue service. It is outcome focused and was originally cross-mapped with the national 'Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-2018'. The five priority areas in the framework are:

- knowing your communities
- leadership, partnership and organisational commitment
- involving your communities
- responsive services and customer care
- a skilled and committed workforce.

The FRSEF is designed to be multi-functional. It can help services to:

- improve their equality practices
- meet statutory duties
- support Prevention activities
- self-assess, monitor progress and set milestones
- provide evidence for external assessment via a peer challenge or other assessment
- recognise and record good practice.

Many services are using the Equality Framework to embed equality, to self-assess and prepare for external assessments. They value the fact that it covers all aspects of a fire service, not just workforce issues. Seventeen fire services have been peer challenged by the LGA since 2008. Over 40 fire and rescue service staff including both specialist equality officers and uniformed staff have taken part in equality peer challenges as peers.

## **Future developments**

The LGA is currently reviewing its improvement offer to the fire and rescue sector, including both the fire Equality Framework and the equality peer challenge, in the light of the announcement of plans for a fire and rescue service inspectorate. The recently-signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on equality, diversity, behaviours and organisational culture in the fire and rescue service commits the LGA to working with the new inspectorate to explore how the LGA and other stakeholders can work with the inspectorate to ensure inspection drives progress on diversity. The LGA then will look to disseminate the expectations on

diversity and assist our members in meeting those expectations before the pilot inspection regime commences in April 2017.

The LGA's support offer will develop further as the inspection regime takes shape. The LGA is working closely with CFOA/NFCC and other stakeholders such as the Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA) to refresh the Equality Framework and to review the equality peer challenge process. An updated version of both will be developed and piloted in 2017. One challenge going forward will be how to use the framework and the peer challenge to help change the culture of the fire sector and strengthen the support around workforce diversity. One way of doing this will be to better identify and spread good practice across the sector.

**Significantly changing the workforce profile will be a long-term undertaking for most services because of a lack of wholetime recruitment. However there are other initiatives that can have a more immediate impact on the workforce profile such as reviewing the way staff are selected and developed for promotion, more positive action around recruitment and selection, addressing unconscious bias in selection and improving the training of managers involved in these processes.**

The LGA will continue to provide support on equality issues to fire and rescue services to help them improve and have workforces that are representative of their communities.

# Conclusion and questions

In this document a variety of groups have been given the opportunity to offer advice on how we can develop as a diverse, representative service. In order to assist this process the following list of questions has been devised, reflecting their comments, which fire and rescue authority members may find helpful in leading the services they are responsible for.

It is not a checklist of things everyone has to do, but is offered as a starting point for further thought. Some of these, we hope, will be questions members will want to ask their chiefs, themselves or their fellow members, others may seem obvious, unnecessary or irrelevant. It is unlikely that we have covered every relevant point. As the political leadership of their service, that is for members to decide. Each of us will have different routes to the goal and different ideas to add. That is why it is essential that we share our ideas and experiences nationally, learning from our successes and unafraid to help others learn from things we have tried that have not worked.

## **Questions for scrutiny:**

### **Data**

- How much recruitment data do we monitor?
- Have we identified any trends in applications from different societal groups, for example around when they fail or drop out of the recruitment process? Do we need to think about further support for those groups?
- What kind of data are we collecting in relation to diversity?

- What are our retention rates for firefighters and other staff with protected characteristics? Do these change when you look across the different ranks?
- Do we conduct exit interviews with all employees to understand if there were any particular issues that have caused them to leave?
- Are we evaluating the impact of policies designed to promote inclusion and diversity?
- What are we learning from our experience?
- Are we sharing that knowledge with other services and learning from them?

NB The Inclusive Fire Service group will shortly be producing guidance on data which will assist members in benchmarking their services' practice.

### **Recruitment**

- What positive action initiatives has our service undertaken? What worked/what did not work?
- How will apprenticeships contribute to the creation of a diverse workforce?
- Can we use RDS recruitment or flexible working arrangements to offer family-friendly employment?
- Are we testing the right qualities?
- Are we using legislative provisions supporting positive action?
- How do we target our recruitment campaigns at diverse groups?

- How do we support recruits through the process? Should we do more to help some individuals pass, for example by retaking physical tests?
- What can we learn from business, the police and armed forces in devising appropriate recruitment strategies?
- Do we provide entry, exit and re-entry points to allow career flexibility?
- Should we advertise nationally or impose a residency requirement?
- Could values-based recruitment increase applications from and appointments of under-represented groups?
- Do we maintain contact with unsuccessful candidates, eg through a register of unsuccessful candidates so that contact can be maintained to monitor interest in further opportunities?
- Have we reviewed our recruitment programme to identify barriers?
- Who has responsibility for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy in our service? Is this the appropriate person and what training have they received?
- How engaged are our current workforce on the diversity agenda?
- Do they have the ability, facility and structures to contribute ideas on this agenda?
- Does every employee know who they can report bullying and harassment to – and do they feel they will be heard?
- What training are we providing on diversity? Does it cover handling reports of bullying, specifically bullying related to protected characteristics?
- What staff support groups exist for female, BAME, LGBT staff? Is there a buddy scheme?
- Do staff know about the national support groups that they can join?

### **Culture**

- Do we know what our staff think about our workplace culture? Can we identify the views of women, black, Asian and ethnic minority (BAME) groups and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) employees as specific groups?
- Do we have a sustainable long-term approach to inclusion?
- Could we benefit from engagement with Stonewall's Diversity Champions<sup>19</sup> Programme?
- What support and training do we offer to ensure inclusive leadership is a value understood at all levels of the service?
- Do we understand our own unconscious bias? How are we overcoming that bias? How is our service addressing this issue?
- How does our service demonstrate inclusive leadership; how do we as leaders exemplify it?
- How can we work with other services to promote inclusion?
- What do we do to identify and encourage minority group members interested in promotion opportunities?
- Are our practices in line with the NFCC People Strategy?
- Is our inclusion strategy up to date and based on evidence in relation to recruitment and culture?
- Do we understand the requirements of the inspection regime?
- Could we benefit from sector support?

### **Perception**

- What image do we present to the public? Does it deter some groups from applying to join us? How can we change that?
- Are fire stations seen as part of the community?
- Do we encourage visitors? Do we run 'have a go days' etc.?

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/get-involved/workplace/diversity-champions-programme>



- Does our community engagement lay the groundwork for diverse recruitment? Could it do more?
- Can we use social media to engage with different communities?
- How do we portray firefighters in our publicity?
- Is inclusion hardwired into the way we talk about our service?
- Do we know why some groups do not see us as potential employers? How can we increase our knowledge?
- What role can ambassadors and champions play in changing perceptions?

Finally, some aspects of change can only be addressed nationally. Is a national campaign on the image of firefighting as a career required? Do you know how to raise these issues with NFCC and LGA? Do you feel you would be heard?

These questions provide a starting point for discussion, but it is also important that we share the good work that's already underway in many areas. If you would like to share what you're doing locally, discuss the issues in more detail or you would like to contact any of the contributors please contact the LGA directly:

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REF 10.5