

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

22 APRIL 2024

1. **DIVERSITY INCLUSION COHESION EQUALITY (DICE)
UPDATE**

Report of the Chief Executive Officer

RECOMMENDED

THAT Scrutiny Committee note the ongoing progress made by the Service in relation to Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion, Equality (DICE).

2. **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

To provide an update to Members regarding the ongoing progress being made by West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) in advancing DICE throughout the Service. Each area of activity strives to support the delivery and improvement of our equality objectives, as well as our statutory requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty and Equality Act 2010.

3. **BACKGROUND**

3.1 DICE objectives fulfil our legal duties as a public-sector organisation under the Equality Act 2010. These are detailed under section 7 legal implications.

3.2 WMFS is committed to Inclusion and Diversity as demonstrated through the alignment of the People programme in striving to create a fully inclusive environment and diverse workforce. This is enabled through the organisational commitment to continue to challenge ourselves and learn from our internal and external stakeholders in our efforts to meet our DICE objectives.

4. **LEADERSHIP, PARTNERSHIP AND ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT**

4.1 Top 50 Inclusive Employers

In December 2023 WMFS was awarded number 1 Inclusive UK company for the second year. We have achieved a top 10 ranking for several years, but this is the first time any organisation has been awarded number 1, for 2 years in a row.

The award is open to both public, private and 3rd sector organisations with tough competition for the top place including several multinational companies, Police, NHS and FRS and government including the House of Lords.

Since the award we have been approached by several organisations to share good practice, with our approach to Brave Spaces and progress around neuro diversity being of particular focus.

4.2 Race Code

We commenced our self-assessment against the Race Code during autumn 2023. The Race Code is an assessment of our internal governance framework to assess how well the consideration of race and therefore other protected characteristics are embedded across policies, processes and systems. Work continues here to determine how we implement the recommendations of this framework across all protected characteristics and our developing DICE strategy.

4.3 Inclusive Workplace Research

All Hands to the Pump - In continuing our commitment to inclusion for all we are working in partnership with the University of Birmingham to undertake a research project that will seek to understand the positive role that can be played by all genders in an inclusive workplace. It is anticipated this research will commence at the end of April.

4.4 Inclusion Steering Group

The Inclusion Steering Group continues to move forward with the development of the Inclusion Road Map MESH page with videos having being filmed featuring key stakeholders explaining the function and aims of the group and how progress will be communicated.

4.5 Stakeholder Groups

Activity across all our Stakeholder groups continues to gather momentum. In November a development and planning day was held using the method of Appreciative Inquiry. This has formed the foundation of future planning for the stakeholder groups and planning for DICE activity in line with People objectives.

Neurodiversity Group

4.5.1 The aims of the group are to raise awareness and enable active discussion around neurodiversity within the Service, engaging and supporting neurodivergent employees.

Most recently to celebrate Neurodiversity Week the group has provided a variety of engagement sessions with staff around Dyslexia, ADHD and Autism. This has involved internal and external speakers, such as Test Help Read and Write.

Key achievement of this group:

The group has influenced the improvement of all recruitment processes in offering a suite of reasonable adjustments for neurodivergent staff, i.e. receiving questions 24 hours prior to interview. It will also include a conversation with the candidate to ascertain if there are any individual needs we can consider.

Awards – Neurodiversity Networking Group Lead, Julie Farruggia received the following awards:

- Our People Award – West Midlands Fire Service Rewards and Recognition.

- Neurodiversity Champion of the Year – Fire in Excellence Awards.

Women and ADHD in the Fire Service – the group shared a questionnaire around women and ADHD in the Fire Service.

Future Plans

Neuro-curious Breakfast meet-ups –, are being organised a series of discussing varied and emerging themes around neurodiversity.

Text Help Read & Write – There are plans to roll out the software to all staff, marketing its benefits and advertising via the group. A launch will hopefully take place during Neurodiversity Celebration Week.

4.5.2 Inspire

The group continues to influence and educate all levels within the Service and engage as role models in the community acting as ambassadors for the Service as an inclusive employer.

WMFS INSPIRE representatives have recently attended the '9s night' organised by the family of CFO Wayne Brown, held in Kent. Representatives also met in London with BAME members of London Fire Brigade during a facilitated Brave Space event, to share staff sentiment on his passing. Inspire are now looking into the viability of running similar sessions for WMFS staff to support a space for open discussion.

Members of Inspire (along with members of all stakeholder groups) have played an integral role in recruitment and promotion processes over the last 6 months, contributing to the assessment of candidates during the selection process. As well as supporting Senior leadership processes by sitting on stakeholder interview panels.

Future plans

- INSPIRE Joint Collaboration with LFB & GMFRS on BAME Mental Health & Leadership (18th April).
- INSPIRE Board Group succession planning - review of board members.
- Windrush 2024 - support of local community group facilitation, including WMFS standard flag bearing.
- Black History Month planning - featuring the historic appointment of the UKFRS first Black CFO Wayne Brown.

4.5.3 AFSA

AFSA's aim is to support and promote inclusivity across the organisation and in this provides exceptional services, events and support to their members.

AFSA Spring Conference is being advertised with the standard application process, as well as 2 network leads 3 additional places are being funded for the conference hosted by Nottinghamshire FRS 10th-11th July.

AFSA conferences are open to all not just AFSA members and provide an environment which enables diversity and learning for all. To ensure a return on investment any of those who attend will be expected to bring learning back to WMFS by providing an overview of the impact and learning from the conference to their team/department and to the stakeholder groups, this will also support the individuals development plans. The DICE team will review the impact and learning from the AFSA conferences 3 months after the event date and yearly to consider the overall return on investment.

4.5.4 FireOut

Our LGBTQ+ networking group supports staff and their families across the organisation who identify as LGBTQ+ as well as allies.

The group creates networking opportunities in a safe space for like-minded colleagues across the organisation and

challenges prejudice, enhances understanding and creates opportunities for learning through education, mentoring and community engagement.

The Group has helped raise awareness across the organisation helping to create an environment where any employee can bring their whole self to work. LGBT+ issues are openly discussed and normalised within the organisation.

Pride 2024 is currently being planned and will be focused on our staff after hosting a successful a tri service event last year. This event will take place on the 25th May 2024.

4.5.5 Affinity

The group continues to support women in the Service via the provision of a platform for networking, advocacy, influencing and socialising. The group provides an opportunity to share experiences, utilise peer support to develop, build confidence and help each other navigate crucial conversations.

Affinity are in the early stages of planning our own regional women's weekend, based on the format of the highly successful Women in the Fire Service development weekend held at the Fire Service College yearly.

Key areas of development include:

- A survey and three focus groups for women to discuss female progression and development within WMFS which was supported and attended by DCFO Bowcock. The outcomes of which will inform our approach to positive action, recruitment and promotion.
- A video montage for International Women's Day (IWD) to highlight some of our female members of staff and their journeys into WMFS and during their career at WMFS.
- An event IWD event took place at Headquarters on the 8th March 2024, where both internal and external

speakers shared their personal journey and experiences with staff.

Future Plans

- Have a go' days for grey and green book staff to enable experiential learning.
- Supporting attendees to the national Women in the Fire Service Event this year.

4.6 Workforce Profile and Firefighter Recruitment

A specific update is provided through a separate report to update Members of the committee. This report identifies the overall workforce profile as well as focusing specifically on the approach to Firefighter recruitment, progression of candidates at each stage of the selection process and breaks this down by gender and ethnicity. This provides Members with an overview of how the Service is progressing in attracting and retaining candidates with protected characteristics throughout the recruitment and selection process.

When comparing gender and ethnicity of our uniformed staff to other Met Fire and Rescue Services, WMFS continues to have the highest percentage of female uniformed staff and are second to London with regards to BAME staff.

4.7 Equality Impact Assessments

20 Initial Equality Impact Assessments have been submitted and reviewed. from Nov 2023, 5 of the Initials have been reviewed to become Full EIAs 3 Full EIAs received from November 2023. A power BI dashboard of EIA is now available providing an overview and RAG rating of EIAs. This data allows an easily viewed overview of EIA and allows trends to be identified which can inform any changes and improvements across the EIA process, as well as with individual EIAs.



Stakeholder groups in particular the Neuro diversity group are now much more actively involved in EIA consultation.

4.8 Brave Space Talks

Brave Space talks continue to be well attended and impactful for staff. These have included topics such as Ethical Veganism, Cross Cultural Mental Health (for Black History month), Faith and Belief in the Fire Service and a powerful Brave Space on domestic violence. This latter Brave Space was delivered from the personal experience of one of our staff who was a victim of domestic violence.

We have had a lot of interest from other Fire and Blue Light Services following the success of the Brave Space which were specifically mentioned in the Spotlight report as best practice.

The Brave Space support learning by providing a safe space for staff to discuss complex issues around inclusion within the boundaries of our core values. Allowing staff to develop a sense of inclusion by being able to share their experiences and learn from each other. This carries far beyond the actual sessions to generate a culture where diversity and inclusion is talked about and explored with curiosity and respect.

4.9 Ramadan Buddies

A repeat of last year's successful Ramadan Buddies event is being planned. Moving forward we are in the early stages of planning more engagement with faith communities including a cricket game during a large community event.

5 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This report responds directly to the General and Specific Duties of the Equality Act and considers DICE issues that are pertinent to the needs of the Service. In doing so, a range of equality data has been analysed and considered regarding all protected characteristics.

6 RISK IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The objectives identified in this report support the organisation in mitigating its risk regarding claims of unlawful discrimination.

7 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The recommendations outlined in this report assist us to fulfil our duties under the Equality Act 2010 particularly to advance equal opportunities and eliminate behaviours that are unlawful under the Act.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) is a legal duty under the Equality Act 2010. It is a way of making sure public bodies, including the Civil Service, take account of equality in their day-to-day work. The duty is to consider the impact of policies on people who share protected characteristics.

The Public sector equality duty came in to force in April 2011 (s.149 of the Equality Act 2010) and public authorities are required, in carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the need to achieve the objectives set out under s149 of the Equality Act 2010 to:

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

To ensure transparency, and to assist in the performance of this duty, the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011 require public authorities, to publish:

- equality objectives, at least every four years (from 6th April 2012)
- information to demonstrate their compliance with the public sector equality duty (from 31st January 2012)

8 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

9 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

The contact officer for this report is Karen Gowreesunker, Head of People Development.