

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 JUNE 2017

1. DIVERSITY INCLUSION COHESION EQUALITY (DICE) UPDATE

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

RECOMMENDED

THAT Scrutiny Committee note the progress made by the Service in relation to DICE during quarters three and four of 2016/2017.

2. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To provide an update to Scrutiny Committee to review and consider the ongoing progress being made by the Service in advancing DICE. This activity supports our equality objectives as well as our statutory requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty and Equality Act 2010.

3. BACKGROUND

The DICE objectives contained within the DICE report were developed in consultation with functions and departments across the Service. The objectives not only fulfil our legal duties as a public sector organisation under the Equality Act 2010, but also help address areas of development towards achieving excellence in the Equality Framework.

This report details our continued progress towards achieving excellence and is structured under the five themes of the Equality Framework.

3.1 Knowing your Communities

- There are now over 3,000 Community Members and we are working hard to embed them with their local community fire stations. They are involved in activities

and events that stations hold as well as being considered when decisions are made. Some of these activities include assisting with the development of The Plan, community speed watches and local clothing collections.

Community Members will be actively engaged with upcoming station open days and events throughout the summer.

- A questionnaire has been designed to gather information from our Community Members with specific regard to understanding potential barriers to recruitment faced by our underrepresented groups. The intelligence gathered will ensure that we are able to target our activity and resource effectively as well as shape the way in which we recruit in the future in an intelligence led way. This will influence our recruitment system, marketing and positive action activity.
- A programme is being run in partnership with Job Centre Plus and local colleges to offer unemployed people, living in some of our most diverse and hard to reach communities, the opportunity to learn about the Fire Service and also achieve qualifications in literacy and numeracy. It is hoped that this will open up employment opportunities for them and support them in making a positive change for their future.
- WMFS once again paraded through the streets of Birmingham City Centre celebrating the Pride festival. The event in Birmingham is one of the largest Pride events in the UK. It is a colourful and vibrant celebration of the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) community in the West Midlands and WMFS employees took this opportunity to engage with LGBT community.

3.2 Leadership, Partnership and Service Commitment

- WMFS is committed to furthering LGBT equality in the workplace and to assist us moving forward we became a Stonewall Diversity Champion in 2016.

Stonewall is the leading LGBT organisation in the world, helping organisations across the globe ensure their workplace is an inclusive environment for all LGBT staff. Each year Stonewall produces a Workplace Equality Index assessing organisations' LGBT inclusivity, our ranking for 2016 shows a good start but with much work to be done.

Following feedback from Stonewall regarding our submission to the index, an action plan has been created to further advance this work.

- The DICE station/section initiative is to provide an outcome based framework to encourage stations and departments to embed Equality Outcomes within day to day activity and encourage a proactive approach to positive action and furthering equality objectives across the organisation. Starting with pilot stations in each area stations will be rated Bronze, Silver or Gold depending on level of activity with groups with a Protected Characteristic and work undertaken to promote positive action and representation across the organisation. Stations/sections will be assessed on staff declaration rates of people data (improving our understanding of diversity already in the organisation), training and development of staff in DICE issues, and engagement with community, for Silver and Gold standard this will involve the station or department generating best practice and self-lead projects to further DICE objectives.

DICE stations/sections will help embed DICE and positive action across the organisation and collate/ generate evidence to meet assessment criteria for the Stonewall Equality Index and Excellence Framework for Fire and Rescue Services as well as putting us in a strong position for any future Home Office Inspectorate.

- In consultation with our LGBT employees and local Transgender organisations and community, WMFS is developing its first Transgender policy to ensure we are a fully inclusive environment.

The policy is being developed by People Support Services with active consultation and advice from Stonewall the leading LGBT campaign group and will form a key part of the re-assessment under the Stonewall Equality Index.

The policy takes a straightforward pragmatic approach to a complex and sensitive subject providing solid guidance to managers and staff, being particularly relevant as the diversity of our organisation grows reflected by the fact that we have had two transgender members of staff in recent years. It will also be a sign of positive commitment to the transgender community of the West Midlands who represent some of the most vulnerable members of society.

- WMFS has a number of stakeholder groups including Affinity, Inspire and AFSA and we are looking to introduce an LGBT group. Stakeholder groups provide a support network for employees who either identify with a specific protected characteristic, or wish to offer support to others.

Working alongside these groups, the DICE team have developed an Equality Stakeholder Strategy which aims to support the groups within the organisation to embed and progress DICE outcomes to create a more inclusive environment, further internal and external positive action and demonstrate best practice in line with the Equality Framework Excellence standard.

3.3 Community Engagement and Satisfaction

- The recent public consultation was conducted to ensure that we engaged with our local communities, partners and businesses to understand their views and opinions about how the Authority currently provides its services in relation to the Integrated Risk Management Plan, Governance and Finance.

The outcomes of the public consultation exercise provided a clear understanding of the opinions of our communities, partners and businesses and these have

influenced the development of The Plan. An Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out on the consultation and will provide valuable learning, ensuring that future consultations are as inclusive as possible.

- Firefighter taster days are held regularly across the organisation. The events are primarily designed to allow members of the community to come along and get an insight into the role of a firefighter. They provide an excellent opportunity to showcase how the role has evolved, challenge public perceptions of the work we do and allow staff to engage with members of the community. These events will foster a sense of confidence in individuals and allow them to make decisions on a potential career from a position of knowledge.

Attendees at taster days are being actively engaged, both during the taster day and post event. We gather information on candidate experience and the likelihood of them applying to become a firefighter. Crucially we capture whether this outcome is different to their career aspirations prior to attending a taster day.

- Targeted attendance at careers events enables us to engage with active job seekers and students. Various solutions have been developed to suit different style of events. These range from workshops to recruitment stands. The imagery and interactive aids used at these events have been developed to focus on the none operational aspect of the firefighter role.
- We are developing our use of social media as a tool for recruitment. Using social media allows us greater control over who sees a recruitment advertisement through insights and targeting. We are developing a specific careers page which all social media platforms will link back to.

Early discussions have been held with the Fire Service College with a view to working in partnership to

develop a sustained, coordinated marketing brand and strategy.

- A pre-recruitment course has been developed which will initially be exclusive to women. The pilot course will commence in June 2017 and will run for 5 evenings over 5 weeks, as well as a teambuilding day. The course is designed to build confidence amongst women applicants, provide advice, guidance and motivation on fitness levels, dispel myths about the firefighter role, and provide positive engagement with female role models within the organisation.

The course will also focus on building interview, teamwork and communication skills, and building a supportive environment where women applicants encourage one another.

3.4 Responsive Services

- Working with a range of partners, teams from Ladywood Community Fire Station are working with West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network to engage with some of our most vulnerable members of the community. A training package is currently being developed with the intention of this being rolled out further across the organisation.
- The Plan has been developed this year in order to make it more accessible, not only to our employees but also to members of our communities. The Plan has been designed to take account of those with hearing difficulties by the use of sign language for the most crucial video areas. All of the videos also utilise closed captions from YouTube and the graphics are clearer, more dynamic and easier to understand.

3.5 A Skilled and Committed Workforce

- We have developed our firefighter recruitment strategy which aims to create a workforce that is truly representative of our local populations. We are

working both internally and externally to consider innovative and modern approaches in the redesign of our services.

The proposed level of recruitment over the next four years will result in us changing 29% of our operational workforce. This provides a greater opportunity to change the profile of the workforce than we have had for many years.

We have introduced ambitious recruitment targets and we will change the way in which we carry out positive action, moving to an ongoing candidate nurturing approach.

- Our candidate nurturing will provide a sustained approach to positive action which will drive our recruitment activity. We will move away from campaign based recruitment, instead focusing on generating a candidate pool that we will nurture through selection.

Our recruitment activity will focus on three phases of (1) Attraction, (2) Selection, and (3) Onboarding. It is our intention to expand our positive action activity across these three phases, offering support and advice to candidates along their recruitment journey.

- 12 women employees are being supported to attend the National Training and Development weekend at the Fire Service College. The programme involves both fireground workshops including Multi Incident Scenario, Urban Search and Rescue, and Driving a Fire Appliance, as well as classroom based workshops including Mental Health, Mindfulness, First Aid, and Women in Leadership.
- An interactive workshop, exploring unconscious bias and how it can affect our everyday decisions, has been developed and as is being delivered across the organisation. The workshops are open to all employees with a focus on targeting line managers. The workshop considers a variety of different types of

bias that we may be prone to. The workshop can also be facilitated for specific teams.

- Workforce profile data continues to be provided at a local level as is used by the PSS Business Partners when discussing local resource requirements and succession planning.

4. 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 with regard to all of the protected characteristics.

5. RISK IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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

6. 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.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

The contact officer for this report is Sarah Warnes, Strategic Enabler for People, contact number 07973 810813.

Phil Loach
Chief Fire Officer