

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE SERVICE

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14 NOVEMBER 2016

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.

2. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

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

3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 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 our objectives and is structured under four themes taken from the Equality Framework for FRS'.

3.1.1 **Leadership, Partnership and Organisational Development**

- We have submitted our application for inclusion in the Stonewall Index, the results of which will be announced in November. We are confident that our policies are strong

as well as our community engagement with events such as PRIDE. We do however anticipate some gaps particularly with regard to Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender (LGBT) awareness training for managers as well as the current absence of an LGBT support group.

- Our stakeholder groups continue to develop. Inspire (formally Race Equality Forum) are well organised and meet regularly. They are developing their approach to internal coaching as well as supporting at careers events and local schools visits. The Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA) conference will be well supported with a range of people attending including Councillors, Strategic Managers and employees alike.
- The Strategic Enabling Team understand the importance of recognising unconscious bias and have completed a bespoke development session to raise their awareness. The DICE team have now developed a training/awareness package regarding unconscious bias and how it can affect decision making across all aspects of the organisation and this will be rolled out to managers across the organisation. We recognise that implicit or unconscious bias occurs when we make quick judgements and assessments of people, situations and data without us realising. Our biases are influenced by our background, cultural environment and personal experiences. Developing individual and teams to understand and recognise this bias is an area DICE will continue to focus on.
- Our workforce planning activity ensures that the organisation is able to understand the age profile which is essential to mitigate any potential risks associated with an ageing workforce. Our uniformed workforce is ageing with the average age currently being 41 years. With no recruitment activity, this will increase to 47 by April 2025. With regard to the gender split, the current average age of our male firefighters is 42, female 38. Our approach to Firefighter Fitness has been developed in line with CFOA research and guidance and we are currently implementing annual fitness assessments for all operational personnel. The Chester Treadmill Test will be carried out on fire stations conducted by Watch

Officers. Any issues that arise regarding an individual's fitness will be referred to our Occupational Health team. This enables early intervention for any fitness related issues, provides bespoke 'work up' programmes for individuals as well as actively monitoring fitness levels. This will support our operational firefighters in maintaining good health and fitness as they get older.

- Working in partnership with West Midlands Police (WMP) we recently hosted a Menopause awareness session targeted at managers and employees alike across the Service.

The event was well attended from both Fire and Police and resources were available for employees to take away. The feedback from the attendees was that the session was really light hearted and informative. The session was delivered by a company called Laughology who delivered the session using humour.

Working in collaboration with WMP we will provide the services of a menopause specialist doctor, to assist in developing our approach in support of Occupational Health, and as part of our on-going well-being strategy. This will consist of 1 clinic a month being provided and access to advice as and when needed.

- In September we made our debut in 'The Inclusive Top 50 Employers List'. The list spotlights organisations who promote inclusion across all protected characteristics. Organisations that feature provide supporting evidence on a range of topics including recruitment procedures, training and a host of diversity related initiatives. Almost 100 submissions were received this year including large employers such as British Airways, Ministry of Justice, SKY, Age UK and ASDA. We were listed at number 31 which is a huge achievement for our debut. We will look to improve on this next year.

3.1.2 Knowing and Involving our Communities

- Our Community Safety Strategy (CSS) has now developed into an interactive community focused tool placing information in the hands of our local communities

so that they can see the risk that lies in the areas within which they live. The interactive tool has been developed and will continue to develop so that community members can be better aware of risks but also that they are better informed about our services, the impact they can have and also how to access them. This still sits with a detailed analysis of risk which informs the effective allocation of front line resources and delivery of services to achieve our attendance standards and importantly to attend all high risk incidents within 5 minutes.

Over the coming months WMFS will be consulting on our CSS (IRMP) with the public and our partners to ensure they are informed of what the analysis is telling us and so that they can feedback on the way in which we propose to deliver our services over the next three years in line with our rolling 3 year corporate strategy, The Plan.

We have both internal and external focus groups, incorporating our Community Members, to develop the interactive CSS, website design and The Plan.

- Community Members continue to be seen as a key group of individuals who have an important role to play, not least by being key stakeholders in the CSS consultation later this year.

The number of Community Members has grown to just over 2600 and continues to be reflective of the diverse communities of the West Midlands, with 49% female and 23% describing themselves as being from a Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) background. The Members continue to receive a centrally distributed newsletter as well as localised newsletters from some of the stations who have actively started to engage with the Community Members who live within their station areas.

We recently held an Open Day at Fire Service Head Quarters to which all Community Members were invited to attend to come along and see the breadth of the services that we offer. Recognising the important role that community members play within our Corporate Strategy two temporary posts have been created within the Corporate Communications Team with the aim of co-

ordinating and promoting the Community Membership Scheme across the organisation and communities to build upon the foundation we have already laid.

3.1.3 Building a Skilled and Committed Workforce

- Profile data continues to be provided at a local level and is being used by our PSS Business Partners when discussing resource requirements and succession planning with local managers. Managers are being coached to raise awareness and understanding of the positive impact they can have on the profile of their teams and what measures they can put in place to actively encourage and support individuals from under-represented groups.

24% of female uniformed employees are in a management position (Ccdr or above) compared to 39% of male uniformed employees. 37% of female non-uniformed employees are in a management position (grade 9 or above) compared to 75% of male non-uniformed employees.

- In August WMFS embarked on a pilot programme in conjunction with Jobcentre Plus and Birmingham Metropolitan College 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 opening up employment opportunities for them and helping them make a positive change for their future.

The pilot was timed specifically to link in with WMFS recruitment but it was quickly identified that this was not only a chance to interact with minority groups about recruitment but to let them know what the Fire Service is doing in their communities to keep them safer, and healthier. During the programme 97 people who are currently on benefits took up the opportunity to come to Handsworth Fire Station to participate in a taster day. The profile of this group included 18 females and 65 BME. Around 60 went on to the college induction day to take part in interviews and team building exercises to

assess suitability for the course itself. 28 people were then selected for the course which included 5 (18%) females and 15 BME (54%).

We hope that some of the group will consider firefighter recruitment but also with the skills and qualifications they have achieved and their understanding of the Service that they will consider not just other roles in the Service but how the Service is working with and in the community to help them in so many ways every day.

At the end of the programme, the group were invited to a presentation day where some of them shared their experiences. Students talked about how their confidence has been boosted and they now feel more resilient. They described the invaluable team working skills they have developed, how they were taken out of their comfort zones and the life changing experience they had encountered.

Any firefighter applicants from this pilot project will be tracked through the recruitment system and we will evaluate the impact before rolling out to other areas across the West Midlands.

- In the run up to our firefighter recruitment campaign, we have developed a series of 'taster days' across the West Midlands service area. These were an invaluable opportunity for people to learn more about the modern firefighter and the physical and mental demands of the role. The taster days consisted of input surrounding the culture and ethos of our organisation as well as the role of the firefighter in our Service.

Potential applicants were given detailed information about the recruitment process, what we look for, including the physical demands through a practical session.

Individuals were encouraged to 'have a go' at some exercises that helped them test their ability to complete the practical assessment during the recruitment process.

The taster sessions were well supported by our

operational employees who gave up their time to assist potential applicants.

The taster days were open to all, however we specifically targeted both women and BME groups to attend and we ensured that each session had a diverse mix of applicants. Of those that attended, 132 were male and 60 were female (31% female), 121 were white and of those that declared their ethnicity, 67 described themselves as being from a minority ethnic background (35% BME). We will monitor these individuals through the recruitment process.

- Following the success of the Sikh Channel coverage of the HQ Open Day, the channel have done a week of breakfast TV interviews with various teams across the organisation including Fire Safety, RTC, Fire Control and Technical Rescue, which culminated in a live interview with the Strategic Enabler People, and the Strategic Enabler Business Development. This provided us with a great opportunity to raise our profile among the Sikh community in the week that our firefighter recruitment campaign opened.
- In preparation for the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy in April 2017 and associated public sector target, People Support Services (PSS) have identified an Apprenticeship Stakeholder group who are currently exploring the use of apprenticeship opportunities across the organisation including both the upskilling of our existing workforce as well as the management of our future vacancies.

PSS are actively involved in the CFOA national working group set up to develop the Trailblazer for the operational firefighter apprenticeship scheme.

3.1.4 Responsive and Accessible Service

- The organisation have completed in excess of 17,000 safe and well visits in the period January to August and are on track to achieve our target of 25,000 per year.

- Our specialist deaf team continue to engage with our communities carrying out Safe and Well visits and other events including family fun days, charity car wash and a deaf cultural day.

We currently have 9 British Sign Language qualified employees, ranging from Level 1 to Level 6 with increasing interest from others to develop these skills.

Following the restructure of Community Safety, the activities of the specialist deaf team will be reviewed with the intention of further developing their work and introducing quality assurance.

EQUALITY FRAMEWORK

- Knowing Your Communities

Our main areas for improvement is how we can evidence our knowledge of our communities. We particularly need to evidence that we recognise our communities are changing, but crucially, we need to evidence how we adapt our service based on these changes, particularly in regard to how we target safety campaigns and the frequency of when they are updated.

- Leadership, partnership and service commitment

We have stronger evidence in this section especially in regard to monitoring equality objectives and we have some excellent examples of our Manager's commitment to equality.

Monitoring our potential influence on partners also needs to be further embedded in regard to equality considerations being demonstrated by partners. All of our procurement/ tender processes include assessment of equality considerations, however this may conflict at times with best value.

- Community engagement and satisfaction/Responsive Service

Although the Community Members scheme is helping progress in this area they remain an under utilised resource. Evidence of robust and meaningful consultation with our communities is patchy. We need evidence of consultation with our community that subsequently changes the services we deliver as a direct result of that consultation. An example of this cannot currently be provided.

Our increasing focus on the health agenda will generate good evidence in this area. The troubled individuals programme for example should provide robust evidence.

- A skilled and committed workforce

We have good evidence in many areas of this part of the framework with inclusive policies, an active external positive action programme and initiatives such as dignity rooms and improvements to maternity provision as well as our personal development courses Reach for the Stars and Personal Effectiveness. Current evidence indicates we need to improve our monitoring of internal development courses to evidence that all employees are accessing them. There is no evidence of discrimination but without better monitoring we cannot prove equal access.

4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

This report responds directly to the General and Specific duties of the Equality Act and considers the 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 assists 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 name for this report is DCFO Phil Hales, telephone number 0121 380 6004.

PHIL LOACH
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER