

West Midlands Fire Service – Positive Action Review

November 2017



**Inclusive Talent
and
Embedding Inclusion**



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1. The brief

West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service (WMFS) have a planned programme in place to address positive action within their teams.

Currently there is under representation from women and the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) community.

There is a Positive Action Manager in place, a Diversity Inclusion Cohesion Equality (DICE) Business Partner and members of the HR team, who are all working on the positive action programmes and wider diversity and inclusion work within the service.

WMFS would like Equal Approach (EA) to review their current initiative, processes and future plans, working in partnership as a 'critical' friend. Through providing advice, guidance and recommendations the objective is to enhance the current Positive Action processes.

The service would like to ensure that an effective and meaningful programme is implemented, facilitating the attraction of high-caliber female and BAME talent, by raising the profile of the organization as a preferred employer.

WMFS would like Equal Approach to review the current positive action process and make recommendations for enhancement by reviewing:

- The processes involved in candidate nurturing.
- What WMFS's requirements are for using positive action; e.g. minimum standards for under-represented groups or widening the net to increase the number of women and BAME candidates entering the positive initiative programmes.
- Identifying how the networks and stakeholders can support the initiative, working more closely together for enhanced results.
- Targets set by WMFS for recruiting under-represented groups.
- Future positive action initiatives to include where they are advertised.
- Content and feedback of taster sessions/pre-recruitment sessions.
- DICE initiatives and how they can support the positive action work.



2. The project

Methodology

The review was carried out by looking at the documents and processes outlaid in the brief, in addition to carrying out semi-structured interviews with the DICE team and wider stakeholders. We also researched the websites and social media activity of other fire and rescue services, assessing their promotion of positive action, equality, diversity and inclusion.

Outcomes

A detailed report including:

- Themes and highlights from stakeholder interviews.
- Recommendations for enhanced practice regarding positive action programmes.
- Policy and process reviews with suggested updates e.g. exit interview template

Out of Scope

Direct consultation with the wider senior leadership team (with the exception of some senior stakeholder group members) was out of the scope. As well as community members, prospective applicants or new recruits. The focus was to review existing documents and activities.

Further work could include interviews/focus groups with prospective applicants or applicants who have dropped out of the process. Additional stakeholder members who were not involved in this review such as leaders and community members could also be of further benefit, to get wider feedback which may inform future planning.

Research

There have been several research pieces which have evidenced the recruitment of a diverse team enhances business performance. Some recent research by Erik Larson (Cloverpop) states:

- Inclusive teams make better business decisions up to 87% of the time.
- Teams with inclusive processes enable decisions to be made twice as fast with half the meetings.
- Decisions made and executed by diverse teams delivered 60% better results.

According to the research, teams outperform individual decision makers 66% of the time, and decision making improves as team diversity increases. All male teams make better business decisions 58% of the time, while gender diverse teams do so 73% of the time. Teams that also include a wide range of ages and different geographic locations make better business decisions 87% of the time.

Diversity and Inclusion training can also support the agenda in ensuring that they are effectively managing and supporting teams to reach their potential.



In the report '[An Inclusive service – the twenty first century fire and rescue service](#)' a survey was conducted in England receiving responses from 40 fire and rescue services:

- 80% of respondents said that they planned to put in place recruitment initiatives to encourage diversity, while 15 & said that they were considering it.
- Examples given of recruitment initiatives included; outreach and targeted work to improve diversity, engaging with young people from under-represented groups, running taster sessions for specific under-represented groups, using social media for targeted advertising and offering help with the recruitment process.

The report also highlighted that London Fire Brigade found:

- 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.

Other highlights from the report include Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service's Equality journey. The actions they carried out to increase under-represented groups included:

- Avoiding tokenistic, short term campaigns.
- Utilising technology and the broad spectrum of available media in a timely, relatable and relevant way. Well thought-out targeted penetration through the 'community telegraph', internet and social media to keep people engaged and informed throughout.
- Visible media and publicity resources which directly and genuinely reflected the target community, not relying on generic passive campaigning of 'one size fits all'.
- A closely networked campaign design which utilised skills in the workforce that clearly understood specific community dynamics and matched target audience needs.



3. Document and Process Reviews

The following documents and procedures were reviewed as part of the process:

3.1 Positive Action and Positive Initiation Document

The initiation document states that 'It is the aim of West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) to create a workforce that is reflective of our local working population's current demographic profile (aged 16 – 64)'. The initiation document also provides a good overview of objectives, goals and stakeholders.

The recent Race Disparity Report 2017, stated that the UK unemployment rate (the proportion of the economically active population who are unemployed) was 4.4% in April - June 2017. The unemployment rate was 3.9% for the Caucasian ethnic group, compared to 7.8% for people from a BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) background; although the rate varied between different ethnic minority groups.

There has been a rise in employment generally for women. That said, women who are long-term unemployed face multiple forms of disadvantage. Men have consistently higher employment rates than women above the age of 22. In an effort to achieve maximum gains, it would be beneficial to target the working population, as well as those who are currently unemployed.

The aspirations for recruiting female and BAME firefighters are also high - 20% of new starters to be women and 35% to be BAME for the period 2017 - 2018. The fact WMFS want to address the current gap is positive, and it would be excellent if this was achieved. Given the make-up of the current workforce and results of previous positive action initiatives; the desired quotas are ambitious.

A change to the assessment centre approach has the potential to yield a greater degree of reward in this area. The process is a great opportunity to identify the best person to fulfill the role.

Whilst WMFS have prioritised the need to recruit women and individuals from the BAME community, consideration should also be made to recruiting other under-represented communities, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans + (LGBT+) community and younger people. It could be made clearer within the promotion that it is also important to recruit other under-represented communities/protected characteristics.

An additional focus on the importance of retention would also be beneficial. There are ambitious figures for recruitment, but it would be prudent to have clear actions, initiatives and targets regarding the retention of BAME, women and other underrepresented communities (eg LGBT+).



3.2 DICE Report 2012 - 15/Objectives 2016 - 19

The document reads well and provides a good overview of previous activity as well as future objectives and targets.

There are several plans in place which will support the positive action process, including the race equality forum, a review of female employees' maternity experience and a targeted development of under-represented groups.

Within the 2016 - 19 objectives it states:

- We will promote positive action initiatives to specifically engage with employees from under-represented groups, to engage with organisational development as well as their own development.
- Building a skilled and committed workforce - in a climate of austerity, we will take a long-term approach to recruiting a diverse workforce. We will positively influence the perceptions of people from under-represented groups and enable their engagement with the service.
- Referring to 15 voluntary positive action advisors: It would be beneficial to understand these roles and their responsibilities. If these roles have not yet been created or recruited, defined roles and objectives need to be established with clear communication channels between the DICE team and stakeholders. In addition, time commitments and requirements to attend meetings and forums, training should also be provided to ensure they are effective.

3.3 Sector-specific research

We carried out a review of the activities undertaken by other fire and rescue services, in relation to positive action. These have been summarised as follows:

Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service

Lancashire have implemented a buddying scheme to support their positive action initiatives. The scheme provides female, BAME and LGBT with a buddy to act as a first-hand point of contact during the selection process. This scheme is for potential recruits but with a focus on under-represented communities. There is also the provision of events such as 'Have a Go' days, which give people from all communities the opportunity to learn more about the role of a firefighter and the selection process.

They have also created a video which discusses the myths of joining the fire service. The video was developed by West Sussex Fire and Rescue services.

<http://www.lancsfirerescue.org.uk/Pages/www.lancsfirerescue.org.uk/positive-action.aspx>



West Yorkshire

There is nothing specific regarding positive action. However, there is an equality, diversity and inclusion page which promotes the importance of diversity within the fire service. Information includes; defining equality, objectives, workforce information and working with communities. There is also a page of case studies regarding how the service has made West Yorkshire safer in terms of its responsibility to its employees, the community, the quality of emergency service and value for money it provides.

<http://www.westyorksfire.gov.uk/about-us/what-we-do/diversity/>

<http://www.westyorksfire.gov.uk/about-us/what-we-do/case-studies/>

West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service

On the recruitment page, there is no reference to positive action. However, there is a range of information available on eligibility, application timetable and selection process. The expected timetable is clear and useful for anyone interested in joining the service. They also have a video called 'What it takes to be a firefighter'. There is a dedicated page on the site for equality and inclusion and what it means for the service, but no reference to DICE on the recruiting page.

<https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/fire-emergencies-and-crime/west-sussex-fire-rescue-service/fire-rescue-recruitment/>

<https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-plans-and-policies/corporate-policies/equality-and-inclusion/>

Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service

Carry out positive action pre-recruitment events. They also clarify the difference between positive action and positive discrimination. In addition, there is a booklet informing people how to prepare for the physical tests involved in becoming a firefighter.

<http://www.twfire.gov.uk/recruitment/firefighters/positive-action-events/#.WfnilLp2vIU>

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service

This service carries out taster and open days. In previous years they have also held involvement workshops, where the community can feedback on equality plans of the fire service.

They send out a positive message on their website which may be useful to adapt and adopt for West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service:

'All Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service applicants go through the same selection processes, and all employees are appointed solely on merit.'



London Fire Brigade

There is a video on the page on becoming a firefighter which describes the overall role of a firefighter, with a focus on 'protecting' the community -

<https://firefightingcareers.london/firefighter-it-means-so-much-more/>

The website has a quiz which asks questions to establish if individuals have the skills to become a firefighter.

They have presented sound bites from firefighters on the importance of their role and the value of having diverse firefighting teams.

The service also defies myths with phrases regarding the fire service which may encourage people to join.

Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue

There is promotion of the Positive about Disability and Stonewall logo. Their website contains a 'Join us' page which provides an overview of their work, the service and keeping Greater Manchester people safe. They do have an equality and diversity page with brief information on providing an equitable service, as well as uploading the inclusion strategy and information regarding the Public Sector Equality Duty. There is no reference to positive action.

http://www.manchesterfire.gov.uk/working_for_us/

http://www.manchesterfire.gov.uk/about_us/equality_and_diversity/

Kent Fire and Rescue

No specific reference to positive action but state *'We pride ourselves on having well-trained professional staff, and an open culture which values diversity and equality of opportunity in employment. How we achieve this is set out in Our Equality Vision and Objectives and in Staff pay and conditions'*.

They provide information and frequency asked questions:

- Find out about joining Kent Fire and Rescue Service as a whole-time firefighter.
- Frequently asked questions about working as a whole-time firefighter.
- More information about being an on-call firefighter.
- Frequently asked questions about working as an on-call firefighter.
- Read a case study including interviews with on-call firefighters at Edenbridge fire station.

<http://www.kent.fire-uk.org/jobs/work-for-us/#firefighters>



Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue

Provide an explanation of positive action and the importance of diversity and inclusion within the service. They also have an equality handbook on the site

<http://www.bedsfire.com/EqualityandDiversity/OurCommunity/Pages/PositiveAction.aspx>

<http://www.bedsfire.com/EqualityandDiversity/Pages/default.aspx>

Cambridgeshire

There is no specific reference to positive action. The careers page includes the Disability Confidence and Stonewall logos and Fire and Rescue Equality Framework.

There is an overview regarding the commitment to equality and inclusion and their Equality Pledge.

Interestingly, Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue are currently recruiting for a Positive Action Officer

<http://www.cambsfire.gov.uk/careers/recruitment-process-1170.aspx>

<http://www.cambsfire.gov.uk/search.aspx?q=diversity>

<http://www.cambsfire.gov.uk/careers/wholetime-firefighters-1371.aspx>

<http://www.cambsfire.gov.uk/careers/meet-our-staff.aspx>

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Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Service

The information regarding recruitment is right at the bottom of the page under 'quick links' – so not prominent. There is a brief paragraph on the recruitment/employment opportunities page regarding 'Equal Opportunities'. People can express their interest in a role if they are transferees. There is no dedicated equality, diversity and inclusion page but brief information relating to the Equality Objectives and service awards for excellence which includes commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.

<http://bucksfire.gov.uk/>

**Good practice from review of websites**

- Buddying scheme for new recruits to support retention and engagement. The buddying could commence from pre-recruitment at the early stages.
- Development of a video/sound bites to promote the positive aspects of working for the fire service and to defy any myths.
- Involvement workshops where the community can feedback regarding DICE activities.
- Case studies to promote how the service engage effectively within communities. This may encourage individuals from the wider community to become part of WMFS.
- Case studies to support the positive action process could include working in the community, a wide range of individuals discussing how they love being a firefighter and encouraging others to join. This can be adapted in any way to suit the recruitment processes e.g. where possible have a wide a range as possible.
- Clear visual timeline on the recruitment process.

3.4 Curzon Consulting Group - Equality Report

A report was completed in April 2016 regarding the barriers and experiences of black Asian and minority ethnic staff and the perception of positive action within the force.

Highlights

The report highlights the following:

- There are assumptions regarding the term 'positive action' - the perception by some team members was that this was positive discrimination, which is unlawful under the Equality Act. This demonstrates a lack of understanding of what positive action means for WMFS in practice.
- Under representation of applications from women and people from the BAME community.
- Lack of understanding on the requirements and qualifications needed to enter the service.
- Perception of the fire services makeup from the wider community being that of a white male.
- Some females within the service feel their needs are not always addressed, e.g. flexibility regarding working hours.
- Perception of a lack of career progression within the fire service from the wider community and internally.
- Many of WMFS's staff had not undertaken equality, diversity and inclusion training for a considerable time prior to the research taking place.



- Perception by some that the equality, diversity and inclusion training was ‘common sense’.
- Make effective use of social media platforms.
- Attend community events, e.g. Mehlas/Pride
- Advertising more widely.
- The fitness test within the recruitment process should be carried out at the end of cycle, as this gives additional time for applicants to train and perform well.
- Perception by some that women are only promoted due to their gender, which prevents some women within the service applying for roles.
- There is a need for the service to be more flexible in terms of working patterns. If possible, this would benefit both male and female firefighters.

In response to the Curzon Consulting Group report, the Equal Approach review found some similar issues with the positive action process:

- Positive action terminology - there are still misconceptions regarding the term positive action. WMFS should consider how this perception can be changed for those within the service (e.g. training and communications).
- Greater awareness of positive action is required, and this could be carried out by providing awareness sessions within the community and internally.

3.5 Review of Exit Interview Template

The exit interview questionnaire is a good template with opportunities for employees to state why they are leaving the service (or transferring to another service), as well as providing their scores and feedback on their experiences and opportunities whilst in the service:

There are references to equality, diversity and inclusion and giving opportunities for employees to state they are leaving due to:

- Implementation of the Equality and Diversity Policy
- Opportunities for training
- Opportunities for personal development
- Promotion and career prospects
- Support from supervisors/managers

It would be beneficial to be more specific in the line of questioning to an equality, diversity and inclusion facet. The implementation of the equality and diversity policy option may not be clear to some employees. Additional questions could be asked under the reason for leaving section to expand the scope of trends being captured.



This could be expanded to say provide options such as due to discrimination/unfair treatment (to make it clearer that a person is stating they are leaving due to a protected characteristic).

There is an ambiguous option for 'other' but if employees are given an opportunity to declare any adverse EDI issues right at the beginning of the form, this could encourage them to provide more information where necessary.

It is recommended that the demographic monitoring on the form needs to be updated to include:

- Gender - to add 'non-binary' and 'other' (please state). In the event someone wishes to self-describe their gender in a different way.
- Sexual orientation categories need to be added.
- Ethnic categories need to match the categories in the 2011 census, e.g. Chinese, Gypsy/Traveler, Arab.

The confidentiality clause on the form is positive; *'The information that you provide will be treated in the strictest confidence and is required for monitoring purposes only.'*

To expand on this further, an additional line could be added to state the information allows the service to identify if there are any leaver issues relating to protected characteristics/equality groups.

This additional information from the exit questionnaire could then inform future Positive Action Programmes and the learning could be embedded.

3.6 Firefighting Selection - Briefing Exercise

No major comments – clear document

3.7 Eligibility Criteria

This seems to be appropriate for the:

- Work at height
- Work in enclosed spaces
- Work outdoors
- Carry heavy equipment
- Complete DBS

It is positive that the need to have two GCSEs has been removed, as this could provide barriers and there are other ways to assess skills required for the fire service.



3.8 FF PQA Interview Report Form

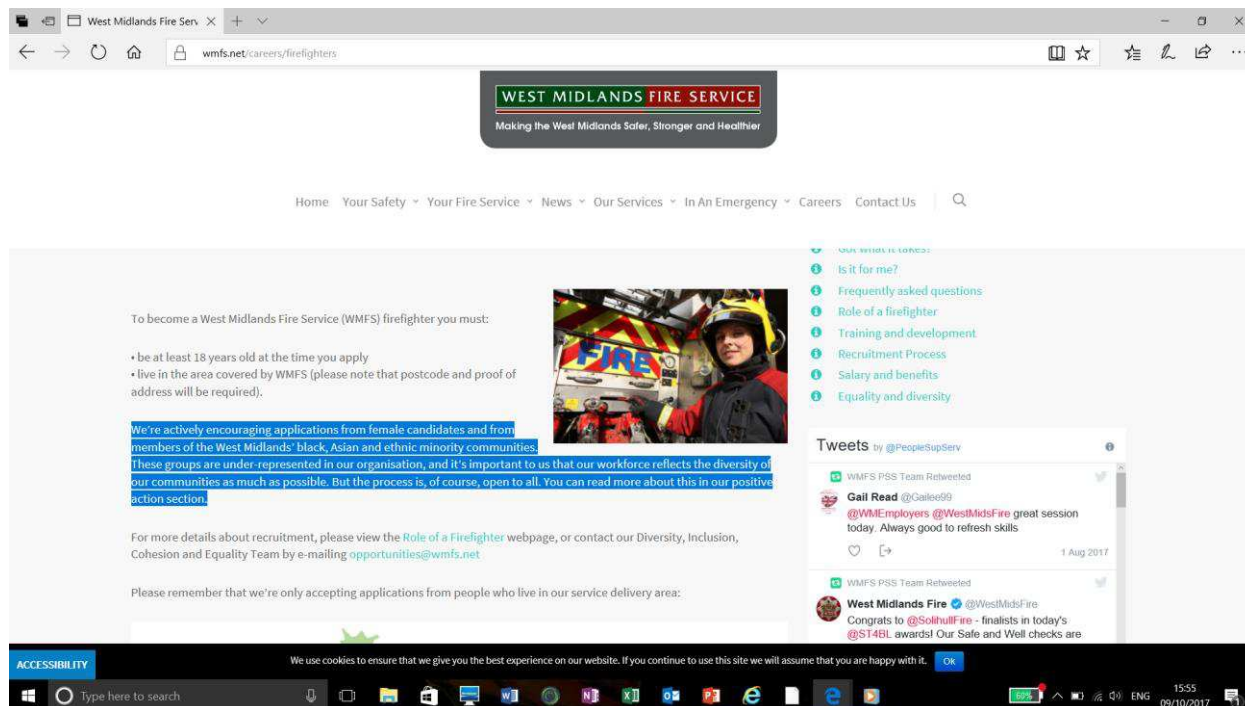
This is a clear document with a good overview of positive and negative indicators for those recruiting and assessing applicants. A few observations:

- Verbal briefing - one of the negative indicators is that the candidate 'Spoke too quickly, communication was confused' this could be a result of nerves therefore perhaps should not be included as a negative indicator.
- Appeared not to listen carefully to the questions asked - this may be seen differently from different individuals (is subjective), reconsider if this should be used as a negative indicator.
- Within the question 'Tell me about a time when you have supported an individual who was vulnerable or distressed'. Re-wording the negative indicator to state 'was not empathetic' instead of sympathetic would be more appropriate concerning vulnerability.

3.9 Website review

The front page of the careers section has no reference to diversity and inclusion, as well as not referring to the range of diverse roles available. It would be beneficial to have some reference to WMFS wanting to recruit a diverse workforce, specifically those that are currently under-represented.

It is positive that in the section regarding 'Firefighters' there is reference to recruiting from under represented communities, e.g. Women, BAME



It is positive that the EDI logos are promoted on the site, e.g. Top 50 employers, Stonewall champion, Disability Confident employer as this highlights that WMFS take DICE issues seriously.

<https://www.wmfs.net/careers/firefighters/equality/>

There is a range of information on the equalities page regarding:

- Explanation of positive action
- Good FAQs - answers some early questions

If an organisation can show it has under-representation of particular groups in its workforce for employment, promotion or training, for a minimum of at least 12 months, the Equality Act 2010 allows it to carry out positive action to encourage applications from people in those groups. They can be targeted, supported and encouraged to apply for jobs, promotion and training.

The law allows us to run training courses, provide support for skills development and to lay on events such as open days. These events are open to all, but we target and encourage under-represented groups to take part.



Although the information above regarding the Equality Act is a true statement. It may put some individuals off applying for roles and they may think they are given 'preferential treatment' or it is tokenistic.

It may be more effective for this page to focus on inclusion and being an inclusive workplace for all communities rather than focus on Equality and protected characteristics.

All applicants go through the same selection processes, and all employees are appointed solely on merit. Our recruitment interview panels are drawn from a diverse range of existing staff, and they're all trained in interview techniques including awareness of unconscious bias.

Again, there may be too much detail for the people viewing the site. The first sentence regarding appointing on merit is sufficient. People who are not from the professional EDI arena, aren't generally aware of issues such as unconscious bias and again this may look like the WMFS is just 'talking the talk'.

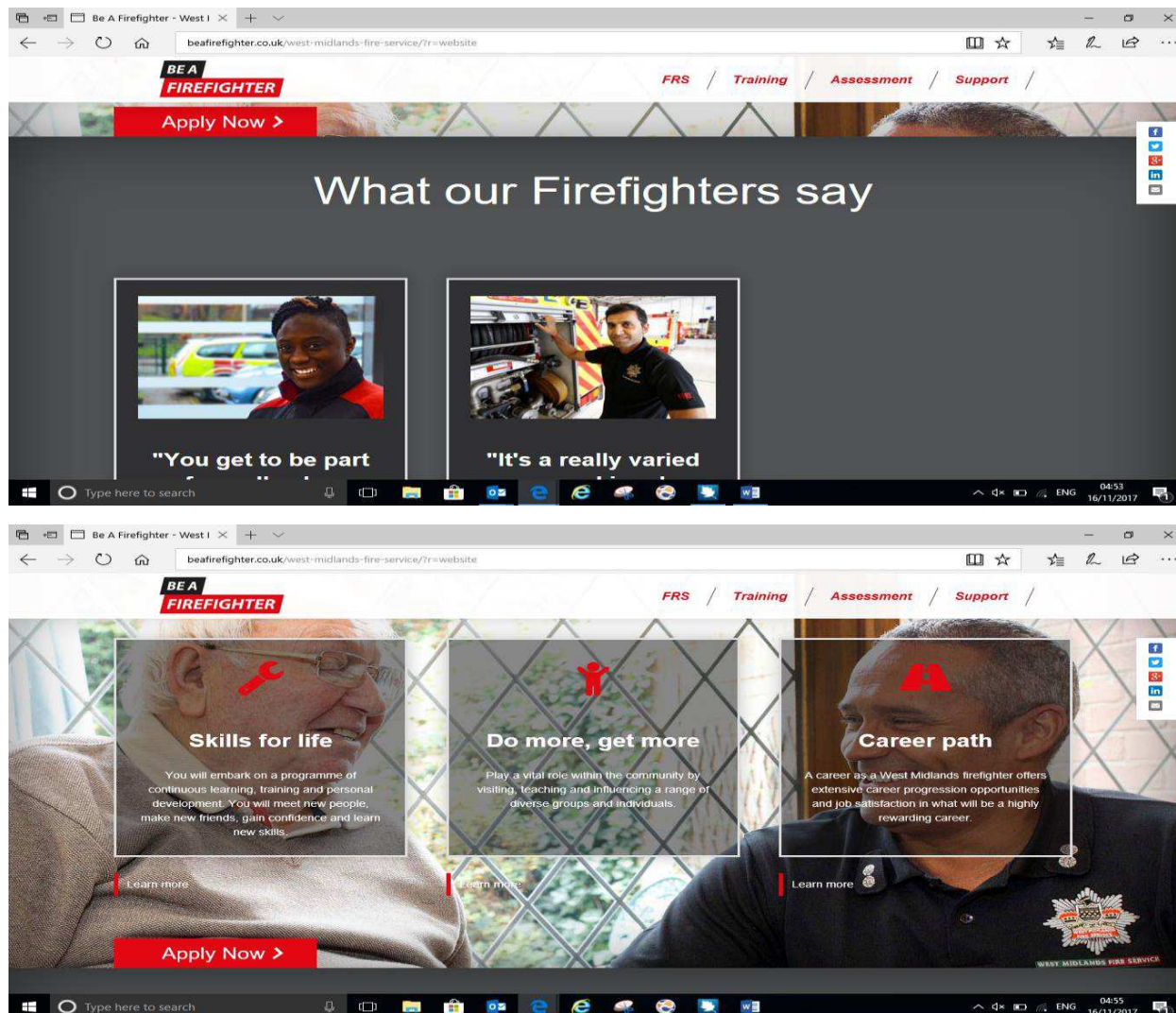
Current recruitment campaign

On the website there is a link to a page which promotes the current opportunities for firefighters. The web pages provide clear advice regarding the requirements to be a firefighter. It also states that the service is looking for firefighters that are underrepresented, as there is a need to ensure that the firefighters represent the diversity of the communities, as much as possible.

The recent campaign worked with the Fire Service College and an assessment tool was procured and with a situational judgement test.

An organisation called Thinkology were also involved in a social media campaign. The information/statistics from the social media activity will be used to assess future targets and recruitment activities. The WMFS website has a link to additional information regarding recruitment for firefighters.

If individuals would like to register their interest this in becoming a Firefighter this allows them to find out more. There is a range of information on the site which includes 'training, information, support and 'what's in it for you'.



There is positive imagery regarding BAME firefighters on the website, but this could be more diverse. Most of the images on the becoming a firefighter page are of BAME firefighters, to normalise this and for visitors to see that there are a wide range of firefighters.

In the 'What our Firefighters say' an individual may visit the site and be given the impression that you are only seeking to recruit BAME firefighters. WMFS want to recruit under-represented groups, but you do not want to deter others from applying. There are only two statements and both from BAME WMFS staff.

There is good explanation regarding what is involved in the training, assessment and a useful booklet on the Fire Fitness Programme, which also provides a good overview of the requirements of the job.

If individuals are interested in becoming a firefighter, you are then directed to a page where you provide your details. It then asks if you have served in the armed forces, then when providing your details individuals are asked further questions regarding fitness.



It would be beneficial on these pages to give a brief overview and explanation of why you are asking these questions, e.g. what is the relevance regarding asking if someone has been in the armed forces.

Regarding fitness, a person needs to have a certain level of fitness, but this could put off potentially good applicants. If the website is collating details for on-going recruitment and the selection process itself was not happening for some time, then it could be stated that fitness is very important, but individuals could work towards the level of fitness applied. Placing such an emphasis on the level of fitness so early in the process could act as a deterrent.

Once you have provided your details it informs you of the taster day event at Ward End. It may be more beneficial to provide information regarding taster days and opening days at an earlier stage. People may not want to officially apply but just to want more information. Applying is a big step and therefore the more informed they are the more likely they will remain within the process.

Engagement - to maintain the interest of potential applicants/firefighters consideration can be given to keep people more engaged. There is currently a high dropout rate from the pre-recruitment days to the fitness test.

WMFS could enhance engagement and ensure they keep in regular contact with the applicants so they have a point of contact.

There could be nominated DICE personal (or stakeholder members) who are available to answer any queries or concerns that they may have. They could also be provided with a buddy or mentor. Other support mechanisms can be a rolling programme of open days/taster days, so people know in advance there are nominated days where they can find out more. Live chat is also increasingly being used as this could be a positive communication method for engagement moving forward.

3.10 Situational Judgement Questionnaire

Some of the questions could be deterring potentially good people to apply. For example, some women may feel that they would struggle with fitness and therefore deterred by the fitness question. Research has also evidenced that women are less likely to apply for roles if they feel they do not meet all the requirements. Men will apply if they feel they meet 60% of the requirements, whereby women feel they must meet 100% of the requirement prior to applying for roles.

It may be beneficial to review the situational judgement/killer questions, to see if the questions could be adjusted so barriers can be reduced for women/BAME/other relevant under-represented communities.



An online tool can be a great way of assessment; however, some issues need to be considered:

- People don't often read questions properly and may not respond to truly reflect their thoughts.
- They may have been 'having a bad day'/not in the best frame of mind to complete the assessment.
- Some people may respond 'how they think they should' respond, rather than how they really feel or how they would really act.

There also isn't an opportunity to change your mind. You may have chosen an answer and clicked 'next' then realise you did this incorrectly. Perhaps an additional button could be added to state 'confirm answer'.

Some questions are asking a lot from applicants, e.g. The below question informs the applicant that they will be expected to conduct talks in schools. Whilst it is positive that this informs there is more to being a firefighter than dealing with emergencies. Talking to people and carrying out presentations can be very daunting, even to those people who are quite confident. This is a skill that can be developed, so I would put less emphasis on this in the early stages.

If there are flexible arrangements permitted within the service, it may be worth stating that here. Individuals with caring or parental responsibilities may be deterred from moving forward from this question.



Apollo Assessment x firefit-preparatory-fitness-p firefit-preparatory-fitness-p + v

apollo.adcuk.com/Assessments/RealisticJobPreview2/Exercise.aspx

Question 3 of 11

Firefighters work shift patterns - working weekends and public holidays is standard. You may also be asked to cover shifts at other watches or stations where needed. How do you feel about this?

I would need to work during the week rather than at weekends or public holidays. I would not be comfortable working over Christmas for example.

I am comfortable working shift patterns, but would prefer to build a strong relationship with a team at one station rather than cover at other locations.

I enjoy adapting to different environments. I am happy to work whatever hours are required.

Building a strong relationship with your main team is hugely important in the Fire and Rescue Service. However, the Fire and Rescue Service is one big team in itself, so you need to be able to build rapport quickly with other teams, just like you would with any member of the public.

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There are real expectations from the questions asked, where some of the requirements of the role can be developed. People can be taught the best way to respond to dangerous situations.

Apollo Assessment x firefit-preparatory-fitness-p firefit-preparatory-fitness-p + v

apollo.adcuk.com/Assessments/RealisticJobPreview2/Exercise.aspx

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE SERVICE

Question 7 of 11

In emergency situations, especially where lives are in danger (e.g. house fires), Firefighters need to help the Officer in Charge make decisions about the team's actions. At times you would be expected to take the initiative and act quickly. How do you feel about this?

I would trust my instincts and take action as quickly as possible, rather than wait for instructions from the Officer in Charge.

I wouldn't feel comfortable taking action or making decisions quickly; that's the Officer in Charge's job.

I'd feel comfortable feeding information to the Officer in Charge and waiting for instructions, but I would be willing to take quick action if I could instinctively see a problem that I could fix.

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It would be beneficial to understand how the responses to the situational judgement exercise are scored, and if any potential candidates are prevented from continuing an application due to not answering all the questions as expected.

It would also be beneficial to know the dropout rate and demographics of those completing the situational judgement questionnaire, in addition to monitoring the dropout rate/attendance at taster days.

The questions relating to social media, knowledge of policies and practices, reminding people they will have to respond to fatalities are good.

Perhaps offer one-to-one discussions with participants first, rather than completing the paperwork/situational judgement questionnaire. An individual can get much more from asking relevant questions that relate to themselves prior to application. This could then allow them to work on any areas for development.

3.11 Fire and Rescue Services Role Maps Booklet

Very clear guidance with good overview of roles.

3.12 Pre-Recruitment Course Feedback

There seems to be generally good feedback except for the greasy pole exercise. The pre-recruitment course feedback is an excellent way to see if there are any issues, and where possible to enhance. If this does not currently take place, reviewing the feedback should take place after each course.

Monitoring of each of the tests and success rates v demographics can also support future planning. Also, to assess the 'near misses' where candidates were very close to passing the tests. A fair process should be implemented to ensure standards aren't dropped but whereby people are supported to reach the standard.

3.13 Review of DICE champion stations PowerPoint presentation

The aim of the DICE champion stations is to support the DICE strategy and support the stations to enhance the culture, capture data to inform future planning and support the; Government Inspectorate, Stonewall Workplace Equality Index and Excellence Framework for FRS.

Overview of aims, bronze, silver and gold standard. The ideas and principles of the DICE champions is very positive and a good way to engage stations in diversity, inclusion, cohesion and equality. However, there may be an opportunity for greater awareness of the champion stations, as there is a lack of knowledge within the wider WMFS team.



It is unclear if the stakeholder groups and wider WMFS team were involved in development of the DICE champion stations, and if they were this may have been a more effective way of bringing them on board. From discussions I believe the information was sent to the stations to provide the relevant information for them to commence work on the activities. In addition to visiting all the nominated DICE stations and going through all the detail to ensure that the work is carried out appropriately. E.g. a training/learning and sharing day.

Nominated DICE champion stations:

Area	Station
Birmingham North	Ward End
	Handsworth
	Ladywood
Birmingham South	Highgate
	Hay Mills
Black Country North	Fallings Park
	Alderidge
Black Country South	Oldbury
	Smethwick
Coventry and Solihull	Foleshill
	Solihull
Fire Safety	N/A

3.14 Stakeholder Strategy 2017

The Stakeholder Strategy provides a brief overview of the work of the stakeholder groups. This provides information regarding their roles and how they can support embedding DICE outcomes. There are currently three stakeholder groups, Affinity (gender/women), Inspire (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) and Fireout (LGBT+).

The stakeholder groups can play a critical role in positive action initiatives and currently this is not taking place. The DICE team and stakeholder groups are not joined up appropriately. There is a lack of communication and some members of the stakeholder groups feel that they have not been supported appropriately by DICE members.

Moving forward these relationships need to be built so that all the stakeholder groups and the DICE team are working collaboratively on positive action campaigns and programmes.

Until the relationship is stronger between the two groups, the positive action programme may not be as effective. The interviews carried out highlighted several themes that are described in greater detail on pages 22-27. I would recommend:



- Review of the stakeholder groups and agree a governance structure which would include reporting structure, budget, and responsibilities. The review could also include and clarify the role of Allies, the importance of cross-networking and how the groups could work effectively together. There is a greater focus now within diversity and inclusion to address multi-identities and intersectionality.
- Clarification of roles and responsibilities of senior management/leaders and their role within the stakeholder group.
- Clarification of how the stakeholders can support activities i.e. will they be given time to do this within their working shifts.
- Clarify expectation and role of line managers' support for stakeholders' contributions.
- The groups could then agree their annual action plans which would support the overall DICE strategy in addition to positive action work.
- To widen the remit of the Inspire group as the stakeholder strategy states the group currently focus on Black African Caribbean communities presently. (This would also support the positive action programme as there is under representation from the Asian and other minority ethnic communities).
- In due course to develop additional stakeholder groups i.e. Disability/mental health.

The above points would also then enhance communication between DICE and the stakeholder groups, as well as planning effective and coordinated internal and external communications.

All the DICE and stakeholder members are very passionate and knowledgeable regarding equality, diversity and inclusion. It would be a great achievement to hone this passion and enthusiasm for embedding diversity, and their specific protected characteristic focus for the benefit of WMFS. Building the relationship so the agreed targets can be achieved with all members feeling valued for their contributions.

3.15 Social Media

There is regular activity on social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter. This includes successes, work within the community, firefighter activity, awards and nominations received and information on becoming a firefighter. There are diverse images used and individuals from different backgrounds, which is positive. Social media is a great way to engage with the communities and should be one aspect of the recruitment activity as well as others highlighted in this report.



It would also be beneficial to seek feedback from stakeholders and the community to see how the social media messages and images can be enhanced.

3.16 Interviews with Stakeholder Group Members, DICE and HR

There were many people who were willing to be interviewed as part of this review which is positive. However, nearly all respondents stated that they wanted to see 'action' following the review and this not be a paper exercise, where useful data is collated but no action or next steps are taken.

Pre-project interviews/discussions:

- Joanne Simmonds – as part of the early discussions to agree the project
- Wayne Roe – as part of the early discussions to agree the project

The below issues were discussed with Wayne Roe and Joanne Simmonds as part of the project planning.

There are several activities taking place within the service to move forward to address positive action. Much of the work to date has been campaign based. Initiatives have included:

- Taster days - these have been carried out at five stations which run for around 15 people each session. The session includes a range of activities including challenging the myths regarding working in the fire service.
- Pre-recruitment course - this course is aimed to build confidence and allay any fears that individuals may have, about applying to join the service. Unfortunately to date, more women have 'failed to attend' through the process.
- In the future the recruitment may be left open throughout the year rather than for an agreed period. It is hoped that this would enhance the opportunity for a greater number of underrepresented groups to apply for roles.
- Often when the recruitment does open there is a positive response but not from women or Black, Asian and Minority ethnic (BAME) communities.
- DICE initiative is taking place. There are eight designated fire stations who are given local KPIs regarding DICE issues. The aim of the initiative is to encourage fire teams to engage in DICE activity but also to compete against the other fire stations taking part.
- The Equality Business Partner has been involved in promoting some of the positive action activities such as the DICE initiative and has developed a toolkit. There are currently no diversity champions in place.



- There is currently a women's stakeholder group (Affinity) and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (Inspire) in place. There is a lead for the newly created Fireout LGBT+ stakeholder group in addition to a Stonewall action plan.
- To gauge feedback, there are FBU surveys and 'what's happening' visits. There have not been any 'staff engagement' surveys for a while.
- To date no focus groups have taken place to support a positive action initiative.
- There has been some networking with other fire stations to see how they are working to address positive action.
- There are links with AFSA who are setting up a working group to identify best practice.

Interviews to discuss the stakeholder groups and their involvement in positive action:

- Jason Campbell
- Michael Campbell
- Stephen Riddell
- Tania Hale
- Tristan Dugdale
- Sara Hall
- Rose Berridge

Questions asked:

1. Have you been involved in any positive action programmes, if yes how?
2. What do you see as the challenges of implementing an effective Positive Action Programme at WMFS?
3. Do you think WMFS could enhance what they are currently doing in terms of their positive action processes?
4. Describe your experience of working in the service?
5. Do you think senior management are on board and positive regarding WMFS Positive Action Programmes?
6. Any other feedback you would like to provide?



Themes

Relationship between DICE and stakeholder groups

- There could be a closer working relationship with the DICE team, the stakeholder groups are not always aware of forthcoming positive action campaigns.
- Expectation to support DICE activity in their own time and at times their own monies.
- Lack of communication between the stakeholder groups and DICE.
- Support was provided by the stakeholder groups in previous years, however due to the disconnect between the group and DICE; there is less willingness to support DICE activities.
- Network members have been asked to be involved in recruitment panels, but this has been requested in their own time.
- It may be more beneficial to strategically choose the DICE champion stations and focus on how they engage, type of incidents, community involvement.
- Lack of knowledge of nominated DICE station and objectives, impact, what good looks like.

Perception of terminology - positive action

Positive action can be seen as negative and mistaken for positive discrimination. It can give the message that the fire service is accepting lower standards from women and the BAME community.

Using section 159 of the Equality Act could result in a negative view or misunderstanding of the positive action process.

'People may feel that you are 'making it easier' for Black people and women. It can give the wrong message'.

Positive action initiatives/campaigns carried out

- Some previous positive action activities lacked diversity or images could be perceived as inappropriate.
- Positive action initiatives could be more strategically driven. BAME communities are more likely to have a dwelling fire. Additional work with these communities may provide a positive perception of the fire service by the BAME community, which could support



the recruitment targets.

- Stations need to be more involved in taster days.
- There needs to be greater resources given to positive action. If there are financial cuts, managers may be pitching against each other for funds to support their programmes.
- Standards should not be dropped as there are key tasks and activities where prospective firefighters may not be competent.

Management

- Lack of visible role models, particularly within leadership. It would also be positive to have younger visible role models.
- Senior management are engaged and want to see a more diverse workforce. They are supportive of DICE and positive action activities.
- Lack of BAME and women in senior management.
- Some managers still need to buy into the positive action and DICE programmes - further time is required to change 'hearts and minds'.
- There may be blockages for some BAME/women to gain promotion.
- Managers need to challenge appropriately at all times regarding positive action. If more did this, this would support cultural change and awareness regarding DICE.

'It would be beneficial to have additional management training with a focus on equality, diversity and inclusion - sometimes they are not equipped to deal with issues'.

Community engagement

- There could be greater outreach and community engagement to support positive action processes - to be delivered using a coordinated approach and to take place regularly. To include schools, churches, community venues, shopping centres, clinics/open sessions, working with parents and local radio.
- ASFA are a great organisation to work with, could work more closely. The conference is always really useful with great sessions and information provided.

'We need to always have a visual impact in the community'

Prospective applicants

- There may be perception from prospective female applicants that need to be 'fitter' and



‘stronger’ than men.

- Lack of visual role models (women/BAME women).
- Lack of confidence from some women regarding the fitness test – they may not feel they are ‘strong enough’.
- Pre-recruitment days have had a positive impact.
- Need to quash the stereotypes (for all under-represented communities).

‘Being a firefighter is not always seen as an option by some women.’

Culture

- Culture has improved but there is still work to do.
- Previously less awareness regarding the need to recruit and encourage under-represented groups to join the fire service.

Communications team

- There could be clearer messages from the communications team.
- Communications team could be more effective.

4. Recommendations

As part of the review process, there are recommendations highlighted in boxes within this report. Below are the key findings/highlights to support the positive action initiatives moving forward.

1. Review the use of positive action terminology as it can be seen negatively. People may see this as a tick box exercise and that people are recruited from the under-represented communities just because of their protected characteristics; rather than skills (also an underlying misconception between positive discrimination and positive action).

Using terms such as inclusion or accessibility, which are seen more positively than terminology such as equality and diversity. As with the London Fire Service and other fire services, another option would be to remove the phrase ‘Positive Action’ completely and just focus on the importance of a diverse workforce (this is a more controversial option, so will assumingly need discussion with senior management).

2. The wider community whom WMFS want to attract may not be knowledgeable regarding the Equality Act and the need to recruit firefighters that reflect the



community. Therefore, this may be seen negatively issue with specific individuals being approached to apply due to 'political correctness' or 'ticking a box'. The messages communicated regarding why it is important to recruit from the wider community could be enhanced.

3. Enhanced training for teams so they are clear regarding the following issues:
 - Clarity regarding on positive action and what it means for WMFS.
 - How diversity and inclusion are relevant to all roles within the service.
 - The importance of working within the wider community.
 - Defying myths regarding equality, diversity and inclusion and WMFS
 - The importance of Stakeholder groups and how they can be involved as members or Allies.

This could support the 'Living the Values' training that is already in place. Additional learning for managers could include:

- How to support and manage diverse teams.
- Mentoring and supporting team members.
- Talent management.
- Getting the best out of teams/personal development.

Any training regarding diversity and inclusion is better absorbed and undertaken using a facilitated learning approach. However, due to resources this may not be possible so a blended approach of facilitated, webinars, workbooks or seminars could be used.

4. Building closer working relationships between DICE and the stakeholder groups. During the interview process, many of those interviewed were not aware of the positive action campaigns. There needs to be a much-improved communication channels and linkage between DICE and the stakeholders. There was also lack of clarity regarding the nominated DICE stations.
5. Enhancement of internal development and promotion for employees/managers, to ensure there is a talent pipeline and talent management processes in place. Review the internal recruitment cycle to assess if there are barriers for BAME/female staff. Following this review, (including monitoring data such as demographic of individuals within different grades, monitoring of employers and managers promoted), implement programmes so that BAME/women and other under-represented communities have a fair opportunity to be successful with promotion in the service.

Support including mentoring and being sponsored by senior managers could also have a positive way to ensure a greater number of women/BAME managers move-up through the ranks. This could be developed into an official programme by WMFS, in way of a mentoring programme specifically for under-represented communities. The scheme should be opened to all those who are involved in the positive actions programme including representatives of BAME, women, LGBT+ for example.

6. Role models - more effective use of positive role models who are visible, given autonomy to support positive action activity.



7. Enhanced partnership working with AFSA. The Asian Fire Service Association are a great resource and this partnership could be developed further. A closer working relationship could increase the number of applications from the BAME community.
8. Targeted support of communities e.g. BAME more likely to be at risk of fire - show commitment and support to these communities (ie via campaigns/greater community engagement) and as a result this could encourage more people from the BAME community to apply.
9. Create strong partnerships with organisations such as West Midlands Police who are also carrying out positive action initiatives (as well as other fire services who are carrying out a similar process). By working together organisations can learn from each other in terms of what has worked, (went well) and areas for development. Joint community ventures and recruitment promotion could take place where appropriate.
10. Focus groups/surveys/discussions with those who have dropped out at any stage of the process. The responses received could support future workforce planning.
11. Focus groups with women and BAME people within the community to assess their views on the Fire service and provide feedback on how the perception and recruitment process could be enhanced.
12. Review use of Section 159 of the Equality Act - although this is legal to do so, this may also impact of current firefighters who do not fully understand how this should be used. This could have a negative impact on the positive action process which could result in poor morale or 'buy in' to the positive action agenda at WMFS. Review if there are alternative ways to find the most qualified and appropriate person for a role. If it is agreed to continue to use section 159, agree how and if this will be promoted and described externally in the future.
13. Use the data from the social media activities to assess how and to where BME/women actively use social media. Then use a targeted approach to communicate positive messages regarding WMFS 'being a good place to work' and the benefits of being Firefighter/why it is a great job.
14. Nurturing strategy - the fitness test aspect of the recruitment is where women may drop out. Assess how this could be adapted so women are clear on the requirements, and perhaps apply at a later stage when they know they are more likely to be successful with the necessary fitness tests.
15. Implement a more strategic and coordinated approach to embedding DICE/station/stakeholder engagement with communities. This is being done well by some, but it would be beneficial to ensure that this being carried out effectively by everyone. Community engagement is critical to support both short term and long workforce planning and recruitment. Currently there are communities that are not being reached. Carry out a mapping exercise of community groups/organisations across the West Midlands. This could be part of the Community members scheme referenced in the 2016-19 objectives
16. Implementation of a 'buddy scheme' for individuals who commence the recruitment process to support where there is a high level of 'drop out' within the current recruitment process.



17. What's happening visits - in the future to collate and monitor feedback so this can be used to support future recruitment planning.
18. Enhance use of positive BAME/female role models within WMFS. This has been promoted on the website, but this could also include other activities within the service. For example, a senior manager promoted the use of section 159/being a BME firefighter in a blog and within social media. Assess how these types of activities and additional work could be used to enhance the recruitment process (and not just used a visible picture on the website).
19. Review the communications strategy to see if they could enhance how they support positive action programmes. When working on programmes that address community, positive action and recruitment engage feedback from appropriate sources. This should include the stakeholder groups, communities and other relevant individuals to ensure the right messages are being communicated.

I would like to say a big thank you to all those who contributed to this piece of work. All those who participated were passionate and wanted the positive action initiative to be more effective. They were keen to see the WMFS ensure a more diverse workforce in the future, as well as greater promotional opportunities for current under-represented groups. WMFS have already carried out several initiatives and practices to support the positive action agenda, which is excellent - the next stage is to implement further work to build on current practice.

5. Next Steps and Contact Details

If you do have any questions surrounding this review, or if you would like any more information then please do not hesitate to contact me.

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