

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1 NOVEMBER 2021

1. DIVERSITY INCLUSION COHESION EQUALITY (DICE) UPDATE

Report of the Chief Fire 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 Scrutiny Committee to review and consider the ongoing progress being made by West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) 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

- 3.1 DICE objectives fulfil our legal duties as a public-sector organisation under the Equality Act 2010.
- 3.2 This report details our continued progress towards achieving our objectives and provides an update in relation to DICE activity. This report covers activity undertaken since January 2020 to date.

4. LEADERSHIP, PARTNERSHIP AND ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT

- 4.1 A series of “Brave Space” talks on a variety of DICE subjects have been held periodically allowing any member of staff to engage in open debate and learning. These have been supported by members of the Staff Engagement Groups and have had an average attendance of around 50 people each talk.

Subjects that have been covered so far have included, Women’s Safety, Neurodiversity, Religion and Belief and Positive Action. More are planned with many suggestions for topics coming from the Networking Groups and other members of staff. Members from other FRS have also attended with a view of using the same format in their FRS.

- 4.2 In December 2020 the official ranking for the Top 50 UK inclusive employers was announced. This nationally recognised league table of the most inclusive employers shines a light on best practice across all strands of diversity including age, disability, gender, LGBT, race, faith and religion.

Compiled by a dedicated panel of judges, the list has been collated based upon organisational performance in a range of areas within the diversity arena. Organisations featured provided sufficient evidence on an amalgamation of topics including recruitment procedures, training and a host of diversity related initiatives. WMFS ranked 6th in this year’s ranking making it the highest-ranking FRS, jumping 28 places from the previous year.

- 4.3 When we entered a new way of working due to the pandemic, we had to change the way we deliver some of our essential training courses.

During the COVID pandemic we have continued to carry out selection activity across the Service. The requirement to have adequately trained people conducting selection processes remains and therefore our training has been adapted to enable a virtual delivery method and be focused on the essential points to enable the attendee to acquire the

basic skills, knowledge and confidence to embark upon their own selection process.

Recruitment & Selection has now been running in its current 'Virtual' format for over 12 months and during that time we have successfully completed 25 virtual training sessions, training 148 members of staff. Feedback from these sessions is always positive and the training is well received by all who participate.

Unconscious bias training has been adapted for virtual delivery and courses scheduled once a month from February to May with courses filling rapidly.

A workshop, focusing on Neurodevelopmental disorders, will be delivered virtually in February. The workshop is designed to improve understanding and knowledge to better support learning of neurodiverse individuals in our workforce.

4.4 The Staff Engagement groups continued to be active throughout the pandemic:

4.4.1 Neurodiversity Group

- Dyslexia screening is going well and can now be done remotely.
- TextHelp testing on Oracle is underway to ensure we can support individuals with dyslexia to use the new Oracle system. An increasing number of staff are now using TextHelp, over 40 people had the function added to their profiles in the past 12 months.
- Arrangements are being made to train around 10 TextHelp "champions" to provide support to staff to use the Read Write functions and to help raise awareness of how Read Write can be useful for everyone.
- Research is underway to provide an eLearning module for all staff on Neurodiversity - collaborating with an external Subject Matter Expert.

4.4.2 Inspire

- In July 2021 Inspire established a Board structure to enable a more structured and collective approach to how the group operates and the activities they are involved with.
- As part of International Women's Day, members of Inspire were guest speakers at a Muslim Women's Association event.
- In June 2021 we saw the refresh of our WMFS Safeguarding Policy. Following consultation with Inspire the policy now includes issues such as Gang, County Lines.
- Several Inspire members attended the Lunch and Learn event celebrating international Windrush Day.
- Inspire have been working with West Midlands Police Violence Reduction Unit and, through Sports Elite, have provided been provided with free Mentoring training. An awareness session and initial training has taken place for six people.
- The 'Hear My Voice' event facilitated by West Midlands Police was attended by members of Inspire who provided feedback to the Communications team about how WMFS can communicate our future strategy.
- Members of Inspire alongside crews at Coventry Fire Station attended the Coventry City Combined Cultural Raksha Bandhan Event. Inspire had representation to take part in the Raksha Bandhan ceremony alongside local personalities and dignitaries.
- In August, Inspire, in conjunction with RCRT, DICE and Handsworth Fire Station attended the Simmer Down Festival, the largest Reggae festival in Birmingham.

4.4.3 AFSA

- Local AFSA members are supporting investigations into a potential solution for wearing BA and beards which is a major barrier to many potential FF applicants from Asian heritage.
- Due to the Covid pandemic, a planned regional event has been postponed. Restrictions permitting, the Midlands

region AFSA are looking to run the regional event in October. The theme of this event will be LGBT+ support and awareness which FireOut will be contributing to.

- Members of the group were key panellists in a recent Brave space talk around Faith and Belief, with several sharing their lived experience of their faith and answering questions about how it impacts on their working life.
- A local AFSA member has organised a charity event taking a large model fire engine up Snowdon in teams to raise money for the FF charity in September.
- The group is also supporting FireOut with the WMFS attendance at Birmingham Pride and Nagar Kirtans (Nov) and planning for future Diwali events.
- The group has been raising awareness via distribution of national AFSA informative newsletters and is now gearing up for the AFSA winter conference in November.

4.4.4 FireOut

- The group attended Birmingham Pride on 25th September and supported crews from Coventry at an LGBT family fun day at the RICOH arena in August which is instead of the normal Coventry Pride event.
- FireOut have been working with DICE on the development of an E-Learning package around building confidence and awareness when working with the LGBT+ community for frontline staff. This package will be launched later this year and has attracted interest from other Services.
- FireOut also helped host consultation events internally to support Wolverhampton City Councils "Rainbow City" project.

4.4.5 Affinity

- Affinity currently has around 100 members. Members of Affinity have been very active supporting the Welfare review adding insight and experience to help improve our welfare provision on station and on the fireground for our female staff.

- Members of Affinity have supported positive action programs by producing short videos used to challenge perceptions and stereotypes during a 'guess my careers event' earlier in the year. Members of Affinity have also supported DICE during the practical selection tests for firefighter recruitment, showing positive female role models in the Service.
- 4.5 To support the development of our managers, a toolkit is being produced to provide a 'one stop shop' for DICE information. These toolkits are being developed with support from the Staff Engagement Groups. Already published on the DICE MESH page are middle managers guides to Positive Action, Extension of the Workplace, and Neurodiversity. A middle manager guide to gender identity will shortly be published. Future guides will include disability, maternity and female welfare.
- 4.6 DICE assisted the development of a Cultural Guide to Bereavement to support the body movement teams during the COVID-19 pandemic. This provided crews with summary background information on a wide range of cultural traditions and norms around care for, and handling, of the deceased.
- 4.7 Positive action sessions have been rolled out to all watches across all stations. The sessions were conducted by the Watch Commander, DICE and covered all areas relating to firefighter recruitment and the Service's approach to positive action. Evaluation and feedback from these sessions have been positive. We have now developed a support package for firefighter recruitment including all information that station personnel needs to know. This package is available on the new Mesh Hub. A Manager's Guide to Positive Action is also under development and will be available as part of the wider toolkits for managers.
- 4.8 WMFS attended the AFSA conference in November 2019 and WMFS staff were among the award winners including Outstanding Endeavour by an AFSA member, Outstanding Charitable award, and Outstanding Charity Innovation. WMFS Fire Authority Members were also recognised in the Shining Light Executive Team award.

- 4.9 New disability and reasonable adjustment workshops have been implemented with a good take up from staff. The workshop is targeted at managers of those with a disability and Representative Bodies. These look at the legal requirements and definitions around disability and reasonable adjustment.

5. COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE, ENGAGEMENT & SERVICE DELIVERY

- 5.1 WMFS staff have continued to volunteer to support activities throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. These include the delivery of Lateral Flow Testing and supporting the delivery of the COVID Vaccination Programme.

Non-operational staff from across the Service have been delivering essential care packages to the most vulnerable people in our communities. Staff from across the Service have volunteered to deliver this vital service to those who were 'shielding' because of COVID-19 or otherwise vulnerable or isolated. These volunteers, working out of the Hubs situated across the brigade area, supported Local Resilience Forum (LRF) partners in delivering crucial support to West Midlands residents in extra need during the challenging circumstances created by the pandemic. Our staff took part in many extra duties which would not normally form part of their role. Under the banner of being #ReadyWillingAble these volunteers have been involved in delivering thousands of essential food and medical parcels.

Our Operational staff have supported local councils and the ambulance service with support for body movement of victims of COVID-19. To ensure our teams carried out this task with dignity and respect to our diverse communities, operational crews received special training which included comprehensive guidance on how different cultures handle the death of a family member.

Staff volunteers continue to support the COVID-19 vaccination programmes. Staff have undertaken both online and face to face training with St. John's Ambulance and our staff are joining vaccination teams across the West Midlands.

- 5.2 Data collection for safeguarding has improved in quantity and quality in the last 6 months with greater equality data now being recorded. Data could be further improved with enhancement to gender identity categories.

The most frequently occurring themes in WMFS safeguarding activity between October 2020 and June 2021 are:

1. Poor living conditions and poor housing (39)
2. Mental health (37)
3. Self-neglect (30)
4. Hoarding (21)
5. Alcohol (16)
6. Child neglect including children not attending school (16)
7. Domestic Abuse including coercion and threat by partner to set fire to property (15)
8. Smoking including smoking in bed (13)
9. Threat of suicide including threat of suicide by child (12)

Multiple themes are often present within a safeguarding concern. For example, mental health and hoarding. Consequently, the frequency of some themes is likely to be significantly higher. For example, poor living conditions may indicate self-neglect but not be recorded as such.

Multiple themes are sometimes identified in the same safeguarding concern. The most commonly occurring together have been:

- Poor living conditions and poor housing (39) –Self-neglect (including neglect) were identified in over 24% and mental health in over 21% of these cases.
- Mental Health (37) – Hoarding was identified in over 16%, and self-neglect, alcohol, threat of suicide in nearly 14%.
- Self-neglect (30) – Hoarding was identified in 20% of these cases.
- Hoarding (21) – Electrical safety risks were present in 21%.
- Alcohol (16) – Mental health and smoking were identified in 25%.

- Child neglect (16) – Poor living conditions were identified in 25%.
- Domestic Abuse (15) – Mental health was identified in nearly 27% and threat of suicide in 20%. Children were recorded as being in the household in 3 cases.
- Smoking including smoking in bed (13) – Alcohol was identified in nearly 31% and mental health in over 23%.
- Threat of suicide (12) – Mental health in nearly 42% and domestic abuse were identified in 25%.

5.3 The Guardian Public Service Awards announced WMFS as the winner of the Workplace Diversity category. The Guardian recognised the work that has been done to encourage more people from underrepresented groups including women and people from BAME communities.

One of our female members of administration has also been recognised in the category of Unsung Hero in the Excellence in Fire Awards, for her charity work.

5.4 During the month of June, the PRIDE flag was flown at all Fire Stations, providing a visual demonstration of WMFS support for the LGBT+ community. Information about LGBT+ history was published on our MESH site both before and during the month to raise awareness amongst our staff. Members of FireOut, alongside our Communications team managed public comments on social media, with any adverse comments challenged respectfully but firmly.

5.5 WMFS attended the World Thinking Day event held at the National Exhibition Centre in February 2020. This event attracted 10,000+ females. Affinity took the lead with this event supported by DICE. Two interactive stands were used, a driving simulation scenario utilising XVR and a 60 second challenge where attendees were challenged to don PPE in a minute or less, replicating the time to get ready prior to an emergency turnout. The day provided the opportunity to engage with many females, spreading not only fire safety messages but also promoting the role of the firefighter and recruitment opportunities.

6. EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS, HEALTH AND WELLBEING

6.1 The welfare review commenced in May 2021 and will review the current welfare and training provision for managers, in line with Health Safety and Wellbeing requirements. The scope of the review includes:

- Welfare provisions - on site / stations
 - Storage facilities for female personal items
 - Dignity rooms
 - Facility for privacy when dressing/undressing into level 2 water PPE
 - Toilet facilities

- Welfare provisions – training on/off site and at incidents
 - Mobilisation of welfare unit / toilets
 - Female welfare packs
 - HVPU welfare vehicle
 - MOU for shared facilities

- Staff Training
 - Training for managers to ensure the right environment is created
 - Incorporated into the progression model
 - Health Safety and Wellbeing training at all levels
 - Welfare considerations to be included in CDC assessments

- Support
 - Signpost to safe channels of networking groups
 - Buddy scheme
 - Supervisory manager mentors

- Policy and Procedure
 - Welfare Policy / Procedures
 - Mobilising

Work is progressing across all workstreams and updates will be provided in future reports.

6.2 As at 1st July 2021 WMFS employed a total of 1,897 employees of which:

- 1,386 (73%) are uniformed, 444 (23%) non-uniformed and 67 (4%) Fire Control
- 12% of uniformed staff are female compared to more than half of non-uniformed staff and 86% Fire Control staff. 50% of the working population of the West Midlands are female.
- 14% of all employees are from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) background. 30% of the working population of the West Midlands are from BAME communities.
- Declaration rates remain high with 93% of all employees having made a declaration regarding disability. 3% have stated they have a disability.
- 86% of all employees have made a declaration regarding sexual orientation. It should be noted however that 12% (224) employees have declared that the 'prefer not to state'
- The average age of our employees is 43 years.

6.3 Our Occupational Health and Wellbeing team continues to offer and promote a wide range of activities for our employees, encouraging participation in our full wellbeing programmes which include the use of gym facilities, 24/7 Support Line (EAP), Occupational Health, Mindfulness and weekly webinars delivered by psychotherapists.

The MESH pages for both Occupational Health and employee Wellbeing offer a 'one stop shop' for information and toolkits for staff.

6.4 Grievances

6.4.1 During the reporting period January 2021 to June 2021 there were a total of 6 grievances raised.

- 2 x contractual issues – 1 is ongoing and 1 is at appeal
- 1 x equal pay – ongoing
- 1 x discrimination – not progressing
- 1 x Bullying and Harassment – not upheld
- 1 x dignity at work – withdrawn

6.4.2 During the reporting period July 2020 and December 2020 there were a total of 6 grievances logged.

- 4 x Dignity at Work / Bullying and Harassment
- 1 x Work Practice / Policy
- 1 x Terms and Conditions

6.4.3 During the reporting period January 2020 and June 2020 there were a total of 11 grievances logged.

- 5 x Dignity at Work / Bullying and Harassment
- 4 x Work Practice / Policy
- 2 x Terms and Conditions

6.5 Discipline Cases

6.5.1 During the reporting period January 2021 to June 2021 there were a total of 9 discipline cases.

- 2 x misconduct – 1 final written warning and 1 ongoing
- 7 x gross misconduct
 - 3 x dismissal – 1 no appeal, 1 appeal dismissed, 1 appeal reinstated
 - 1 x final written warning and demotion
 - 3 x ongoing

6.5.2 During the reporting period of July 2020 and December 2020 there were a total of 21 discipline cases. 8 misconducts (4 from one case, 2 from another). 13 gross misconduct (9 from one case).

- 8 x misconduct – 6 informal resolution, 2 written warning
- 13 x gross misconduct (9 from one case)
 - 6 x dismissal
 - 1 x resignation
 - 5 x final written warning
 - 1 x no case to answer

6.5.3 During the reporting period of January 2020 and June 2020 there were a total of 6 discipline cases.

- 1 x misconduct – written warning
- 5 x gross misconduct

- 2 x no formal outcome (did not progress to hearing)
- 3 x final written warning

6.6 WMFS Gender Pay Gap reported for the snapshot date of 31st March 2020 was 9.8%. The pay gap has decreased when compared to the 11.3% gap reported for 2019.

As at 31st March 2019, when considering the top 50 salaries, there were 15 females in this group. This increased to 18 in 2020. When considering the top 100 salaries, there were 24 females in this group in 2019, compared to 32 in 2020.

7 RECRUITMENT TRAINING AND PROGRESSION

7.1 In the year 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021, WMFS employed 72 new entrant firefighters. Of these, 19 (26%) are women and 22 (31%) BAME.

Since April 2021 WMFS have employed 32 new entrant firefighters. Of these, 5 (15%) are women and 12 (38%) BAME.

Whilst activity has been restricted due to the pandemic, a range of positive action initiatives continue for both women and BAME candidates.

BAME candidates are offered online group workshops to offer preparation information and advice for behavioural assessment. These include an overview of the Service, the wider role of the firefighter, as well as interview techniques and effective communication. Individual support is offered where necessary to accommodate work/home situations and any individual concerns via teams, phone or email.

Female candidates are offered several levels of support. Online group workshops are taking place to offer preparation information and advice for behavioural assessment.

Female candidates have also received a group session for fitness advice to be followed up with an individual fitness assessment and home fitness programme offered by Occupational Health.

Females who have been offered employment, and are waiting for their training programme to commence, attend kit familiarisation / female fitness sessions to best prepare them for training.

We have seen a decline in the number of females who are successful during recruitment. This has been attributed to our inability to provide targeted physical training sessions during the pandemic restrictions. Now that restrictions are easing, the female recruitment course that was facilitated in 2018 and 2019 will be re-introduced.

The 'Be a Firefighter' portal that we utilise for initial attraction and expressions of interest is having a facelift. Working alongside colleagues in our Communications team, we have produced new video footage and photographs, and the look and feel of our recruitment web pages will be enhanced. This follows research undertaken by our WCdr in DICE, considering feedback from candidates and 'best practice' examples from other Services.

- 7.2 At the time of writing the report, the Service had commenced a recruitment campaign for Fire Control. The approach to recruitment has been reviewed and a targeted approach to advertising, utilising social media, is underway.

To enhance our Fire Control recruitment, members of DICE are working alongside Fire Control and reviewing selection tools, making full use of available technology for online recruitment.

- 7.3 As part of the Emerging Risks project, an ongoing approach to recruitment for the Technical Rescue Unit commenced in July. An Attraction and Selection strategy has been developed and a programme of attraction activity commenced. A dedicated MESH site has been published to support this work and there has been significant engagement with teams from across the Service including the Networking Groups.

The first phase has resulted in 46 applicants, with 5 (11%) being female and 4 (11%) BAME. This is representative of the pool from which we are recruiting (existing firefighters).

The level of applicants and diversity has massively increased when compared to the campaigns in recent years.

- 7.4 42% of uniformed posts are Crew Commander or above. 25% of female uniformed staff hold positions of Crew Commander or above, compared to 44% of male staff.

25% of BAME uniformed staff hold positions of Crew Commander or above, compared to 44% of white staff.

65% of non-uniformed posts are grade 9 or above. 53% of female non-uniformed staff hold positions of grade 9 or above, compared to 79% of male staff.

60% of BAME non-uniformed staff hold positions of grade 9 or above, compared to 67% of white staff.

- 7.5 Our positive action strategy has been enhanced to encompass internal positive action for progression. During the attraction phase of promotion selection activity, candidates from under-represented groups will be actively engaged to encourage and support participation in selection activity. Early and sustainable contact is made with our Networking Groups throughout.

8 **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.

9 **RISK IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

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

10 **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.

11 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

12 **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

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