

**WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**7 NOVEMBER 2022**

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.

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

4.1 **Stakeholder Groups**

Activity across all our Stakeholder groups continues to gather momentum following the relaxing of restrictions during the Covid 19 pandemic.

### Neurodiversity Group

The aims of the group are to raise awareness of neurodiversity within the Service and support neurodivergent employees. The group provides a platform where discussion around neurodiversity can take place, providing a 'safe space' where staff can talk in confidence.

The group is having an extremely positive impact on our staff. It has enabled open discussions around neurodiversity and raised awareness around the different aspects of neurodivergent conditions. This has resulted in a more open environment where staff feel able to talk about their conditions and where other staff feel able to come forward and ask for support and screening.

The group has been influential in various consultations and development of training programmes, online learning and new employee ICT systems to ensure it meets the needs of all staff.

### Inspire

The group continues to influence and educate all levels within the Service and engage as role models in the community acting as ambassadors for the Service as an inclusive employer. Members have attended a variety of community-based events including the Windrush Commemorative event in Birmingham in June and the Simmer Down festival in July. Several of the leads have been filmed as part of the BBC We Are England series scheduled to begin on BBC1 in October. The Remembrance Day Parade, Birmingham, will be attended with a flag bearer highlighting the role of BAME servicemen and women in the world wars.

Members of Inspire are actively involved in recruitment activity, attending positive action sessions with potential applicants, as well as attending new entrant passout events.

### AFSA

AFSA's aim is to support and promote inclusivity across the organisation, nurturing an environment that champions diversity. AFSA provides exceptional services, events and support to their members and associates, through clear leadership and support. This promotes effective delivery of equality, diversity and inclusion and reduces inequalities that staff and communities experience.

AFSA has supported and encouraged members to attend various national workshops and events including a winter conference in Liverpool, a WMFS hosted event focused on Women's advancement and empowerment in the workplace and a Spring conference in Kent.

AFSA locally helps raise awareness and encourage development and progression among Asian heritage staff.

### FireOut

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

The group creates networking opportunities in a safe space for like-minded colleagues across the organisation and challenges prejudice, enhances understanding and creates opportunities for learning through education, mentoring and community engagement.

Fireout provides confidential support for LGBT+ employees and organising WMFS attendance at Pride which includes a Pride Breakfast networking event. The group has supported the refresh of our transitioning policy as well as a recent survey on staff understanding and attitudes towards gender neutral toilet facilities. On an individual level they have supported our first operational member of staff who is transitioning in the workplace and have actively engaged with our Brave Space talks promoting understanding and awareness.

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

### Affinity

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

Members of the group have attended AFSA events, Women in the Fire Service, developed themselves via courses promoted on the site and applied for progression opportunities.

The group membership is no longer solely female as the importance of wider engagement to support understanding and the benefits of male allies has been recognised. To support female only discussion, a 'safe space' channel has been created that enables female members to discuss more sensitive/personal issues such as menopause and maternity.

Members of the group have been stakeholders for review of policy, equipment and uniform.

The group also influences via promoting benefits of networking, workshops and building confidence via new friends/peer support and encouraging personal development.

#### 4.2 Equality Impact Assessments

Since January 2022, 33 Initial Equality Impact Assessments have been completed. Of these, 7 progressed to a Full Equality Impact Assessment.

Of the 7 that progressed to Full EIA, 4 have been completed:

- 3 x Continue with the activity with no major change needed
- 1 x Adjust the activity to remove or mitigate any adverse impact

Work is ongoing in the development of an Equality Impact Assessment PowerBi dashboard.

#### 4.3 Buddy Scheme

The Buddy scheme was introduced in 2019 and the scheme has continued to grow over the last few years. Workplace buddies make a huge difference to the speed in which new employees manage to settle into their new role in a new organisation.

All of our workplace buddies have received appropriate training for the role and have ongoing development and support from the DICE team. We have increased the number of workplace buddies adding specific specialisms for LGBT+ and dyslexia, as well as adding menopause buddies for all of our staff, not just new starters, ensuring all staff feel supported.

#### 4.4 Mission to Mars

The 'Mission to Mars' was launched in June, which recognises that our new values need to be alive in the Service every day. Our staff were asked to nominate people across the Service who they believe embody our core values, have the highest level of credibility with their peers and demonstrate the highest level of competence in their role. Over 130 nominations were received from people wanting to highlight their colleagues for recognition.

#### 4.5 Period Power

Period Power are a charity with the aim to ensure period dignity in the workplace, as well as in schools. WMFS, FBU and Unison have coordinated the delivery of sanitary products from Period Power. These are now available at all WMFS premises, accessible to both employees and visitors.

### 5. **UNDERSTANDING AND WORKING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES**

#### 5.1 Safeguarding

Safeguarding data for quarter 1 provides some points of note:

- Gender is still reported as male or female. 47% of safeguarding concerns are about males, 52% female and 1% not stated;
- 29% of safeguarding concerns are about children and 71% about adults. This is an increase in child safeguarding concerns from 18%;
- Ethnicity is now recorded in the Fire Control data using the Home Office categories in place of the previous free-text;
- Mental health and poor housing or living conditions are the most frequent recurring themes in reported safeguarding concerns.

A Safeguarding toolkit has been produced to help our staff with safeguarding. The toolkit is used alongside the safeguarding policy and procedures and the NHS safeguarding app. The

MESH site for Safeguarding provides information for our staff on related topics including:

- People in Position of Trust, social media and safeguarding.
- Whistle Blowing.
- Safeguarding Oversight and Assurance.

Staff engagement is being planned with watches and middle managers to provide an overview of key developments in safeguarding.

## 5.2 Gang Violence

Members of our Stakeholder Groups have been working alongside colleagues from West Midlands Police in their initiative to reduce gang violence. They have volunteered to be trained as mentors to young people in the community to inspire them to have greater aspirations and career goals.

## 5.3 Safe and Well Priorities

The Reducing Health Inequalities CRMP project is supporting WMFS to be the most effective as possible at reducing risk and vulnerability. Through the project we identify, prioritise and evolve our prevention activities to the most vulnerable. To assist with this, we have seen changes to the Prevention performance management targets set for Safe and Well visits for 2022/2023. The prioritisation of our Prevention activity is based on risk and we know that effective referral pathways from partner organisations will generally identify people at greater risk than self-referrals from individuals, their families or friends.

There is now a target related to the percentage of Safe and Well visits that result from a referral from a partner organisation. Our staff are encouraged to make visits to riskier households, therefore targeting higher risk and consequently more able to reduce health inequalities. The most effective way of identifying higher risk households is by nurturing referral pathways with partner organisations that already have contact with those individuals.

#### 5.4 Armed Forces Day

WMFS is committed to treating our serving personnel, veterans and their families with fairness and respect. In June, all of our stations and locations were asked to fly the 'Armed Services Show Your Support' flag to show our support to not only those within the Service who are reservists but to all of those who make up the Armed Forces Community.

#### 5.5 PRIDE Month

All our stations once again flew the Pride flag during June to show support for the LGBTQ+ community. Information about LGBTQ+ history was issued on MESH before and during the month to highlight a wide range of LGBTQ+ issues and history. Middle managers discussed the flag during online meetings and FAQ's for managers was issued in preparation. Our Communications team, working alongside FireOut, managed public comments, with adverse comments being challenged respectfully, but firmly. Flying the flag was described as an expectation in all staff briefings and healthy debate held on why it was important for us to do so.

### 6. **DIVERSE AND ENGAGED WORKFORCE**

#### 6.1 Workforce Profile

As at 1 October 2022 WMFS employed a total of 1854 employees of which:

- 1359 (73%) are uniformed, 425 (23%) non-uniformed and 70 (4%) Fire Control.
- 13% of uniformed staff are female compared to more than half (54%) 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 90% of all employees having made a declaration regarding disability. 4% have stated they have a disability.
- 85% of all employees have made a declaration regarding sexual orientation. It should be noted however that 11% (199) employees have declared the 'prefer not to state'.
- The average age of our employees is 43 years.

## 6.2 Grievance

During the reporting period from 1 January 2022 to 30 June 2022, 5 grievances were lodged. Out of the 5 grievances, there was 1 collective grievance which involved 3 employees.

Of the 7 employees who raised a grievance:

- Gender – 3 males and 4 females
- Ethnicity – 5 White British, 1 Asian, 1 PNTS
- Sexual Orientation – 5 Heterosexual, 2 PNTS
- Disability – 6 none, 1 PNTS
- Religion or Belief – 4 none, 1 Christianity, 1 Islam, 1 PNTS

3 grievances were raised by employees on Grey Book T&C's.

4 grievances were raised by employees on Green Book T&C's.

The details of each grievance are presented below:

- 1 x grievance received under bullying and victimisation. Due to the lack of information presented by the employee, there was no investigation carried out and the grievance was closed.
- 1 x grievance received under bullying, victimisation and sexual harassment. The appeal outcome was that there was satisfactory support provided to the employee.
- 1 x grievance received, extension to temporary contract during resignation period. The outcome was that annual leave payment was given as goodwill gesture. Appeal was not upheld.
- 1 x collective grievance received, under bullying, harassment, disability discrimination. The outcome was



part upheld with adjustments and recommendations for management to work in line with policies.

- 1 x grievance received, under terms and conditions of employment around long service leave entitlement. The outcome was not upheld as the policy applied correctly.

### 6.3 Discipline

During the reporting period from 1 January 2022 to 30 June 2022, there were 7 disciplinary cases. 5 were Gross Misconduct and 2 Misconduct.

Of the 7 employees subject to disciplinary action:

- Gender - 6 males and 1 female
- Ethnicity – 4 White British, 2 Black Caribbean, 1 Mixed White/Asian
- Sexual Orientation – 6 Heterosexual, 1 not stated
- Disability – 7 none
- Religion or Belief – 3 none, 2 Christianity, 2 not stated

The details of each disciplinary are presented below:

5 x gross misconduct disciplinary cases:

- Inappropriate language used at work, outcome was no case to answer.
- Criminal charges/safeguarding, case is still ongoing (court proceedings).
- Rude gesture made to a member of public. Outcome resulted in demotion.
- Inappropriate behaviour displayed by a trainee FF. This case is still ongoing.
- Arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol, 18-month final written warning.

2 x Misconduct disciplinary cases:

- Damage to brigade vehicle 12-month written warning.
- Employee chooses to leave early without consent. Case ongoing.

## 6.4 Occupational Health and Wellbeing

Our Occupational Health and Wellbeing team continue to provide a range of support for our staff.

### Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)

The EAP provision has been expanded and new support is available including:

- Assistance with the cost of living crisis, financial and debt advice.
- A new App for mental health, MyMindPal has been launched.
- Self-referral to free telephone counselling. The provision is also available to family members.

### Wellbeing Programme

In April we saw the launch of our Wellbeing Programme, with a clear focus on everyone's health and wellbeing. There has been an increased level of activity and engagement including a range of provisions which are easily accessible to support, promote and improve health and wellbeing.

Partnering with the Firefighters' Charity there are webinars taking place each month on a wide variety of topics. These include Wellbeing Leadership, Mental Health and Physical Health, Understanding and Managing Back Pain, Musculoskeletal Injury Prevention, Management and Rehabilitation.

### Men's Health Week

In June, WMFS celebrated Men's Health Week. The overall aims of the week are to:

- Heighten awareness of preventable health problems for males of all ages;
- Support men and boys to engage in healthier lifestyle choices/activities;
- Encourage the early detection and treatment of health difficulties in males.

Our Occupational Health and Wellbeing team provided information around Men's Health, promoting the Wellbeing pages targeting our male colleagues.

## 6.5 Menopause in the Workplace

Our Brave Space talk in June 'Let's talk about the Menopause' enabled our staff to discuss the wide ranging and varied impact that the menopause has on many of our female staff and indirectly on many of our male staff.

Our Occupational Health and Wellbeing Team, in conjunction with Affinity, are working alongside colleagues from across the Fire Sector, to further raise awareness, share good practice and influence the provision of support for employees.

An 'Understanding the Menopause' workshop was held in July which focused on menopause, premature menopause and perimenopause, exploring the psychological and physical symptoms and impact on both body and mind. The session was delivered using group discussion as well as providing self-help strategies and information on accessing further support.

## 6.6 Firefighter Recruitment

- Between April 2022 and October 2022 WMFS will employ 52 new entrant firefighters, of which 16 (31%) are women and 13 (25%) BAME.
- WMFS expectations during 2020/2021 for new entrants was 50% of all trainee firefighters to be female and 35% to be from a BAME background. This was adversely affected during the pandemic and highlighted the positive impact that face to face positive action has upon the diversity of new entrants.
- In order to address this a programme of events has been built into the current recruitment process that offers focused support at appropriate stages of the recruitment process for every female and BAME candidate. The support is already starting to give us very positive and encouraging results.

Since November 2021, 42% of BAME males who have engaged with the positive action programme are either now employed or in the final stages of the recruitment process. At the last phase of behavioural assessments, BAME

males had a 72% success rate. The picture is even more encouraging for the female candidates who have engaged with the positive action programme with 60% either now employed or in the final stages of the recruitment process. The last two phases of practical selection tests have seen a 90% success rate for female candidates.

- A new social media campaign has been developed alongside our partners at Thinkology. Our careers pages have a fresh new look and feel, and our application portal is being refreshed with new diverse imagery. We have produced a new range of videos featuring members of our stakeholder groups to support our positive action activity.
- Taster days are being developed following a pilot session at Canley Fire Station in May. Taster days will be run at our community fire stations and will offer the opportunity to those who may not have considered the role of a firefighter before. Potential applicants will have the chance to engage with local crews and carry out some physical activities that relate to the role of a firefighter as well as have input around the role, the Service and the recruitment process.
- The DICE team, in conjunction with our Workforce Analyst, are currently scoping surveys to capture candidate experience at each stage of selection. The workforce analyst is also working alongside Thinkology to implement an effective candidate tracking facility enabling tracking of candidate success from recruitment through to the Trainee Firefighter Development Programme and beyond.

## 6.7 Progression

- 41% of uniformed posts are Crew Commander or above. 26% of female uniformed staff hold positions of Crew Commander or above, compared to 43% of male staff.
- 27% of BAME uniformed staff hold positions of Crew Commander or above, compared to 44% of white staff.

- 66% of non-uniformed posts are grade 9 or above. 53% of female non-uniformed staff hold positions of grade 9 or above, compared to 81% of male staff.
- 60% of BAME non-uniformed staff hold positions of grade 9 or above, compared to 69% of white staff.

Our coaching pool is used to support internal development and progression to provide confidence for staff to put themselves forward for promotion opportunities. This is also supported by the Buddy scheme.

## 7. **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.

## 8. **RISK IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

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

## 9. **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.

## 10. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

## 11. **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

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OFFICIAL

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