

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13 NOVEMBER 2017

1. **DIVERSITY INCLUSION COHESION EQUALITY (DICE) UPDATE**

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

RECOMMENDED

THAT Scrutiny Committee note the progress made by the Service in relation to DICE during the last 6 months.

2. **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

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

3. **BACKGROUND**

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

3.1 **Knowing your Communities**

- 3.1.1 We now have over 3,000 Community Members and this number continues to increase. There is a 50/50 gender split and the highest percentage (37%) are in the age range of 25-44 years. 761 (26%) community members describe themselves as being from a Black or minority ethnic (BME) background. 110 (4%) have declared that they are Lesbian,

Gay, Bisexual or Transgender (LGBT), however 1,048 (34%) have not stated their sexual orientation.

- 3.1.2 A questionnaire was recently sent to all Community Members to gather information about the perceptions of the role of a firefighter and any potential barriers to recruitment that may be faced by our communities. We received 217 responses and these are being analysed to identify any themes. The results will be used to target our positive action activity.
- 3.1.3 WMFS is integrating our Community Members with stations and they have recently supported our station open days, brigade exercises and clothing appeals.
- 3.1.4 A recent Equality Impact Assessment showed that we are performing well with the diversity of our Community Members when compared with national statistics.

3.2 Leadership, Partnership and Service Commitment

- 3.2.1 The DICE station initiative was launched in September 2017 and eleven stations have been identified for the initial roll out. Stations will be audited every three months against a set of performance criteria in a wide range of equality areas. These include their commitment to positive action, being proactive in engaging with diverse communities, and ensuring all staff are well trained in a range of diversity awareness, as well as understanding the impact of unconscious bias on their decision making.
- 3.2.2 WMFS is committed to furthering LGBT equality and attracting LGBT new entrants to increase the diversity of the workforce. A video has been produced by one of our Crew Commanders which will be used as promotional material to encourage LGBT applicants. The Service's FireOut) has been launched including support for our staff who are parents with LGBT children.

A small group of employees attended the Manchester Pride event in August. This was the first social event of FireOut and was open to all.

The transgender policy has been developed and agreed through consultation. The policy was published in October 2017.

3.2.3 The Disability Confident Scheme is a national scheme designed to help recruit and retain disabled people, and people with health conditions, for their skills and talent. The scheme has three levels. WMFS is currently at Level 1 – Disability Confident Committed as we have inclusive and accessible recruitment, we communicate our vacancies widely, offer an interview guarantee to disabled people, as well as providing reasonable adjustments in selection and employment.

WMFS is now working towards Level 2 – Disability Confident Employer and we have submitted a self-assessment against 2 themes: a) getting the right people for our organisation, and b) keeping and developing our people. Disability Confident Employers are recognised as going the extra mile to make sure disabled people get a fair chance.

3.2.4 WMFS has submitted evidence against the criteria for the Inclusive Top 50 UK Employers 2017. This is a definitive list of UK based organisations that promote inclusion across all protected characteristics, throughout each level of employment within their organisation. As well as showcasing the organisation, the Inclusive Top 50 UK Employers also highlights organisations that are effectively making changes which allow them to become an inclusive employer. In 2016 we were ranked 31 out of 50 and we expect to increase our ranking this year.

3.2.5 Scrutiny Committee are currently reviewing our approach to Firefighter Recruitment and Positive Action as part of the Committee's work programme. To support this work, we have recently engaged with a leading equality and diversity consultancy, who are reviewing our current positive action initiatives, processes and future plans. Working in partnership with us as a critical friend, they will provide advice, guidance and recommendations for future positive action activity.

3.3 A Skilled and Committed Workforce

3.3.1 As at 1 July 2017, WMFS employed a total of 1891 employees of which 1391 were uniformed, 437 support staff and 63 fire control. 5% of uniformed staff are female, compared to more than half of non-uniformed staff and nearly 90% of fire control staff. Our workforce is ageing, with the average age of all staff being 44 years.

10% of our employees describe themselves as being from a BME background, compared to 30% of the working population of the West Midlands. When considering this in more detail the largest under-representation is seen amongst the Asian communities where our workforce profile is 3% compared to 19% of the working population.

Declaration rates are generally high across all staff with 99.2% declaring ethnicity, 93% declaring disability status, and 78% declaring both sexual orientation and religion.

3.3.2 The first women only pre-recruitment course has been held across 5 weeks. The course has been designed to remove or reduce barriers to recruitment. 15 women attended the course and have completed an evaluation questionnaire. Feedback from delegates was positive and the progress of these women will be monitored through the firefighter application process.

The second pre-recruitment course will commence in November 2017. The course will be further improved, taking into account the feedback and learning from the first course. We will include a fitness assessment (Chester Treadmill) as well as awareness sessions regarding the psychometric assessments that will be used in selection.

3.3.3 It is recognised that, historically, female firefighter applicants have been disproportionately unsuccessful during the physical tests. In September, we will introduce female only fitness sessions. The sessions will offer advice on fitness and nutrition and provide the opportunity for delegates to assess their physical ability and undertake bespoke fitness activities. These sessions will be targeted at female

applicants ahead of them attending the practical selection test.

3.3.4 Working alongside a locally based company, Airwaves Media, we are further developing our approach to taster days, specifically targeting the South Asian communities in the West Midlands. It is anticipated that the events will attract up to 15 potential applicants per session and will run regularly throughout the year.

3.3.5 The proposal from the Fire Service College (FSC) has been agreed. We are currently focussing on the Attract module of the FSC 'Attract to Train' programme. The attract module is made up of two main elements which include marketing and management of interest via social media, and sifting of applications via a number of online tools.

The final proposal includes targets that have been agreed with the FSC to ensure that we see a return on our investment over and above what we would normally expect from our own marketing campaign. It is expected that the pool of applicants generated via the FSC will be diverse, with 30% female representation and 26% BME representation. The pool of applicants will be assessed on a quarterly basis throughout the 12-month contract and we will review the profile of the candidates on the 3rd and 6th month anniversary of the contract start date.

3.3.6 Our approach to positive action and firefighter recruitment is being considered as best practice within the sector. Our positive action co-ordinator was recently a lead speaker at a Westminster Briefing Conference focusing on positive action in the public sector.

4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

This report responds directly to the General and Specific Duties of the Equality Act and considers DICE issues that are pertinent to the needs of the Service. In doing so a range of equality data has been analysed and considered with regard to all of the protected characteristics.

5. **RISK IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

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

6. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

The recommendations outlined in this report assist us to fulfil our duties under the Equality Act 2010 particularly to advance equal opportunities and eliminate behaviours that are unlawful under the Act.

7. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

8. **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Nil.

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