



Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

2022 - 2025



County Durham and Darlington
Fire and Rescue Service

Safest People, Safest Places

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

1. Foreword

County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service's (CDDFRS) vision is to have the Safest People, Safest Places. Our core strength in achieving this is through our people who are proud to work for an organisation connected closely with its communities and who are genuinely committed to changing and saving people's lives.

The Service's strategic priorities are detailed in our Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) which explains our vision "Safest People, Safest Places" and how we plan to achieve this. In order to assess all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks that could affect the communities of County Durham and Darlington we have in place a methodology for assessing the potential of these risks to cause harm to our communities which is set out within our Community Risk Profile (CRP). These risks are then analysed by the Divisional Management Teams to assist them when developing their own station-based profiles.

This Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy in addition to the People Strategy and Workforce Plan forms part of a suite of documents which support the delivery of the CRMP. They explain the interventions which will take place to support the achievement of our vision and ensure the Service supports and develops staff with the right professionalism and skills who demonstrate our cultural values and behaviours.

The Government's fire reform agenda set a clear direction of travel to ensure FRS are efficient, accountable, transparent and reflective of the diverse communities they serve. This is underpinned by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) regime and the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England that sets out the overall strategic direction for fire and rescue authorities. Following our first inspection it is evident that we need to continue to develop strategies to increase our understanding of the communities we serve and increase the diversity of the workforce across all roles, our EDI Strategy sets out how we aim to do this.

We expect the Authority to continue to face a very challenging financial climate going forward with great uncertainty as to future Government funding. This is exacerbated by restrictions on the amount of income we can raise through council tax and predictions of significant pressures on spending. As well as this, the unexpected nature of the COVID-19 pandemic has seen the Service make changes to the way we operate in order to keep our staff safe whilst continuing to deliver services to our communities. As we look to the future it is important that we do not pause with the delivery of our EDI agenda, we must ensure we continue to identify innovative solutions to engage with our workforce and communities to deliver quality interventions and the EDI Strategy will help us achieve this.

CDDFRS has a history of adapting and dealing well with adversity throughout this prolonged period of austerity. Putting our staff at the heart of everything we do and developing and maintaining a positive organisational culture will help to ensure that we continue to be successful, despite these many challenges. We are committed to delivering a professional, innovative, and effective FRS, as we continue to work towards our vision of "Safest People, Safest Places".

2. Where are we now?

This document outlines our approach to EDI up until 2025. It summarises the continuing work towards embedding EDI at the heart of our activities and seeks to consolidate and build upon the significant progress already achieved. We recognise that EDI is cross cutting and runs through every aspect of the Service. It is of utmost importance in our inward facing responsibilities as an employer but also that we understand our diverse communities and their needs to effectively provide our outward facing service delivery activities.

A diverse and inclusive organisation is one we must all strive to achieve. We believe diversity, in all its various forms, is central to our success as an organisation, ensuring a diversity of experience, thought, challenge and understanding. Our efforts to become more diverse and inclusive don't take place in isolation, they are part and parcel of us achieving wider cultural transformation across the whole Service supported by our vision, strategic priorities, organisational strategies and workforce plan. We are ever conscious of the need to ensure that our workforce reflects the diversity of our local population and so will endeavour to develop a greater understanding of our communities, identify any barriers that prevent or discourage individuals from applying to join the Service or progressing within it and act to remove them. We will undertake positive action to make all reasonable adjustments to our workplaces and roles to ensure that people with cultural, religious or disability requirements are welcomed into our workforce.

This strategy aims to ensure compliance with legislation, the Equality Act 2010 as well as the requirements of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England with regards to EDI and ensure we continue to develop and improve. It will build on our reputation of being a respected organisation, seen as an employer of choice with regards to recruitment, retention and advancement and provide the foundation should we be assessed under the revised FRS Equality Framework (FRSEF).

This strategy should be read in conjunction with other relevant documents, policies, procedures and strategies including our CRP, CRMP, People Strategy, Workforce Plan and our Values and Behaviours. It has been developed taking into consideration the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) People Strategy, NFCC EDI Strategic Improvement Plan, Core Code of Ethics, Fire Vision 2024, the work of the Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG), outcomes of the Adrian Thomas Review, HMICFRS State of Fire and Rescue and individual FRS reports.

3. What we mean by Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Equality

Equality is defined in law (the Equality Act 2010), General Equality Duty to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited under the law. It is about ensuring individuals or groups of individuals are not treated differently or less favourably on the basis of their specific protected characteristics including areas of race, gender, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity and age.

Diversity

Diversity is about promoting and fostering everybody's right to be different, about being free from discrimination, valued as an individual, and having choice and dignity with a right to your own beliefs and values. Diversity is a word which means 'varied and different'. Diversity, therefore, is about more than equality. It is about creating culture which values individual differences and encourages people to be themselves at work.

Inclusion

Inclusion refers to an individual's experience within the workplace and in wider society and the extent to which they feel valued and included.

4. Legal Framework and Public Duty

The Equality Act 2010 is the key piece of legislation which underpins this strategy and summarises a series of duties which are designed to protect employees and our service users against any form of discrimination. These duties are further supplemented by the Public-Sector Equality Duty (PSED).

In summary, CDDFRS must have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Having due regard for advancing equality involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.
- It describes fostering good relations as tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between people from different groups. It states that compliance with the duty may involve treating some people more favourably than others.

The PSED is supported by specific duties which require us to:

- Publish information to show compliance with the PSED at least annually; and
- Set and publish equality objectives at least every four years.

Compliance with the general equality duty is a legal obligation, but it also makes good business sense. We believe that if we can provide services to meet the diverse needs of our communities, we will undertake our core business more efficiently. Furthermore, a workforce that has a supportive working environment is more productive.

From 6 April 2017 we are also legally required to publish information on:

- Gender Pay Gap (Mean and Median Averages)
- Gender Bonus Gap (Mean and Median Averages)
- Proportion of men and women receiving bonuses
- Proportion of men and women in each quartile of our Service's pay structure.

5. Where do we want to be?

We believe that our workforce is our greatest asset and in times of increased austerity and changing demands, appreciating the value that our staff bring to our Service and embracing the need for a diverse workforce is more important than it has ever been.

EDI is central to the Home Office's policy and inspection regime. The NFCC EDI Strategic Improvement Plan has been written to complement the NFCC People Strategy 2017-2022 and the NFCC EDI Position Statement.

The NFCC People Strategy recognises the need for transformational change and as such supports the changes needed in FRS to better serve their communities. One of the key areas of improvement within the strategy is to '*strengthen the ability to provide an excellent service by diversifying staff, promoting inclusion, and creating a fair and equal place to work*'.

Findings from HMICFRS reports into the FRS highlight that there is still a low representation and balance of diversity in roles across the FRS. The business case for diversity is well documented, people from different backgrounds, identities and ways of thinking, behave differently and when this is embraced it enables us to be creative, innovative, adaptable and flexible. We recognise that the continued improvement of our services will only be achieved with a workforce that accesses the widest possible talent pool and is made up of individuals who have a greater understanding of and represent our diverse communities across all roles of the organisation.

It is our aim to ensure EDI is integral to everything we do, and the recognised framework enabling us to take this approach is the FRSEF. The FRSEF is based on the Local Government Association's (LGA) Framework and is designed to help FRS integrate their commitments to promote EDI into their day-to-day work.

The FRSEF has five key priority areas outlined below which will set the direction and focus of our EDI strategy:

1. Leadership, Partnership and Service Commitment;
2. Effective Service Delivery;
3. Community Knowledge and Engagement;
4. Employment, Health and Wellbeing;
5. Recruitment, Training and Selection for Progression / Promotion.

To enable the five key priority areas to be achieved, each will have an action plan which will be driven and monitored by the EDI Group (EDIG) and refreshed as progress is made.

6. Our Values and Behaviours

PROFESSIONAL



INNOVATIVE



EFFECTIVE



PIE represents our values and describes the service our customers should expect. This element of 'being the best' is the external key message around the service we provide

The 4C's communicates the behaviours we expect all our people to display at work. Delivery of the 4 C's across the service will lead to an organisation which displays the PIE values and fulfils the organisation aim of 'being the best'



How We Approach Challenges

Our people should approach challenges with flexibility, enthusiasm, motivation, passion, determination & resilience.

How We Conduct Ourselves

Our people should conduct themselves in an honest, trustworthy, reliable, accountable, consistent and respectful manner.

How We Collaborate

Our people should be approachable, supportive, encouraging, inclusive and show that they value their own development and the development of others when collaborating and working with others.

How We Drive Change Across the Organisation to Make a Difference

Our people should drive change by being creative, resourceful, courageous, original, clear and focused.

7. How do we get there?

Using the FRSEF, we have identified objectives under each of the five key areas which we believe will help us address gaps identified through both data analysis and consultation with internal and external stakeholders. Details of the actions to be undertaken under each key area are included in our EDI Action Plan. This will be managed through the EDIG which is chaired by our Assistant Chief Fire Officer and attended by the Combined Fire Authority's (CFA) Equality Member Champion as well as a cross section of employees and trade union representatives.

1. Leadership, Partnership and Service Commitment

The value that our professional and political leaders place upon EDI influences our drive to deliver a workforce that reflects the communities of County Durham and Darlington and a culture which encourages merit and ambition over unconscious bias or discrimination.

We place high importance on ensuring visible leadership throughout our Service and expect our leaders to support the delivery of this strategy as well demonstrating personal commitment to reducing inequality, challenging discrimination and delivering services, where possible in collaboration with our partners that are inclusive and accessible to diverse communities.

We see leadership as a skill to be developed across our organisation at all levels as demonstrating and promoting fairness and inclusion is required by all employees regardless of their role.

We will:

- Demonstrate that strategic decisions are influenced by local EDI priorities and that the Service has a reputation within the community and with partners for achieving EDI outcomes;
- Seek regular opportunities for our leaders and Communications Team to promote EDI and endorse activity that is inclusive, and which promotes the Service as an equal opportunities employer;
- Ensure we comply with all relevant legislation and data publishing requirements, demonstrating our commitment to transparency and information sharing whilst actively using this information to inform our

decision-making processes;

- We will benchmark our achievements against other comparable organisations and share our experience and good practice.

2. Effective Service Delivery

We recognise that our services need to be accessible and responsive to the needs of people in the community at any given time and we will ensure that equality and inclusivity are embedded in the delivery of our services. We recognise that we cannot provide the best service possible unless we understand and have the trust of our communities. We believe that practicing equality in all that we do and having a workforce that is reflective of the people it serves will help build that trust.

We will:

- Endeavour to utilise our fire stations and premises, placing them at the heart of the community, encouraging engagement and an open culture that builds on the public's trust of the FRS;
- Promote our commitment to EDI throughout the procurement process and in our relationships with suppliers and contractors;
- Ensure that the Service's communication channels are fully accessible by all diverse groups, including those with disabilities and those with English as a second language;
- Ensure a robust equality impact analysis process is in place to ensure that actual and potential impacts on the community and the workforce are properly addressed.

3. Community Knowledge and Engagement

By building a workforce that is truly representative we will enable greater trust, inclusivity and understanding with our local communities. By having a richer picture and greater understanding of our communities will enable us to ensure our services are fully inclusive and targeted, in the most cost-effective manner, to reduce risk amongst the most vulnerable as well as being seen as an employer of choice.

Information gathered by a range of methods and from a range of sources, about local

communities, residents and businesses will be analysed to identify the varying needs and risks for different groups, individuals and communities and used to inform services. Furthermore, the Service needs to understand the views of these diverse communities and how their needs impact on the Service's policies and working practices to ensure that our work is fit for purpose and important messages are being received.

We will:

- Analyse demographic data to develop a richer picture and better understand our communities, how communities are changing and what new communities are emerging within our Service area;
- Have effective engagement and feedback structures in place with our diverse communities and partners and monitor outcomes to understand the views, experiences and impact on at risk, vulnerable and minority communities;
- Further develop partnership working with local and national organisations to promote inclusion activities.

4. Employment Health and Wellbeing

Our People Strategy sets out plans to promote and support a diverse workforce. Workforce monitoring takes place at all levels of the Service, where data is analysed to ensure steps are taken to address any adverse trends. We are aware that the disclosure of personal data needs to be improved amongst our workforce, so this process can be undertaken more effectively.

The Service promotes a clear set of values and behaviours that we expect from our workforce, performance against these is reviewed annually through the appraisal process. We have clear processes in place whereby employees can raise any workplace concerns without fear of retaliation or reprisal and we measure our workforce's perceptions around this in our culture survey, proactively designing interventions to make improvements where required.

Maintaining a healthy and happy workforce will undoubtedly have efficiency benefits for the Service in terms of attendance at work and productivity. There is growing evidence that the wellbeing of employees has a direct impact on productivity delivered and the experience of the public engaging with our services. We seek to empower our employees to take control of their own health and wellbeing in addition to ensuring

the Service has effective support mechanisms in place.

We will:

- Undertake a regular culture survey, asking our employees to feedback on their employment experience. The survey will track progress against key measures around fairness, perceptions and behaviours, the results of which are openly shared with our workforce and trade union representatives and helps shape our interventions for improvement, processes and ways of working moving forward;
- Have effective monitoring and review processes in place to ensure policies and procedures for employees are perceived as fair and are widely consulted upon through a diverse range of views;
- Promote the NFCC Code of Ethics and Service's values and behaviours expected from employees and effectively challenge poor behaviour;
- We will address issues identified affecting culture, working practices, facilities, equipment and clothing so that our employees can work in a safe, supportive and inclusive environment;
- We will review our current provision for health, fitness and wellbeing and ensure we have effective and supportive interventions available which suits the needs of individuals.

5. Recruitment Training and Selection for progression / Promotion

Our employees are our most valuable resource, which is why we invest considerably in their recruitment and training. We aim to recruit, retain and develop a workforce across all roles that reflects the communities in which we serve. To deliver an inclusive and diverse workforce, we must have an inclusive culture in all of our workplaces and in the community, in which everyone is supported and developed to do their best, free of inappropriate or unprofessional behaviour. Our workforce needs to be flexible, with up-to-date skills, state-of-the-art equipment, first-class training and operating to rigorous professional standards.

We recognise that to achieve a truly diverse workforce will take long term commitment, innovation, and bold action to deliver this change. We are determined to build this vital diversity using our Talent Management Framework and by using a wide range of positive action initiatives both internally and externally within the bounds of the Equality

Act 2010 to encourage people from all backgrounds to consider career opportunities with us. Our Positive Action Strategy is attached as Appendix A.

We will:

- Ensure our methods of recruitment and promotion, both internally and externally assess our expected behaviours and are inclusive, fair, open and transparent;
- Set performance measures for recruitment and retention of underrepresented groups, particularly into uniformed roles. We will use this data to direct positive action initiatives and address unseen and unconscious barriers to underrepresented groups seeking employment, promotion and development opportunities;
- Ensure our new employees are properly onboarded so they understand the Service's behavioural framework and expectations and know what behaviours to expect from others;
- Establish clear development pathways for our workforce which are flexible, supportive, offer variety and enable a range of career progression options;
- Provide training and development opportunities for staff to improve understanding of EDI and the benefits of a diverse workforce.

8. Measuring Progress

We will monitor progress of this strategy in the following ways:



Role of the Fire Authority and Service Leadership Team (SLT)

Both Members of the Fire Authority and SLT believe in this strategy and that it will help to deliver the Service's vision in respect of EDI. Leading by example, our Members and SLT will set the standard for what is expected of all staff in enabling this strategy to be delivered by 2025.



Role of our Staff

This strategy will only be successful if all staff within CDDFRS support it, making the vision for EDI a reality. In supporting this strategy, employees will not only assist in enabling the actions outlined but they will also demonstrate their support through their behaviours.



Performance Indicators (PI's)

We will develop a suite of appropriate Performance Indicators to help measure the progress of this strategy.



Culture Survey

Our culture survey will assist us in having insight into the motivations, attitudes and behaviours of our staff and assist in identifying interventions required. Progress will be measured against key indicators and shared with the workforce.



Reporting Progress

Scrutiny of progress against the strategy and action plan will be undertaken by the EDIG and the HR Committee of the Fire Authority who will receive regular reports from the Assistant Chief Fire Officer in their role as strategic lead for EDI.

