

Safest People, Safest Places

County Durham and Darlington
Fire and Rescue Service



Human Resources Committee

18 November 2021

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

Report of Assistant Chief Fire Officer

Purpose of Report

1. To outline the Service's approach to improving the diversity of the organisation through gaining a greater understanding of the communities we serve and developing positive action strategies to address the improvements in the key areas identified.

Background

2. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (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, their needs and their perceptions of the fire and rescue service (FRS) to effectively provide our outward facing service delivery activities.
3. A diverse and inclusive organisation is always of great value and one we must all strive to achieve. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services, Sir Thomas P Winsor's, report 'The State of Fire and Rescue – The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2020', highlighted that there is a lack of gender and race diversity in FRS.
4. He also highlighted that diversity and equality are important at all levels of the Service and the sector should focus on improving diversity and equality in leadership roles.
5. A key principle of our People Strategy 2020 – 2023 and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022 - 2025 (Appendix 1) is the drive to be a more diverse and inclusive organisation and where individuals feel they can be their true self at work. This means staff feel able to openly express personal identities and act in a way that feels authentic and true to oneself.
6. Authenticity at work is reported in our Culture Survey 2021 as high across the Service which is positive however there are still a number of respondents who do not feel this is the case and which can have negative implications for individual wellbeing and self-esteem, further work is required to address this and will be included in the Culture Survey Action Plan.

Workforce Statistics

7. National statistics show that only 17.3% of the 44,595 staff in FRS are female and only 5.1% are from a minority ethnic group. With regard to the operational workforce, 7% are female and 4.4% from a minority ethnic group. However, it must be noted that approximately 10% of all staff did not state their ethnicity.
8. In County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS), 15.4% of our total workforce are female and 2% from a minority ethnic group. With regard to the operational workforce, 5.7% are female and 2.4% from a minority ethnic group.
9. In 2019, it was recognised by Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) that although the number of black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) firefighters (FF) the Service had was low, we were one of only two English FRS whose percentage of FF from a BAME background was above the percentage of the local population.
10. As highlighted above in point 7, 15.4% of our workforce also did not state their ethnicity. We will continue to encourage all personnel to complete all aspects of equality data within Firewatch to improve our data and enhance our understanding of the demographics of our workforce.
11. In CDDFRS our gender pay gap (GPG) is 8.77% which is slightly higher than the national average figure of 7.4%, this means that female staff earn on average 8.77% less than male staff. Our current organisational structure denotes that a significant number of senior roles can only be occupied by wholetime operational employees, however the highest proportion of our female workforce are currently employed on Green Book terms and conditions which are typically lower than Grey Book equivalent roles.
12. The organisation also operates a very lean back office and has a low attrition rate, meaning opportunities for either gender to progress within corporate roles can be limited. This is also similar for those working the on-call duty system where roles are only available to Watch Manager level and those working in Control, with only one role available at Station Manager level.

Current Position

13. We believe that our workforce is our greatest asset, and we recognise the critical need to recruit, retain and develop an excellent, motivated and diverse workforce to steer our way through the challenging and changing environment in which we operate. The Strategic Workforce Plan assists to support and improve our ability to respond to this and outlines our workforce planning processes to ensure that we have the right number of people with the right skills, knowledge, values and behaviours at the right time, in the right job to deliver the priorities of the Service.
14. Integral to our workforce planning is the need to be ever conscious in ensuring that our workforce reflects our local population, so will undertake positive action with the aim to build a representative workforce, be fully inclusive and make the Service an employer and partner of choice. The People Strategy and EDI Strategy both commit to positive action to help encourage recruitment from underrepresented groups to help to achieve this aim. Positive action activity has taken place prior to recruitment processes, albeit inconsistently, with some progress being made albeit small.

15. To further support our drive to attract, recruit and retain a diverse workforce, the Service has a suite of policies and procedures to ensure we proactively support and encourage diversity within our workforce. The Work Life Balance Policy and supporting procedures provide transparency, support flexible working and provide family friendly options to enable greater attraction, retention and development of the best people. Family specific policies ensure we are offering maximum opportunity to both parents irrelevant of gender.
16. Recruitment into wholetime (WT) FF positions was put on hold in 2010 due to austerity which significantly impacted the opportunity to increase the diversity of the workforce through external recruitment until 2017 when WT recruitment recommenced.
17. The introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy in 2017 resulted in the creation of our innovative FF Apprenticeship Scheme which provided another opportunity to recruit our future workforce. Due to its innovative approach to recruitment and selection, the aim was to increase the diversity of the candidates deemed successful and lower the average age of the workforce.
18. Recruitment into On-call FF positions and Corporate roles has continued where a vacancy has arisen.
19. Table 1 below outlines our operational recruitment activity since 2017 for both WT FF, FF Apprentices and On-call FF and highlights the diversity of successful candidates achieved and the requirement for further initiatives to assist to increase the diversity of the operational workforce.

Table 1

Group	Date	No. employees	Male	Female	Total BAME	Male BAME	Female BAME
WT Course 168	May-17	12	10	2	0	0	0
WT Course 169	Sep-19	6	5	1	0	0	0
WT Course 170	Mar-20	11	9	2	0	0	0
App Cohort 1	May-17	9	5	4	0	0	0
App Cohort 2	Sep-18	11	6	5	1	0	1
App Cohort 3	Sep-19	7	4	3	0	0	0
App Cohort 4	Jan-21	8	5	3	0	0	0
App Cohort 5	Sep-21	8	7	1	0	0	0
On-Call (Employed)	May 2017 - date	71	65	6	1	1	0
On-Call (Start & Left)	May 2017 - date	21	19	2	0	0	0
RDS to WT Transfers	Dec 2017 - date	29	28	1	1	1	0
Total		193	163 (84%)	30 (16%)	3 (2%)	2	1

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy - Areas of Focus

20. We believe diversity, in all its various forms, is central to our success as an organisation, ensuring a diversity of culture, experience, thought, challenge and understanding and this difference brings great strength.
21. 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 and organisational strategies.
22. In order to improve the way we deliver services and positively impact on culture, we want to increase our understanding of the communities we serve and increase the diversity across all roles of our workforce.
23. To enable us to achieve this vision, 3 key areas of focus have been identified to drive improvements in the areas above.

Understanding our Communities

24. Our communities generally require the Service when an emergency arises. To understand the causes of potential fire and rescue situations so that prevention and protection messages and initiatives are made relevant to the diverse needs of the community, we need to acquire and use information as effectively as possible. We understand that every contact with our communities counts and are essential to our success. The identification and development of key contacts and networks will provide a richer picture of the makeup of our communities, develop relationships, trust and confidence within these communities which in turn will enable us to target activities accordingly and deliver a fair and equitable service to our local communities.
25. We get much of our information through our work in partnership with other organisations both locally and nationally and use equality information to inform our decision making in respect of community engagement and determining organisational strategies. We know we can improve our response to our communities if we have greater awareness of them and are able to effectively hear and understand their needs.
26. In addition, by increasing our understanding of our communities, we will be better positioned to identify any potential barriers within our recruitment and engagement processes and target our interventions to underrepresented groups to promote the Service as an employer and partner of choice. This in turn will assist us to reflect more closely the communities we serve and provide us with opportunities to increase representation of underrepresented groups in leadership roles and reduce our gender pay gap.
27. A project has been instigated with the aim to further develop the understanding the Service has of the communities it serves. This in turn will provide specific areas of focus and targeted interventions for prevention, protection and response activities as well as areas of focus and targeted interventions to support our positive action strategy and recruitment. These activities will be incorporated into station and Service plans. This intelligence will also assist in the development of the Community Risk Profile (CRP) and the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP).

Talent Pipeline - Cadets

28. Organisations that place a strong emphasis on finding and developing talented employees soon build a reputation as such, with good people attracting good people.

To support this vision, the Service has developed a Talent Management Framework (TMF) to provide a systematic and strategic approach to our workforce to achieve our ambition of 'Being The Best' fire and rescue service, an employer of choice and having a diverse and inclusive workforce. A Positive Action Strategy has been developed to support our TMF and prepare potential FF of the future.

29. Our Cadet Scheme which is currently in place at 10 stations across the Service area offers a great potential opportunity for a talent pipeline if the attraction element at the start of the process is effective.
30. Our Cadet Scheme currently requires interested persons to complete an application form, they are then invited to their nearest station for an induction / taster session. The only criteria currently applied is age and the desire to take part in physical activities. The process does not currently identify talent and the potential for progression to a career in the Service and in particular into an operational role.
31. The delivery of the Cadet Scheme is currently not standardised across the Service, providing an inconsistent approach to the development of the young people. Although there is great commitment from the Arson Reduction and Young Peoples Coordinator and our cohort of Cadet Instructors and volunteers, the current arrangements do not provide a transparent and balanced approach to development, it also does not consistently nurture talent and best prepare the Cadets to apply for progression via recruitment into the Service.
32. It is proposed that a review of the current Cadet Scheme is undertaken with the aim to:
 - a. Define the purpose/s of the Cadet Scheme.
 - b. Develop a programme of positive action to raise the profile and aims of the Cadet Scheme.
 - c. Conduct a review of the recruitment process to help attract candidates with the potential to progress to a career within the FRS.
 - d. Develop a structured programme of development including qualifications which is fair and accessible to all Cadets.
 - e. Develop a succession planning process to create a talent pipeline for progression to our future workforce.
 - f. Ensure the delivery of the Cadets programme centrally and at each station can be adequately resourced.
 - g. Develop a structured programme of development for our Cadet Instructors to ensure consistency across all schemes.

Development of Underrepresented Groups

33. As outlined in point 11 of this report, our GPG is 8.77% which means that female staff earn on average 8.77% less than male staff. The aim of GPG reporting is to identify any imbalance in pay between genders and encourages organisations to consider positive steps to address any identified gaps.
34. Our current organisational structure denotes that a significant number of senior roles can only be occupied by wholetime operational employees, however the highest

proportion of our female workforce are currently employed on Green Book terms and conditions which are typically lower than Grey Book equivalent roles.

35. Our TMF seeks to nurture and develop our employees and appoint them to the most suitable opportunities as their careers evolve. Evidence suggests that diversity and inclusion lead to a greater employee experience in the Service and as such welcome the challenge of enabling employees from all backgrounds to develop and excel in their roles. For the purposes of this paper, this involves supporting those from underrepresented groups to develop their leadership potential and progress their career with the aim to increase the diversity of staff in leadership roles across the organisation.
36. Our current female operational strength in leadership roles reflects one strategic manager, no middle managers and only three females occupying a supervisory manager role, albeit one supervisory manager has progressed to the Station Manager Talent Pool.
37. Our TMF should seek to develop a diverse, capable and evolving leadership population across all levels of our leadership framework and increase the number of vacancies filled via our internal talent through a range of positive action initiatives guided by our Positive Action Strategy.
38. The development of a team succession plan for underrepresented groups will assist with understanding the aspirations of these staff and help to further inform future strategies and interventions.
39. Developing initiatives for underrepresented groups to assist their career progression will need a robust communication strategy so as not to negatively impact on the perception of fairness across the organisation and inadvertently impact the specific aim of encouraging females to progress their career into a leadership role.

Conclusion / Next Steps

40. It is proposed that the key areas of focus regarding 'Understanding our Communities' and 'Talent Pipelines – Cadets' outlined in this report should be progressed as two projects each accompanied with a PID and monitored through the Performance and Programme Board (PPB) to assist in our drive to better understand the communities we serve and to assist the recruitment of a workforce which better reflects our communities.
41. The aim of these projects is to make a positive difference to the number of candidates from underrepresented groups applying for operational roles in the Service, improve our performance in PI43 'Operational new starters from underrepresented groups' and to increase our target in PI43 currently set at 20% to 30%.
42. It is proposed that the key area of focus 'Development of Underrepresented Groups' is progressed and set as an objective of the wider Talent Management Framework with the aim to increase the diversity of staff in leadership roles across the organisation.
43. A Communications Plan will be developed to ensure key stakeholders understand the aim of each project and a series of metrics developed to measure the success in the three key areas identified.

Recommendations

44. Members are requested to:

- a) **Note** and **comment** on the content of the report.

Sarah Nattrass, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, 0191 375 5587