

# Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2018 – 2022



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## Introduction

County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service's (CDDFRS) vision is simple, we want to have the safest people and safest places. We have three values: Professional; Innovative; and Effective (PIE) and they describe the service our customers should expect.

This document outlines our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion (ED&I) up until 2022. It summarises the continuing work towards embedding ED&I at the heart of all our activities and seeks to consolidate and build upon the significant progress that has already been achieved. We recognise that ED&I runs through every aspect of the Service. It is of utmost importance in both our outward facing service delivery activities and inward facing responsibilities as an employer.

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 and organisational strategies. We are ever conscious of the need to ensure that our workforce reflects our local population and so will endeavour to identify any barriers that prevent or discourage individuals from applying for jobs 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 as well as the requirements of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England with regards to ED&I 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 re-assessed under the revised Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework (FRSEF).

This strategy should be read in conjunction with other relevant documents, policies, procedures and strategies including the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP), Workforce Development Strategy and our Strategic Workforce Plan. It has been developed taking into consideration the Equality Act 2010, Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, National Workforce Strategy, Fire Vision 2024, the work of the Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG) and the outcomes of the Adrian Thomas Review.



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## What we mean by Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (source: National Workforce Strategy)

### Equality

Equality is defined by law (the Equality Act 2010) 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.

## 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.



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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.

Compliance with the general equality duty is a legal obligation, but it also makes good business sense. We believe that if we are able to 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.

### **Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework**

ED&I are central to the Home Office's policy and inspection regime. A Memorandum of Understanding on Equality, Diversity, Behaviours and Organisational Culture in the Fire Service sets out the commitments of the IFSG to support the Government's quest for improvement in ED&I through the development of supporting strategies for fire and rescue services.

It is our aim to weave ED&I into 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 Framework and is designed to help fire and rescue services integrate their commitments to promote ED&I into their day-to-day work.

Key priority areas include:

- Leadership, Partnership and Service Commitment;
- Effective Service Delivery;
- Community Knowledge and Engagement;
- Employment, Health and Wellbeing;
- Recruitment, Training and Selection for Progression / Promotion.



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## Our Key Objectives

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. Full details of the actions to be undertaken under each key area are included in our ED&I Action Plan. This will be updated annually and managed through our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group (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 unions representatives.

## Leadership, Partnership and Service Commitment

The viable value that our professional and political leaders place upon ED&I affects our ability 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 ED&I priorities and that the Service has a reputation within the community and with partners for achieving ED&I outcomes;
- Seek regular opportunities for our leaders and communications team to promote ED&I 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;



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

### 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 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 by placing them at the heart of the community, encouraging an open culture that builds on the public's trust of the fire and rescue service and makes fire stations available as resources for community groups;
- Hold community events including open days at our fire stations where our front-line staff can engage with the local diverse community, promote career opportunities, Cadet/Young Firefighter Association (YFA) and apprenticeship schemes; offer fire safety advice and improve public understanding of risk;
- Promote our commitment to ED&I 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;
- Undertake robust and meaningful equality impact assessments in relation to our internal and external policies and projects to ensure that actual and potential impacts on the community and the workforce are properly and appropriately addressed.



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### Community Knowledge and Engagement

By building a workforce that is truly representative we will enable greater trust, inclusivity and understanding with our local communities. This will support us to understand our communities better so that we can ensure our services are fully inclusive and targeted, in the most cost-effective manner, to reduce risk amongst the most vulnerable. Information is regularly gathered by a range of methods and from a range of sources, about local communities, residents and businesses. It is 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 work is fit for purpose and important messages are being received.

We will:

- Analyse demographic data to better understand how communities are changing and what new communities are emerging within our Service area;
- Have effective engagement structures in place to allow for informal and formal interactions 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 with partner organisations such as Disability Confident, Stonewall and MIND (blue light initiative);
- Increase the awareness of our Cadet and YFA schemes amongst young people in diverse communities outlining career path opportunities such as our apprenticeship scheme, on-call and wholtime firefighters, command and control and other non-operational roles;
- Recognise that our political leaders have a good understanding of the needs of our community and use this knowledge to ensure ED&I remains central to the organisational strategic priorities.



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### Employment, Health and Wellbeing

Our Workforce Development 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 through our cultural 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 will 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 Service's values and behaviours expected from employees and effectively challenge poor behaviour;
- Encourage employees to participate in equality monitoring by demonstrating how data can inform policies and procedures to support the needs of our whole workforce. We will reassure





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our employees of confidentiality and anonymity at all times and compliance with the general data protection regulations;

- 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 of our employees and ensure we have effective and supportive interventions available which suit the needs of an individual when required.

### 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 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 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 a wide range of positive action initiatives within the bounds of the Equality Act 2010. This will enable us to reach out to those with diverse skills, backgrounds, experiences and aptitudes that will enhance diversity and inclusivity amongst our workforce of the future.

We will:

- Review our methods of recruitment and promotion, both internally and externally, to ensure expected behaviours are suitably assessed and processes are inclusive, fair, open and transparent;
- Set ourselves organisational targets for recruitment and retention of underrepresented groups, particularly into uniformed roles. We will use this data to direct and guide any positive action initiatives and address unseen and unconscious barriers to underrepresented groups seeking employment, promotion and development opportunities within our organisation;



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- Ensure our new employees are properly inducted and developed, so they understand the Service's behavioural framework and expectations from day one and know what behaviours to expect from others;
- Establish clear development pathways for our workforce which are flexible, support opportunities to work in different teams, projects and locations and enable a range of career progression options which are further supported by mentoring and coaching opportunities;
- Offer development opportunities to promote a diverse workforce, tailored equalities training will be provided for all employees with enhanced training for our managers and those involved in recruitment. We aim to support and improve our workforce's understanding around ED&I and eradicate inappropriate behaviour such as bullying, victimisation, discrimination and harassment.

### **Monitoring Performance and Progress**

The CFA is keen to ensure that the ED&I work it undertakes is effectively performance managed. As such, the EDIG, which is chaired by our Assistant Chief Fire Officer – Service Support will have responsibility for ensuring the successful implementation, monitoring and review of this strategy and the accompanying action plan. There is a standing item on the EDIG agenda to review progress against this strategy and action plan. Progress is further reported by exception to the Service Leadership Team. A report will also be compiled every six months to highlight progress to the CFA Performance Committee.

Individual appraisals are completed annually for each employee which primarily focusses on their behaviours at work. The Service's behavioural framework sets out our expectations of how our employees should behave whilst at work and measures. We measure employee performance around behaviours such as being approachable, supportive, encouraging and inclusive. Data from our appraisals will help us understand if there are any areas of underperformance which need to be addressed through our action plan.



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## Consultation & Involvement

To enable us to promote ED&I as a service provider and employer, we will actively encourage key stakeholders to participate in the development of equality and inclusion initiatives. Ongoing consultation is important to continue to develop and progress this Strategy and action plan.

Key stakeholders will be consulted and included through:

- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Working Group;
- Employee Network Groups;
- Culture Survey;
- Trade Union Meetings;
- Service Leadership and Management Teams;
- Partnership Meetings.

The Service is also an active member of a number of external networks and working groups which enable the sharing of best practice and provide guidance and support across all strands of equality.

These include:

- Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG);
- National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Inclusion Practitioners Group;
- Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA);
- Women in the Fire Service (WFS);
- Rainbow Alliance (Pride);
- Stonewall.

