

Report of the Head of Corporate Services

Organisational Development - Equality and Diversity Review

Purpose of report

1. To provide an update on the findings of an independent review of Equality and Diversity in the Service and to outline steps being taken to address key points and recommendations.
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Recommendation

It is recommended that the findings and recommendations set out in the Equality and Diversity Review be welcomed and incorporated within an action plan being developed as part of the forthcoming People Strategy.

Introduction and Background

2. Members will be aware that responsibility for Equality and Diversity now sits with the Audit and Standards Committee. In light of this, at the last meeting Members requested an update on the independent review of Equality and Diversity carried out by The Wisdom Factory CIC (Community Interest Company) on behalf of the Service's Organisational Development (OD) Group. The OD Group, led by the Head of Corporate Services, is currently examining key areas of the equality agenda including organisational culture, equality objectives and workforce development. This is being drawn together into an overarching People Strategy and action plan.
3. The review is a central component of this overall approach helping to set a baseline for integrating the Service's commitment to promoting equality and diversity into day-to-day work.
4. The areas examined and the findings of the review are set out in The Wisdom Factory CIC report 'Equality and Diversity Review' dated March 2017 attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

Undertaking the Review

5. Throughout February 2017, two members of The Wisdom Factory CIC (both of whom are highly experienced equality and diversity practitioners) conducted a review of the Service against the Leadership, Partnership and Service Commitment element of the national Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework. The Equality Framework is a self-assessment toolkit developed by the Local Government Association and the Chief Fire Officers Association to support fire services in assessing their work on equality.

6. The team considered the full range of relevant Service documents, conducted telephone interviews with a broad spectrum of staff and facilitated two focus groups held at Service headquarters. They also undertook an equality data monitoring exercise to establish the current employment position.
7. Their report considered two main areas; Employment Monitoring, which identified eight recommendations, and Framework Review, which has identified 16 recommendations. In addition, the report also highlights a number of helpful themes in relation to organisational culture and experience, which emerged through the interviews and focus group meetings.

Findings and Recommendations

Employment Monitoring

8. In examining the employment position, full year data from 2015-16 was examined. The report sets out data relating to the number and proportion of staff in terms of gender, ethnicity, disability, age, sexual orientation and religion and belief. It also notes instances of grievances and disclosure, and comments on how data is collected and reported. Finally, it suggests there are similarities in relation to the national picture across the fire and rescue service as a whole.
9. Key themes emerging from the research identified the following:

Recruitment	The majority of applications are from men (65%). 90% of applications for retained positions are male.
Applications for promotion	Of 47 applications: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all identified as White British, • two identified as female, • six identified as disabled, • none identified as LGB (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual).
Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) representation	While the Service attracts a strong number of job applications from the BAME community, they are underrepresented in the number of staff in post.
Formal Grievances	Disabled members of staff raised three out of the six formal grievances this year.
Age	65% of the current workforce sit within the age brackets 36-45 and 46-55.
LGB	Less than 1% of the workforce identify as LGB.
Ethnicity	A large proportion of job applicants prefer not to state their ethnicity.
Disclosure within the workforce	No employees declined to state their disability status or age, and ethnicity disclosure is very high. However, over half declined to disclose their sexual orientation or religion.

10. Full details are set out in the report at Appendix 1. There were eight specific recommendations in relation to employment monitoring, which were set out under the heading of Equality Monitoring and Data Collection. They are a mix of practical actions and suggested improvements to monitoring activities and are detailed below:

1	Consider a review of the terminology and range of options in the data forms.
2	Consistently provide a 'prefer not to say' option for all characteristics in data collection processes and monitor those responses. This may indicate characteristics which still attract stigma and act as barriers to an open and respectful culture.
3	Add gender reassignment, marriage/civil partnership and pregnancy/maternity to the full data collection and reporting processes or otherwise ensure there is a mechanism to monitor these protected characteristics.
4	Consider why non-disclosure rates are disproportionately high for ethnicity at the job application stage and for sexual orientation and religion among the workforce. This may require reflection on a 'it's no-one's business but mine' belief and consideration of the benefits of an open-minded and trusting workforce.
5	Amend the data collection process to ensure collection and analysis of successful and unsuccessful applications for employment and promotion by reference to protected characteristics in order to further evidence commitment to the public sector equality duty. We know, for example, that this year 11% of job applicants were from the BAME community but what was the conversion rate? What proportion was offered a job compared to other ethnicities? If certain protected groups were disproportionately failing in recruitment stages, it is important to know this and consider the impact of issues like unconscious bias.
6	The new regular reminder to staff to keep their data up to date is positive. Consider monitoring the response rate by retained staff who may not have the same levels of access to the office and may need a facilitated time to do this to demonstrate the importance of this exercise. Consider clearly articulating the benefits of disclosure, reflecting our communities and having accurate data.
7	Check that the current I.T systems are being fully utilised to their full reporting capabilities.
8	Evaluate staff's understanding of disability in its true broad terms using training and surveys. Also, seek to combat myths and unnecessary fears by exploring opportunities internally and in recruitment to demonstrate real life examples of adjustments which the Service has implemented to support disabled staff.

Framework Review

11. The review considered six main areas under the Equality Framework heading and identified 16 recommendations that would help advance the equalities agenda. Summaries of each area considered are set out below followed by the related recommendations.

Leadership	<p>The Service's values offer a public commitment to diversity and inclusion. There are many valuable initiatives and campaigns which undoubtedly benefit minority groups, including older and disabled people. There seems to be a firm and widespread commitment to seeking data-sharing arrangements to optimise all opportunities to identify people 'at risk' and to find new and innovate ways to support them.</p> <p>Vulnerability overlaps with equality but they are not the same.</p> <p>A clear and transparent equality strategy would allow the Service to expand upon its values, by agreeing a shared vision for the Service internally and for the way in which it provides services to the community and setting achievable objectives. This would help the Service demonstrate that the leadership understands the importance of equality and inclusion to employees, the different equality needs of local communities and give clear direction to everyone at all levels in the organisation.</p>
Local Vision and Priorities	<p>A lot of good work is being done by individuals who are passionate about serving the community and particularly vulnerable people. There are programmes emerging or in existence which target specific groups identified as a local priority. Confidence levels in established processes like signposting and Home Fire Safety Checks are high. Many people are leading on new strategic partnerships to deliver Services differently to meet local needs in light of shrinking budgets. Knowledge of local 'at risk' groups is also strong.</p> <p>Interviewees and focus group participants struggled to articulate a clear 'shared vision' across the two counties with partners. There was a perception that most initiatives are responsive rather than part of a clear plan. This may not be the case and, if it is not, this is a communication issue not a strategy problem.</p>
Corporate Policies and Processes	<p>There is some suggestion that the equality impact assessment processes lack teeth. They are often criticised in organisations for being a 'box ticking' exercise. Their true value is only seen when they do their job and identify a positive or negative impact on a vulnerable group. For them to do their job, the person performing or overseeing them needs to have a sufficient knowledge about differing needs of groups and barriers.</p> <p>The annual employment data monitoring exercise is an important corporate process for reflecting on equality and diversity and evidencing commitment to the public sector</p>

	<p>equality duty.</p> <p>The consistent messaging around 'vulnerable groups' in corporate documents is strong. A concerted effort to identify and communicate the Service's 'equality story' with reference to specific minority groups into future documents would be very powerful in advancing the equalities agenda.</p> <p>Levels of confidence in the Signposting and Home Fire Safety Checks processes appear high.</p> <p>Staff seem empowered to create partnerships and suggest initiatives to better support community groups. Confidence levels to make advances on the equality agenda <i>inside the Service</i> were not so high with some anxiety expressed about how this might affect career progression. The Organisational Development group members all nominated themselves to get involved and support policy-making which is very positive. The interest in a positive action group also demonstrates commitment from current staff to improve diversity within the Service. It is important that these groups are provided with training so they continue to feel empowered, to ensure their input is based on sound and knowledgeable foundations and to create a legacy impact by sharing this expertise in their day to day work.</p>
Meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)	<p>The Service has devised and published equality objectives in line with its PSED. It is accepted that, to date, there has been a low level of monitoring and scrutiny. The absence of references to the duty in corporate documents and strategies suggests that, to date at least, they have not been consciously valued. This is echoed by the fact that no-one in the two focus groups - staff who are engaged in equality matters – could identify one of the Service's equality objectives.</p> <p>Some processes are really becoming more robust eg by using an expert provider for the Wyre Forest consultation to secure contact with members of the community from all protected characteristics.</p> <p>There is no strategy as yet around equality and diversity so this presents an opportunity to reflect on what the workforce and leadership will/could look like in ten years time and what interventions are needed both practically and culturally to achieve this.</p>
Monitoring and Scrutiny	<p>It appears that there has been a great deal of reflection this year about the Service's general approach to equality and diversity. The Equality and Diversity group was disbanded and the Organisational Development group</p>

	was established with cross-Service representation. The idea to move this group so it reports to the Audit and Standards Committee would be valuable if it results in more robust scrutiny of the equalities agenda (which is currently quite 'gentle'). The positive action group was also placed on hold this year whilst opportunities are explored to clarify its terms of reference and give it more powerful strategic direction.
Effective Communication	<p>There is a lot of evidence of effective communication mechanisms. The Service clearly empowers staff to get involved and implement an idea which is intended to support and reach out to the community.</p> <p>The Communications team have a strong channel of communication internally and a range of external channels to share messages. Strategic direction on equality priorities both in the Service and in the community would allow all staff to make a powerful additional impact through clear and consistent messaging about the Service's equalities agenda.</p>

12. The associated recommendations suggest ways of embedding equality and inclusion into the organisational culture and into ways of working, so that there is a clear, shared vision and measurable objectives driving the strategy forward. They are as follows.

1	Consider developing, in consultation with staff and community groups, an Equality and Inclusion Strategy which demonstrates the importance placed on equality and diversity by the organisation and its leadership.
2	Identify who should lead the equality and diversity agenda from both a behavioural and practical/expertise perspective.
3	When promoting initiatives and activities, carefully communicate who they seek to target or support in order to avoid suggestions of 'wooly' policies.
4	Review equality impact assessment processes against their purpose.
5	Identify the Service's equality messages (and language that reinforces this) and take steps to ensure this is integrated in all future corporate documents.
6	Vehicles for staff to influence policy should be promoted and broad cross-sections of staff should be encouraged to get involved to seek fresh perspectives on an evolving issue.
7	Staff groups charged with influencing and monitoring equality policy and outcomes need robust training.
8	The revised equality objectives (required under public sector equality duty) need to be taken through a process which is grounded in evidence and results measurable objectives.
9	Take steps to ensure all policies consciously consider the equality objectives so that the Service can begin to openly embed them in strategy and in staff's minds.

10	All protected characteristics should be considered in equality matters but this is particularly required under the public sector equality duty.
11	Improving data collection processes on protected characteristics will enable the Service to identify differing impacts on different groups, help evidence fulfilment of the public sector equality duty and potentially identify gaps in delivering to certain groups.
12	Use vehicles such as the Organisational Development group and positive action group to explore opportunities for fostering good relations and utilise internal and, crucially, external communication channels to promote activities.
13	Continue to explore the reporting and scrutiny process for activities which advance the equality agenda eg is the Organisation Development group the right vehicle and, if so, are its recommendations and outputs being scrutinised thoroughly and by the right people?
14	Review the extent to which the public is approached in setting (and challenging progress on) the equality objectives.
15	Ensure any equality and diversity strategy involves clear direction on communication, both internally and externally.
16	Seek out opportunities to evaluate access to internal and external communication channels by minority groups in order to take steps to mitigate potential barriers.

Organisational Culture and Experience

13. In analysing equality and diversity matters within the Service, the team noted a number of themes highlighting concerns that people may have in relation to equality issues. Examples include a concern about saying or doing 'the wrong thing' and making sure that equality presentations and training are not just a 'tick box' exercises. There was also a view that the organisational culture could be more open and trusting, which would be a more supportive environment for people to feel comfortable in disclosing their characteristics.

Conclusion/Summary

14. The Equality and Diversity Review is an important piece of independent research and evidence. It has highlighted many actions that can be taken to help embed the equalities agenda within the Service and throughout the workforce. A key action proposed is the development of an Equality and Inclusion Strategy, which would both complement existing strategies and address responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. The strategy would require a clear vision with measurable and achievable objectives, and would need a process for monitoring success and ensuring accountability and scrutiny.
15. It is proposed that each recommendation and each theme or concern identified should be fully considered and incorporated in a comprehensive action plan, which is currently being drawn together alongside the development of a new People Strategy. Actions are expected to be delivered over a three year timetable to 2020.

Corporate Considerations

Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	N/A
Strategic Policy Links (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy frameworks and if they do not, identify any potential implications).	The Equality and Diversity Review is an important contribution to the developing equalities agenda. Its findings and recommendations will be considered and incorporated into an action plan being drawn together alongside the preparation of a new People Strategy.
Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).	N/A
Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)	The Service's Organisational Development (OD) Group commissioned the independent review, which included interviews with a broad spectrum of staff and two focus groups. The OD Group will continue to have oversight of the proposed actions.
Equalities (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	As an independent review, an EIA is not required at this stage, but one would be prepared once any new strategy is proposed. The Review makes recommendations across the whole equality and diversity spectrum. In particular, it recommends the development of an Equality and Inclusion Strategy, which would help to address responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Equality and Diversity Review, The Wisdom Factory CIC, March 2017

Background Information

Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework, published by the LGA and CFA

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