

Report of the Head of Corporate Services

15. Update from the Equality and Diversity Advisory Group

Purpose of report

1. To provide an update from the Equality and Diversity Advisory Group since the last report to Committee on 21 March 2016.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the following areas are noted:

- i) Positive progress against the Service's current equality objectives was reported to the Equality and Diversity Advisory Group Meeting on 27 June 2016;*
- ii) There is a proposed realignment of equality and diversity replacing the Advisory Group with an Organisational Development Board led by the Assistant Chief Fire Officer in order to better support embedding equality and diversity across the Service;*
- iii) Excellent progress has been made in equality and diversity training, and there are plans to introduce an e-learning package;*
- iv) A Service representative attended the recent Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA) Annual General Meeting and Development Day on 26 and 27 May 2016;*
- v) Service representatives attended the MIND Blue Light Regional Conference;*
- vi) A Service representative attended the Women in the Fire Service UK Annual Conference.*

Background

Equality and Diversity Advisory Group

2. The Equality and Diversity Advisory Group helps to ensure Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service meets its duties under the Equality Act 2010. The Group's core function is to promote equality of opportunity and thereby help to eliminate unnecessary and unlawful discrimination within Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service and to develop a working environment where individual diversity is valued

3. The Group meets quarterly and is represented by each department across the Service in order to mainstream Equality and Diversity across the whole Service. Two Authority Members and representatives of the trade unions also attend the meetings.
4. Since the last update to the Policy and Resources Committee on 21 March 2016, there has been one meeting of the Equality and Diversity Advisory Group on 27 June 2016.

Progress Update

5. There has been progress in a number of important areas, as noted below.

Equality Objective

6. The current equality objectives were approved by the Fire Authority in 2013 and are as follows:
 - To continue to embed equality and diversity within all aspects of service delivery and support functions; and
 - To develop partnerships to improve equality
7. Progress against the current objectives has been analysed and a number of points were noted:
 - There is an appropriate equality impact assessment process in place;
 - Staff have annual equality and diversity training which is monitored by the Training Centre;
 - The Community Risk Department utilise data to target prevention activities in conjunction with partner organisations; and
 - Ethnicity data is captured through Home Fire Safety Checks which provides information on the profile of recipients who receive this service.
8. Public authorities are required to prepare and publish one or more objectives they think they should achieve to support delivery of the aims of the general equality duty. This had to be in place for the first time by 6 April 2012, and revised at least every four years thereafter. The Service is developing a revised set of equality objectives, which will be published in 2017.

Proposed realignment of Equality and Diversity

9. The responsibility for Fire and Rescue Policy has recently transferred to the Home Office. It is anticipated that there is likely to be a greater level of scrutiny of organisational equality and diversity activities in the future and it is therefore important to have robust systems in place to monitor, demonstrate and evidence compliance with the Equality Act.
10. In response to this, the Service has contacted West Midlands Fire Service, Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service to discuss their approach to equality and diversity and benchmark against the following areas:

- Embedding equality and diversity;
- Governance structure;
- Reviewing progress on and refreshing equality objectives;
- Equality and diversity training; and
- Equality impact assessments

11. Following a discussion at the last meeting, it was agreed to disband the Equality and Diversity Advisory Group in its current form and replace it with a working group tasked by an Organisational Development Board, which is led by the Assistant Chief Fire Officer. This is in order to better support the embedding of equality and diversity, and mainstream it into other people and community focused work streams. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer and Head of Corporate Services will provide Committee updates as appropriate.

Equality and Diversity Training

12. All Service employees are required to have annual Ethical Framework training. It was reported that as at 16 June 2016 all but 13 staff across the whole Service have successfully completed their Ethical Framework training. In an effort to support a more flexible approach in the future, the Training Centre is planning to introduce an e-learning package which will cover equality and diversity, and will be developed with counterparts at the Police to explore joint working opportunities.

Asian Fire Service Association

13. A Service representative attended the two day AGM and Development Day event which was held at Devon & Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service on 26 and 27 May 2016. Diane Dunleavy, Equality and Diversity Manager, at Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service was elected as the Chair at the AGM. The focus of the Development Day was the refugee crisis and asylum seekers and knowledge gained was shared with the Community Risk Department, who are currently working with Redditch Borough Council.

MIND Blue Light Regional Conference

14. Service representatives attended the MIND Blue Light event at West Midlands Police on 12 July 2016. The purpose of the event was to explore methods of raising awareness of mental health in the workplace and challenge stigma about mental health problems, and for Blue Light Champions to network and share best practice. Knowledge gained will be used when developing the future Health and Wellbeing approach for the Service. As part of this, collaboration opportunities with West Mercia Police will be explored in areas such as training.

Women in the Fire Service UK National Training and Development Event

15. A Service representative attended the Women in the Fire Service UK Conference which was held at the Fire Service College on 17 to 19 June 2016. The purpose of the event was for colleagues to network and try a range of operational and classroom based activities.

Conclusion

16. The Service continues to make good progress in embedding Equality and Diversity and will continue to provide updates to this Committee.

Corporate Considerations

Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	The core function of the Equality and Diversity Advisory Group is to promote equality of opportunity and thereby help to eliminate unlawful discrimination within the Service. This will help the Authority meet its Public Sector Equality Duty obligations as set out in s.149 of the Equality Act 2010
Strategic Policy Links (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications).	The work of the Equality and Diversity Advisory Group links to the values set out in "Our Strategy".
Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).	None
Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)	None
Equalities (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	Not necessary, this report provides an update of current work and does not require a decision to be made.

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