



COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY

25 JULY 2017

INCLUSIVE FIRE SERVICE GROUP – IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

REPORT OF AREA MANAGER WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to inform members of the publication of Circular NJC/8/17 - Inclusive Fire Service Group - Improvement Strategies (Appendix 1) which seeks the support of employers and employees in implementing the improvement strategies.

BACKGROUND

2. The Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG) is a group led by the National Joint Council (NJC) which has been undertaking a comprehensive piece of work engaging directly with fire and rescue services and their employees to consider equality, diversity, cultural and behavioural issues. The purpose is the development of improvement strategies which could be supported nationally and used locally to deliver improvement.
3. The group includes employer and employee representation from the NJC and representation from the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), the Fire Officers Association (FOA) and the Retained Firefighters Union (RFU). It has also engaged with special interest groups such as Stonewall, Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA), Women in the Fire Service, Women in the Police Service, Fire Brigades Union (FBU) Women's, BME and LGBT groups, Unison, GMB etc.
4. The remit of the IFSG is as follows:
 - (a) To assess the current position in respect of equality, diversity, behavioural and cultural issues; and
 - (b) The identification of guidance in relation to any further strategies that could be used at local level to further encourage improvement;
 - (c) In respect of (a) above, to consider whether it is necessary to gather new monitoring data or whether there is sufficient monitoring data already available.
5. The group has undertaken a substantial amount of work in respect of (a) and (b) above which includes:
 - A behavioural and cultural survey;
 - Engagement with special interest groups;
 - Focus groups with female, BME and LGBT employees;
 - An all staff employee survey, whether uniformed or non-uniformed;
 - Four regional workshops with Equality and Diversity Officers and local union representatives who lead on that area;
 - Two workshops with senior fire service managers, the majority of which were Chief Fire Officers.

IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

6. Consistent messages have emerged across the work undertaken, which has allowed the group to be able to identify improvement strategies relating to four keys areas in addition to some general points:
 - Promoting an inclusive culture (which includes tackling bullying and harassment);
 - Recruitment;
 - Progression and;
 - Retention.

NEXT STEPS

7. Given the comprehensive evidence upon which the strategies are based together with the support and consistency of message across services and union representatives alike, the IFSG believes that the above strategies should be welcomed by the sector and quickly progressed.
8. Each service is asked to consider the strategies in detail and to advise the group of its response by no later than 28 July 2017. The Service's response is attached as Appendix 2. This will inform the future work of the IFSG which will include a monitoring role to identify and measure improvement.
9. In addition, the Service has developed an action plan in response to the circular to ensure that the general points and four key strategy areas are fully considered and progress against each is measured.

CONCLUSION

10. Whilst the Service already satisfies or is progressing the objectives of the strategies, we will not be complacent. Workforce reform is one of the three key pillars of the Fire Reform Programme and there is no doubt that the government are determined to introduce and drive change in these areas which it is hoped will lead to a more inclusive fire service. It is expected that the fire service inspectorate once introduced, will examine progress against the strategies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

11. The members are requested to:
 - (a) **note** the report and publication of Circular NJC/8/17 Inclusive Fire Service Group - Improvement Strategies;
 - (b) **agree** the Service response to the Circular and improvement strategies;
 - (c) **receive** further future reports and monitor progress against the action plan.

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