

COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY

County Durham and Darlington
Fire and Rescue Authority



21 MARCH 2018

INCLUSIVE FIRE SERVICE GROUP IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

Report of Assistant Chief Fire Officer Service Support

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To provide Members with an update on the Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG) Improvement Strategies as published in Circular NJC/1/18.

BACKGROUND

2. The IFSG led by the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services (NJC) undertook a comprehensive piece of work engaging directly with fire and rescue services (FRS) and their employees to consider equality, diversity, cultural and behavioural issues with the purpose of developing improvement strategies which could be supported across the board and used at local level to deliver improvement.
3. The group is independently chaired by Professor Linda Dickens and includes employer and employee representation (Fire Brigades Union (FBU)) from the NJC, representation from the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), the Fire Officers Association (FOA) and the Retained Firefighters Union (RFU). The IFSG has also engaged with special interest groups such as Stonewall, Asian Fire Service Association, Women in the Fire Service, Unison, etc.
4. In addition, the group has worked directly with equality and diversity specialists and FRS employees at all levels across all FRS in the UK to understand their views of what works well but also how best to improve the service as an inclusive place to work and to attract a more diverse workforce.
5. In undertaking the work, the group conducted a comprehensive survey of FRS to ascertain the baseline position. Focus groups were held with a number of women, BME and LGBT employees, which was followed by a confidential survey of all staff. The findings were then discussed through two forms of workshops. The first involved equality and diversity officers from FRS as well as local union representatives. The second workshop involved senior FRS management at Chief Fire Officer level.
6. As a result, a number of improvement strategies were identified which were circulated to all FRS who were asked to consider them at both officer and member levels. 49 out of 50 FRS responded to the survey which included County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS), 1 FRS responded that it would not be able to submit a return.
7. As set out in the attached report (Appendix 1), the strategies were very well received, and responses indicate substantial support. The report also indicates the actions FRS intend to take, the improvements they expect to see and, if appropriate, expected timescales.

8. CDDFRS conducted a gap analysis and developed an action plan which reports our position and progress on the four key areas of the Improvement Strategies which is attached as Appendix 2.

CONCLUSION

9. The Service already satisfies or will continue to progress the objectives of the strategies. 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.
10. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) will utilise a diagnostic question set to assess 'how well the fire and rescue service looks after its people', so it is expected that HMICFRS will examine progress against the strategies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

11. Members are requested to:
 - (a) **Note** the publication of Circular NJC/1/18 IFSG Improvement Strategies;
 - (b) **Note** and comment on the content of the report and the action plan.

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