

**REPORT AUTHOR:** CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

**SUBJECT:** NJC CIRCULAR NJC/8/17 – INCLUSIVE FIRE SERVICE GROUP SUGGESTED STRATEGIES

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Background Papers:

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service People Strategy  
NJC Circular NJC/8/17

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Implications (tick ✓):

LEGAL		FINANCIAL	
HUMAN RESOURCES		EQUALITY IMPACT	
ENVIRONMENTAL		POLICY	
CORPORATE RISK	Known	OTHER (please specify)	
	New	CORE BRIEF	

*Any implications affecting this report are noted at the end of the report.*

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**PURPOSE:**

To inform elected Members of the work of the Inclusive Fire Service Group.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. To consider the strategies suggested by the Inclusive Fire Service Group.
  2. Consider elected Member support to progressing the strategies and agree for continued monitoring through the elected Member chaired Corporate Equality Group.
  3. Respond to the Inclusive Fire Service Group with the detail given within the report.
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## 1. Background

- 1.1 The Inclusive Fire Service Group is independently chaired by Professor Linda Dickens and includes employer and employee representation from the National Joint Council and representation from the National Fire Chiefs Council, the Fire Officers Association and the Retained Firefighters Union. It has also engaged with special interest groups such as Stonewall, Asian Fire Service Association, Women in the Fire Service, Women in the Police Service, FBU women's, BME and LGBT groups, Unison, GMB etc.
- 1.2 Both elected Members and Officers have been asked to consider the strategies suggested and how they can be taken forward in our Service, and provide a response by **28 July 2017**.
- 1.3 The remit of the Inclusive Fire Service Group is as follows:
  - i. the purpose of this group is assessment of the current position in respect of equality, diversity, behavioural and cultural issues;
  - ii. identification of guidance in relation to any further strategies that could be used at local level to further encourage improvement; and
  - iii. in respect of (i) above, to consider whether it is necessary to gather new monitoring data or whether there is sufficient monitoring data already available that can be drawn from, eg the NJC survey, the survey conducted by the FBU, local employee satisfaction surveys, and other sources.
- 1.4 The NJC have asked that the strategies suggested by the group are considered positively at both elected Member and Officer levels. To that end the paper is split into two parts. The first considers the overarching general improvement strategies detailing progress going forward. Appendix A contains the tactical actions which have been considered and the Services response.
- 1.5 It is recommended that these actions are monitored through the Services' Corporate Equality Group.

## 2. Improvement Strategies

The overarching general improvement strategies are:

- 2.1 Inclusivity should be embedded in every aspect of the Fire and Rescue Service.

Inclusivity is a key consideration from recruitment, induction, training, knowledge, progression and retention demonstrated through the Service's focus to be an employer of choice detailed within its People Strategy.

Going forward there is more that can be done and this will continue to be supported utilising good practice and with a review of the People Strategy for National alignment.

- 2.2 There is a need for visible senior ownership and leadership - to lead by example and to ensure that local strategies and initiatives become reality on the ground, thereby embedding inclusion as the norm. Within a Service this should be at Chief Officer level. Within a Fire Authority a specific Member of the Authority should hold the portfolio.

The Chief Fire Officer launched BFRS's first Single Equality Scheme in 2012 ensuring the monitoring of cross-organisational equality objectives. In 2013 the Chief Fire Officer published a comprehensive Equality Statement setting out how BFRS will embed equality, diversity and fairness.

The internal governance structures includes a Corporate Equality Group, delegated to the ACO, with functional areas represented to monitor progressing the equality duty and the single equality action plans. The elected Member of the Human Resources Policy and Challenge Group holds the equality portfolio and chairs the Corporate Equality Group.

The Service has in place a positive action plan to focus progress on inclusion and diversity outcomes.

Going forward: BFRS will work with partners to share good practice for delivering local strategies and initiatives. Progress against the Single Equality Scheme and the Positive Action Plan will continue to be reported to the Corporate Equality Group.

We hope to build on our successful female wholetime recruitment process from last year in 2018.

Training gaps are being identified with the introduction of a suite of unconscious bias training being delivered this year.

The Positive Action Plan and outcomes will continue to be rooted to Corporate Equality Group and Human Resources Policy and Challenge Group.

Following the NFCC's agreement to a Memorandum of Understanding for Inclusion, BFRS will update its actions and issue its own statement.

- 2.3 Union involvement should be recognised as an important factor in delivering improvement, particularly in respect of peer to peer involvement.

The importance and benefit of Trade Union involvement is recognised at BFRS. Facility time has been extended to assist Fire Brigade Union involvement in corporate meetings such as the Corporate Equality Group. A consultation framework exists including a Service Consultative Committee chaired at Principal Officer level and functional level meetings with Heads of Service.

- 2.4 Fire and Rescue Services should ensure the workplace is fit for purpose for all groups of employees including correct Personal Protective Equipment and gender specific station and fireground facilities.

Workwear for operational and support staff are gender specific and issues are monitored and progressed through the Service's Workwear and Clothing Committee.

The present PPE provider measures all operational firefighters individually, thereby providing a bespoke structure firefighting tunic and leggings. Within the collaborative PPE project, the winning tender also measure and make a dedicated wearer package which is designed around individual gender and build.

Station facilities all have gender specific toilet, shower and changing facilities. Shift stations also have individual study/sleep rooms (lockable for privacy).

The Property Team regularly visit stations and any changing requirements will be picked up. There is an annual Property Asset Management Plan and a budget round where Station Commanders can put forward budget bids should any additional station or fireground facilities become necessary.

Fireground facilities include welfare packs on rescue pumps and welfare units (mobile toilets) where there is a prolonged incident. Going forward the new Property Manager will carry out a further review of access requirements.

### 3. Conclusion

In conclusion, BFRS are fully supportive of the work of the group and in ensuring progress is made against the inclusion agenda. It is felt that the strategies themselves do not particularly introduce anything new to existing strategies. However, that does not mean that we do not believe we can do better and drive improvement and outcomes by implementing further initiatives.

### 4. Recommendations

- i. To consider the strategies suggested by the Inclusive Fire Service Group.
- ii. Consider elected Member support to progressing the strategies and agree for continued monitoring through the elected Member chaired Corporate Equality Group.
- iii. Respond to the Inclusive Fire Service Group with the detail given within the report.

**PAUL M FULLER CBE QFSM  
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**

## **Implications**

### **FINANCIAL**

Any budget requirements will be met within existing budget or for part of this years budget setting process.

### **HUMAN RESOURCES**

New policy or a review of existing Human Resources policy or procedures may entail following consideration of the initiatives.

The report from the Inclusive Fire Service Group also included actions which have been considered below:

### **Promoting an Inclusive Culture**

- i. Fire and Rescue Services should ensure that all managers are trained in people management including skills such as how to have difficult conversations and that all managers recognise their responsibilities in promoting an inclusive culture.

In 2013 BFRS delivered a suite of Professional Standards Training focussed on the organisations virtues and national values embedding how to deal with difficult situations and conversations. This has since been built into induction practices for an ongoing common framework. Additionally, Towards Cultural Competence training is delivered for WMs and equivalent. A progression pathway of Leadership training is delivered from a Level 3, Level 5 and Level 7 BTEC/Diploma in leadership and management. Collaboration with other blue light services has seen two pilots of middle manager training as well as utilisation of the cross sector leadership programme.

The Service is a long established supporter of the Executive Leadership programme with a commitment that Corporate Management Team members will complete the course.

- ii. Senior managers should lead by positive example. They should challenge bullying and harassment behaviours at every level, ensuring where necessary that management styles change in order to drive a different and improved culture.

The Service developed and implemented a suite of virtues and a clear policy on conduct. A dedicated policy is in place to support bullying and harassment complaints and behaviour was a key component of the recent Professional Standards training. Organisational temperature is monitored via employee surveys.

Going forward an external facilitator will chair focus groups and managers will have a programme of station and section visits. Internal ambassadors will be trained from within the workforce to support employees in using the bullying or harassment policies.

- iii. Fire and Rescue Services should promote a culture where challenge is accepted and welcomed as a positive contribution. This should be in both directions.

Feedback is valued although it is recognised the routes for it need to be stronger. The Core Brief was designed to invite feedback and although successful in communicating key messages has not delivered the two way engagement sort. Suggestion schemes exist as do the provision of management briefing days. Working groups delivering projects include workforce representation. The Services Communication strategy includes an action plan to improve employee engagement.

- iv. Fire and Rescue Services should ensure that all employees are aware of, and understand, the relevant policies. Where an incident is reported and found to be accurate it is important that action is taken and is seen to be taken as a result. Everyone needs to be confident in the process.

Policies are in place and employee survey's show a high percentage understand the relevant policies. Confidentiality is a difficult component of discipline outcomes and remains challenging in making action transparent across the organisation.

- v. Fire and Rescue Services should monitor the use of discipline and grievance procedures in order to identify and correct any problematic trends. This should also include an element of monitoring at the informal level in order to pick up issues at an early stage.

In place reported as part of workforce statistics and monitored by Corporate Management Team.

- vi. Fire and Rescue Services should consider the creation of trained Equality and Diversity Champions. These are voluntary roles based on enthusiasm and commitment and irrespective of seniority. Champions play a central role in actively supporting the mainstreaming of equality and diversity initiatives and disseminating equality and diversity good practice, whilst also supporting the strategic development of initiatives to create an inclusive culture. Consideration should also be given to the role Allies can play. In relation to LGBT, for example, 'allies' is a term used to describe heterosexual people who believe that lesbian, gay and bisexual people should experience full equality in the workplace and use their role within the organisation to create a culture that is inclusive of everyone.

BFRS is in the process of identifying equality champions to support the work in addressing the under-representation of Black and Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) and female staff in Operational roles. Once established it is envisaged that this group will be expanded to support the mainstreaming of equality and diversity work across the service.

- vii. Fire and Rescue Services should also consider the creation of mediators (and may wish to consider whether they should be provided externally as well as internally).

Where need has required it, external mediators have been utilised. Regional approaches to mediation are being monitored through the Regional Blue Light HRD Collaboration Group.

## Recruitment

- i. There should be a national media campaign covering the full range of the modern firefighter role (similar to the current Army campaign) and what the fire service does in order to inform perception. It should:
- be supported by a website which would also include information on recruitment and potentially divert the interested person to their 'home' Fire and Rescue Service.
  - include information on selection (based on national guidance, not prescription) recognising that the skill set needs to be wider than operational ie people skills, and provide information on fitness requirements.

This suggestion was seen, by far, as the most influential way to alter perceptions and improve diversity. It would be useful in terms of recruitment and retention. Recruitment because it would dispel the myth that the job is just about fighting fires and retention to avoid the job not living up to expectations.

This work was started under a Government programme called Ordinary People Extraordinary career that put the foundations in place for such a national scheme but was stopped due to funding and a change in Government. We look forward to seeing how this national picture progresses.

- ii. Fire and Rescue Services should explore, and where appropriate utilise, recruitment opportunities such as apprenticeships and cadets in order to increase diversity in the workforce.

The Cadet scheme is now established with BFRS and we now have 4 units at Kempston, Leighton Buzzard, Luton and Sandy Stations. Although the Cadet Scheme is not a formal recruitment path, it is recognised as an opportunity to promote the Fire Service as an employer of choice for young people and for those from underrepresented groups in the Community. Cadets are an inclusive and diverse group and within the sections BFRS as a career choice will be inherent to the delivery of lesson plans.

The Service is fully engaged with the national work being progressed in maximising apprenticeships for the benefit of the individual and the organisation.



- iii. Fire and Rescue Services should undertake greater and early engagement with specific communities/schools/colleges and not just when recruitment is on the horizon. This would further reinforce understanding of the role as it is today. This should utilise employee role models whilst being careful to maintain a balance with their core work.

This work is undertaken throughout the year with careful balancing of resources. The position of a recruitment adviser role is being reviewed.

- iv. Fire and Rescue Services should ensure they have visible family friendly working policies supported by a greater use of flexible working arrangements.

Policies are all in place, the use of the policies and the feelings around work life balance are monitored through the Employee Survey.

- v. Fire and Rescue Services should develop an internal communications strategy to explain the difference between positive action and positive discrimination in order to counteract the view of some that an individual has only been employed/promoted because they are female/BME/LGBT. This would be supportive to such individuals and also be helpful in terms of encouraging progression.

The need for Positive Action measures and the difference between lawful action (Positive Action) and unlawful action (Positive Discrimination) is communicated to staff via the Services equalities handbook, through the Induction process, equality training and through recruitment literature used to promote operational vacancies.

- vi. Fire and Rescue Services should consider commissioning work in their own areas to identify any obstacles that local communities feel there are to applying to work with the Service.

BFRS work with many partners and remains committed to improving the safety of our community through the development, and effective management, of a wide range of relationships. These relationships will be the means of delivery of the aims and objectives of the Service's Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP).

Through our relationship strategy we define how the Service should effectively manage its relationships and engage with statutory processes, local networks and other community based organisations

## **Progression**

- i. Fire and Rescue Services should ensure that promotion processes which are fair and transparent are applied consistently and clearly explained to all employees.

Nationally recognised promotion processes have been implemented and updated where necessary. For Grey Book employees this utilises the national PQA framework consisting of assessment and development centres as well as in band processes. Green Book staff have bespoke selection processes implemented depending on the level and complexity of the post.

- ii. Fire and Rescue Services should develop support networks and meaningful mentor/coaching programmes. (Note - mentors/coaches do not need to come from the particular group, eg a BME mentor for a BME crew manager).

Specific Coaching and Mentoring training was provided in 2011 and since has progressed informally for new operational staff to the Service and formally to support promotion to the command roles of Crew Commander and Station Commander. This position is being reviewed in 2017-18 to improve the existing arrangements to support organisational development and will include exploring partnerships with other fire and rescue services and other emergency services colleagues. The Service is also engaged regionally through a strategic HR Development forum to share and learn from notable practice.

- iii. Fire and Rescue Services should encourage interest in promotion in general and through talent spotting by including leadership training, opportunities for development such as job swaps, taster weeks and acting-up/temporary promotion (so that an individual can experience the different role). This should be underpinned by a fair and transparent policy which sets out clearly the criteria by which such opportunities will be offered.

Leadership training is available at differing levels for both Green Book and Grey Book employees. Policies exist on how acting up and temporary promotion opportunities are applied. Further opportunities are being developed through succession and talent management approaches and apprenticeship opportunities for those already employed.

- iv. Fire and Rescue Services should explore the greater use of flexible working arrangements which may also assist with improving, eg the bottle neck at Station Manager level given the extent of on-call commitment which for some may conflict with caring responsibilities.

BFRS is the only Service to have successfully implemented a 24 hour shift pattern for Grey Book staff through local agreement. A RDS project is in place, monitored through Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group to optimise the RDS working model. Flexi policies exist for all employee groups and workforce balance monitored through employee surveys.

## Retention

- i. Introduction of a national media campaign, as set out under 'recruitment', should ensure that recruits are fully aware of the work of the Service and the part they will play in that. Therefore, they should not become disappointed or disengaged as they progress in their career.

Look forward to seeing national developments.

- ii. Fire and Rescue Services should ensure that expectations around fitness levels are clearly explained, and support provided, including the potential impact of female only issues such as maternity or the menopause.

Proactive and preventative resource is in place through an Occupational Health Practitioner and Fitness Adviser provision. Consulted policies in place utilising National best practice guidance. A 97% pass rate in fitness obtained this year.

- iii. As with recruitment and progression, Fire and Rescue Services should explore greater use of flexible working arrangements.

As detailed in sections above.

- iv. Where Fire and Rescue Services do not already conduct exit interviews they should now do so. The outcomes from such interviews should be recorded and monitored to ensure early identification of any themes which can then be resolved for the future.

Exit interviews are available for all staff leaving BFRS. Outcomes are routinely captured by HR, monitored by the Diversity team, details including themes are reported at each Corporate Equality Group (CEG) meeting.  
Embedded

- v. Fire and Rescue Services should consider how best to maintain the interest and commitment of employees through the variety of the work undertaken within the role.

Considered and monitored.