Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy

2021-2024

Contents

Foreword

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The fire and rescue service plays a unique role in the community, not only responding to emergencies and saving lives, but also helping some of the people most at risk in society to stay safe and well. In order to fulfil this role effectively, we must recognise the diverse needs of the communities we serve and gain their trust through a workforce that reflects their identities and understands their needs.

This philosophy has been Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's driving force over the last decade and it is the reason why we have worked incredibly hard to champion equality, celebrate diversity and be inclusive in all that we do. Our work has reaped rewards. We engage with individuals at risk in a more effective and targeted way than ever before helping to keep deaths, injuries and damage from fire at an historic low. On every fire station and in every department we are steadily building teams of colleagues from a range of backgrounds and of different identities. We are regarded across our sector and the wider public service as an open, inclusive and compassionate organisation.

We are proud to introduce our **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy for 2021-24,** which aims to take this vital work to the next level. It sets out a clear framework for how we will continue to forge ever-closer relationships with all sections of our community and cement our growing reputation as an employer of choice.

There are, however, challenges ahead. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted and entrenched many of the social disparities and health inequalities that exist in the UK. There are lessons for our sector to learn from the Grenfell Tower tragedy, in which a disproportionate number of people from low income and ethnically diverse backgrounds lost their lives. The intimidation of transgender people, and those who support them, shows how social media can amplify the voices of those who hold prejudiced opinions about those they view as 'different'. Like all organisations that work to improve people's lives, we must reflect on whether there is more we can do to keep underrepresented communities safe and carry on fighting their corner as visible allies.

This EDI Strategy includes priorities that aim to help us achieve these goals, but we can only do so with the continued and much-valued support and commitment of our colleagues, Cheshire Fire Authority members and partners. We look forward to working with you over the next three years to make further progress with this important agenda.

02   Introduction and context

National picture

Through the Home Office, the Government sets out a clear strategic direction to ensure services are effective, accountable, transparent and reflective of the diverse communities they serve. This is assured through Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspection criteria and a National Framework. At the same time the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) drives improvement and development across the sector.

A **White Paper on Fire Reform** will be published during the lifespan of this EDI Strategy, likely strengthening its importance even further. The paper will set the future direction for English fire and rescue services, ensuring we put the public first, meet the needs of the communities we serve and adapt to societal changes.

The **#MeToo** and **#BlackLivesMatter** campaigns have shown how popular opinion can have a fundamental impact on public policy making. The power of social media in influencing social change is something that we and other public services must consider in the years ahead. At the same time we must also recognise that social media is often a vehicle for perpetuating hate.

HMICFRS found that during the **pandemic** fire and rescue services went above and beyond their normal duties to carry out lifesaving work, but there are too many barriers preventing them from fully supporting communities when they need it most. We have forged new and exciting partnerships during this unprecedented health crisis, providing support to colleagues in local authorities, the NHS, social care and the third sector. We must capitalise on these opportunities to work with partners in order to reach individuals and families who have been previously disengaged.

As highlighted by HMICFRS, the Thomas Review and the Local Government Association Fire Vision 2024, a key challenge for our sector is **workforce transformation**. HMICFRS's 2020 State of Fire and Rescue report cites *"a woeful lack of race and gender diversity"* with only five percent of fire and rescue staff from an ethnic minority group. Services must respond by improving workplace culture, engaging more effectively with all staff and ensuring they attract the best talent from diverse communities. The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) echoes this priority in its own EDI Strategy, stating we must *"strengthen our ability to provide an excellent service by diversifying our staff, promoting inclusion, and creating a fair and equal place to work".*

Local picture

While Cheshire is not home to large ethic communities like some of our neighbouring regions, the county is becoming increasingly **socially and economically diverse**. For example, as people live longer we are seeing an increasingly ageing population and our prevention strategy must adapt accordingly. Cheshire also has a blend of large rural expanse, areas of heavy industry and expanding urban areas. As such, in all four of our local authority areas there is both affluence and neighbourhoods where residents experience significant disadvantage. Our EDI strategy must therefore be flexible enough to enable us to engage communities in ways that suit them. A one-size-fits-all approach will not work.

Cheshire's demography presents a particular **recruitment challenge** in attracting different ethnic and cultural minority groups to work with us. In this respect, we must learn from our success in recruiting a greater proportion of skilled and talented LGBT+ people and women. The pandemic has provided an opportunity for us to review some of our **working arrangements** and we believe the appeal of remote working and alternative working hours could encourage more people from different backgrounds to consider working for us in the future. If our workforce continues to diversify, it will enable us to draw on a broader range of skills and experience, meet the dynamic and ever-changing needs of our communities and attract even more exceptional people to the organisation. It is a virtuous circle.

Our proudest achievements

As a result of our 2017-20 EDI strategy, we have:

- maintained a top 10 place in the **Stonewall Workplace Equality Index**, reaching 8th in 2017, 4th in 2018 and 3rd place in 2019 and 2020. We have been ranked the most LGBT inclusive emergency service in the UK for the past six years.

- run two highly successful national **Proud to Provide** conferences, featuring high profile speakers, experts and people with lived experiences sharing knowledge of LGBT issues.

- have **increased the profile of female staff** who now represent 19% of the workforce.

- revalidated our **Disability Confident Employer** accreditation and become members of the **Business Disability Forum.**

- launched a world class **Maternity and Adoption Policy** and doubled the provision for **Paternity Leave.**

- launched a **Menopause Policy** with supporting guidance for managers.

- strengthened our **staff networks** for women, cultural heritage and disability and run working groups to explore specific EDI issues.

- enhanced our **mental health and wellbeing** provision, employing a dedicated advisor and creating a steering group and staff-led wellbeing community.

- engaged a broader **range of partners** which has enabled us to engage, communicate with and support more people at risk.

- modernised many of our **fire stations** to make them more accessible and inclusive to colleagues and the wider community.

- developed a robust infrastructure to support **neurodiverse individuals** through the entire employment lifecycle.

- undertaken a major programme of **positive action** to recruit more women and people from underrepresented backgrounds and launched a bold accompanying publicity campaign.
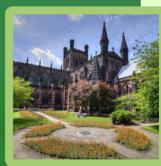
- provided opportunities for all staff to complete a suite of **EDI** training, face-to-face and through e-learning.

- contributed to **national projects and research** with the NFCC, Asian Fire Service Association, Women in the Fire Service and Local Government Association, to increase EDI awareness and find solutions to address inequality.

Cheshire in profile

Area:	919 square miles.
National infrastructure:	Motorway network, flightpaths for Manchester and Liverpool airport, significant nuclear and petrochemical sites.
Population:	1,069,646 people.
Gender split:	Female 51%, Male 49%. (Source: NOMIS mid year 2020 estimations)
Trans status:	1% of the Cheshire population. (Source: Stonewall estimations)
Age breakdown:	27.4% (0-24), 52.4% (25-65) and 20.2% (65+). (Source: NOMIS mid year 2020 estimations)
People with disability or longterm health condition:	Approximately 19%. (Source: ONS and Leonard Cheshire)
Ethnicity:	96.9% of the Cheshire population are White British. (Source: Census 2011)
Religion and belief:	After Christianity, the second most popular religion is Islam, although 22% of residents indicate they do not have a religion. (Source: Census 2011)
Sexual orientation:	Based on Stonewall estimation that between 5%-7% of the population are LGB, this equates to between 53,482 and 74,875 people in Cheshire. (Source: NOMIS mid year 2020 estimations)

Please note that the data included in this strategy will be updated as soon as the Census 2021 data is available.

03 Our legal duties

Our ambition to put EDI at the heart of everything we do has always gone above and beyond meeting our statutory responsibilities.

However, there are important legal duties that Cheshire Fire Authority must uphold through the delivery of this EDI Strategy over the next three years. Compliance with the Authority's general and specific equality duties is fulfilled though the publication of this EDI Strategy, delivery of an accompanying action plan and through the annual publication of comprehensive equality monitoring data.

Central to EDI legislation in England and Wales is the **Equality Act 2010**, which applies to all employers and service providers. It outlines a series of duties designed to protect employees and service users against direct and indirect discrimination.

Since 2017, under the Equality Act 2010 **(Gender Pay Gap Information)** Regulations all employers with 250 or more employees must publish data annually on how much male and female colleagues are paid compared to each other. This information helps to identify disparities and can be used to inform specific work related to gender equality and positive action.

In addition, we must work to the **Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED),** which compels fire and rescue authorities and other public sector bodies to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act.

- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

- publish information demonstrating our compliance with the PSED and to set ourselves specific, measurable equality goals and objectives.

Our Core Values

Be Inclusive
By acting fairly, with integrity, respect and without prejudice.

Do the Right Thing
By holding each other to account for ensuring high standards of professionalism in everything we do.

Act with Compassion
By being understanding and offering help to each other and to our communities with warmth, patience and kindness.

Make a Difference
By making an impact in our organisation and in our communities in whatever ways we can, for as many people as we can.

Our **Core Values**

Developed with colleagues across our Service during 2019 and launched in 2020, our Core Values are the guiding principles by which we undertake all our work. It was highly encouraging during engagement and consultation about what it means to work for the organisation to see EDI highlighted as the most common and consistent theme. As a result **Be Inclusive** is the first of our four Core Values and it is the central aim of this strategy.

In addition to our own Core Values, we fully support the **NFCC Core Code of Ethics.** This sets out five principles to improve cultures and promote inclusion in the sector:

- **putting our communities first**
- **integrity**
- **dignity and respect**
- **leadership**
- **equality, diversity and inclusion.**

Roles and Responsibilities

Cheshire Fire Authority's commitment to EDI and delivering cultural improvements is reflected in the significant time and resources dedicated to ensuring this work is prioritised and well co-ordinated.

However, everyone – not just members, senior officers or the equality and inclusion lead – has a role to play in making the organisation a fairer, more inclusive environment. We can all be leaders in promoting EDI so it becomes a natural part of our day-to-day work, regardless of our position.

- The Authority has appointed **two dedicated member equality leads,** to provide political leadership, advice and support. However, all members have a responsibility for championing and approving EDI activity, as well as acting as figureheads for key projects.

- Our **Chief Fire Officer** is accountable for the implementation of this EDI Strategy by ensuring sufficient resources are made available and chairing the our multi-disciplinary Equality Steering Group.

- With the support of the Equality and Inclusion Officer, **the Service Management Team** are responsible for the co-ordination and strategic management of this EDI Strategy. They ensure that EDI objectives feature in all corporate, departmental and individual action plans and that monitoring and evaluation takes place.

- The **Equality Steering Group meets** quarterly and is chaired by the Chief Fire Officer and attended by the Authority's Equality Member Champions and Heads of Department. All departments and shift systems are also represented, as well as trade unions, staff network groups and individuals representing those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. The group reviews all EDI workstreams and scrutinises monitoring data.

- The **Transformation Function** comprises the Equality and Inclusion Officer, the Policy and Transformation Officer, the in-house Communications team and the Mental Health and Wellbeing Advisor. Reporting to the Director of Transformation, this function is responsible for developing this EDI Strategy, the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) framework, co-ordinating staff network groups and positive action recruitment activities, engaging with stakeholders and completing external benchmarking processes and audits.

- **Managers** and employees in supervisory roles have a responsibility for implementing and promoting this EDI Strategy by ensuring colleagues are adequately informed, trained and supported to carry out their duties with EDI in mind.

- **Staff, trade unions, staff network groups and volunteers** are critical to the delivery of EDI objectives and maintaining a positive, open and inclusive culture. These include those who participate in staff network groups, our allies and equality champions, those who work for representative bodies, our wellbeing community, carers groups and our youth provision. Our trade union colleagues play a vital role in implementing this EDI Strategy and work closely with managers, staff and the Equality and Inclusion Officer to promote EDI.

- We recognise the role we can play in enabling our **partners, contractors and suppliers** to support the delivery of our EDI objectives and, where necessary, learn from our experience. Their behaviours and values have the power to support or undermine our efforts.

Our Strategy
2021 - 2024

At a glance

Our EDI Strategy has been developed in collaboration with managers, colleagues, members and our trade union partners to provide a framework enabling us all to take forward our shared EDI priorities. At the centre of our strategy is our Core Value ambition to Be Inclusive. Achievement of this objective will rely on activity across four interdependent themes and supporting principles. These will be described in detail over the following pages.

Be Inclusive

Our Organisation
- Inclusive leadership
- Openness and transparency
- Accessible

Our People
- Attract
- Engage
- Develop

Our Communities
- Build trust and confidence
- Understand
- Keep safe

Our Partners
- Make a difference
- Collaborate
- Identify

Our organisation

We aim to be an organisation where being inclusive comes as second nature, regardless of the role being fulfilled or the service provided. All senior leaders, Fire Authority members and managers will lead by example, encouraging colleagues across the Service and beyond to be role models in their own right and champion EDI issues that matter most to them. We will learn from our mistakes and be open and transparent about where we can get better. As a result, our policies, systems and processes will develop in ways that do not disregard the specific needs of individuals or groups.

We will achieve this by:

- embedding EDI within our **leadership development programmes** and developing the capability of managers to proactively embed EDI in everything they do.

- ensuring member champions, senior leaders, managers and colleagues are **highly visible** in their commitment to EDI and speak openly at internal and external events.

- maintaining an **ongoing dialogue around EDI**, exploring ways we can work together to address both historic and emerging challenges.

- **embedding our EIA process** across the organisation to ensure the needs of all those impacted by a policy or service development are considered and actions are tracked.

- promoting and monitoring uptake in EDI **training and development** activities, ensuring colleagues are aware of the professional and personal responsibilities.

- enforcing our well-established **zero-tolerance** approach to bullying, prejudice and any form of discrimination.

- continuing to **monitor our suppliers' commitment** to equality, diversity and inclusion throughout the procurement and contract management process.

- **designing and adapting our buildings,** as we continue our capital development programme, to create accessible, inclusive workplaces and community facilities befitting of a modern fire and rescue service.

Our people

We aim to be an organisation that is so well regarded for being inclusive that we become the employer of choice in our sector. We want to attract, recruit and retain the very best talent to firefighting and professional services roles. Our colleagues will reflect the full spectrum of our diverse communities and will feel safe, valued and able to bring their 'whole selves' to work. They will feel supported to reach their full potential, regardless of their background or any challenges they have experienced.

We will achieve this by:

- being **creative and innovative** in our approach to positive action, maximising opportunities to reach under-represented communities and ensuring there are no barriers in our recruitment processes.

- continuing to **monitor workforce demographic data** to identify trends and needs, and target underrepresented groups in recruitment activity.

- providing **targeted support and adjustments** to individuals who need it, at every stage of the employee lifecycle. These might include physical adaptations or variations to roles, hours or working locations.

- regularly reviewing our policies and procedures so they promote a **safe and inclusive culture** where colleagues feel comfortable to be themselves at work.

- continuing to develop a variety of mechanisms enabling people to **feel safe** to make suggestions, raise concerns or make disclosures about issues they experience or observe.

- providing a comprehensive and relevant **education programme** that enables all staff and volunteers to better understand a range of EDI issues.

- **raising awareness** of EDI issues through internal communications, campaigns, events and activities.

- promoting **mentoring, reverse mentoring and coaching** as a means of developing colleagues from minority identities and senior leaders' understanding.

- developing our **staff networks and equality champions** by recruiting more members, widening the themes and providing for people who identify with more than one protected characteristic.

Our communities

We aim to ensure every person we interact with feels they have received the very best service and that we understand their needs. Our frontline staff will understand how EDI impacts on their work and continue to carry out their duties in a respectful, empathetic and compassionate manner. We will have a person-centred approach to keeping children, young people and adults at risk safe through prevention activities, especially those who are disadvantaged. Our protection teams will be aware of EDI issues relevant to technical fire safety and enforcement of legislation when engaging businesses and commercial premises.

We will achieve this by:

- reviewing the way we **engage and consult** with our communities on our proposals and plans, ensuring views are sought from a diverse range of people.

- **communicating** in ways that enable us to connect with all communities and promote safety messages, career opportunities and important information in a civil emergency.

- undertaking **data-led risk and equality analysis** to ensure our full range of services are inclusive, accessible and targeted to those most in need.

- considering the longer term impact of the **Covid-19 pandemic** on our risk profile.

- taking on board and understanding the EDI implications associated with the **Grenfell Tower** fire and the **national fire reform programme.**

- developing **function-specific training and guidance** so that colleagues understand EDI considerations in the delivery of their day-to-day roles.

- ensuring our **volunteers and the young people** we engage with feel able to join our staff networks and attend events relevant to them.

- being **visible EDI champions and role models** by attending community events and festivals, supporting awareness campaigns and being an active partner in helping to shape the national EDI agenda.

Our partners

We aim to develop a broad network of active, meaningful partnerships across all sectors and sections of the community. These will help us engage with marginalised groups, understand their needs, develop our EDI expertise and extend our reach. We will share our experiences with other fire and rescue services and public organisations and seek out examples of notable practice elsewhere.

We will achieve this by:

- developing relationships with **specialist EDI interest groups** that support the delivery of this strategy and enable us to identify new and emerging groups of people that are deemed at risk.

- continuing to engage with **external benchmarking and other relevant organisations** to ensure we are following best practice and are leaders in EDI.

- organising **local, regional and national events** that not only provide learning opportunities for our staff, volunteers and young people, but also partners with whom we can work to achieve inclusive workplaces and services.

- being active and influential members of the **NFCC EDI network.**

- working with partners to **target safety messages** and to **promote the Service as an employer of choice.**

07 Making it happen

This EDI Strategy provides a high-level framework for EDI for the three years spanning 2021-24. Primarily it will be delivered through a detailed annual EDI action plan, progress against which will be performance-managed by the Equality Steering Group, chaired by the Chief Fire Officer as the accountable officer for its implementation.

In addition, an EDI report is produced by the Equality and Inclusion Officer every six months for Cheshire Fire Authority's Performance and Overview Committee, to summarise progress and appraise members of future activity.

Our annual departmental plans and Service-wide strategies and programmes are informed by comprehensive Equality Impact Assessments and include clear EDI objectives and actions. This ensures we consider the potential impacts on under-represented groups and people that fall under the nine protected characteristics outlined in the Equality Act 2010.

Every member of staff will have an annual appraisal, which includes an assessment of performance against their objectives, their wellbeing and their commitment to Core Values and creating a positive workplace culture.

As a result of all these actions, we are embedding our commitment to EDI within our practices and procedures.

Our Networks

Our three staff and volunteer EDI networks will play in integral role in the delivery of this EDI Strategy. They are led by employees, supported by allies and have a seat on the Equality Steering Group.

Firepride

Our LGBT+ staff and volunteer network exists to:

- help our Service provide an environment where everyone can feel safe in being open about their sexual orientation or gender identity.

- ensure the organisation recognises the challenges that LGBT people sometimes face at work.

- be ambassadors for our Service within the LGBT communities of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington.

- act as a sounding board for any part of our Service that wishes to engage with the LGBT community.

- join forces with LGBT colleagues in partner organisations and the community to raise the profile of LGBT issues.

- make new contacts, network, get together socially and make a difference.

Limitless

Our women's network exists to:

- help the Service to create and maintain an open workplace culture and an environment where women can feel supported and have access to opportunities to the same extent as their male colleagues.

- ensure the organisation recognises and understands the barriers and challenges that female staff and volunteers sometimes face at work.

- act as a sounding board for any part of our Service that wishes to engage with women in the community.

- assist with and develop coaching and mentoring opportunities for female staff, as well as reverse mentoring and coaching opportunities for male colleagues.

- inform, challenge and review corporate documents, policy and strategy through consultation and engagement.

- be ambassadors for the Service with women in Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington.

- join forces with female colleagues in the fire and rescue service, partner organisations and the community to raise the profile of women working in the fire and rescue sector.

- provide a network and forum to make friends, get together socially and build links across the organisation.
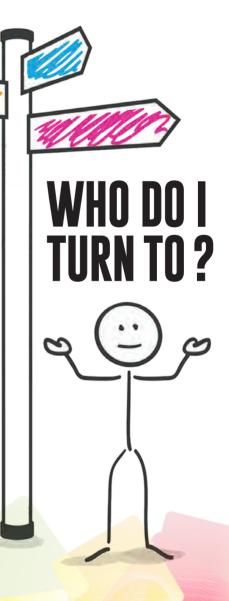
REACH

Our embryonic cultural heritage network exists to:

- provide a platform for staff, volunteers and young people in the service to discuss developments and challenges surrounding race equality and other interconnecting themes.

- help raise awareness and increase visibility of race equality and other interconnecting themes.

- act as sounding board to ensure the service is promoting race equality and inclusion at all levels and across all work streams.

- identify race equality champions who can represent the service at external events and conference.

09 Support and resources

The following policies and resources support the Service's efforts to create and maintain a positive culture of equality, transparency and inclusion.

- Annual Equality Monitoring Report.
- People Strategy.
- Equality Impact Assessment Template and Guidance.
- Positive Action Toolkit.
- Gender Pay Gap.
- Trans Guidance.
- Who do I turn to?
- 50/50 recruitment poster campaign.
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020-2024.
- Mental Health and Wellbeing (Steering Group, Champions and Community).
- Maternity Scheme, Champions and Resources.
- Menopause Policy, Champions and Resources.
- Ramadan Guidance.
- Staff Networks.

WHO DO I TURN TO ?

Fire doesn't care about gender, race or sexual orientation...

...Neither do we.

There are no Firemen or Firewomen in the modern service - just Firefighters. We're a close team of self-disciplined individuals who have each other's backs.

It doesn't matter about your gender, race or sexual orientation; we're looking for like-minded team players to join today.