



Including *everyone*

Our Equality, Inclusion
and Diversity Strategy
2025 - 2028

April 2025



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This strategy has been produced by Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's Communications, Engagement and Inclusion Team. If you would like this information in another format or language, please call **01606 868700** or email **equalities@cheshirefire.gov.uk**



We are active members of:



Introduction



Alex Waller
Chief Fire Officer
and Chief Executive

The principles of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) are at the heart of everything Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service does.

Without a workforce that represents, understands and meets the needs of our increasingly diverse communities, we simply could not keep people safe from fire and other harm. That is the reason why one of our four core values is **‘being inclusive, by acting fairly, with integrity, respect and without prejudice’**.



Cllr Stef Nelson
Chair of Cheshire Fire
Authority

By making EDI a priority over the last 20 years, we have already made significant progress. Through one of the UK’s most ambitious prevention programmes, every year we engage with thousands of people of all ages and backgrounds, using our understanding of the different risks they face to target our efforts where they will have greatest impact. We also work with an increasingly diverse range of businesses and commercial premises to ensure they meet their fire safety responsibilities. As a result, we’re seeing fewer fire incidents than ever before and fewer deaths and injuries from fire.

The firefighters, community safety teams and professional services colleagues who deliver this lifesaving work now include more women, people from minority ethnic backgrounds, people with disabilities and people who identify as lesbian, gay, bi or trans (LGBT) than ever before. They are able to be themselves, and give their best at work and to their communities, because together we have created a service that is “good at ensuring fairness and promoting diversity”, and has “well-defined values” and “a positive working culture”*.

This strategy, which we have developed in consultation with our staff inclusion networks, is our commitment to maintaining and building on this work over the next three years.

There are fewer objectives than in our previous EDI strategies, but our ambitions for the next three years are clear, mission-focused and measurable. They will enable us to meet our statutory commitments and are, for the first time, clearly organised under two simple themes of ‘our people’ and ‘our communities’.

Our strategy’s central theme, however, is **Including EVERYONE**, because we believe that everyone benefits from a fire and rescue service that values fairness, understanding and mutual respect.

* His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, 2023.

Context

This EDI strategy supports the fulfilment of the:

- United Nations' [sustainable development goals](#) of gender equality, reduced inequalities, and peace, justice and strong institutions.
- [Human Rights Act 1998](#), to ensure the fundamental rights and freedoms to which everyone in the UK is entitled.
- [Equality Act 2010](#), to protect everyone against discrimination and unfair treatment.
- [Public Sector Equality Duty](#) (Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010), requiring us to:
 - eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the 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 equality information, equality objectives and [gender pay gap information](#).

This strategy is also informed by a number fire and rescue service priorities, including:

- [National Fire Chiefs Council's \(NFCC's\) Core Code of Ethics](#) and its supporting [Fire Standard](#), which promotes consistency of ethics and behaviours across the fire and rescue service.
- [NFCC's Maturity Model for EDI](#) which helps fire and rescue services ensure EDI is embedded in its leadership and overall way of working.
- His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service (HMICFRS's) [assessment criteria](#) that relate to fairness and diversity.
- recommendations of HMICFRS's [Values and Culture in Fire and Rescue Services](#) report, which challenges services to create and maintain safe and inclusive workplaces.

And it supports the delivery of our:

- [Community Risk Management Plan \(CRMP\) 2024-28](#), which sets out ways in which we will deliver more prevention, more protection and a better emergency response.
- People Strategy 2025-28, our blueprint for attracting, retaining and developing talent and leadership in a safe, inclusive and healthy workplace environment.
- Core Values of being inclusive, doing the right thing, being compassionate and making a difference.
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, which describes the procedures for how we govern EDI in our Service, together with roles and responsibilities.

Our strategy at a glance

Including *everyone*

In our workplace:



Everyone can be themselves

and feel safe, respected and able to give their best



Everyone has a voice

so they can share their unique experiences and shape our Service for the better



Everyone has a fair opportunity

to reach their full potential because of their skills and talents, not their backgrounds

Serving our communities by:



Understanding everyone

through talking and listening to people from a diverse range of backgrounds



Meeting the needs of everyone

through services that recognise the different risks and challenges people face



Supporting everyone

by being proud champions for diversity and inclusion, and strong and visible allies to people who feel underrepresented

Our workplace



Everyone can be themselves

and feel safe, respected and able to give their best

Objectives

- Deliver a programme of team-based learning on subjects such as **inclusive leadership, psychological safety, active bystandership** and **allyship**.
- Make our **processes for dealing with concerns** clearer and more trusted, so that more people feel safe to raise an issue if they need to.
- Widen participation in our **staff inclusion networks** by supporting leads to make meetings and activities more accessible.
- Develop and promote an **anti-sexual harassment at work policy** and training programme to comply with the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023.
- Support our staff inclusion networks to create opportunities for colleagues to **celebrate and learn about difference** through cultural celebrations, conferences and networking events.

Measures of success

- ✓ Good levels of participation, positive evaluation from participants and continued low numbers of dignity at work issues.
- ✓ Increase in positive response to Staff Survey question about feeling able to be yourself at work.
- ✓ Increase in positive response to Staff Survey question about feeling safe to raise concerns.
- ✓ Increase in numbers of colleagues attending network meetings and events.
- ✓ Continued low numbers of dignity at work issues and increase in positive response to Staff Survey question about feeling safe to raise concerns.
- ✓ Good levels of participation, positive evaluation from participants and greater understanding of celebrating difference.
- ✓ Increase in positive response to Staff Survey question about whether our Service is inclusive.



Everyone has a voice

so they can share their unique experiences and shape our Service for the better

Objectives

- Encourage a **wider range of colleagues and our staff networks to share their views** through the Engaging Everyone internal communications and engagement channels, launched in 2024.
- More routinely involve staff inclusion networks and a diverse range of colleagues in the **development of meaningful equality impact assessments** (EIAs) of new policies, projects, activities and facilities.

Measures of success

- ✓ Increased levels of engagement with Engaging Everyone channels, especially among frontline firefighters and community safety teams.
- ✓ Simpler process for involving networks and colleagues in EIAs and a greater number of EIAs that include network contributions.





Everyone has a fair opportunity

to reach their full potential because of their skills and talents, not their backgrounds

Objectives

- **Challenge traditional stereotypes** of people who work for the fire and rescue service in all our public-facing communications.
- Ensure **recruitment campaigns** reach people who are currently underrepresented in our workforce.
- Review **recruitment and selection processes**, to ensure fairness and that no one is disadvantaged because of their identity or background.
- Continue to refine our Elev8 and Wider Horizons **development programmes**, which help colleagues overcome barriers to career progression in our Service.

Measures of success

- ✓ Higher levels of awareness of diversity of roles and required skills, particularly among younger people and people from other underrepresented groups.
- ✓ Profile of applicants and new starters should reflect the diversity of the Cheshire population in general in terms of protected characteristics.
- ✓ Profile of candidates at every stage of the process should reflect that of the initial pool of applicants.
- ✓ Positive evaluation from colleagues participating in the programmes, greater diversity at all levels and reduction in gender and other pay gaps.



Our workforce at the end of 2024

While we employ a more diverse range of people than ever before, like the rest of the fire and rescue sector we have a long way to go before our workforce truly represents the communities we serve (see page 13). Over the next three years, we will continue to focus our attraction and recruitment activities at people who may never have considered a career in the fire and rescue service, particularly women and people from diverse ethnic backgrounds. We will also explore ways of engaging younger people, arguably the future of our Service, through traineeships and apprenticeships.

Total workforce

 **771** people
across **856** roles

Age

 Only **4.3%**
aged **17-24**

Disability

 **4.6%**

LGB

 **4.8%**

 **9.61%**
GENDER PAY/GAP



2024 Mean hourly rate



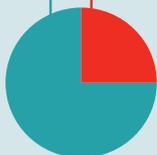
£16.56



£18.32

Gender overall

74.9% men
25.1% women



Gender of firefighters

87.5% men
12.5% women



Ethnic diversity

90.7% white
5.8% minority ethnic
3.5% undisclosed



A key area of focus for this strategy, and our new People Strategy, will be to ensure we maintain a workplace culture that is inclusive, safe and respectful. Over the coming years we would like to see more staff agreeing with these statements.

“I am able to be myself” **82%**

“The Service is inclusive” **80%**

“I would feel safe to report concerns if I had them” **65%**

(Sources: Q2 2024/25 Equality Monitoring Report, 2024 Gender Pay Gap report and 2023 Staff Survey)

Our communities



Understanding everyone

through talking and listening to people from a diverse range of backgrounds

Objectives

- Improve the range and quality of **data we gather about our communities** to help us carry out more meaningful EIAs and develop diversity profiles of each fire station area.
- Widen participation in our formal **public consultations and surveys** by engaging a broader range of community groups.
- Ensure the ways we measure **service user satisfaction and gather insight** include people from underrepresented backgrounds.

Measures of success

- ✓ Greater knowledge among teams of where to focus engagement and richer feedback to inform EIAs of future plans and developments.
- ✓ Profile of respondents should reflect the diversity of the Cheshire population in general in terms of protected characteristics.
- ✓ Profile of respondents should reflect the diversity of the Cheshire population in general in terms of protected characteristics.





Meeting the needs of everyone

through services that recognise the different risks and challenges people face

Objectives

- Deliver **training and awareness** so staff can continue serving all members of the community with dignity, respect and cultural awareness.
- Partner with diverse community groups to widen participation in our prevention programmes and deliver joint outreach initiatives that **keep people from underrepresented communities safe.**
- Introduce regular **equity reviews** of the different ways we interact with the public, to identify and address any factors that may result in some people receiving a better service than others.

Measures of success

- ✓ Good levels of participation and positive evaluation from participants and greater cultural awareness. Positive feedback from service users and partners that represent them.
- ✓ Better understanding of risk among target communities, positive feedback from partners and fewer incidents involving people from underrepresented backgrounds.
- ✓ Tangible improvements to the way we provide services that EIAs might not have anticipated.





Supporting everyone

by being proud champions for diversity and inclusion, and strong and visible allies to people who feel underrepresented

Objectives

- Adopt an **inclusive by default approach to communicating and engaging** with the public, promoting the themes of inclusion, fairness, dignity and respect in our messaging and branding and making our channels communications accessible.
- Continue to be a **proud and visible** ally to underrepresented groups at community events and by amplifying awareness campaigns that align with our core values.
- Continue to support the **development of EDI in our sector** by taking part in benchmarking schemes and local, regional and national inclusion networks and working groups.

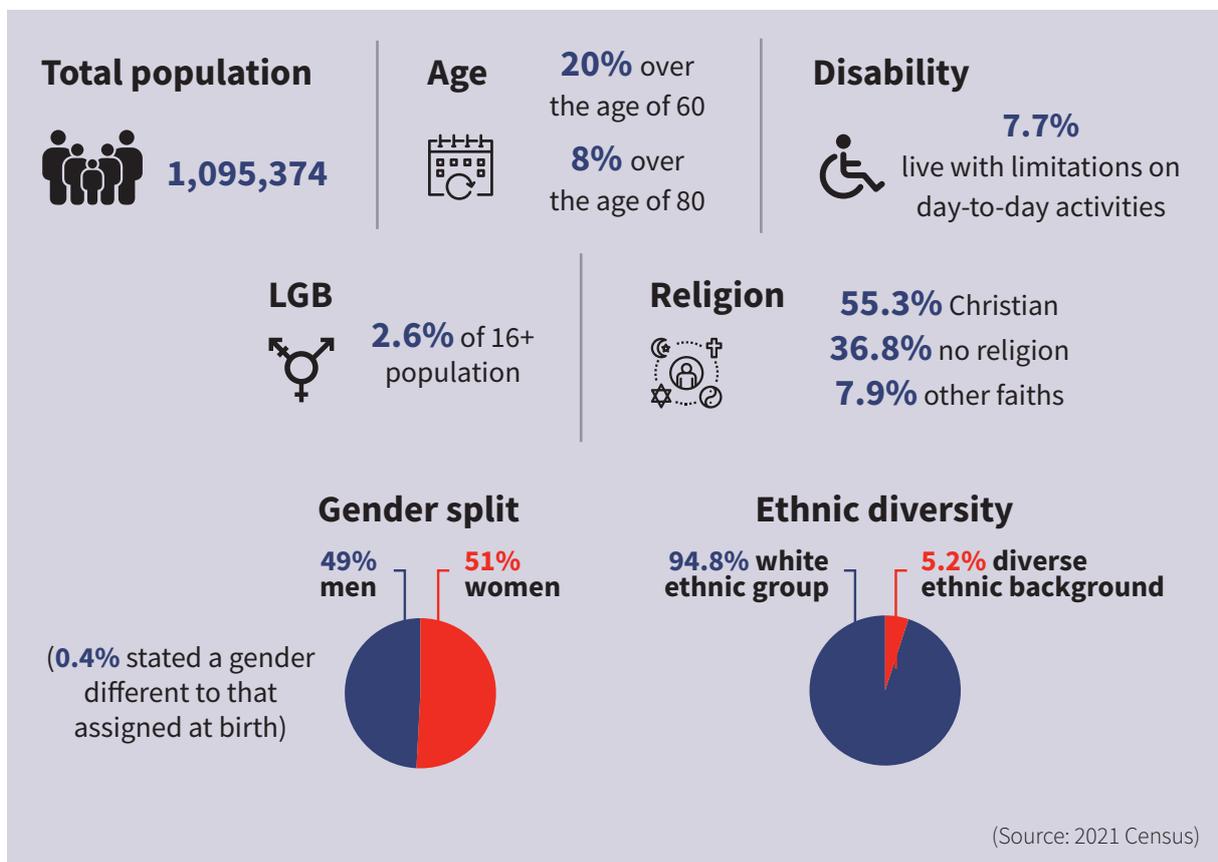
Measures of success

- ✓ Respondents to our public perception survey saying our Service stands for inclusion, positive partner feedback and increased diversity of interest in recruitment and other campaigns.
- ✓ Positive feedback from members of underrepresented communities and increased trust and confidence from those groups in our public satisfaction survey.
- ✓ Recognition by stakeholders of our EDI work as good practice and of our Service as an EDI leader in our sector.



Cheshire at a glance

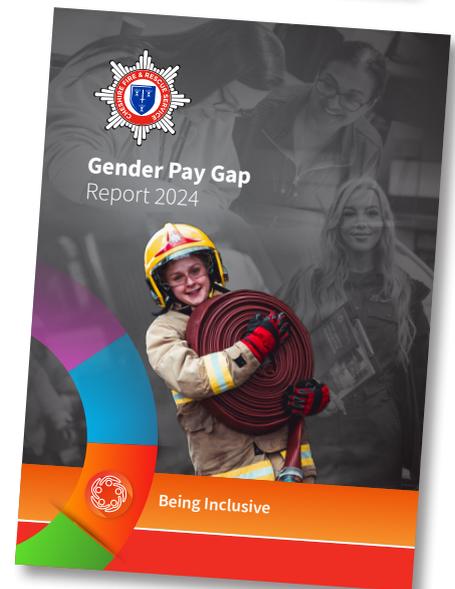
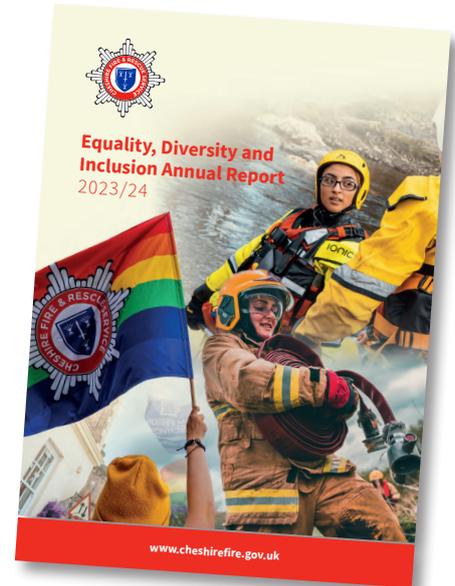
Thanks to its strong economy and thriving cultural scene, Cheshire's population is growing and becoming ever more diverse. This data helps us to not only compare the composition of our workforce to the communities we serve, but also helps us identify risk and plan our services to meet the needs of as many people as possible. Over the three years of this strategy, we want to get a deeper and more dynamic understanding of the local population to strengthen even further the work we do to keep people safe.



Making it happen

To support the delivery of the objectives set out in this strategy, over the next three years we will as a matter of course:

- produce an annual **EDI action plan**, setting out our key tasks and actions
- monitor progress through our quarterly **EDI Group**, chaired by the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, with representation from departments, staff networks, representative bodies and Fire Authority EDI member champions
- present an **EDI annual report** to the Fire Authority's Performance and Overview Committee each September and publish it on our website
- include in our action plans, any tasks required in **response to recommendations** made during inspections, participation in external benchmarking or accreditation schemes, and good practice advocated within the fire and rescue sector
- make use of **national resources** where appropriate, including National Fire Chiefs Council's EDI toolkits and equality of access information
- produce and publish an annual **Gender Pay Gap Report** and work towards reporting other pay gap data when this requirement is introduced
- continue to **monitor the protected characteristic profile** of people applying for roles, employees, those undertaking training activities, those who have been promoted and leavers
- where practicable, **monitor the protected characteristic profile and experiences of people accessing our services**
- continue to enforce **a zero-tolerance approach** to bullying, harassment and victimisation on the grounds of age, sex (including misogyny), gender or trans status (transphobia), sexual orientation (homophobia or biphobia), ethnicity (racism or xenophobia), ability or disability, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy, or religion or belief.



Definitions

Together, the principles of **equality, equity, diversity and inclusion** form the foundation of a fair, respectful and supportive environment where everyone can thrive.

- **Equality** refers to treating everyone the same, rather than differently or less favourably, because of protected characteristics such as age, race, sex, disability, etc. It means providing equal access to opportunities, ensuring fair treatment and promoting social justice.
- **Equity** goes a step further by recognising that different people face different barriers. It means giving people what they need to reach an equal outcome, rather than giving everyone the same thing. Equity ensures that resources, opportunities and support are distributed fairly and according to individual differences and needs.
- **Diversity** refers to the range of differences within society. This includes visible differences such as race, sex, age and physical ability, as well as less visible factors like background, skills, experiences, perspectives and beliefs. A diverse working environment values and celebrates the unique contributions that people with various characteristics bring.
- **Inclusion** is about creating an environment where everyone feels valued, respected and empowered to contribute fully. It involves removing barriers to participation and fostering a culture where everyone belongs. Inclusion means celebrating difference, rather than tolerating it, enabling people to bring their full selves to work or to a community.
- **Protected characteristics** are specific attributes outlined in the Equality Act 2010, which are legally protected from discrimination. These characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Discrimination towards any of these characteristics is prohibited in areas such as employment, education and public services.
- **Positive action** refers to measures that address disadvantage or underrepresentation of people with protected characteristics. It includes creating fair and equitable opportunities through targeted initiatives like outreach, training or mentoring, enabling people to overcome barriers and compete equally. It ensures a level playing field for all, unlike positive discrimination, which is unlawful and involves giving preferential treatment, for example, by recruiting to quotas.

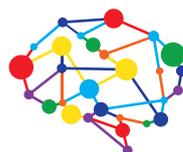


A network for *everyone*

Our **staff networks** are here to enable colleagues who share protected characteristics to **support** each other, **raise awareness** of key issues and **have a voice** in our Service's development.



**Armed Forces
Network**



Divergence
Neurodiversity Network



Firepride
LGBT+ Network



Limitless
Women's Network



REACH
Race Equality And Cultural
Heritage Network

If you want to find out more, or would like to join one of our staff networks, please email: equalities@cheshirefire.gov.uk

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