

An inclusive fire service

Recruitment
and inclusion

Foreword

At the start of last year the Local Government Association (LGA) published a memorandum of understanding (MoU)¹ on equality, diversity, behaviours and organisational culture in the fire service, co-signed by the Asian Fire Service Association, National Fire Chiefs Council, Fire Brigades Union, Fire Officers' Association, GMB, quiltbag, Retained Firefighters Union, Stonewall, Unison and Women in the Fire Service.

The MoU was a recognition that the fire service had to change.

The existing firefighter workforce was just five per cent female and overwhelmingly white. For the first time in five or more years services were looking to recruit new firefighters and the Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC) was determined to ensure that this round of recruitment would leave the fire service looking more like the communities it serves.

We have a very long way to go to achieve this, but National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) monitoring has shown that we are making progress.

The FSMC is determined to see this improvement continue.

Since publishing the MoU and publicising it to the membership of the Fire Commission, we have promoted its values; through last year's conference publication 'An inclusive service:– The twenty-first century fire and rescue service',² two fire leadership essentials courses and a masterclass on inclusion for fire authority members.

1 www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/memorandum-understanding-f0f.pdf

2 www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/10.5%20final%20An%20Inclusive%20Service%20-%20Twenty%20first%20century%20FRS_web.pdf

In addition, the LGA and NFCC have been involved in work, led by the Home Office, on a forthcoming campaign around the image of the firefighter, following research that suggested this deterred a more diverse range of applicants. The campaign material will include a bootcamp/fitness guide explaining the type of exercises which a potential recruit might undertake to increase their fitness, a role models document and a myth buster document.

The LGA has also been involved in helping to shape the new inspection regime – again alongside the NFCC. We have sought to ensure that our diversity and inclusion ambitions are reflected in the judgement criteria, out for consultation at the time of writing, and that these values will be embedded in the changes to our refreshed peer support offer that will sit alongside the new inspection system.

The MoU recognised the key role of the Inclusive Fire Services Group (IFSG) in taking the inclusion agenda forward. The IFSG is independently chaired by Professor Linda Dickens and includes employer and employee representation from the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services (NJC) and NFCC, the Fire Brigades Union, the Fire Officers Association and the Retained Firefighters Union. On 5 June the IFSG contacted all chief fire officers, chief executives and clerks to fire authorities, chairs of fire authorities and fire and rescue authority directors of HR, enclosing a number of improvement strategies and asking them 'to consider the strategies suggested at both member and officer levels, how they can be taken forward in individual services, and provide a response by 28 July 2017'. An update on this work is provided on page 24.

We are determined to be a service that reflects the communities it serves. Fire Vision 2024, published alongside this collection of case studies and owned by the Fire Commission, sets a challenging new target to increase the rate of female firefighter recruitment to 30 per cent nationally by 2024/5, while individual fire services should reflect the ethnic diversity of the community they serve in both frontline staff and staff as a whole – proportions that should be mirrored in senior positions.

We know that these targets will not be easy to achieve. We will be inviting signatories to the MoU to attend a summit this spring to review progress against the MoU's commitments and discuss future initiatives.

As the case studies in this document show, much is being done to ensure the current round of recruitment increases the extent to which we represent the communities we serve. I hope you find them inspiring. They are early stages in a long journey.

Councillor Ian Stephens

Chair, Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC)

Contents

Gloucestershire Fire And Rescue Service	6
Humberside Fire and Rescue Service	8
West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service	10
Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service	12
Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service	14
Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service	16
Surrey Fire and Rescue Service	18
Kent Fire and Rescue Service	20
London Fire Brigade	22
Inclusive Fire Service Group	24

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service

A new recruitment and selection strategy at Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service that emphasises candidates' personal strengths and values, rather than focussing narrowly on physical strength, has yielded a diverse group of 15 future firefighters, eight of them female.

The process began with a review of the National Firefighters' Selection Test, introduced in 2006 and still used across the country, which Gloucestershire had come to regard as outdated. Guidance for the test says it is 'designed to reflect operational practices' – only one aspect of the modern firefighters role.

Mark Astle, Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service's Head of Personnel and Organisational Development, explained: "Within the tests there is little about personal attitude, behaviours or values. So we decided to write our own evaluation process".

Before the new selection strategy came in to operation, Gloucestershire began to lay positive foundations by using current firefighters as role models. Firefighters from underrepresented groups went out to engage with the community, including colleges and universities, with the aim of educating parents, as much as children, about career progression and opportunities within the fire service. According to Mark, "it is only possible to attract a diverse workforce if you portray a diverse workforce".

After feedback revealed that many women thought they were not strong enough to become firefighters, a series of 'have-a-go' days both at the station and out in the community looked to bust this myth. The events explained the diversity of a modern firefighter's role, with the increased focus on prevention, protection and supporting local health service initiatives.

A traditional media campaign alongside social media was led and run by the new generation of firefighters. It included biographies from existing members of staff, such as a mother of two who talked candidly about how she had "never imagined she would become a firefighter, but look at me now!"

Candidates were encouraged to #Buildyourfuture with Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service and a sense of anticipation and excitement was created with an online countdown to the closing date. Tweets outlining the role of a modern firefighter and the positive development culture within Gloucestershire were used to entice applicants. This led to 700 inquiries, with 450 applications completed and progressing to the next stage.

Initial applications were assessed by a team of six, who scored the same one question in each application to avoid bias or varying approaches to responses.

Some 160 candidates were invited to an evaluation day, which was facilitated by members of Gloucestershire's award winning Inclusive Network Group. The group, comprised of staff members from across the organisation, takes an active role in its development and produced their core values, which formed the basis of the marking criteria on the evaluation day.

In the past, the traditional selection day had mainly assessed applicants' physical strength and manual dexterity. Under the new selection strategy of 'recruiting for values and train for skills', candidates instead completed a new mental agility test, took part in a group discussion and worked together to come up with a group presentation on a safety topic of their choice.

At this point, candidates also underwent a breathing apparatus phobic test and a height test – the two elements of a candidate's makeup that the fire service cannot alter or train someone in.

“Throughout the process we endeavoured to ensure a positive candidate experience that provided opportunities to really demonstrate their personal strengths and values” said Mark. “We didn't have officers marching around trying to deselect people, we aimed to get the best out of individuals, creating an environment for them to demonstrate their finest qualities.”

Every facilitator involved in all aspects of selection underwent unconscious bias training beforehand and every effort was made to ensure the facilitators were representative of the group being evaluated.

The next stage was a fitness test, which led to the final 65 candidates for interview. “We haven't reduced fitness requirements, and putting the physical testing at the end of the process concerned some people” said Mark. “But we take the view that if we had the perfect candidate but they weren't quite fit enough, we will invest in them to make them fit, ensuring that by the time they start as a firefighter, they are fully fit to carry out the role. We can train for fitness, but you can't always train the right values, behaviours and qualities.”

According to Mark, fire service recruitment and selection needs to change to fit the requirements of a modern service.

Councillor Nigel Moor, Cabinet Member for Fire, Planning and Infrastructure said “I am delighted to see that Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service's innovative approach to recruitment has not only generated a group of firefighters with the right personal strengths and values, but also produced a group that is representative of our communities”.

Humberside Fire and Rescue Service

As the first fire service internationally to sign up to a United Nations movement to advance gender equality, Humberside Fire and Rescue Service is taking action to support women and igniting interest in the movement elsewhere.

The UN's HeForShe movement aims to galvanise support from men, as well as women, for gender equality.

Miriam Heppell, Humberside Fire and Rescue Service's Director of Human Resources said: "The basic premise of HeForShe is that equality of the genders is not a woman's issue, it is a human rights issue. We discovered that no other fire services internationally had joined the movement, so we decided that we would be the first".

As part of putting its name to the movement, Humberside has made two main commitments; to recruit more women through a better understanding of why women are reluctant to apply to the fire service generally and to improve the experience of women that work for Humberside, including supporting better career progression.

Humberside has commissioned research from the University of Hull to explore why the fire service has struggled with female recruitment. In 2017, a Humberside recruitment movement aimed at filling 20 firefighter places generated 2,000 applications. Only 17 per cent of applicants were women, however, and very few of these demonstrated the fitness and strength capabilities that are part of the selection process.

Miriam explained: "We undertake many activities to attract female applicants; we run positive action activities; we are looking at apprenticeships and designing a cadet scheme, to reach school age women and encourage them early to see the fire service as a career; we run bootcamps; we are talking to athletic women who play in football and rugby teams and who go to the gym to try to encourage them to consider the fire service. We are doing all that work and some of it is going to have some benefit. But to be more effective than this scatter gun approach, we need to fundamentally understand why women are not applying".

As part of the celebrations for International Women's Day 2017, a HeforShe workshop was held early in 2017 to which various men from across the service were invited. Participants took part in exercises to trigger thinking about gender and equality. The impact on some of the attendees was profound.

"Some of them walked out of the room in tears saying: 'I'm married with two daughters and I never realised the disadvantages the women in my life would come up against'" said Miriam.

Allied to this work to ensure women have a positive experience within the fire service and progress through it, is the development of a core skills framework. This has involved exploring what skills are necessary and desirable across the board, not just in terms of firefighter competency, but in terms of what are often labelled 'softer skills', such as good communication, awareness of mental health and an understanding of equality issues.

Everyone in the service, regardless of their job, will be expected to have this set of core skills and a training programme will be rolled out to support the aim.

Female staff are also being encouraged to become involved with the Women in the Fire Service network. Funding is being provided for 15 women to attend its annual training and development weekend in June. Humberside will also host a regional pilot for a women's development programme, focusing on elements such as assertiveness, leadership skills and building confidence.

Humberside has now become a HeForShe advocate, encouraging other fire services and organisations around the country to sign up to it. As part of that work, presentations have been made to the National Fire Chiefs Council and Yorkshire and Humberside Employers Association. Other fire services are now approaching Humberside for advice on how to become involved.

"It is spreading and that was our aim all along" said Miriam, "to ignite some fire behind it and get people on board."

Councillor John Briggs, Chair of Humberside Fire and Rescue Authority said: "I am delighted to add my name to the list of those being 'counted in' to the HeForShe pledge and what is particularly pleasing is to be a member of the first fire and rescue service in the UK to do so.

We intend to make gender equality part of the fabric of our service. We are not interested in tokenism, this decision of ours will not be put in a drawer and forgotten about.

I am proud that we are committed to increase the numbers of both women applying for, and being recruited to, firefighter posts in this service and we intend to improve the engagement experience, development and promotion opportunities of and for women in our workforce.

I have no hesitation in commending the principles of HeForShe to all other organisations. We're counted in, now it's your turn to join us."

More information can be found on the HeForShe website: www.heforshe.org/en

West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service

When West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service found that some promising new recruits from underrepresented groups were initially unsuccessful in its selection tests, it devised the 'nearly there' initiative to give them the support and encouragement to try again.

The fire service's first recruitment drive in nearly 10 years, launched in 2017, produced very positive results in terms of the diversity of applications. Some 700 were from women, 12 per cent of the total, while 11 per cent were from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups (over 600 people).

However, the retention of those applicants through the selection process proved more difficult.

In the first stage of the process, which involved an online assessment of values, decision making ability and competence in numeracy, literacy and mechanical reasoning, there was a disproportionate failure rate among BAME candidates in the situational judgement test.

For female applicants, the sticking point was the physical assessment stage, where upper body strength is paramount and candidates face a timed test carrying out simulations wearing full fire kit. Of the 45 women who took part in the physical tests, there was a 10 per cent success rate, meaning only four were successful.

Subsequent analysis of the data from the selection stages has led to the development of the 'nearly there' strategy, which West Yorkshire hopes will make a difference when year two of the recruitment campaign starts in March 2018.

As part of the strategy, BAME participants who had sat the online tests were invited back to take part in focus groups to help the fire service understand the drop off rate.

From feedback, it appeared that at least part of the problem was about access to information. The BAME group were less likely to know a firefighter or someone who worked in the fire service and were less familiar with what the job entails. Lacking these networks and a familiarity with the terminology could have disadvantaged candidates who were coming to the fire service afresh.

Emily Davis, West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service's Diversity, Engagement and Inclusion Manager, explained: "We have clearly done a good job inspiring people to apply to the fire service. But it may be that we only spoke to them a few weeks before the application date. It doesn't give them much time to do their homework if they are starting from scratch".

Under the 'nearly there' banner, BAME candidates have been invited back to take part in training sessions to help them prepare to apply in year two of the recruitment drive.

A second intervention was aimed at female applicants who had failed the physical assessment. They were invited to meet with the training team at HQ and bespoke physical training plans were devised for them to follow. Of the initial 38 women, just under 20 undertook the training, some attending HQ every fortnight to help keep them on track.

"They are all fit, keen people anyway but this just gives them an idea of the best way to prepare and build up their strength" said Davis. "Part of this is using role models, who look like them, to show them it can be done."

West Yorkshire is also targeting physically fit women in a partnership with a national fitness chain. The company has allowed the fire service to put stands and marketing in gym foyers. The image of one of the fire service's female firefighters, who happens to be slight in build, has been made into a pop-up banner and is being used in gyms across West Yorkshire.

Allied to this are 'awareness days lite'. Fire crews, which have played a crucial part in getting the recruitment message out on the ground, can invite people into stations to get a flavour of the job, handle some of the equipment and receive information on the key recruitment dates that are coming up.

From these days, high potential women are being identified and invited to HQ to meet staff.

"We are trying to dispel some of the myths, familiarise people with who we are and present a friendly, inclusive face, and ultimately make them confident through the process" said Davis.

Applications to the second recruitment round will be monitored to see what proportion of the individuals who took part in the two interventions reapply and are successful.

Councillor Judith Hughes, Chair of West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority said: "We were very successful in attracting women and BAME candidates during 2017, but unfortunately they were not as successful as we would have hoped. A great deal of work has gone into preparing them for the application process this year, and we have also chosen to put more emphasis on getting 'firefighter fit' in our publicity campaign.

I hope the support which is now available will give these underrepresented groups the boost they need to create a level playing field. This could be the first step in an extremely rewarding career for them."

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's fourth place ranking in Stonewall's list of top lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+) inclusive employers this year is testament to the service's high-quality inclusion work.

It has come a long way since first taking part in the charity's Workplace Equality Index in 2010, when it was placed in 224th position.

Through policies such as a dignity at work policy with a zero tolerance approach to discrimination, bullying and harassment (explicitly including LGBT+ related discrimination), LGBT+ inclusive family friendly policies and active LGBT+ and Allies networks, the service has improved its position in Stonewall's ranking year on year.

Not only is Cheshire benchmarking its progress against other fire and rescue services, it is benchmarked against 'big hitters' such as banks and leading accountancy firms which have substantial resources to devote to inclusion.

Its success is down to a combination of factors, not least the commitment of the senior management team, an equality steering group with oversight of diversity and inclusion work, and buy-in from staff on the ground.

Cheshire places a high emphasis on being an inclusive employer. Because of this, in its recent collaboration with Cheshire Police to merge support staff into one organisation, the equality, diversity and inclusion function was intentionally retained by Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service. The Equality and Inclusion Officer reports directly to the Director of Transformation and has access to senior managers, including principal officers on a daily basis. Senior managers are fully supportive of, and engaged with, equality work, with the Chief Fire Officer chairing the Service's Equality Steering Group.

At the heart of the approach is FirePride, an LGBT+ inclusion network, and FirePride Allies, colleagues who actively support the work that FirePride does. It means the activities of the 15-strong FirePride network are backed up by another 90 or so allies.

According to Melanie Hockenull, the Equality and Inclusion Officer, the challenge that Cheshire is meeting head on is a general misperception of the fire service as macho, homophobic or at best, disinterested with a lack of understanding of the LGBT+ community.

"We have to address these legacy issues and we need to make sure that everyone can be themselves at work because, if you are hiding a large part of who you are, you will not be performing to the best of your ability" she said. "LGBT+ inclusion leads to improvements in business and individual performance."

A FirePride Business Plan is developed each year that includes an action plan, using the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index as a framework.

As well as attending Pride events in Manchester and Chester, complete with an out-of-service rainbow branded fire appliance, and other inclusion events, the network is consulted on policies and procedures to ensure they are inclusive.

Under the innovative Allies approach, colleagues sign up to an online directory, including "I'm an Ally because..." quotes. If staff want to be more visible in their support, there are rainbow lanyards, laces and even a pink fire engine pin badge that can be worn.

Cheshire's commitment to inclusion and its Stonewall index success has paid dividends. In recent recruitment rounds for wholetime firefighters, a significant number of wholetime recruits identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Staff engagement surveys also show high levels of engagement among LGBT+ staff.

Councillor Bob Rudd, Chair of Cheshire Fire and Rescue Authority, recognises the importance of LGBT+ inclusion to the wider LGBT+ community, noting that “Residents can be sure that the services we provide, be they emergency response, Safe and Well visits or youth work, are delivered in a way that’s inclusive of the wonderfully diverse communities we serve. No one from the LGBT+ community should hesitate to engage with our staff or volunteers and the service’s fourth position on the Stonewall Top 100 list provides that reassurance”.

Using FirePride as its inspiration, a women’s network group, Limitless, was set up one year ago, spearheaded by Group Manager Lynsey McVay, the service’s most senior female operational member of staff.

“It is focused on women but it is open to anyone” said Hockenhill, “recognising that we won’t progress without the buy-in of our men.”

In a partnership with Cheshire Police the network has planned a programme of events around International Women’s Day on 8 March 2018 which will culminate in a joint conference looking at role models and female police officers and firefighters on the ground.

The network is also consulted on key policies, including Cheshire’s recently launched maternity and adoption policies. These policies were also developed in partnership with representative bodies. The revised maternity and adoption policies are quite ground-breaking for the fire and rescue service, allowing for up to a year’s full pay for those on maternity or adoption leave.

Female recruitment figures are strong. In 2016, 24 per cent of wholetime new recruits were women. In 2017, the figure was 14 per cent, which remains above the national average, and the service is looking to build on this in 2018.

The networks are accountable to the Equality Steering Group. Every quarter the network chairs provide updates on the work they are doing. Both groups have terms of reference which are tied in to Cheshire’s core values and five year strategy.

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service

As part of its strategy to target women in its on-call firefighting recruitment, Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service routinely holds female taster days and visits schools to reach out to parents.

The recruitment of on-call firefighters in rural areas is an ongoing issue for the service. By targeting women in their recruitment drives Shropshire ensures that the widest pool of potential recruits available is accessed.

In Shropshire, 'positive action' days aimed at women and minority groups are held throughout the year where fire station staff, HR personnel, fitness instructors and on-call group support teams give advice and support. All elements of the on-call role are explained, as is the application and selection process and the physical requirements.

The days, organised by Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion department and delivered by station staff, are publicised through local media and social media, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. The on-call group support team spreads the word with leaflets and flyers throughout the local area.

Phil Davis, Station Manager in the West area, explains: "What is important, particularly in trying to attract women into the service, is getting the truth of the role out there. You don't need to be super fit or marathon runners and you don't need superhuman strength to do the role effectively. What we try to give them is an understanding of the full role of a firefighter and an honest appreciation of the on-call system. We let them know it can be as fulfilling as it is demanding".

The positive action days, which include BAME taster days, are in addition to more localised recruitment drives for on-call firefighters.

With the requirement of a five-minute response time for on-call responders, this recruitment is focused on the specific areas where the service struggles to recruit. But again, reaching women, as well as male applicants, is important.

Evening and weekend cover tends not to be a problem, but covering daytime hours can be. As well as working closely with local businesses to provide employees who are working nearby to be on-call, residents who are at home during school time are an obvious group to approach.

One recent initiative, which Shropshire hopes to develop further in the future, is targeting stay-at-home parents with children at school, who are in the main women, to provide on-call firefighter cover during the day.

To this end, firefighters held an open morning at a primary school in Bridgnorth, which one of the on-call stations has links to.

Neil Grove, Station Manager in the South area said: "It was a way of catching these parents, who just happened to be predominately women, when they are dropping kids off at school and then follow it up with trips to the fire station".

The various activities are having some success. The on-call stations in the West and South have twelve female on-call firefighters and a number are mothers who provide cover during school hours.

One of the sticking points with pursuing this potential pipeline further are the nationally set hours of availability that the fire service demands.

Generally there are two types of on-call cover – full cover or three quarter cover. Full cover is a minimum of 120 hours per week, while three quarter cover is about 80 hours.

Neil explained: “It does curtail this activity to a degree as some of these people do not have three quarter hours available to give us. Even three quarter cover equates to up 84 hours of standby cover.

But this is an area where Shropshire have been bold enough to use some discretion. Where there is a specific need for daytime cover, we will look at people who can provide us with say 40 hours cover but we have to pay them the standard three quarter rate. At the moment that makes sense when we can keep a community safer by doing so. But to make it sustainable, with more people on shorter contracts, there will need to be greater flexibility as our on-call firefighter cadre becomes more diverse”.

Councillor Eric Carter, Chairman to the Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority is confident the approach of the fire service to recruiting women and BAME groups is showing improved results.

“The communities of Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin expect us to respond to the emergencies in their lives with the appropriate resources to deal with whatever events are unfolding” he said. “As employers of choice, we recognise how important it is to have a workforce which is representative of our communities. This is not only a moral responsibility, but supports more effective interactions with victims across all ranges of diversity.

We know our tactics work because in the most recent round of wholetime recruitment we got over 16 per cent of applications from women – we just need to stay committed to making this change happen.”

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service maintains its on-call appliances availability at over 96 per cent across the county.

Chief Fire Officer Rod Hammerton said: “I attribute this fantastic performance to the community spirit of the people in Shropshire and the fact that, as a service we put the on-call duty service at the forefront of our decisions. Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service is an on-call duty service with a whole time core that gives us resilience”.

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service has rewritten its home and business safety leaflet, bringing in experts to make its messages reflect the realities of Muslim life.

The innovative new approach is aimed at tackling the disproportionate number of Asian businesses in the fire service's prosecution figures and to help keep the community safe at key times such as Ramadan.

It is just one example of the work being undertaken as part of a diversity and inclusion project that began two years ago, based on two strategic aims: 'knowing our communities' and 'engaging with diverse businesses'.

"We began with a round table of staff with leadership or resource responsibilities for keeping our communities safe. The kind of questions we were looking to answer were who are our diverse communities, where do they live, how are they fairing, how can we get to them and how can we have credible relationships?" said Wendy Kenyon, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service's Diversity, Engagement and Consultation Manager.

Using all the data available, a colour coded map was produced showing the distribution of residents covered by protected characteristics legislation. It is robust, easy to use and simple to understand.

The expectation is that staff involved in planning or strategies will consult the data to analyse the possible impact on various groups. It can also make resource allocation more efficient. For instance the message about fire risks associated with Ramadan – cooking with hot fat at night when people may be tired, wearing saris or hijabs when cooking – can be targeted from those stations with a higher proportion of Muslim residents.

A calendar of events has also been produced which allows for timely campaigns. The most recent was aimed at Jewish residents celebrating Hanukkah, where accidents with candles resulted in two house fires in another fire service area this year.

"Stage 1 of the project is about knowing our communities, understanding where they are and linking their risk profile to our service delivery and targeting resources efficiently. On various measures, it has been successful" said Wendy.

The next step involves meeting, engaging and consulting with communities to develop services that meet their needs.

A number of staff have been chosen to become 'community champions'. They will use a proportion of their time, about five per cent, to establish contacts and have ongoing dialogue with community groups and organisations, such as charities, with expertise in a particular religion, nationality, health problem or other issue.

As part of its work with the Asian community, the fire service has enlisted the help of a multi-faith champion who has already delivered diversity training to staff.

The expert in Islam has become a broker between Merseyside and sections of the Muslim community. He has reviewed fire service publications to ensure they are unbiased and use the right language. He is also looking at everything the fire service is asking of these communities, including the significant issue of business safety, and linking it to the Quran and to scripture.

Five scholars are now prepared to endorse the new home and business safety leaflets and to discuss the issue at Friday prayers. A roundtable with 13 scholars is also planned which will involve the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Wendy Kenyon, and staff who deliver home and business safety.

“Ultimately we want less prosecutions, more home fire safety checks, more people allowed across the door, more people coming to our meetings, more people feeling they can volunteer for the work that we do and more people applying for our jobs” concluded Wendy.

Figures show that while the recruitment of female firefighters and apprentices increased between 2014/15 and 2016/17, BAME recruitment was less successful.

It is hoped that forging better links with these communities will help to increase applications from groups who are under-represented and the diversity of Merseyside’s workforce and volunteers in order to better reflect the residents it serves.

A recent volunteer recruitment campaign, to enlist people to help provide information about home fire safety, attend events and deliver safety presentations in schools, suggests the inclusion message is beginning to get through. The team of 14 volunteers are from diverse backgrounds, and include men and women, people with a disability, and people from BAME backgrounds.

Councillor Barbara Murray, the Lead Member for Equality and Diversity on Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority said: “We have worked hard to understand our diverse communities on Merseyside. The work the service has carried out around the ‘Knowing our communities’ project has been instrumental in helping to map high areas of diversity to enable us to target key fire safety, road safety and business safety messages, as well as promote ourselves as a diverse employer of choice.

The community mapping work has assisted us to target key resources in times where budgets have been cut, thus enabling us to do more with less. The work is the foundation of community engagement and will assist us into stage two of the project where we will be building strong and sustainable relationships with the diverse communities of Merseyside to help understand the risks of fire within their day-to-day lives.”

Surrey Fire and Rescue Service

Surrey Fire and Rescue Service is taking steps to better promote its career opportunities to women and to ensure they thrive in the working environment once they are on board.

On International Women's Day, 8 March 2018, the fire and rescue service will sign its name to the United Nations 'HeForShe' campaign, a solidarity movement aimed at the advancement of gender equality.

"Surrey Fire and Rescue Service will be asking its predominately male workforce to support female colleagues, at all levels, across all areas of the service and for all to stand shoulder to shoulder to end gender inequality" said Dan Quin, Area Commander tasked with driving forwards workforce reform. "By standing together in this way, we can evolve our organisation for the better for all concerned."

On the same day, and as part of the action plan drawn up to support the HeForShe pledge, Surrey will establish a women's support group that can also include representatives from the county.

A review of the service's development and promotion processes, which forms part of the larger review of talent management, will also be undertaken to ensure that they are equally as supportive for women as they are for men and a commitment will be made to a fair gender balance in fire and rescue service meetings. Gender equality training sessions will also be offered.

The action plan commitments create a positive backdrop for the launch of a new recruitment approach, devised as part of Surrey's People and Inclusion Strategy, which will open up both uniformed and non-uniformed vacancies to county council employees and beyond.

The campaign, under the strap line 'opening the service up for business', is a bold move and breaks with the tradition of operating two separate recruitment routes for uniformed and support staff, which has until now seen uniformed posts only being undertaken by uniformed members through internal promotion or inter-service transfers.

According to Dan, the internal trigger which motivated the change was a clear shortage of suitable staff to join the development programme for future middle managers positions.

"We had opportunities available for five people but, using internal processes, we were unable to identify five candidates" he said. "From our officer reform, it was also clear that we needed fewer people to meet our operational requirements than we needed to fulfil our managerial activities, which meant that there was the potential to convert some of the posts into non-uniformed roles without undermining operational effectiveness/resilience."

"We are keen to make sure our standards are not lowered in order to fill vacancies and to encourage a greater mix of people in the organisation, so we decided that we would look at alternative means."

This has culminated in the 'opening the service up for business' plan which aims to utilise, as a county council service, not only the skills and capabilities of those that are already working in the county council but also those beyond it.

An expression of interest advert has been drawn up which will encourage people to come forward and find out more about the opportunities that are available in Surrey Fire and Rescue Service.

It is hoped the move towards greater inclusion will also improve diversity in the service, which has a significant underrepresentation of women. With its more diverse workforce, the council presents Surrey with a large pool of potential talent.

In the past, diversity in uniformed roles would generally have had to come from the ground up. The new approach, which will initially employ individuals on a secondment basis with positions becoming permanent in some circumstances, will give more scope for improving diversity at higher levels within the service, and develop the right talent into operational roles having first assessed their managerial skills.

Councillor Denise Turner-Stewart, Chair of the Fire and Rescue Authority said: “Enabling each available role to be reviewed and flexibly recruited to, on the basis of service need, provides an excellent opportunity to balance our workforce in terms of gender and access different capabilities.

Surrey Fire and Rescue Service are making a deliberate effort to improve their skills in assessing talent, developing our people and improving accessibility to the service at all levels.”

Kent Fire and Rescue Service

At Kent Fire and Rescue Service, no project, policy or change is undertaken without first considering the possible impact on diversity and inclusion.

The service's People Impact Assessments (PIAs) have become firmly embedded into Kent's practice.

The reports look at how internal and external practice, policies and procedures might affect groups with protected characteristics, such as those from ethnic minorities, the LGBT+ community and people with disabilities, as well as the 'customer' (a term embraced by the service) more generally.

One of the most recent areas of work to benefit from a very detailed PIA was a review of the service's flooding response.

The PIA highlights that residents who do not have English as their first language may struggle to understand communications about flooding and water safety and emphasised the need to look at the suitability of Kent's messaging.

In the case of the elderly, their possible digital exclusion could make communications more difficult and there could be a danger to health if medication is left behind and their doctors' surgery is out of action.

It also looks at the potential impact of conditions such as dementia which are known to cause sufferers to be drawn to water. The report advises that 'such considerations could be factored into actions such as the search for missing persons in and around water'.

Firefighters who may have once been sceptical about the usefulness of PIAs are coming to see the advantages of putting them at the foundation of what they do. It has been a long process but by emphasising practical considerations that apply to crews on the ground, staff have bought in to the concept.

"The PIA is embedded into our project documentation. It happens at the initial scoping stage, very early on" said Karen Irvine, Assistant Director of Human Resources.

In a recent Kent Fire and Rescue Service recruitment drive, a PIA was developed to outline the barriers to more diverse recruitment. On the back of the document, the service decided to reach out and test assumptions about those barriers, for instance the belief that Asian families have no interest in the fire service because they want their children to go in to the professions.

Community Engagement Officer Jo Harfleet was appointed to go out to community and faith groups including temples, gurdwaras, mosques and other locations to speak to members of the Asian community in the county.

Through this work, the service has tapped in to the Gurkha community which up until that point had been below the radar.

"We began by looking at the obvious pockets of community that we knew about. We have quite a big Polish community for instance, and from that contact Jo was picking up smaller communities that we could also make contact with" said Irvine. "Similarly, within the temple, there are different groups that meet regularly. So the coffee morning for older people was an ideal group to visit for our community safety message, while the Saturday morning school was perfect for a presentation on education and careers in the fire service."

Ground work for the development of PIAs was laid by an earlier 'operational diversity' approach. This outlined practical considerations for crews, for instance in a case of extracting an individual from a car who happened to be autistic, the firefighter would not use the sheet on their head.

Crews understood and appreciated this work because they could relate to how it worked for them out in the field.

“Having had the first generation of that kind of thinking we are now moving on to our second and potentially third generation of policies, and staff are moving along with us” said Irvine.

Councillor Nick Chard, Chairman of Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority, said the People Impact Assessments give Kent Fire and Rescue Service a valuable tool to ensure services do not remain static but evolve with the diverse and changing needs of the communities in Kent.

“We have integrated the People Impact Assessment into our everyday work which enables us to focus on who we are delivering our services to. Also, by embedding PIAs into our projects and policy development, we are able to think very early on who will be impacted and take this into consideration when developing new services, procuring operational equipment or developing new operational procedures” he added.

London Fire Brigade

Currently only 7.2 per cent of London Fire Brigade's (LFB) operational workforce are women, but a new recruitment drive, coupled with a high profile social media campaign, is aiming to change that.

In November 2016, consultants were commissioned to look into why the firefighter role still isn't appealing to women. The aim of the exercise was to highlight women's perceptions of firefighters and to identify the barriers to women taking the steps to join LFB.

A sample of women firefighters were interviewed as part of the research, alongside experts who have had some success in increasing the number of women in their organisation and a representative sample of women from London, who possessed skills and attributes in line with firefighting's general skills.

The findings revealed that while women had many of the qualities that are important in the firefighting role, there was an overall lack of awareness of what the job entailed and misconceptions that put women off.

It became clear that women were not being 'sold' the job and that elements of the application process, and even the LFB website, were not seen as user friendly.

In the light of these findings, an entirely new recruitment campaign has been designed that aims to attract female applications, as well as interest from the BAME and LGBT+ communities.

The campaign went live on 2 October and sets out to show why 'firefighting means so much more'. It includes a brand new website with interactive features and fresh content, leading through to a new mobile enabled platform for people to apply. One of the highlights is a film presenting the different roles that a professional firefighter juggles in order to protect the communities the LFB serves.

It features real London firefighters and is being used across all communication channels including Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

The work is part of a longer term approach to firefighter recruitment. The selection process has been reviewed and is carefully monitored to ensure there is no adverse impact on female applicants. As the campaign is developed further, it will support a new outreach team that has been set up to promote careers in the fire service and offer personal support with preparing for the application stages and fitness tests.

Around the same time as the recruitment drive got under way, the LFB launched a social media campaign, #FirefightingSexism. Aimed at replacing the dated and inaccurate term 'firemen' with the term 'firefighters', it encourages people to post photos and tweet what firefighting sexism means to them. In a matter of days, it had gone viral on Twitter and Facebook.

Comments posted on social media in response to the campaign have been mixed. Many support the message. Some have objected that the campaign is simply about being politically correct or a waste of resource. Views have also been shared by some fire and rescue service staff either publicly or via internal communication channels, that the campaign may restrict them from expressing themselves freely and that sexism works both ways, for example with regards to parental leave.

Internal communications have been an important part of the campaign to explain its aims and information has been made available internally and externally regarding the minimum costs involved when using social media.

While some external audiences and colleagues may struggle to accept the message, a range of measures are in place to ensure female firefighters can thrive in their jobs, said Susan Ellison-Bunce, Head of Strategy and Inclusion at London Fire Brigade.

“There’s a very active women’s group which offers mentoring, advice and support. We make sure through the borough commander, the station manager and down through the command chain that women firefighters are as well supported as their male colleagues” she said. “We don’t want them to be singled out for special treatment but we do want them to be treated well and be able to thrive like any other person in the organisation.”

Coaching and mentoring is a key plank of the strategy and the LFB is developing a new network which, for the first time, will involve an internal assessment of staff who want to become coaches and mentors.

“We are not just accepting people automatically” said Ellison-Bunce. “If we don’t feel people are suitable at that moment in time, we will offering development and training.”

About 35 LFB staff are also taking part in a new coaching and sponsorship project launched by the Greater London Authority (GLA), particularly aimed at women, which will involve co-coaching with colleagues in other services and the sharing of good practice.

Chair of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, Fiona Twycross said:

“There are more London Fire Brigade women firefighters than ever before, but with females still making up less than ten per cent of the workforce we have a way to go to make the fire and rescue service fully accessible and inclusive. The work the brigade is doing right now is really exciting.

It’s challenging perceptions, generating long over-due debates, creating accessible ways for people to learn about the role of a modern firefighter and importantly, it’s working hard to ensure children grow up knowing that no matter what sex they are they can be a professional firefighter.”

Inclusive Fire Service Group

The Inclusive Fire Service Group was set up by the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services (NJC). It brings together a diversity and depth of expertise to address this important and challenging issue from employer and employee perspectives, identifying strategies that could be used at a local level to further encourage improvement.

It is chaired by the Independent Chair of the NJC, Linda Dickens, and other interested parties, such as the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), the Fire Brigades Union, Fire Officers Association (FOA) and Retained Firefighters Union, accepted invitations to be part of the group.

The group also engaged with wider groups such as Stonewall, MIND, Women in the Police Service, Asian Fire Service Association, Women in the Fire Service, the Fire Brigade Union's women, black, Asian and ethnic minority (BAME) and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+) committees, and other trade unions (Unison and GMB Union).

Following on from an in depth evidence gathering phase (which included collection of baseline data and information, employee focus groups, a wider employee survey, workshops with equality and diversity managers and union representatives from fire and rescue services across the UK and with senior managers), work has focussed on development of the strategies. These were circulated to fire and rescue services who were asked to consider them at both member and officer levels.

In general, the group felt that:

- Inclusivity should be embedded in every aspect of the fire and rescue service.
- 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.
- Union involvement should be recognised as an important factor in delivering improvement, particularly in respect of peer to peer involvement.
- 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.

In essence the specific strategies identify practical steps to achieve improvement and cover four main areas:

- promoting an inclusive culture
- recruitment
- progression
- retention.

A detailed copy of the strategies can be found in the group's most recent report.³ In addition, the report indicates the responses received from services, as to what extent it is intended to use each of the strategies, the improvements services expect to see and, if appropriate, expected timescales.

3 www.local.gov.uk/njc-circular-0118

The strategies were very well received and responses indicate substantial support. Once a sufficient period of time has passed during which the strategies can become embedded and start to deliver results, the group intends to monitor the outcomes. It can then consider: what has delivered the best results and importantly share that information; whether any of the strategies need to be revised; and if there is a need to develop further strategies. This will ensure that the momentum to deliver improvement is maintained.



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