

26 January 2018

## **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on equality, diversity, behaviours and organisations culture in the fire service – one year on**

### **Purpose**

For decision.

### **Summary**

It is now a year since the LGA and its partners signed this MoU. The report summarises subsequent work in this policy area and asks members to decide on its future direction.

### **Recommendation**

That members of the Fire Services Management Committee support the proposal in paragraph 29.

### **Action**

Officers to proceed as directed.

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### **Background**

1. On 31 January 2017, the LGA published a memorandum of understanding on 'Equality, diversity, behaviours and organisational culture in the Fire Service (MoU)'.<sup>1</sup>
2. The MoU was co-signed by the Asian Fire Service Association, National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), Fire Brigades Union (FBU), Fire Officers' Association, GMB, quiltbag, Retained Firefighters Union, Stonewall, Unison and Women in the Fire Service.
3. The MoU recognized the role of the Inclusive Fire Services Group (IFSG) in taking forward some of its actions. The IFSG is independently chaired by Professor Linda Dickens and includes employer and employee representation from the National Joint Council (NJC) and NFCC, the Fire Officers Association and the Retained Firefighters Union.

### **LGA commitments and Action**

4. The LGA's commitment under the MoU was largely to promote specific activities in relation to diversity and inclusion. This has been fulfilled to date by publishing the MoU, and the conference publication on an inclusive service,<sup>2</sup> a letter from FSMC lead members to Fire Commission members in March, promoting both the publication and the measures in the MoU, two fire leadership essentials courses and a masterclass on inclusion for fire authority members, which was held at Layden House on 26 September 2017.
5. The LGA also undertook, together with the NFCC, to establish an online community to share practice on diverse recruitment as soon as possible, in conjunction with any IFSG work on improvement strategies. A new existing Chief Fire Officer Association (CFOA) community was created for the purpose. This was not successful. There is a pre-existing CFOA community, however, which has provided a forum for sharing information and good practice and which the LGA is a part of.
6. To help facilitate information sharing this year's conference publication will consist of case studies around inclusion, diversity and recruitment.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/memorandum-understanding-f0f.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> *An inclusive service - The twenty-first century fire and rescue service*  
(<https://www.local.gov.uk/inclusive-service-twenty-first-century-fire-and-rescue-service>).

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7. The LGA undertook to monitor the numbers and proportions of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) and female candidates at stages of recruitment to identify barriers to recruitment. In the event, as the FSMC was informed in June, NFCC carried out this work through an exercise to understand where services lose applicants with protected characteristics during recruitment.
8. The broad results of the NFCC's work demonstrate that applicants are lost evenly at different stages but identified a particular issue for women with fitness tests. The tests have been validated against the needs of the job so NFCC is working with the Home Office to produce guidance and case studies which will be used nationally as part of an upcoming campaign to help women meet the required fitness levels.
9. It is notable that in recent recruitment exercises there is an increase in women and BAME candidates who are successful.
10. The joint chairs of the NFCC Equality Group (EDIP), Nicky Thurston and Andrew Brodie, have subsequently contacted the LGA to see if there would be interest in having a member champion for inclusion and diversity. The champion would provide a member's perspective on their work as well as provide challenge. The expectation is that there would be regular informal contact via telephone or in person as well as attending an EDIP meeting. EDIP has membership from officers across the fire and rescue service and feeds into the wider NFCC Workforce Coordination Committee, chaired by Ann Millington.
11. The Fire Vision, which is the subject of a separate paper, includes targets for higher rates of BAME and female recruitment to firefighter roles.
12. The Home Office has been leading on work around the image of the firefighter, following research that suggested this deterred a more diverse range of applicants. The LGA and NFCC have been involved in this work. The work is progressing well and the Home Office hopes to have a draft of the first product (a fitness guide) produced by the end of the work and undertake some targeted media activity.
13. The awareness campaign material will include a range of documents, which will highlight the role of a firefighter and will also show the fire sector as a good employer. The bootcamp/fitness guide will explain the type of exercises which a potential recruit might undertake to increase their fitness and then give them the confidence to attend a have a go day at their local fire station. Officials are working with a design company to ensure that the guide is ready to launch by the middle of February, during the New Year health and fitness period.
14. The other products in the campaign include a role models guide, myth buster document, which will deal with some of the reasons people might think that they cannot be a firefighter and mention the benefits of a career in the fire sector, and best practice guide,

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showcasing some of the success achieved by different services in recruiting a diverse workforce.

15. Two actions in the MoU related to the Inspectorate (these were: to arrange an early meeting to align work on diversity and inclusion with the Inspectorate and to embed work on diversity and inclusion in our review of peer support). When members reviewed progress on the MoU in June 2017 they were keen to ensure that these were taken forward.
16. The first of these commitments has been covered by LGA membership of the External Reference Group advising the HMICFRS on the development of inspection. The draft methodology for inspection is currently being consulted upon and includes a number of questions under the heading “How well does the FRS look after its people?”. These are set out in **Annex A**.
17. The LGA’s work on peer support will be increasing as inspection takes shape and the working group on this will be reminded of the MoU commitment.
18. The LGA is represented on a project board overseeing the new system of professional standards for the fire sector and will be responding to the ongoing consultation on the National Framework. These represent further opportunities to promote inclusion and diversity.

### **Inclusive Fire Service Group**

19. The MoU made six references to the work of the IFSG, which related to employee surveys and improvement strategies. The employee survey has taken place and the [outcomes have been published](#).
20. On 5 June the IFSG contacted all CFOs, Chief Executives/Clerks to Fire Authorities, Chairs of Fire Authorities and FRA 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’.
21. This fulfills the IFSG commitment to publish improvement strategies. The response from FRAs has been extremely positive with widespread support to adopt and action the strategies. It is recognised that FRAs need time to action the strategies and see results. However they are aware that the outcomes will be monitored once they have had an opportunity to become embedded.
22. One IFSG reference in the MoU – to publish guidance on data collection – has not yet been completed because of delays in taking forward a consistent approach on data

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collection with the Home Office and HMCIFRS. That work is on-going and a meeting with HMCIFRS is scheduled for next month.

23. A further reference simply covered continuing IFSG work to develop guidance, support and improvement strategies on a wide range of equality, diversity and cultural issues in general. The IFSG will monitor use of the now issued strategies and the resulting outcomes to maintain the focus on improvement. The strategies will be revised, adapted or added to as necessary to ensure they remain relevant and effective. Guidance will be issued as and when appropriate.

### **Monitoring work**

24. The remaining commitment was for the signatories to 'jointly monitor the progress of actions arising from the memorandum throughout 2017, adjusting them as necessary and jointly review its impact in December 2017'.
25. This was supported by the actions from the June FSMC meeting:
- 25.1. To consider the early feedback from the IFSG survey in August 2017 and whether further work was needed to gather information on progress.
- 25.2. To issue a survey to fire and rescue authorities covering the actions not covered by other monitoring and report back to the Committee meeting on 22 September.
26. Primarily as result of the demands of work arising from the Grenfell Tower fire, this has not yet happened. Not only has Grenfell reduced resource available at the LGA and NFCC but FRAs have been stretched both by the increased number of inspections required and by data requests from central government, NFCC and LGA relating to those inspections. The LGA has therefore been reluctant to add to this burden and has not carried out the survey referred to above.
27. The IFSG does not report to the LGA and has not yet produced results for discussion with LGA officers. This is due to the issues set out in paragraph 22 above and also to the need to wait for the strategies to take effect before their results can be measured.
28. The LGA committed to review the MoU with fellow signatories. Although there are good reasons why this has not yet taken place, there is a risk that despite the conference publication and ongoing IFSG work, the drive to increase the diversity of the sector's workforce may lose momentum, in particular because work around building safety and related issues looks likely to continue at its current level throughout 2018.
29. It is therefore recommended that a summit be convened between all MoU signatories to be held after Easter (the earliest realistic point given the forthcoming LGA Fire Conference) to review progress and advise on future work.

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30. We do not have information at what rate the sector is adopting any of the measures set out in the MoU, although there are examples of good practice. In practical terms. The inclusion of diversity measures in the remit of the inspectorate should drive activity and this arguably reduces the need to monitor progress against the MoU. Members therefore need to consider whether, in the current climate, a survey to determine what activity is taking place is the best option.

### **Implications for Wales**

31. As responsibility for fire and rescue policy is a devolved matter, the work set out in the report will be limited to English Fire and Rescue Authorities.

### **Financial Implications**

32. The proposed work will be covered by existing budgets

### **Issues for decision**

33. Do members agree that a summit should be arranged as set out in paragraph 29?
34. Should a survey of FRAs be conducted to establish what measures are being adopted to promote diversity or are members content to leave this to the inspection process?
35. Do members wish to nominate a member champion to work with the NFCC's EDIP group?