

25 January 2019

## **Inclusive Fire Service Group Report**

### **Purpose of report**

For information.

### **Summary**

To provide background information on the Inclusive Fire Service Group given the attendance of its Independent Chair, Professor Linda Dickens, at today's meeting, where Professor Dickens will update on the Group's work.

### **Recommendation**

Members are asked to note the paper.

### **Action**

Officers are asked to note member comments

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## **Inclusive Fire Service Group Report**

1. Professor Linda Dickens, Independent Chair of the Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG), has been invited to today's FSMC meeting. Between October 2013 and September 2018 Professor Dickens was also Independent Chair of the National Joint Council and the Middle Managers Negotiating Body. The information below is provided to members as background on the IFSG.
2. The National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services (NJC) has a continuing commitment to equality, diversity and cultural issues in the fire service. Section 2 of the Scheme of Conditions of Service (Grey Book) covers issues such as equal opportunities of employment and a working environment free from discrimination, harassment or bullying. Therefore the expectation is that fire authorities will already have *'set out and communicated the principles and strategies that are fundamental to developing an organisation which values all.'*
3. The NJC decided to return to these matters for review and to further develop its commitment, leading a piece of work to identify guidance in relation to any further strategies that could be used at local level to encourage improvement. In doing so, it set up the IFSG involving wider interested parties ie, National Employers, National Fire Chiefs Council (then the Chief Fire Officers Association), Fire Brigades Union (FBU), Fire Officers Association and the Fire and Rescue Service Association (then RFU). This provides a unique opportunity at national level to discuss and take into account the views of employers, managers and workforce representatives together. The group has also engaged with special interest groups such as Stonewall, Asian Fire Service Association, Women in the Fire Service, Women in the Police Service, FBU women's, BME and LGBT groups, Unison, GMB etc.
4. It was agreed that the purpose of the IFSG would be assessment of the current/starting position and identification of guidance in relation to any further strategies that could be used at local level to lead to improvement.
5. Its first major task (identification of the starting position) proved to be complex and time consuming given the different ways in which relevant information was recorded (or not) within individual fire and rescue services (FRSs). It did nonetheless provide the first in depth piece of sector research for many years. A copy of the detailed Behaviour and Cultural Survey [report](#) was provided to Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) and FRSs.
6. The group also committed to the provision of guidance in respect of [Personal Use of Social Media](#) policies given the increasing cultural issues related to social media. FRAs were encouraged to put in place such a policy where they did already have one or to review existing policy.
7. In developing the subsequent improvement strategies the IFSG undertook a substantial amount of work, building upon the Behaviour and Cultural Survey and engagement with special interest groups.

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- 7.1. Focus groups with female, BME and LGBT employees.
- 7.2. An all staff employee survey, whether uniformed or non-uniformed.
- 7.3. Four regional workshops with Equality and Diversity Officers and local union representatives (FBU, RFU and FOA) who led on or had an interest in that area.
- 7.4. Two workshops with senior fire service managers (majority CFOs).
8. Consistent messages emerged across the work undertaken, which allowed the group to be able to identify improvement strategies relating to four keys areas: promoting an inclusive culture (which includes tackling bullying and harassment; recruitment; progression and retention).
9. As a general point the IFSG identified 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.
10. The strategies were [circulated](#) to FRA/FRSs and the unions also brought them to the attention of their members. The support of employers, managers and employees alike was sought in taking them forward and delivering improvement. FRA and FRSs were asked to consider the strategies suggested positively at both member and officer levels. The strategies were widely welcomed and supported.
11. Having allowed time for the strategies to become embedded, the IFSG will now move into a monitoring role to assess progress made and any further work required.
12. The IFSG is aware of work also now being undertaken through other channels such as the NFCC, the Equality Framework in England, the Home Office and the Memorandum of Understanding developed by the LGA. It has engaged too in that work feeling it is important that these various areas of activity complement and reinforce each other.

### **Implications for Wales**

13. The NJC is a UK-wide body. The WLGA is one of the four employer stakeholder bodies on the NJC and therefore fully involved in the work of the group.

### **Next Steps**

14. Officers to note member comments and take forward any suggestions.