

Diversity and inclusion discussion paper

Purpose of report

For discussion.

Summary

This paper sets out the current issues around diversity and inclusion in the fire sector; the work of the National Fire Chiefs Council, National Joint Council and Local Government Association in this area; and a proposal for future work in this area. Members are asked to comment on how the LGA can help fire and rescue authorities and services to address issues around diversity and inclusion.

Recommendation

That members consider the current issues and ongoing work in the sector, and that members comment on the proposed LGA approach to diversity and inclusion as detailed in paragraphs 16-21.

Action

Following members discussion, officers will incorporate comments into the LGA approach to this priority area.

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Introduction

1. At the October 2019 FSMC members agreed to make Inclusion one of the three main priorities for 2019-20 alongside responding to the State of Fire and Rescue report and building safety. Following this decision, officers have been considering how the work of FSMC might contribute to this agenda and this paper sets out proposals for members' consideration. The paper outlines the historical and ongoing work of National Fire Chiefs Councils (NFCC), National Joint Council (leading the Inclusive Fire Service Group) and Local Government Association (LGA), and a proposed approach to supporting diversity and inclusion work in the fire sector.

Background

2. In January 2020 HMICFRS published the first National State of Fire report. As in previous national reports published in January and June 2019, HMICFRS expressed concerns about the poor grades given in the 'People' pillar, where 25 services received Require Improvement judgements and two were graded Inadequate. The Inspectorate particularly highlighted issues around recruitment and retention across the sector, including the lack of diversity in services, and in some instances a lack of defined values with which to challenge unacceptable behaviour, poor performance and talent management processes; and unhealthy cultures in some services, which allowed bullying, harassment and unlawful discrimination to persist.
3. The themes identified by HMICFRS reflect the findings of a number of previous reports which have raised the lack of diversity in the sector, and highlighted the benefits that would flow from having more diverse and inclusive services. Most recently Adrian Thomas' report *Conditions of fire and rescue staff: independent review* (2016) suggested that a whole change in culture was required including 'an acceptance that women, ethnic minorities together with all groups that make up the diversity of the working population have a place in the fire and rescue service.'
4. The key findings from the HMICFRS national report included:
 - 4.1. Lack of diversity remained a significant challenge for fire and rescue services. In October 2019 when the last workforce statistics were published only 6.4 per cent of firefighters were women and only 4.3 per cent were from an ethnic minority. This is an increase of 2.5 per cent for women and 1.2 per cent for ethnic minorities since 2010. Data on sexuality and religion are still classed as 'experimental' data due to poor response, either due to services not collecting this data or a high level of non-response to these questions.

- 4.2. A need for a better understanding of the importance, value and necessity of diversity and inclusion in some services; they found that although senior leaders might be able to articulate the case for diversity, this has not always filtered down to the different levels of the service.
- 4.3. In a small number of services, a toxic cultures persists, including bullying, harassment and unlawful discrimination; a lack of understanding of the impact of unconscious and conscious bias on those disadvantaged by it; and non-inclusive language, practices and provision. HMICFRS had particular concerns about sub-cultures developed within individual watches which were contrary to service values.
- 4.4. Concerns about recruitment and progression systems which have not always supported the service to recruit, retain and promote the best into each role from the widest pool of candidates; this fails to utilise the range of skills, experience and diversity of thinking available in local communities.
5. There have been significant challenges to increasing diversity in frontline roles, including moratoriums or low levels of firefighter recruitment for a number of years, and more generally a lack of central resource to drive change, which HMICFRS particularly highlighted in their report. However, in the second cycle of inspections HMICFRS are likely to focus more closely on areas they consider to be problematic, like diversity and inclusion. They also have the option of carrying out a thematic inspection.
6. There is of course a legal requirement on fire and rescue authorities to promote diversity and make themselves more inclusive. Authorities are subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty which was introduced in 2011 as part of the Equality Act 2010. The duty obliges public sector organisations to promote equality by eliminating unlawful discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

NFCC activity

7. In 2017 the NFCC published a People Strategy in response to Sir Ken Knight's report *Facing the Future* (2013) and the Adrian Thomas report *Conditions of fire and rescue staff: independent review* (2016). The Strategy defined six areas of improvement, including developing cultural values and behaviours which make the Fire and Rescue Service a great place to work for everyone, and diversifying the workforce and creating a fair and equal place to work.
8. Flowing from the Strategy the NFCC established the People Programme which commissions projects in support of the aims of the Strategy. Phase 1 of the Programme focused on leadership, apprenticeships, on-call, blended learning, health and wellbeing and inclusion and delivered two key outputs (the Leadership Framework and the Apprenticeship Strategy).

- 8.1. The Leadership Framework (January 2019) is a step-change in how leadership is defined; the new approach focuses on outcomes rather than outputs, places emphasis on continuous improvement and clearly defines leadership behaviours.
- 8.2. The Apprenticeship Strategy (March 2019) explicitly supports the improvement of the diversity and inclusivity of workforces by providing an entry route for people from all backgrounds and to provide retraining opportunities for existing staff.
9. Key products relevant to diversity and inclusion which are still to be delivered include future working patterns work, people impact assessments, a recruitment toolkit, talent management work, and the Inclusivity Strategy which will promote inclusion as a golden thread through all NFCC work and is expected to be signed off in April 2020.

National Joint Committee for Local Authority and Fire and Rescue Services activity

10. The National Joint Council (NJC) set up the independently chaired Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG) involving wider interested parties such as the, National Employers, NFCC, Fire Brigades Union, Fire Officers Association and the Fire and Rescue Service Association. This provides a unique opportunity at national level to discuss and take into account the views of employers, senior 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, the FBU women's, BAME and LGBT groups, Unison, GMB etc.
11. The Group undertook a comprehensive piece of work to identify the various positions in services and to promote strategies that could be used at a local level to encourage improvement. The sector was consulted on these strategies which received wide-ranging support. They were published in January 2018 and can be viewed [here](#). Following a period of time to allow the strategies to become embedded at a local level, an in-depth piece of work to review the implementation and impact of the strategies is now underway. This has included an online management survey, focus groups with female, BAME and LGBT identifying employees and workshops with FRS equality and diversity officers and local union representatives. A full meeting of the IFSG is expected to take place in March. The Group will then consider the findings of the recent exercise and next steps. A full report will be issued shortly thereafter.

LGA activity

12. In January 2017 a Memorandum of Understanding on equality, diversity, behaviours and organisational culture in the Fire Service. The MoU was signed by the LGA, the NFCC, several fire unions and representative groups; it committed its signatories to uphold the principles and deliver actions specified within the MoU and is attached in **Appendix A**. In order to fulfil the commitments within the MoU the LGA published '[An inclusive service: the twenty-first century fire and rescue service](#)' which set out the changing role of the firefighter and outlined activities underway to develop a more diverse workforce.

13. At the 2018 Fire Conference the Fire Vision 2024 was launched. The Vision considered the future role of the service and the ways in which services need to change. Recruiting, retaining and developing a workforce that reflects local communities is a key part of the Vision and was defined in some clear targets to increase the number of new female firefighter recruits to 30 per cent by 2024/5; having staff who reflect the ethnic diversity of communities at all levels; and ensuring that gender and ethnic balance is not eroded by poor retention. In support of the Vision '[An inclusive fire service: Recruitment and inclusion](#)' was subsequently published to support the Fire Vision and provided case studies on leading practice from across the country.
14. The Home Office has been gathering data on the proportions of new joiners who are women or from an ethnic minority group for two years. In 2018/19 12.6 per cent of new firefighters were women, and 5.3 per cent were from an ethnic minority group. Overall 23.4 per cent of new staff in 2018/19 were women.
15. Alongside its publications the LGA has endeavoured to support members through a series of development events. From 2017/18 to 2019/20 this has included seven masterclasses focused on culture, diversity and inclusion and seven Leadership Essentials programmes for fire and rescue which include a specific session on inclusive cultures and diversity.
16. Following the publication of the HMCIFRS' second national report in June 2019 FSMC lead members agreed to establish a Fire Diversity and Inclusion Champions Network, which met for the first time in January. The Network has 39 authorities signed up to it and is intended as a space for sharing of best practice and to equip member Champions to drive improvement in their own services.

Proposed approach

17. Addressing the lack of diversity and inclusion in the fire and rescue sector will take sustained effort and focus over a number of years. As the figures on new joiners demonstrate, while progress has been made, there is still more to be done to meet the target in Fire Vision 2024 on the number of new joiner firefighters who are women. This sustained effort by individual authorities and services will be reinforced by HMCIFRS's continued focus on the area in their inspections and the work of the NFCC and IFSG.
18. The LGA can also continue to play an active role in driving change across the sector to make it more diverse and inclusive. Fire and rescue authority members are uniquely placed to help drive change in this area by providing the leadership at all levels needed to drive change, while also challenging inappropriate behaviour and it is proposed the LGA should continue to support them to do this.
19. The LGA will do this going forward by focusing on developing the Champions Network. It is proposed the LGA continues to build the Champions Network by encouraging all FRAs to appoint a member Diversity and Inclusion Champion, if they have not already done so, so all English fire and rescue authorities have a nominated champion or

champions. The Network would be a forum to gather and share best practice, to engage with and promote the work of others in the sector on this agenda and to develop skills to support and challenge their local services to drive meaningful change.

20. The LGA would support the Champions Network to develop outputs which could include:
 - 20.1. A champion job description
 - 20.2. A FRA diversity and inclusion charter to support the work of the NFCC People Programme
 - 20.3. Member development resources to support scrutiny activity, for example on scrutinising equality and HR data and people impact assessments; and
 - 20.4. Other resources as determined by the needs identified through the Network.
21. The LGA would also continue to build strong relationships with the NFCC People Programme, the IFSG and other relevant groups and with individual services to ensure good practice is gathered and shared. This would be disseminated through the Champions Network, through the Fire Services Bulletin and through a new page on the LGA Fire website.
22. Finally, the LGA through Champions Network would consider ways to continue to promote the shared narrative about the value of diversity for the workforce, organisation and the community in harmony with the work of the IFSG and NFCC.
23. Although the LGA will continue to deliver Leadership Essentials programmes for fire and rescue authority members, officers' assessment is that bespoke, standalone events on culture, diversity and inclusion are no longer the best way to engage members from a wide range of authorities on this agenda. Instead the discussions proposed with the Champions Network on the development of member resources will hopefully identify what, if any, training for members the LGA might commission to support the Network.
24. **Members are asked to comment on and approve the proposed approach and to suggest further activities to support FRAs.**

Implications for Wales

25. Responsibility for the fire and rescue services in Wales is a devolved responsibility of the Welsh government. However, where there is the opportunity for shared learning, we would look to engage with the Welsh LGA to collaborate on common issues.

Financial Implications

26. This work would can be completed within existing budgets.

Next steps

27. Officers to develop a work plan based around the planned approach and members comments.