

Equality and Diversity in the Fire and Rescue Sector

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

The report outlines the work delivered to date and proposed next steps for the LGA's Fire Diversity and Inclusion Champions Network.

Recommendation

That members of the Committee note the report.

Actions

Officers to continue to provide updates to members.

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Equality and Diversity in the Fire and Rescue Sector

Background

1. Improving equality, diversity and inclusion in the fire and rescue sector forms a key priority of the LGA's [Fire Vision 2024](#). In recognition that achieving a truly diverse workforce will take long term commitment, innovation, and bold action to deliver change, various positive action approaches (within the bounds of the Equality Act 2010) were outlined and key targets included in the document, including:
 - 1.1. by 2024/5, 30 per cent of new firefighter recruits nationally should be female; this represents a step change for the fire and rescue service and will require a cultural transformation which we are determined to achieve
 - 1.2. in each fire and rescue service both frontline staff and staff as a whole should reflect the ethnic diversity of the community they serve
 - 1.3. the diversity of senior managers mirrors these developments
 - 1.4. the gender and ethnic balance in the workforce should not be eroded by poor retention (that is, those staff five years in will not be less diverse than the cohort was when recruited)
 - 1.5. staff at all levels and local communities have confidence in the political and operational leadership of their service.
2. In late 2019, the LGA established the [Fire Diversity and Inclusion Champions Network](#) (the Network) to bring together elected representatives who are responsible for diversity and inclusion issues in their fire and rescue authorities. The Network is chaired by Dr Fiona Twycross, Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience in London, and Vice-Chair and Diversity Champion for the FSMC.
3. As outlined in the [Terms of Reference](#), the Network was designed to develop skills to challenge their services to improve in this area. This includes hearing from experts about key equality and diversity issues for the fire sector, to identify barriers to greater diversity and inclusion in fire and rescue services, and to share best practice from across the country. The majority of FRAs have a nominated representative on the Network.

FRS sector responses

4. After the first cycle of independent inspections in 2019/20, reports by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) highlighted that while there is good work under way in most services to increase workforce diversity, there remains significant issues associated with culture, diversity and inclusion in the fire and rescue sector.

5. On the National Employers side, the Fire National Joint Council (NJC) have established the Inclusive Fire Service Group (the IFSG) to lead this work. The IFSG includes employer and employee representation from the NJC and representation from the National Fire Chiefs Council, the Fire Officers Association and the Fire and Rescue Services Association. In 2017/2018, the IFSG produced a series of [improvement strategies](#) and are currently finalising a report into the outcomes of embedding this work.

What the Network has delivered

6. In 2020, the Network has convened four times, including two in-person conferences before the COVID-19 pandemic led to meetings being held virtually.
 - 6.1. In January, the Network held a full-day conference in London. Sessions were held with Keeley Foster, Deputy Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade, about the barriers to greater diversity and inclusion in the fire sector. The Network also discussed options for the group's forward plan and key activities, including: creating the Network as a forum for networking; capturing and sharing best practice through regular meetings; and providing the opportunity for experts to showcase best practice from their services and from other public sector services (such as police and ambulance services).
 - 6.2. In March, the Network convened for a short meeting as part of the 2020 Fire Conference. The focus of this session was to finalise its Terms of Reference, and workshoping future topics.
 - 6.3. In July, the Network held its first virtual meeting, which focused on the theme of positive action. The session was led by guest speakers, Jagtar Sing, National Adviser for the Asian Fire Service Association, and Nicola Green, Legal Director at Capsticks Solicitors.
 - 6.4. In October, the Network discussed the benefits of staff networks. Members heard presentations from a panel of speakers, including: Anna James, Watch Manager, and Zoe Baker-Powell, PMO Manager (Service Transformation Team) from Avon Fire and Rescue Service, to discuss their staff engagement network; and Serena Simon, Programme Director (Church St Regeneration) at Westminster City Council, to discuss the Council's BAME Network.
7. The [video recordings and transcripts](#) for the July and October sessions are now available on the Champions Network webpage, as will those for all future sessions.

Future work

8. The Network was due to convene again in November 2020, with the theme for this session planned to be 'Racial Inequality'. During planning for this session, officers determined that in order to do the topic justice and give it the time it needs, it should be delivered over several sessions instead of just one.

9. As a starting point, the Network will meet on 22 January 2021, and again on 5 February, to discuss issues related to 'Racial Inequality'. This includes:
 - 9.1. In January, an introductory session to the fundamental concepts related to racial inequality, and a presentation from Ann Millington, Chief Executive, Kent Fire and Rescue Service, on Equality of Access to Services for Black and Minority Ethnic Communities.
 - 9.2. In February, the Network will hear a presentation from Wayne Brown, Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Phil Loach, Chief Fire Officer, West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service regarding the work they have led with their workforce throughout 2020 in response to the Black Lives Matter movement in the United Kingdom, as well as broader diversity and inclusion work in their local area.
10. To best prepare for these sessions, the LGA will be procuring an experienced and specialist facilitator to assist in the planning process and guide the group activities and discussions. It is intended that they will also support officers to collate some helpful resources and e-learning modules for members to complete before the sessions, so that members can familiarise themselves with key concepts in advance. These can also be made available more widely for the sector.
11. These two sessions will inform further work on this topic, as well as developing a forward plan for the Network in 2021.
12. Subject to approval by the FSMC, there will be a plenary session on diversity and inclusion at next year's Fire Conference in early March 2021.

Financial Implications

13. All work will be carried out using existing LGA resources.

Next steps

14. Officers will take forward any decisions as directed and proceed with conference planning.