

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Fire and Rescue Sector

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

The report outlines the priorities for improving equality, diversity and inclusion in the fire and rescue sector, including 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.

Contact officer: Rachael Aldridge
Position: Policy Adviser
Phone no: 020 7664 3370
Email: Rachael.Aldridge@local.gov.uk

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion 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 inclusive and diverse workforce will take long term commitment, innovation, and bold action to deliver change, the document outlines positive action approaches and key targets to deliver on this priority agenda, 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. Both State of Fire 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.

HMICFRS State of Fire 2020

3. In 2020, following public consultation and engagement with expert reference and technical advisory groups, HMICFRS updated its inspection methodology. This involved broadening its assessments covering effectiveness, efficiency and people, to improve how the Inspectorate looks at risk, protection, and equality and diversity.
4. A key finding in the [State of Fire 2020](#) was that diversity and inclusion in the fire and rescue sector must be improved. The Inspectorate highlighted that there continues to be a significant lack of gender and race diversity in fire and service, and that no service is close to having a workforce representative of its community. Figures from March 2020 show that only 17.3 percent of the 44,595 staff in fire and rescue services were female. Only 5.1 percent of staff were from a minority ethnic group, and the percentage of black firefighters is even lower, although there has been some slight recent improvement.

5. It is recognised that sustainable change requires a workforce culture where staff feel safe and supported to discuss issues related to race and discrimination, and are confident to address injustices and challenge negative behaviour. Further, that these conversations about inclusion and diversity should not be left to those most affected by it. The Inspectorate highlighted that services need to better educate all their staff on the importance of diversity and inclusion, and to take a zero-tolerance approach to bullying, harassment and discrimination.
6. Improving equality, diversity and inclusion remains a priority area for HMICFRS. In the next round of inspections, the Inspectorate has updated their methodology to include a sub-diagnostic to assess fire and rescue services' approach to race and inequality in greater detail. This includes:
 - 6.1. what services are doing to improve their lack of diversity and equality
 - 6.2. the ways in which services are tackling and eliminating discrimination at every level
 - 6.3. how services are educating their workforces to develop cultures that welcome difference and get the best out of people
 - 6.4. how services are engaging with their diverse communities and responding to their needs.
7. Another area of focus will be on how services are undertaking their Equality Impact Assessments, including looking at how well the fire and rescue services are promoting equality, diversity and inclusion to ensure fair and open opportunities for all (that is, their workforce and the public).

2021/22 Annual Plan - Fire Diversity and Inclusion Champions Network

8. The LGA's key mechanism to drive this priority agenda is the [Fire Diversity and Inclusion Champions Network](#) (the Network). Established in late 2019, the Network brings together elected representatives who are responsible for diversity and inclusion issues in their fire and rescue authorities. 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.
9. In 2020, the Network convened four times, including two in-person conferences before the COVID-19 pandemic led to meetings being held virtually. Topics covered included: Positive action; The Benefits of Staff Networks; and a Two-part meeting series on 'Improving Racial Equality in the Fire and Rescue Sector'.
10. The LGA is in the process of developing an annual plan for the Champions Network, which will guide the EDI learning and development activity in 2021/22. This will involve scheduling topics/discussions at the Network's bi-monthly meetings in a way that builds across each session, so that there's a general progression of learning and skill development across the year.

11. To inform this annual plan, the LGA is currently engaging its Network members to review the work completed to date and provide information regarding:
 - 11.1. the ways in which learning from Champions Network sessions has been applied in FRAs
 - 11.2. the main challenges to raising issues of concern or communicating best practice in FRAs
 - 11.3. what skills/interactive work Members have identified as an area for development
 - 11.4. what has worked well/what could be improved with the virtual meeting format and preferences for how sessions are to be delivered in the future
 - 11.5. how information is accessed and shared outside of Network meetings.
12. Officers will report back to FSMC Lead Members regarding the outcome of this review and provide the Committee with the annual plan for approval.

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 preparing a draft annual plan for the Champions Network.