
Report to Fire & Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee

9 March 2023

Diversity in Recruitment

Report by Chief Fire Officer

Summary

This report provides an update on the positive actions carried out within West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service (WSFRS), to improve diversity in its recruitment. Creating a diverse workforce is complex; it requires positive action to attract a diverse range of applicants, as well as creating a work environment that embraces and supports difference. This briefing contains details on:

- improvement actions we have taken to diversify our recruitment,
- improvement actions taken to create an inclusive workplace
- future actions to be taken

Focus for Scrutiny

The Committee is asked to review the progress on the work to date and agree the future areas of focus through the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP).

Key Lines of Enquiry:

- i. The progress made in creating a diverse workforce since the first inspection of the Service by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services
- ii. How well the service is taking positive action to ensure we have an inclusive workplace
- iii. Identify any areas for consideration for future positive action or any areas to highlight to the Cabinet Member for Community Support, Fire and Rescue

Proposal

1 Background and context

- 1.1 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) monitors the diversity of a Fire and Rescue Service workforce compared to the community it serves and what actions the Service has taken to improve that diversity. A diverse workforce encompasses nine protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010. These are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation, and national campaigning is underway for caring to become the tenth protected characteristic.

- 1.2 Nationally, Home Office research and analysis on 'Pathways and barriers to leadership in fire and rescue services' 2022 reports the sector-wide issue that:
- "Many staff consider the workplace a very male-dominant, macho environment with some hostility towards women's place in the service... some participants, however, mentioned that the culture in their service had improved in recent years with the recruitment of new staff."*
- 1.3 Creating a diverse workforce is complex. It requires positive action to attract a diverse range of applicants, as well as creating a work environment that embraces and supports difference. The 2022 State of Fire report supports this in stating that:
- "Services shouldn't just focus on improving their recruitment of diverse staff members. They should also make sure they are retaining staff from all walks of life by improving the inclusivity of their environments and cultures."*
- 1.4 According to the latest 2021 Census data the West Sussex population, aged 18 – 50, is 51% female and 49% male. Ethnicity data at District/Borough/Parish level has not yet been released. However, the countywide data shows that the population is 84% White British. The white population increases to 91% if other white backgrounds are included, e.g., Irish, European, Roma, Gypsy and Traveller.
- 1.5 Our Service workforce recruitment applications for wholetime in 2016 were 91% Male, 9% Female, which in contrast to our most recent process in 2020/21 had moved to 81% Male, 16% Female and 2% would prefer not to say. The ethnicity of applicants in 2016 was 95% White and 5% across Asian, Black, Chinese, mixed and prefer not to say. In 2021 this had moved to 91% White and increased to 9% across the other ethnicities which shows progress in both areas over the last 5 years, albeit a small increase.
- 1.6 It is estimated that around 1 in 7 people (more than 15% of people in the UK) are neurodivergent, meaning that the brain functions, learns and processes information differently. Neurodivergence includes a range of conditions including Attention Deficit Disorders, Autism, Dyslexia and Dyspraxia. None of these are related to intelligence. However, some of the traditional assessments used within recruitment processes may cause a disadvantage for some neurodivergent applicants, e.g., written tests, interviews.
- 1.7 The speed at which a Fire and Rescue Service can increase the diversity of its workforce is influenced by the frequency of its recruitment activity. The WSFRS recruitment cycle for Wholetime Firefighters is every 2 to 3 years. The last recruitment campaign took place in 2020.
- 1.8 Retained Fire Fighters are required to turn out to calls within an agreed timeframe to enable the fire appliance to be mobilised. This means that recruitment is necessarily very local. As a result, the scope to increase the diversity of the applicants is limited by the diversity of the surrounding area. However, commitment 3.5 of our CRMP is to review our retained ways of working and contracts. The Task & Finish Group, which was set up to review ways of working, supported by the scrutiny committee, enables us to make further improvements to support our diversifying workforce.
- 1.9 The People Priority within the WSFRS CRMP 2022 – 2026 sets an ambition to continue the improvements made in relation to its people. This includes an

action to review recruitment practice and procedures. The work will be informed by lessons learnt from the last recruitment campaign, ongoing Retained Firefighter recruitment and benchmarking practices against the National Fire Chiefs Council best practice Maturity Models for recruitment; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I); leadership and other people related areas.

- 1.10 WSFRS is embedding the Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services which sets out five ethical principles, based on the Seven Principles of Public Life, and provides a basis for promoting good behaviour and challenging inappropriate behaviour. The five ethical principles are: Putting our community first; Integrity; Dignity and respect; Leadership; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. These five principles align with the County Council Values: Customer centred, Listen and act upon, Honest and realistic, Genuinely valued, Trust and support.

Improvement actions taken between 2021-2023

1.11 Diversifying recruitment:

- 1.11.1 Over the past two years the following actions have been taken to improve recruitment and promotion processes.
- 1.11.2 Local Risk Management Plan: Fire Station open days and other community activities. Reaching out to groups within the community has the benefit of making the Service more approachable and seen as an achievable and sort-after career.
- 1.11.3 "Have a go" days to encourage applicants who may not have considered WSFRS as a career option and/or those who are considering a career change.
- 1.11.4 A fitness guide was produced for applicants to receive guidance on how to attain and retain fitness levels and why those levels are important.
- 1.11.5 A new Development Centre process has been implemented which identifies those who are suitable for promotion to a substantive role or show potential for future promotion. This process has been designed to be fully inclusive and accessible for all. Evaluations from applicants tells us that the support offered to them has been positive.
- 1.11.6 The Chair of every recruitment/development centre panel must complete the Recruitment & Selection course and Unconscious Bias training prior to recruiting. Other panel members are also encouraged to complete the training.
- 1.11.7 Interview skills training is provided as standard for applicants who are successful in the first stage of the Trainee Fire Fighter recruitment process or applicants for Development Centres (both internal and external applicants).
- 1.11.8 The recruitment process now involves stakeholder panels for Group Manager roles, and Green book equivalents, and above.
- 1.11.9 Neurodiversity assessments are offered to successful applicants to support initial and on-going employment. Applicants have reported feeling valued.
- 1.11.10 Improvements have been made to post-interview feedback, to demonstrate objective decision-making, and support creation of robust development

plans. Internal applicants are also now supported to develop their personal development plans.

1.11.11 Mentoring and coaching schemes have been introduced to aid staff development both when preparing for promotion and once in-post.

1.11.12 The last recruitment campaign from 2020 resulted in 3 cohorts of Trainee Fire Fighters. Of the 33 Trainees, 12% are female and 27% are neurodivergent.

1.12 Creating a diverse & inclusive workplace to ensure sustained diverse recruitment:

1.12.1 The Diversity and Inclusion Steering Group (DISG) created and launched to provide strategic direction and accountability for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in WSFRS.

1.12.2 A Self-assessment has been conducted of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion practice and performance against National Fire Chiefs Council and Local Government Association, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Framework. The DISG agree and ensure delivery of the improvement Action Plan.

1.12.3 Diversity champions have been introduced, supporting the agenda of and normalising the language of inclusion and diversity to remove the stigma.

1.12.4 People Impact Assessments (PIAs) have been implemented across all internal governance papers, to ensure Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is considered in all projects.

1.12.5 A 'Core Behaviour Standards and Expectations Framework' has been implemented across the service, which aligns both the County Council's values, and the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Code of Ethics. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion are both at the heart of every behaviour standard as well as being an explicitly stated standard with expectations detailed accordingly.

1.12.6 An internal annual calendar of ED&I events has been implemented, including supporting colleagues to learn more and understand about: Racial discrimination; Working with minority communities in business; NFCC Lunch & Learn sessions; Inclusive Employers webinars; Menopause awareness; International Women's Day; International Men's Day.

1.12.7 Supporting existing colleagues who are neurodivergent: assessment & supporting reasonable adjustments.

1.12.8 Bitesize guides have been created for all colleagues to understand what inclusivity means for specific groups: Faiths; Understanding bias; Allyship; Banter; Bullying & harassment; Transgender & Non-binary; LGBTQ; Communicating with Disabled Service Users.

1.12.9 Team awareness training provided for teams on creating an inclusive workplace.

1.12.10 Community engagement, including, Pride events across West Sussex; visits to Crawley Gurdwara; the Apple Tree Centre and Hindu Temple; Langley

Green Mosque; Career presentation to Worthing College Public Sector Course students.

- 1.12.11 The Orange guide for WSFRS buildings has been developed, and thanks to the capital investment of members, to date we have started the work on our estates improvement but to achieve the desired outcomes there will be further investment needed as buildings are changed. The implementation of the Orange guide is currently in force in the build of the Horsham Training centre & Fire Station. Including gender neutral facilities and a multi faith prayer & wellbeing room created.

1.13 Actions to be taken in future:

- 1.13.1 The following actions will be undertaken over the next 12 – 24 months to continue the improvements already made:
- 1.13.2 2023 Recruitment project to improve future processes. Including lessons learned from last new recruits process, improvements to our adverts, reviewing our residential recruits course approach, all aligned to best practice from NFCC maturity models and Asian Fire Service Association recruitment guide.
- 1.13.3 Improved data to measure our success, including improved ED&I measures on our workforce dashboard to monitor application rates, recruitment rates & promotion. This remains a sector-wide issue, as noted in the State of Fire 2022 report, “A lack of equality data in the fire and rescue sector presents a challenge” (page 53).
- 1.13.4 Leadership & culture programme: Inclusive workplace workshops to be delivered to all managers across WSFRS in 2023. In 2024, Inclusive leadership to be investigated for roll out across the Service.
- 1.13.5 Further bitesize guides to be developed including; Inclusive Language; Neurodiversity.
- 1.13.6 Neurodiversity consistent approach to IT, profiling and reasonable adjustments.
- 1.13.7 Carrying out an investigation into our ageing workforce, understanding the opportunities and risks, and leading a discussion on this within WSFRS.
- 1.13.8 Investigating implementation of a restorative practice approach to conflict resolution and 'freedom to speak up' guardians.
- 1.13.9 Ensuring the WSCC Dignity and Respect at Work policy is launched and widely communicated within WSFRS.
- 1.13.10 Diversity & Inclusion learning programme to be developed and publicised.
- 1.13.11 Develop Bystander training pilot to support staff to speak up and challenge behaviours.
- 1.13.12 Develop a Positive Action plan to improve the diversity of applicants, including a regular schedule of 'Have a go days'.

2 Summary

- 2.1 In summary, WSFRS is doing a considerable amount to promote and improve our ED&I both in recruitment and ongoing inclusivity of our environment and culture. Applicants to our Service experience, right from the outset of recruitment, through to promotion, and ultimately leaving the service that we are a people centred, employer of choice service, who recruit and retain individuals who are Proud to Serve. Our improvements to take positive action in the future are aligned to NFCC recommendations and best practice across both the Fire sector, and more widely.

3 Consultation, engagement and advice

- 3.1 Consultation & engagement has happened with staff through channels including:
- Diversity champions
 - Diversity and Inclusion Steering Group
 - Developing the Development Centre process
 - Leadership & culture programme
- 3.2 Communication has happened within the community through channels including:
- Participation in community events and religious festivals
 - Fire station open days
 - 'Have a go' recruit days
- 3.3 Advice has been sought from the following groups:
- National Fire Chiefs Council
 - WSCC experts, including HR and EDI
 - The Fire Fighter's Charity
 - Inclusive Employers
 - Asian Fire Service Association

4 Finance

- 4.1 There are no financial implications in this report.

5 Risk implications and mitigations

- 5.1 There are no risk implications or mitigations in this report.

6 Policy alignment and compliance

- 6.1 Our Council Plan – This report is directly aligned to the WSFRS CRMP.
- 6.2 Legal implications – The public sector Equality Duty 2010 means that legally, public bodies have to consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work – in shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to their own employees. It also requires that public bodies have due regard to the need to; eliminate discrimination; advance equality of opportunity; and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities. Every action in this report is designed with the Equality Duty in mind.
- 6.3 Equality duty and human rights assessment – This report contains no negative impacts on any of the protected characteristics. The work noted in this report is

all positive action to improve our diversity, and therefore fulfil our Equality duty.

- 6.4 Climate change – There are no impacts on climate change.
- 6.5 Crime and disorder – There are no impacts on Crime & disorder
- 6.6 Public health – There are no impacts on public health.
- 6.7 Social value – This report has positive implications for the community, and it supports the benefits of an effective Fire and Rescue Service to all residents in West Sussex.

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