

Memorandum of Understanding

Equality, diversity, behaviours and organisational culture in the Fire Service

This Memorandum commits its signatories to demonstrably uphold and promote the principles it sets out, deliver the commitments within it and take the specific actions it contains within the timetable agreed.

Principles

We recognise that in order to provide the most effective service to the public, the fire and rescue service as a whole should reflect the diversity of the community it serves. The employment of specific groups within the service, such as firefighting personnel should also meet this requirement. A more diverse workforce is needed at all levels up to and including senior managers.

The service is a team of proficient staff who all contribute to the activity of the service. Every role makes an essential contribution to preventing fires, saving lives and keeping the public safe.

Every employee is entitled to equal treatment regardless of race, religion or belief, disability, marital status, age, gender, including gender identities, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation and expressions, or membership of a trade union.

No one should be bullied or harassed at work.

Commitments

The service will be a place where everyone is supported to do their best, free of inappropriate or unprofessional behaviour.

All employees will be free to report workplace concerns without fear of retaliation or reprisal.

Employees will be treated and will treat each other with trust and respect. Being respected means being treated honestly and professionally, with each person's different talents, background, and perspectives valued.

The current level of diversity within both the firefighter workforce specifically, the workforce as a whole, and among volunteers, needs to be improved significantly and we will do all we can, both together and separately, to encourage the recruitment of a more diverse workforce and to promote an image of the service as an employer of choice for all.

This issue extends to career progression and we will do all we can to address this, including (for example) examining promotion processes and the scope to develop or expand mentoring schemes.

We will encourage the sharing of best practice across services, including effective management and leadership training and other tools which can help to promote a culture of inclusion and diversity.

Bullying, victimisation, discrimination and harassment will not be tolerated and there will be effective routes to report such behaviour and consequences for employees found to have engaged in these practices.

We recognise that we can only retain a diverse workforce by creating and maintaining an inclusive culture that embraces difference.

Individual managers and leaders must take responsibility for recognising and countering the effects of unconscious bias and countering any institutionalised discriminatory practice

We recognise that the work of the Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG) has an essential part to play in ensuring change in the fire service. Its bottom-up approach will both complement this statement and be important in delivering associated outcomes in a sustainable manner.

Our commitment to these objectives will go beyond mere compliance with the law.

These principles apply throughout the service from political leaders to all staff

We recognise that these are fine words, but that all in the sector will be judged by their actions and outcomes.

Actions

We agree to support relevant national or local activity and initiatives, and to share successful practice and work that did not produce successful results as learning can be gained from both.

We will immediately begin work on raising awareness of the role of positive action and the law around it in addressing diversity in recruitment and progression.

We will immediately begin to encourage all individual services to conduct exit interviews with all employees and to record, monitor and act upon any evidence from these interviews which relates to bullying, victimisation, discrimination or harassment

Once the Independent Inspectorate is established the Local Government Association (LGA) will seek an early meeting to explore how it and other stakeholders can work with it to ensure inspection drives progress on diversity. LGA then will look to disseminate the expectations on diversity and assist our members in meeting those expectations before the pilot inspection regime commences in April 2017.

LGA and the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) will establish an online community to share practice on diverse recruitment as soon as possible, in conjunction with any IFSG work on improvement strategies.

IFSG workshops designed to secure the commitment of senior fire service managers to improved understanding and leadership on diversity and cultural issues are being organised to be held in February 2017.

LGA will encourage all services to have undertaken training on identifying and countering the effects of unconscious bias by 31 October 2017 and to take steps at institutional level to counter those effects.

LGA will encourage all services to have undertaken inclusive leadership training for senior managers by 31 October 2017.

LGA will encourage all services to publish an inclusiveness strategy by 1 January 2018 and to demonstrably act on that strategy and to embed inclusion in across their activity.

LGA will consider diversity issues as part of its ongoing restructuring of improvement support to fire and rescue services through its peer challenge offer and working with relevant stakeholders, such as the Inclusive Fire Service Group, update the joint Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework by April 2017.

The LGA will encourage all services to monitor the number and proportion of applications from women, BME and LGBT individuals and to monitor the numbers and proportions at stages of recruitment to identify barriers to recruitment. The IFSG will do this at national level.

The IFSG will continue to develop guidance, support and improvement strategies on a wide range of equality, diversity and cultural issues.

In addition to detailed baseline information already gained from a survey of services, the IFSG will issue guidance on the collection, recording and monitoring of data early in 2017 which will include recruitment and progression issues. We will immediately promote it.

The IFSG is already developing diversity and cultural improvement strategies founded on detailed research on the experience of female, BME and LGBT staff, including focus groups, and from the workforce and fire service management more widely.

A survey seeking wider information on equality, diversity and cultural issues (including those relating to career progression and bullying and harassment) will be issued in January 2017. Workshops will be held in February 2017 with Equality and Diversity staff in services and union representatives with responsibility in such areas in order to access experiences at that level and their ideas for improvement.

The strategies will be promoted by all UK stakeholders on the IFSG (the National Employers which includes the LGA, the Fire Brigades Union, Retained Firefighters Union, Fire Officers Association, NFCC) and in addition wider unions and special interest groups working with the IFSG. The impact of these strategies will be monitored by the group on a regular basis to identify success and be updated and/or revised as necessary

We will encourage all stakeholders to work together at local or national levels to complement the activities of the IFS Group.

We will jointly monitor the progress of actions arising from the memorandum throughout 2017, adjusting them as necessary and jointly review its impact in December 2017.

How we will work together

The parties agree that relationships at national and local levels will be based on the following principles

- Respect and understanding – clarity about and mutual understanding of the distinct roles of each stakeholder and the value each party brings to the relationship.
- Constructive interaction with a demonstrable commitment of all stakeholders to making the relationship work through investment of time and resources.
- Recognition of the value of independent trade unions and special interest groups in providing a range of perspectives about equality and diversity both in general and in the specific context of the fire and rescue service.
- Recognise the value of services individually and collectively working with a range of stakeholders and partners to deliver improvements within an increasingly challenging external context.

Signatories

This statement is supported by the following organisations

