

## Equality Diversity and Inclusion Member Champion Report 2023/2024

Work has continued across the Service in 2023/2024 to promote Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). Progress and activities against our EDI objectives from the past 12 months are outlined below.

Objective One: Increasing the diversity of staff at all levels – We recognise the value that a diverse workforce brings and will take action to increase the diversity of job applicants, seeking individuals with the right behaviours and skills to help us reflect and engage with our local communities.

2023/24 saw two rounds of wholetime firefighter apprentices start in service. In Q2 8 apprentices started their training with a further 18 starting their training in Q4. Of these 26 that started, 19% were female, 12% were from an ethnic minority background currently underrepresented within the service and 4% stated they had a disability.

Have a Go days were run in April and May which had a total of 37 attendees across the four sessions.

Q3 saw the introduction of an extensive positive action programme ahead of recruitment opening this programme included four online sessions about the role of a firefighter where attendees heard about the role from operational firefighters and from our Head of Learning and Development about the training process. A further four online sessions were offered breaking down the various stages of the recruitment process and provided tips and tricks on how to write a supporting statement. The next lot of sessions were a tour of a fire station with a drill demonstration from crews, the drills ranged from RTC to ladder drills to give individuals an insight into some of the tasks carried out as part of the role. Four of these sessions were ran across the county. Finally, five Have a Go days were hosted across the county to give individuals the opportunity to try out the physical tests required at recruitment. Feedback of the sessions was really positive. Over 100 people registered their interest with 67 individuals attending at least one of the sessions. 38 of those went on to apply in the current recruitment process. A full evaluation is being completed to help shape our positive action offer for 2024/25.

The Summer Internship completed its second year of the scheme in Q2. Five interns aged 16 and 17 from ethnic minority groups currently underrepresented in the service joined the service for five weeks over summer. Each intern spent one week with Business Support, Programme Office, Facilities, Enforcement and Collaboration and Policy and had the opportunity to visit operational fire stations across the county.

This year the Service had two matches for the Leonard Cheshire Change 100 Programme who joined the Service for three months in the summer, one intern was matched with the Communications and Engagement Team and another matched with the Data and Performance team. A third was requested for the Learning and Development Team but an appropriate match was not found.

Our recruitment processes are constantly being reviewed to ensure they are inclusive and accessible. Our equality monitoring questions have been reworded to be more inclusive and promote disclosure. For example, there is now an option to “self-describe” so individuals can type their own answers rather than fitting themselves into one of the set answers. Adjustments are now offered at every stage of the recruitment process including application, interview, group exercise (where relevant) and appointment, this is clearly communicated to candidates throughout.

Our Candidates' Guidance to Interview was also reviewed providing candidates with more information on the types of adjustments we could make as well as providing further information as to what to expect during interview, including photos of the interview space so candidates know what to expect. This aimed to decrease some anxiety that individuals may experience when coming for an interview.

Objective Two: Leadership and corporate commitment – We will support our organisational leaders to understand their role in tackling inequalities and demonstrating inclusive behaviours, in line with the Behavioural Competency Framework. This commitment means we will be strong and visible in our leadership and ensure that all staff and members of our local communities have confidence in our commitment to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion.

In Q1 the Services new Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Coordinator started allowing a refocus on EDI related workstreams across the service.

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan was reviewed and new plan for 23/24 was introduced following approval from the EDI Steering Group.

Collaboration and partnership work have also been critical to the progress of the EDI agenda over this period. Memberships with the Business Disability Forum and Inclusive Employers have been maintained and renewed. Both memberships provide access to learning opportunities and learning resources that are promoted to staff through communication channels. In addition, these memberships provide RBFRS with consultative support on EDI and Disability related measures.

RBFRS has continued to participate in and maintain representation on several sector and regional networks including the Five Shires Collaboration, the Neurodiversity and Training Group and AFSA (Asian Fire Service Association) South Region Forum.

Policies continue to be reviewed to include gender neutral language, and Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) are included for all new and revised policies. More widely, EIAs are undertaken for activities including procurement, projects, and new equipment. Guidance and training are available to staff undertaking assessments and a register of all EIAs enables transparency, access to research and data and the sharing of learning. EIAs support organisational decisions. The EIA guidance and LMS package was reviewed and updated in Q3 to further support staff to complete high quality EIAs.

Both the Gender Pay Gap Report and Ethnicity Pay Gap Report have been produced and published externally as per previous years. It is not mandatory for RBFRS to complete The Ethnicity Pay Gap Report however we continue to voluntarily report on these figures.

In Q4 the service submitted their Disability Confident Leader for Revalidation following the end of the first 3 years of validation.

A review of the HMI spotlight review and the LFB Culture Report were undertaken and considered alongside the renewed vision and purpose which was launched at the all-staff conferences in June. Following a gap analysis of the LFB report an action plan was implemented and led to the development of the RBFRS Development Programme.

The Service amended its Green Book Annual Leave Policy to include the provision of flexible bank holidays. This offer allows for individuals to swap statutory public holidays for other time off to observe religious holidays such as swapping Easter Monday to take Eid off.

Objective Three: Improving our service delivery by creating strong links with our community - We will connect and communicate with our diverse local community to develop meaningful and sustainable links, which help us to increase our understanding of their needs. We will ensure that we tailor our prevention, protection, and response activities accordingly and target the most vulnerable people with the greatest risk.

Colleagues across the Service have engaged with members of the community in several forums to promote the activities and services we provide.

Local safety plans have been designed to incorporate equality considerations whilst continuing to identify risk at a local level and target prevention and protection activity appropriately. This has included an increasing awareness of individuals and groups in the community who are less likely to engage with our services and activities.

This year the Service attended three Pride events across the county including Reading, Newbury and the first Bracknell Pride to engage with our local LGBTQ+ community.

Engagement with more vulnerable and underrepresented communities continues on a hub level. An example of some of the work throughout the year including:

- Red Watch Slough attending the VIP launch of Visit my Mosque at the Jamia Masjid Islamic Centre in Slough.
- A crew from Bracknell attended Bracknell Forests first Cultural Day which focussed on a blend of culture and community cohesion.
- Wokingham Road White Watch attended the Aisha Masjid & Islamic Centre in Earley where they worked with the Muslim community to raise awareness of fire safety in the home. During this time, they were able to reach 600-700 passers-by and were invited to have dinner at the head table. This work also resulted in a further 43 safe and well referrals from the community.

- Crews from Caversham Road visited student halls and interacted with the Polish community putting up language posters in key locations.
- Promotion of services to the deaf community by actively seeking out contacts and requesting targeted social media posts containing BSL (British Sign Language).
- Prevention delivered a fire safety talk to the Nepalese Community with the help of an interpreter.
- Crews in central Hub supported with the Wokingham homeless count and engaged with the homeless to provide important fire safety advice.
- EDI Coordinator attended the Celebrating Diversity event in the East of Berkshire providing the opportunity to connect with individuals from diverse local communities including the Sikh community.
- Continued visits to refugee hotels across the county to give fire safety advice.
- Attendance at Bracknell Fun Fest which was an opportunity to engage with foster carers supporting immigrant children.

Meetings have been held with relevant staff across the organisation to understand how we can better capture work carried out within the community and events that we attend to ensure better information is captured on who we are targeting to ensure Equality of Access to all. This work will then allow us to identify groups that we may not currently be working with.

Objective Four: Building on our inclusive culture – We will continue taking action to ensure we have a culture where everyone feels valued and is treated with dignity and respect and support all staff to the creation of an inclusive working environment.

To support the creation of an inclusive environment, staff understanding and awareness of EDI a number of articles and webinars are shared on various topics including LGBTQ+ history month, Neurodiversity and Black History Month amongst others. A comms calendar is created annually which marks the celebration and awareness days throughout the year that the Service celebrates.

Personal stories from staff within the organisation have been shared such as an article published highlighting the impacts microaggressions have on an individual.

As part of our membership with the Business Disability Forum and Inclusive Employers the service has access to learning opportunities and webinars throughout the year. The upcoming webinars are posted on Viva Engage platforms for individuals to sign up. Webinars have included Neurodivergent Contributions in the Workplace, international Day of the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Understanding and Challenging Islamophobia and many more.

This year the EDI Network had a review with a name change and updated Terms of Reference to further promote best practice sharing. At the end of March, the EDI Network had its first in person event.

This year the service hosted three All Staff Conferences to launch our new vision and purpose the day started with talks from members of our SLT about the vision and a space for questions with the afternoon focussing on Active Bystander Training from Active Bystander UK.

We continue to review and implement policies and guidance where necessary. For example, our Line Managers Guidance for supporting staff celebrating Ramadan was reviewed and expanded to include more detail ahead of Ramadan in 2024. The Maternity, Paternity, Shared Parental and Adoption Policy was updated to include the increase in paid leave entitlement for fertility treatment and to include information on statutory shared parental pay.

A large focus area for us within the Service this year has been support for Neurodivergent individuals. A Neurodiversity Handbook was created and made available on the staff intranet which received positive feedback from members of staff across green and grey book. The handbook has now been created in a hard copy format and is available across all stations and HQ.

New accessible bathroom signage was designed and has now been added to all accessible toilets across RBFRS sites and includes braille. In addition, new signage has been created for gender neutral showers and toilets on stations which is currently being rolled out.

The organisation celebrated National Inclusion Week in Q2 which saw HQ staff come together for a Potluck Lunch to celebrate individuals' cultures, feedback of the

event was positive with staff requesting it to be a regular occurrence moving forwards.

### Looking Ahead

Looking ahead to the 2024/25 year we will be introducing EDI and Cultural Awareness training to all staff across the organisation. In addition to new LMS packages on Bullying and Harassment, Allyship and Inclusive recruitment as well as a refresh of our existing Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion E-Learning packages.

The Summer Internship will run for its third and final year of the pilot scheme throughout July and August. Spaces have been advertised for five interns aged 17 or 18 who will work across our Business Support, Programme Office, Facilities, Training and Development, IT and Information Governance teams as well as attending operational fire stations across the county.

The Service will also continue to engage with partners including the Five Shires Collaboration and AFSA to support the delivery of this work, particularly regarding establishing informative measures for benchmarking. We will also be expanding our positive action activities to occur on a more regular basis following the evaluation of the Discover a Career as a Firefighter sessions that happened before Christmas.

A refresh of the upcoming years EDI Action Plan is being completed with focus areas including equality data and Neurodiversity.

Cllr Morag Malvern, EDI Member Champion