

Introduction

Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority (BMKFA) is fully committed to Equality and Diversity. The Authority recognises fairness and inclusion is fundamental to everything it does, to achieve its vision of making Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes the safest areas in England in which to live work and travel.

The Authority believes a workforce that better reflects the diversity of the local working population will create a stronger, more enriched and well-informed organisation, able to meet the expectations of a modern Fire and Rescue Service. This is a key aspect of our People Strategy. The Authority's objective is to embed Equality and Diversity into everything it does internally and externally.

The Authority recognises having a diverse flexible workforce, which better reflects the community it serves, can enhance performance as well as improve its service to the community.

Under the Equality Act 2010, public sector organisations are expected to use this understanding to demonstrate 'due regard' to the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct that is prohibited by, or under, the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
- Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it.

The aim of the PSED is to embed equality considerations into the day to day work of public authorities so they tackle discrimination and inequality, and contribute to making society fairer.

The Equality Duty covers the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

The duty applies to marriage and civil partnership, but only in respect of the requirement to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination.

The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017 that came into effect in 2017 require public sector organisations employing over 250 staff

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to carry out gender pay gap reporting. In accordance with the Regulations, the Authority is required to annually publish six pieces of prescribed data about the pay and bonuses of male and female workers within the organisation:

1. Mean gender pay gap in hourly pay
2. Median gender pay gap in hourly pay
3. Mean bonus gender pay gap
4. Median bonus gender pay gap
5. Proportion of males and females receiving a bonus payment
6. Proportion of males and females in each pay quartile

This data must be published 'within the period of 12 months beginning with the snapshot date' (Regulation 2(2)). The snapshot date for public sector employers is 31 March each year.

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The Authority's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Objectives 2020 to 2025, which were approved at the June 2020 Fire Authority are set out against elements of the Authority's core values:

- **Diversity** - Our culture will engage and value diversity and difference to enhance our service offering to the public.
- **Service to the Community** - We will provide a more diverse range of services to better protect the communities we serve.
- **Improvement** - Our employment offer will be inclusive and embrace flexibility to support improved diversity representation across the service.
- **People** - We aim to be an employer of choice, attracting, recruiting, retaining and developing staff from diverse backgrounds, to reflect the communities we serve.

Progress against objectives has been reported to the Fire Authority on a regular basis. Regular updates are planned against the six, 12 and 18 to 24 month specific objectives detailed in Appendix 2. For progress to date, please see the Appendix 2.

BMKFA Headlines

- In January 2020 Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service carried out a follow up **Employee Culture Survey**. The survey featured questions relating to EDI and Respect and Recognition. The results and data provided the Service with an insight to how its employees felt about EDI. 78 per cent of respondents agreed that the Service values and promotes employee diversity, with 79 per cent of the 352 respondents agreeing that they are treated with respect as individuals.

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Employees were invited to provide a free text response, where 213 were received and analysed. Of these 12 per cent featured EDI. These responses are helping the Service to explore opportunities and inform future actions.

The employee engagement group will soon begin to plan for the next culture survey which will take place in January 2022. With a focus on EDI and Employee Wellbeing questions specifically aimed at these key areas featuring as a custom dimension.

- In the 2019 **HMICFRS report**, the People pillar, where EDI is assessed, was deemed “Good”. An improvement plan was written to ensure further sustained progress. In July 2020, the Head of Human Resources spoke at the Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA) Webinar on “Fairness, Diversity and Training at Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service”. She covered the improvement plan, progress to date, workstreams and communications. An article was also published in the September 2020 AFSA Inclusion magazine.
- In January 2021 the **HMICFRS Pandemic report** stated “Staff wellbeing was a clear priority for the service during the pandemic. It proactively identified wellbeing problems and responded to any concerns and further needs. Senior leaders actively promoted wellbeing services and encouraged staff to discuss any worries they had”

“Most staff survey respondents told us that they could access services to support their mental wellbeing if needed. Support put in place for staff included occupational health, counselling, peer support, and access to external resources such as mindfulness presentations. The service has discussed with its staff how it should plan for the potential longer-term effects of COVID-19 on its workforce.”

“Staff most at risk of COVID-19 were identified effectively, including those from a black, Asian and minority ethnic background and those with underlying health problems. The service worked with staff to develop and implement processes to manage the risk, including individual risk assessments. The service made sure that its most vulnerable staff ‘shielded’, and it adopted flexible ways of working to enable working from home. It also provided COVID-19 testing for all staff members and families who had symptoms.”

- The **People Strategy** which was approved at the October 2020 Fire Authority was refreshed to ensure it was fully reflective of the 2020 – 2025 Corporate Plan. The strategy details the Service’s vision, values, aim and key areas. EDI is one of the five key areas and highlights our EDI objectives. The Service’s People Strategy is intended to be flexible to address how we can most effectively respond to our

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current and future needs. The strategy features on both our internal intranet and external public facing website.

- Due to the restrictions associated with Covid19, many community events were cancelled. **Community Engagement** was progressed through new ways of working including:
 - Virtual presentations to community groups including a series of talks simultaneously translated into Urdu
 - Engagement through the new Community Boards across Buckinghamshire including the planning and approval of recovery support
 - Delivery of food parcels to families identified by Social Care
 - Welfare visits
 - Virtual school and uniformed group visits
 - Fire and Wellness visits to high-risk occupants
 - Virtual On-Call awareness evenings and interviews, which moved to socially distanced, covid secure interviews when restrictions allowed
 - Participation in virtual LGBTQ+ Pride webinars on Hate crime, Trans awareness to Trans acceptance and Positive action.

- **Service policies and procedures** are under regular review to ensure they reflect the community we service and support employees for example – Pay Policy, Leave procedure, Flexi time system guidance, Trauma Support guidance note, Discipline procedure, Grievance procedure. The Attendance Management Procedure is currently undergoing consultation.

- In May 2020 the **Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion Talent Inclusion and Diversity Evaluation (TIDE) Survey** was completed and the Bronze Standard awarded. The survey benchmarked against 98 organisations, across 26 sectors, on the following areas – Workforce, Strategy and Plan, Leadership and Accountability, Recruitment and Attraction, Training and Development, Employment practices, Communication and Engagement and Procurement.

- In 2020 an **Equal Pay Audit** was carried out by an external organisation. The report showed there are no issues with pay parity.

- The **Addressing Inequalities collaboration** was set up originally to address inequalities following the Black Lives Matter movement. The five Fire Services - Buckinghamshire, Royal Berkshire, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire and Warwickshire are working together to demonstrate their commitment to drive the initiatives forward. The Chief Fire Officer from each service have a strong commitment to improve awareness and understanding of racial equality issues in each Fire and Rescue Service.

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The aims of this project are that the services across all five counties:

- are better educated in the issues regarding race inequality and injustice
- are safe spaces where people can have respectful and constructive dialogue about racism and all the other prejudices present in society
- will have action plans that support continuous and sustainable improvement that makes the service more diverse and inclusive.

To date a joint video has been published internally, a shared resource hub discussed, and a series of interactive webinars are due to be held.

- The **EDI group membership** includes new employees from across the organisation. There is more confidence from group members, who are actively engaging and sharing with colleagues. Group members are taking ownership of the EDI objectives for example working on the following areas:
 - attendance a wide range of **collaboration events** and participating in National Fire Chief Council (NFCC) consultations for example Equality of access to services and employment for Black people, and LGBT communities, Core Code of Ethics, Maturity Models and Coaching and Mentoring.
 - attendance at a range of **EDI virtual workshops and webinars** are attended by the EDI group and learning, and resources are shared with employees across the service.
 - the Head of Human Resources attended the inaugural NFCC EDI Forum and regularly attends virtual Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA) and South East AFSA regional events.
 - promotion of the **Hidden Disabilities Sunflower scheme**. Not all disabilities are visible – some are hidden and not immediately obvious, such as learning difficulties, mental health as well as mobility, speech, visual or hearing impairments. Living with a hidden disability can make daily life more demanding for many people, and it can be difficult for others to identify, acknowledge or understand the challenges you face. Wearing the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower discreetly indicates to people around you that you may need additional support, help or a little more time. Training will be available to all staff via the HEAT online training to support wider understanding of people with hidden disabilities.
 - communications on **Pronouns** and why sharing and respecting pronouns are an important way to be inclusive. Pronouns are used in place of a proper noun (like someone's name). We use pronouns most often when

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referring to someone without using their name. Our most used pronouns (he/she) specifically refer to a person's gender. For queer, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and transgender people, these pronouns may not fit, can create discomfort, and can cause stress and anxiety. Using someone's correct gender pronouns is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for their identity. It's always best to ask and listen to how a person refers to themselves.

- research and costings into the **Change 100 internship programme** of paid summer work placements and mentoring for disabled students and recent graduates undertaken. Talented university students and recent graduates with a disability or long-term condition are matched with employers. Change 100 allows access to a unique candidate we might never have reached otherwise. We continue to explore options for introducing interns into the organisation; the earliest this could happen is 2022.
- promotion of **sign language**, with members of staff working with their colleagues to aid understanding.