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**NATIONAL JOINT COUNCIL
FOR LOCAL AUTHORITY
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES**

**To: Chief Fire Officers
Chief Executives/Clerks to Fire Authorities
Chairs of Fire Authorities
Directors of HR (Fire Authorities)**

Members of the National Joint Council

25 May 2021

NJC/2/21

INCLUSIVE FIRE SERVICE GROUP REPORT

1. Please find attached the latest report from the Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG).
2. The IFSG undertook a monitoring exercise in 2020 to determine the extent to which the group's improvement strategies had become embedded and whether or not they had begun to deliver improvement.
3. The IFSG remained keen to capture a range of views comparing original and current perceptions. Therefore, the exercise involved:
 - A survey of all FRSs
 - Independently run focus groups covering BAME, LGBTQI and female employees.
 - Workshops with FRS Equality & Diversity Officers/leads and local trade union representatives.
4. This report provides feedback on each aspect of the monitoring exercise.
5. In common with much work across the sector, the issuing of the report has been affected by resources needing to be focused on the response to the COVID-19 situation.
6. The IFSG will now consider its next steps.

Yours faithfully,

**NAOMI COOKE
MATT WRACK**

Joint Secretaries

Foreword

1. The Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG) was established by the National Joint Council (NJC) to enhance its continuing commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion.
2. The IFSG is unique in the fire service in that in addition to national employer and employee representatives from the NJC, it includes broader senior management and trade union representation. The following organisations also have two seats each – National Fire Chiefs Council, Fire Officers Association and the Fire and Rescue Services Association. The group has sought to be collaborative - complementing and enhancing, rather than competing with other initiatives.
3. You will be aware of the substantial work undertaken by the IFSG initially to research the position and to develop evidence-based improvement strategies. These were very well received by the sector, which committed to their adoption and, as requested, provided timescales within which it was expected each service would begin to see improvement as a consequence.
4. Based on these timescales the IFSG undertook a monitoring exercise in December 2019.
5. The purpose of this exercise was to determine the extent to which the improvement strategies had become embedded and whether or not they had begun to deliver improvement.
6. The IFSG remained keen to capture a range of views comparing original and current perceptions. Therefore, the exercise involved:
 - A survey of all FRSs
 - Independently run focus groups covering BAME, LGBTQI and female employees.
 - Workshops with FRS Equality & Diversity Officers/leads and local trade union representatives.
7. This report provides feedback on each aspect.
8. In common with much work across the sector, the issuing of the report has been affected by resources needing to be focused on the response to the COVID-19 situation. However, I am pleased to now be able to present this report to you on behalf of the IFSG.
9. IFSG members have contributed their considerable expertise and experience, time, and energy to fulfil its remit and I wish to record my thanks to them and to the NJC Secretariat.
10. Furthermore, the work of the group has been informed by a range of activities and assisted by various individuals and bodies to whom thanks are also due. These include LGA Research which was commissioned by the group to undertake the two research reports and independently conduct the employee focus groups.

11. The IFSG would like to thank all those FRS employees who gave their time to attend the employee focus groups and helped to provide valuable insight into working in the sector.
12. We would also like to extend thanks to those who attended the Equality & Diversity officer and local trade union representative workshops, which were well received and provided an excellent level of debate and often consensus.
13. The Inclusive Fire Service Group looks forward to continuing to work with all of you to deliver further improvement in equality and diversity.

Professor Linda Dickens

Independent Chair - Inclusive Fire Service Group

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To view more research from the Local Government Association's Research and Information team please visit: <http://www.local.gov.uk/local-government-intelligence>

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Introduction

The Local Government Association's (LGA) Research and Information Team was commissioned by the National Joint Council (NJC) led Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG) to conduct a survey of fire and rescue services to understand the extent to which the improvement strategies had helped fire and rescue services improve their situation in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Methodology

The survey was conducted by the LGA's Research and Information team using an online form. An email containing a unique link was sent to all 49 fire and rescue services in the United Kingdom¹. The survey was available to complete online during winter 2019/20.

The final response rate from the survey was 100 per cent.

Where tables and figures report the base, the description refers to the group of people who were asked the question and the number in brackets refers to the number of respondents who answered each question. Please note that bases vary throughout the survey.

Where the response base on specific questions is less than 50, care should be taken when interpreting percentages, as small differences can seem magnified. Therefore, where this is the case in this report, the non-percentage values are reported, in brackets, alongside the percentage values.

Throughout the report percentages in figures and tables may add to more than 100 per cent due to rounding.

¹ Whilst there are 49 recognised UK Fire and Rescue Services, the Isles of Scilly (whilst usually combined with Cornwall for NJC purposes) completed a separate submission for this section of the survey. Hence there are a maximum of 50 responses for this section.

IFSG improvement strategies survey

This section contains analysis of the full set of results.

Inclusivity should be embedded in every aspect of the fire and rescue service

The improvement strategies state that “there is a need for visible senior ownership and leadership - to lead by example and to ensure that local strategies and initiatives become reality on the ground, thereby embedding inclusion as the norm. Within a service this should be at chief officer level. Within a fire authority a specific member of the authority should hold the portfolio.”

Almost three quarters of fire and rescue authorities (74 per cent/35 respondents) said their senior lead for equality and diversity was a senior officer, i.e. the chief fire officer (CFO), an assistant chief fire officer (ACFO) or a deputy chief fire officer (DCFO). Just over a fifth (21 per cent/10 respondents) said this was another officer or manager.

Where services said the senior lead for equality and diversity was another officer or manager, they were asked to specify who this was. Six of the 10 specified that this was an area manager, one said this was a member of the strategic leadership team, one said this was a head of service, and one specified an Inclusion and Diversity Manager (who was managed by a member of the executive group).

Please see Table 1.

Table 1: Senior lead for equality, diversity and inclusion at service level		
Response	Per cent	Count
Senior officer (CFO/ACFO/DCFO)	74%	35
Other officer/manager	21%	10
There is no specific senior lead at service level	2%	1
Don't know	2%	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>47</i>

Base: all respondents (47)

At authority level, 19 per cent of services (eight respondents) said the senior lead for equality, diversity and inclusion was the Chair of the fire and rescue authority, but around three fifths (56 per cent/28 respondents) said this was another elected member. Another fifth (19 per cent/nine respondents) said there was no specific lead at authority level.

Services specified which other elected member was the senior lead for equality, diversity and inclusion. In most cases this was another senior elected member, including portfolio holders, deputy Chairs, and in two cases, the police, fire and crime commissioner for the area. In most other cases there was a separate named lead or champion.

Please see Table 2.

Table 2: Senior lead for equality, diversity and inclusion at authority level		
Response	Per cent	Count
Chair of fire and rescue authority	19%	8
Other elected member	56%	28
There is no specific individual lead at authority level	19%	9
Don't know	6%	3
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>48</i>

Base: all respondents (48)

The improvement strategies state that “union involvement should be recognised as an important factor in delivering improvement, particularly in respect of peer to peer involvement.” Respondents were asked whether a number of aspects of trade union involvement were already in place in June 2017, before the IFSG improvement strategies were issued, and then whether they were now in place.

There had been increases in all six of the aspects of trade union involvement since June 2017.

- Almost all fire services (98 per cent/47 respondents) said trade unions were involved in meetings and decisions on inclusions issues, up from 85 per cent in June 2017.
- More than nine out of 10 (92 per cent/44 respondents) said unions were actively consulted/involved in focus groups, up from 85 per cent in June 2017).
- Just over two-thirds (67 per cent/32 respondents) said trade unions were involved in the feedback process in relation to training, up from 52 per cent in June 2017).
- Just over three-fifths (63 per cent/30 respondents) said learning from bullying and/or harassment cases was addressed together with union involvement, up from 48 per cent in June 2017.
- Three-fifths (60 per cent/29 respondents) said special interest bodies,

for example AFSA, Women in the Fire Service and Stonewall, were actively consulted and/or involved in focus groups, up from 38 per cent in June 2017.

- Finally, over half (54 per cent/26 respondents) said union representatives were involved in the development of training, up from 42 per cent in June 2017.

Please see Table 3

Table 3: Which of the following aspects of trade union involvement have been implemented in your service? (June 2018 and now)				
Response	June 2017		Now	
	Per cent	Count	Per cent	Count
Trade unions are involved in meetings and decisions on inclusion issues	85%	41	98%	47
Unions are actively consulted/involved in focus groups	85%	41	92%	44
Trade unions are involved in the feedback process in relation to training	52%	25	67%	32
Learning from bullying/harassment cases is addressed together with union involvement	48%	23	63%	30
Special interest bodies, for example AFSA, Women in the Fire Service and Stonewall, are actively consulted/involved in focus groups	38%	18	60%	29
Union representatives are involved in the development of training	42%	20	54%	26

Base: all respondents (48)

The improvement strategies state that “Fire and Rescue Services should ensure the workplace is fit for purpose for all groups of employees including correct Personal Protective Equipment and gender specific station and fireground facilities”.

Nine out of 10 (90 per cent/44 respondents) strongly agreed or tended to agree that their fire service provided a range of tailored and gender-specific personal protective equipment suitable for all firefighters.

Please see Table 4.

Table 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

"Our fire service provides a range of tailored and gender-specific personal protective equipment suitable for all firefighters"

Response	Per cent	Count
Strongly agree	47%	23
Tend to agree	43%	21
Neither agree nor disagree	4%	2
Tend to disagree	4%	2
Strongly disagree	2%	1
Don't know	0%	0

Base: all respondents (49)

Nearly three-fifths (57 per cent/28 respondents) said that provision of tailored and gender-specific personal protective equipment had improved since the IFSG improvement strategies were issued in June 2017. A further two-fifths (39 per cent/19 respondents) said provision had stayed about the same.

Please see Table 5.

Table 5: How, if at all, has the provision of tailored and gender-specific personal protective equipment changed since June 2017, when the IFSG improvement strategies were issued?

Response	Per cent	Count
Provision has improved	57%	28
Provision has stayed about the same	39%	19
Provision has worsened	0%	0
Don't know	4%	2

Base: all respondents (49)

Fire services were asked what proportion of workplace facilities across their service currently offer gender-specific toilet, shower and changing facilities. Just over a third (35 per cent/17 respondents) said all places offered these facilities. Under half (45 per cent/22 respondents) said most had these facilities. A fifth (20 per cent/10 respondents) said some had these facilities.

Please see Table 6.

Table 6: What proportion of workplace facilities across your service currently offer gender-specific toilet, shower and changing facilities?

Response	Per cent	Count
None of them	0%	0
Some of them	20%	10
Most of them	45%	22
All of them	35%	17
Don't know	0%	0

Base: all respondents (49)

Fire services were asked what proportion of fireground facilities mobilised by their service offered gender-specific toilet and welfare facilities. The largest number of fire services (45 per cent/22 respondents) said no firegrounds had these facilities. One-fifth (20 per cent/10 respondents) said all firegrounds had these facilities.

Please see Table 7.

Table 7: What proportion of fireground facilities mobilised by your service currently offer gender-specific toilet and welfare facilities?

Response	Per cent	Count
None of them	45%	22
Some of them	14%	7
Most of them	12%	6
All of them	20%	10
Don't know	8%	4

Base: all respondents (49)

Promoting an inclusive culture

The improvement strategies state that “Fire and Rescue Services should ensure that all managers are trained in people management including skills such as how to have difficult conversations and that all managers recognise their responsibilities in promoting an inclusive culture”.

Fire services were asked whether all managers receive appropriate management training specifically in several areas. Four-fifths of fire services (80 per cent/39 respondents) said managers received training about addressing disciplinary and grievance matters at an informal stage. Seven out of ten (70 per cent/35 respondents) said managers had training about how to have difficult conversations. Seven out of ten (70 per cent/35 respondents) said all managers had unconscious bias training. Nearly two-thirds (64 per cent/32 respondents) said managers had training on how to spot and challenge bullying and harassment. Three-fifths (60 per cent/30 respondents) said managers had training on the benefits of an inclusive workforce. Nearly half (48 per cent/24 respondents) said they had cultural awareness training. Finally, just over two-fifths (42 per cent/21 respondents) said they had training in change management.

Please see Table 8.

Table 8: Do all managers receive appropriate management training specifically including the following?		
Response	Per cent	Count
Addressing disciplinary and grievance matters at an informal stage	80%	39
How to have difficult conversations	70%	35
Unconscious bias training	70%	35
How to spot and challenge bullying and harassment	64%	32
Training on the benefits of an inclusive workforce	60%	30
Cultural awareness training	48%	24
Change management training	42%	21
Other	63%	12

Base: all respondents (all questions: 50; except addressing disciplinary and grievance matters at an informal stage: 49; and other: 19)

Fire services were also asked whether the lead on equality, diversity and inclusion at authority level received appropriate training specifically in three areas. Two-fifths (40 per cent/14 respondents) said the lead received unconscious bias training. Two-fifths (40 per cent/14 respondents) said they had cultural awareness training. Two-thirds (66 per cent/23 respondents) said they had training on the benefits of an inclusive workforce.

For all areas of training, a sizable percentage did not know whether the equality, diversity and inclusion lead received that type of training (23 per cent, 26 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively).

Please see Table 9.

Table 9: Does the lead on equality, diversity and inclusion at authority level receive appropriate training specifically including the following?		
Response	Per cent	Count
Unconscious bias training	40%	14
Cultural awareness training	40%	14
Training on the benefits of an inclusive workforce	66%	23
Other	43%	6

Base: all respondents (all questions: 35; except other: 14)

The improvement strategies state that “Senior managers should lead by positive example. They should challenge bullying and harassment behaviours at every level, ensuring where necessary that management styles change in order to drive a different and improved culture”.

Respondents were asked to what extent a list of activities were characteristic of their fire and rescue service. More than nine out of 10 fire services (92 per cent/46 respondents) said senior managers challenged bullying and harassment behaviours at every level to a great or moderate extent. More than nine out of 10 fire services (92 per cent/46 respondents) said managers ensured, where necessary, that management styles changed in order to drive a different and improved culture to a great or moderate extent.

The improvement strategies guidance also states that “Fire and Rescue Services should promote a culture where challenge is accepted and welcomed as a positive contribution. This should be in both directions”.

Nine out of 10 (90 per cent/45 respondents) said the Fire and Rescue Service promoted a culture where challenge, by and within all levels of the organisation, was accepted and welcomed as a positive contribution to a great or moderate extent.

Please see Table 10.

Table 10: To what extent are the following activities characteristic of your fire and rescue service?					
Response	Great extent	Moderate extent	Small extent	Not at all	Don't know
Senior managers challenge bullying and harassment behaviours at every level	68%	24%	4%	0%	4%
Senior managers ensure, where necessary, that management styles change in order to drive a different and improved culture	62%	30%	4%	0%	4%
The fire and rescue service promotes a culture where challenge, by and within all levels of the organisation, is accepted and welcomed as a positive contribution	54%	36%	8%	0%	2%

Base: all respondents (50)

The improvement strategies state that “Fire and Rescue Services should ensure that all employees are aware of, and understand, the relevant (HR) policies. Where an incident is reported and found to be accurate it is important that action is taken and is seen to be taken as a result. Everyone needs to be confident in the process”.

Respondents were asked to what extent two statements in relation to equality, diversity, culture, discipline and grievance policies were true of their fire service. More than nine out of 10 fire services (94 per cent/47 respondents) said it was true of their service that employees were aware of where to find the relevant HR policies to a great or moderate extent. More than nine out of 10 (94 per cent/47 respondents) said it was true that any changes to HR policies were communicated to all employees regularly to a great or moderate extent.

Please see Table 11.

Table 11: To what extent are the following statements in relation to equality, diversity, culture, discipline and grievance policies true of your fire service?					
Response	Great extent	Moderate extent	Small extent	Not at all	Don't know
Employees are aware of where to find the relevant HR policies.	74%	20%	6%	0%	0%
Any changes to HR policies are communicated to all employees regularly.	58%	36%	6%	0%	0%

Base: all respondents (50)

The improvement strategies state that “Fire and Rescue Services should monitor the use of discipline and grievance procedures in order to identify and correct any problematic trends. This should also include an element of monitoring at the informal level in order to pick up issues at an early stage”.

Almost all respondents (98 per cent/49 respondents) said their fire and rescue service recorded the numbers of disciplinary and grievance procedures. The remaining one respondent did not know whether or not this was the case.

Please see Table 12.

Table 12: Does your fire and rescue service record the numbers of disciplinary and grievance procedures?		
Response	Per cent	Count
Yes	98%	49
No	0%	0
Don't know	2%	1

Base: all respondents (50)

Just over three-quarters (76 per cent/37 respondents) said this data was analysed in order to identify trends in equality, diversity and cultural issues.

Please see Table 13.

Table 13: Is this data analysed in order to identify trends in equality, diversity and cultural issues?		
Response	Per cent	Count
Yes	76%	37
No	22%	11
Don't know	2%	1

Base: respondents who said their service recorded the numbers of disciplinary and grievance procedures (49)

Where this data on disciplinary and grievance procedures was analysed, services were asked to what extent this had led to a reduction in formal procedures since June 2017, when the IFSG improvement strategies were issued. Half (50 per cent/18 respondents) said this had happened at least to a small extent.

Overall this means that 36 per cent of all fire services (18 respondents) indicated that they had recorded and analysed data on grievance and disciplinary procedures, which led to improvements since June 2017 at least to a small extent.

Please see Table 14.

Table 14: To what extent has this led to a reduction in formal disciplinary and grievance procedures since June 2017, when the IFSG improvement strategies were issued?		
Response	Per cent	Count
To a great extent	6%	2
To a moderate extent	25%	9
To a small extent	19%	7
Not at all	44%	16
Don't know	6%	2

Base: respondents indicating that data was analysed in order to identify trends in equality, diversity and cultural issues (36)

The improvement strategies state that “Fire and Rescue Services should consider the creation of trained Equality and Diversity champions”. Just over four-fifths of respondents (82 per cent/41 respondents) indicated that their fire and rescue service had equality and diversity champions and/or allies.

Please see Table 15.

Table 15: Does your fire and rescue service have equality and diversity champions and/or allies?		
Response	Per cent	Count
Yes	82%	41
No	18%	9
Don't know	0%	0

Base: all respondents (50)

Where respondents had indicated that their service had equality and diversity champions and/or allies, over three-quarters (77 per cent/30 respondents) said that they had training that was appropriate to that role.

Please see Table 16.

Table 16: Do equality and diversity champions/allies have training that is appropriate to that role?

Response	Per cent	Count
Yes	77%	30
No	18%	7
Don't know	5%	2

Base: respondents who said the fire and rescue service had equality and diversity champions and/or allies (39)

The improvement strategies state that “Fire and Rescue Services should also consider the creation of mediators (and may wish to consider whether they should be provided externally as well as internally)”. Only four per cent of fire services (two respondents) said they did not currently use mediators, while nearly half (46 per cent/23 respondents) used both internal and external mediators.

Please see Table 17.

Table 17: Does your fire and rescue service have equality and diversity champions and/or allies?

Response	Per cent	Count
We currently use internal mediators	24%	12
We currently use external mediators	24%	12
We currently use both internal and external mediators	46%	23
We do not currently use mediators	4%	2
Don't know	2%	1

Base: all respondents (50)

Just over three-fifths of respondents (63 per cent/31 respondents) said the use of mediators has stayed about the same since the IFSG improvement strategies were issued.

Please see Table 19.

Table 18: How has the use of mediators, whether based internally or externally, changed since June 2017, when the IFSG improvement strategies were issued?

Response	Per cent	Count
Use of mediators has increased	22%	11
Use of mediators has stayed about the same	63%	31
Use of mediators has decreased	6%	3
Don't know	8%	4

Base: all respondents (49)

Recruitment

The improvement strategies state that “Fire and Rescue Services should explore, and where appropriate utilise, recruitment opportunities such as apprenticeships and cadets in order to increase diversity in the workforce”. Just over three-quarters of fire services (76 per cent/37 respondents) had implemented an apprentice programme and nearly three-quarters (74 per cent/37 respondents) had implemented a cadet programme.

Please see Table 20.

Table 19: Have you implemented an apprentice or cadets programme?		
Response	Apprentice programme	Cadet programme
No, we currently have no plans to implement this	12%	16%
No, we have not implemented this, but we plan to in 3 or more years	6%	8%
No, we have not implemented this, but we plan to within the next 2 years	6%	2%
Yes, we have implemented this	76%	74%

Base: all respondents (apprentice programme: 49; cadet programme: 50)

The improvement strategies state that “Fire and Rescue Services should undertake greater and early engagement with specific communities/schools/colleges and not just when recruitment is on the horizon. This would further reinforce understanding of the role as it is today. This should utilise employee role models whilst being careful to maintain a balance with their core work”.

Almost nine out of 10 fire services (88 per cent/44 respondents) had routinely undertaken greater engagement work with specific communities in the last two years, outside of recruitment rounds.

Please see Table 21.

Table 20: Has your service routinely undertaken greater engagement work with specific communities in the last two years, outside of recruitment rounds?		
Response	Per cent	Count
Yes	88%	44
No	12%	6
Don't know	0%	0

Base: all respondents (50)

The improvement strategies state that “Fire and Rescue Services should ensure they have visible family friendly working policies supported by a greater use of flexible working arrangements”.

In both the 2017/18 and 2018/19 financial years, more than nine out of 10 fire services (94 per cent/46 respondents and 94 per cent/45 respondents, respectively) offered flexible working arrangements.

Please see Table 22.

Table 21: Please indicate whether your fire and rescue service offered flexible working arrangements in each of the previous two financial years?		
Response	Per cent	Count
2017/18	94%	46
2018/19	94%	45

Base: all respondents (2017/18: 49; 2018/19: 48)

Fire services who had indicated that they offered flexible working arrangements were asked to quantify the number of requests received and the number granted. Between the 2017/18 and 2018/19 financial years both requests for flexible working arrangements and requests that were granted increased. On average there were 4.5 requests for flexible working arrangements in 2018/19, up from 3.7 in 2017/18. Of requests granted, there were 4.0 in 2018/19, compared to 3.1 in 2017/18.

Please see Table 23.

Table 22: How many requests for flexible working arrangements did you receive, and how many were granted during 2017/18 and 2019/20?					
Financial year		Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Count
2017/18	Requests	0	29	3.7	44
	Requests granted	0	23	3.1	44
2018/19	Requests	0	39	4.5	43
	Requests granted	0	29	4.0	43

Base: respondents who said they offered flexible working arrangements (2017/18: 44; 2018/19: 43)

The improvement strategies state that “Fire and Rescue Services should develop an internal communications strategy to explain the difference between positive action and positive discrimination in order to counteract the view of some that an individual has only been employed/promoted because they are female/BME/LGBT. This would be supportive to such individuals and also be helpful in terms of encouraging progression”.

Nearly seven out of 10 fire services (69 per cent/34 respondents) had developed an internal communications strategy to explain the difference between positive action and positive discrimination.

Please see Table 24

Table 23: Have you developed an internal communications strategy to explain the difference between positive action and positive discrimination?		
Response	Per cent	Count
Yes	69%	34
No	29%	14
Don't know	2%	1

Base: all respondents (49)

The improvement strategies state that “Fire and Rescue Services should consider commissioning work in their own areas to identify any obstacles that local communities feel there are to applying to work with the service”.

Over half of fire services (55 per cent/27 respondents) said work had been undertaken to identify any obstacles that local communities may feel in applying to work in their service. A further 37 per cent (18 respondents) said they planned to carry out this work in the next 12 months.

Please see Table 25.

Table 24: Has work been undertaken to identify any obstacles that local communities may feel in applying to work in your service?		
Response	Per cent	Count
No, this has not been undertaken yet	6%	3
No, this has not been undertaken, but we plan to in the next 12 months	37%	18
Yes, this work has been undertaken	55%	27
Don't know	2%	1

Base: all respondents (49)

Progression

The improvement strategies state that “Fire and Rescue Services should ensure that promotion processes which are fair and transparent are applied consistently and clearly explained to all employees”. Almost seven out of 10 fire services (68 per cent/34 respondents) said promotion processes were equality impact assessed to identify any barriers to under-represented groups. Just over three-quarters (76 per cent/38 respondents) said unions/representative groups are involved in reviews of promotion processes. Just over seven out of 10 (72 per cent/36 respondents) said internal interviewers/assessors are given unconscious bias training.

Please see Table 26.

Table 25: Please indicate whether or not each of the following things happen in relation to promotion processes in your fire and rescue service.		
Response	Per cent	Count
Promotion processes are equality impact assessed to identify any barriers to under-represented groups	68%	34
Unions/representative groups are involved in reviews of promotion processes	76%	38
Internal interviewers/assessors are given unconscious bias training	72%	36
Promotion processes are equality impact assessed to identify any barriers to under-represented groups	68%	34

Base: all respondents (50)

The improvement strategies state that “Fire and Rescue Services should develop support networks and meaningful mentor/coaching programmes”. Almost nine out of 10 fire services (86 per cent/42 respondents) said they offered internal support networks and just over three-quarters (76 per cent/38 respondents) said they offered mentors and/or coaches.

Please see Table 27.

Table 26: Does your fire and rescue service currently offer internal support networks or mentoring/coaching programmes?		
Response	Per cent	Count
Internal support networks	86%	42
Mentors/coaches	76%	38
Other	54%	7

Base: all respondents (internal support networks: 49; mentors/coaches: 50; other: 13)

The improvement strategies state that “Fire and Rescue Services should encourage interest in promotion in general and through talent spotting by

including leadership training, opportunities for development such as job swaps, taster weeks and acting-up/temporary promotion (so that an individual can experience the different role). This should be underpinned by a fair and transparent policy which sets out clearly the criteria by which such opportunities will be offered”.

Almost nine out of 10 fire services (88 per cent/43 respondents) offered leadership training to aspiring non-managerial personnel and all 50 fire services offered acting-up and/or temporary promotions. Only just over one in ten (13 per cent/ 6 respondents) offered job swaps and/or taster weeks.

Please see Table 28.

Table 27: Which of the following opportunities, if any, does your fire and rescue service offer to staff in order to encourage promotion?		
Response	Per cent	Count
Leadership training (to aspiring non-managerial personnel)	88%	43
Job swaps/taster weeks	13%	6
Acting up/temporary promotions	100%	50
Other	67%	6

Base: all respondents (leadership training: 49; job swaps/taster weeks: 45; acting-up/temporary promotions: 50; other: 9)

Retention

The improvement strategies state that “Fire and Rescue Services should ensure that expectations around fitness levels are clearly explained, and support provided, including the potential impact of female only issues such as maternity or the menopause”. All but one fire service (98 per cent/48 respondents) said that all employees were aware of the expectations around fitness levels.

Please see Table 29.

Table 28: Are all employees aware of the expectations around fitness levels?		
Response	Per cent	Count
Yes	98%	48
No	2%	1

Base: all respondents (49)

Almost all fire services (96 per cent/44 respondents) said they offered individual and/or bespoke support for personnel in achieving fitness standards.

Please see Table 30.

Table 30: Do you currently offer individual/bespoke support for personnel in achieving fitness standards?		
Response	Per cent	Count
Yes	96%	45
No	2%	1
Don't know	2%	1

Base: all respondents (47)

More than nine out of 10 fire services who offered individual/bespoke support for personnel in achieving fitness standards (94 per cent/34 respondents) said they offered support specifically related to maternity. Just over four-fifths (81 per cent/25 respondents) offered support specifically related to menopause. Just under four-fifths (78 per cent/29 respondents) offered support specifically for age-related issues.

Please see Table 31.

Table 31: Do you currently offer bespoke support for the following potential fitness issues?		
Response	Per cent	Count
Maternity	94%	34
Menopause	81%	25
Age-related	78%	29
Other	67%	6

Base: respondents indicating that they offered individual/bespoke support for personnel in achieving fitness standards (maternity: 36; menopause: 31; age-related: 37; other: 9)

The improvement strategies state that “where Fire and Rescue Services do not already conduct exit interviews they should now do so. The outcomes from such interviews should be recorded and monitored to ensure early identification of any themes which can then be resolved for the future”.

Just under a third (30 per cent/15 respondents) said exit interviews sometimes take place, half (50 per cent/25 respondents) said exit interviews take place most of the time and just under a fifth (18 per cent/9 respondents) said exit interviews always take place. Only one fire and rescue service (two per cent) said that exit interviews never take place.

Please see Table 32.

Table 32: Are all employees aware of the expectations around fitness levels?

Response	Per cent	Count
An exit interview always takes place	18%	9
An exit interview takes place most of the time	50%	25
An exit interview sometimes takes place	30%	15
An exit interview never takes place	2%	1
Don't know	0%	0

Base: all respondents (50)

Two-thirds of fire and rescue services who conduct exit interviews (67 per cent/33 respondents) said the outcomes of exit interviews are monitored to identify potential themes/trends.

Please see Table 33.

Table 33: Are the outcomes of exit interviews monitored to identify potential themes/trends

Response	Per cent	Count
Yes	67%	33
No	29%	14
Don't know	4%	2

Base: respondents indicating an exit interview takes place at least sometimes (49)



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Inclusive Fire Service Group Workforce survey 2019

March 2020



Summary

Key findings

- The survey relating to employees within the scope of the NJC for Local Authority Fire and Rescue services recorded a total of 30,209 non-retained staff, of whom 95 per cent were whole-time. A total of 18,183 retained duty system staff (RDS) were also recorded. In both cases, about a half, 52 per cent, were in a firefighter (competent) role.
- 90 per cent of non-retained staff and 94 per cent of RDS staff were male.
- 100 per cent of non-retained and RDS staff had the same gender as their sex registered at birth.
- 95 per cent of non-retained and RDS staff were white.
- 97 per cent of non-retained staff and 98 per cent of RDS staff were heterosexual.
- The overall turnover rate of non-retained staff was 6.9 per cent, slightly higher than the recruitment rate of 6.2 per cent. Trainee firefighters accounted for more than 60 per cent of all recruits.
- The overall turnover rate of RDS staff was 11.1 per cent, slightly lower than the recruitment rate of 11.5 per cent.
- Turnover of non-retained staff was higher among males (7.2 per cent) than females (4.5 per cent) while recruitment was higher among females (9.4 per cent) than males (5.8 per cent).
- Turnover of RDS staff was also higher among males (11.1 per cent) than females (10.1 per cent) and recruitment was again higher among females (21.3 per cent) than males (10.9 per cent).
- Turnover of non-retained staff was higher among black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) staff (9.5 per cent) than white staff (6.8 per cent), and the same was true of the recruitment rate (8.8 per cent compared with 6.0 per cent).
- Turnover of RDS staff was higher among white staff (11.2 per cent) than BAME staff (7.9 per cent), as was the recruitment rate (11.8 per cent compared with 7.1 per cent).
- Turnover of non-retained staff was slightly higher among bisexual, gay and lesbian staff (7.8 per cent) than heterosexual staff (6.9 per cent), and the same was true of the recruitment rate (10.0 per cent compared with 6.0 per cent).
- Turnover of RDS staff was higher among heterosexual staff (11.4 per cent) than bisexual, gay and lesbian staff (4.4 per cent), and the same was true of the recruitment rate (11.7 per cent compared with 7.5 per cent).
- There was a 2.1 per cent increase in the numbers of non-retained staff between 2018 and 2019, and a 4.2 per cent increase in the numbers of RDS staff.
- The proportion of non-retained staff who were male fell slightly from 91.0 per cent to 90.3 per cent between 2018 and 2019, while for RDS staff it fell from 95.4 per cent to 93.6 per cent.
- There was no change between 2018 and 2019 in the ethnic minority profile of non-retained staff (95 per cent remaining white) while the proportion of RDS staff who were white fell slightly from 99 per cent to 95 per cent.

Introduction

Background

In December 2019 the Local Government Association's Research and Information Team conducted a survey of all UK Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) on behalf of the Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG). To gather a full picture, services were also asked to provide information about the size and composition of the workforce, and monitor changes since a similar National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire & Rescue Services (NJC) survey conducted in 2018.

Response

The survey was sent to the Human Resources Director and Chief Fire Officer in all 49 FRSs in the United Kingdom in December 2019. By early February, all 49 had responded.

Although all FRSs responded to the survey, not all could provide all the requested items of information¹. The data should therefore be treated with caution, particularly that covering gender identity, for which information was not available for about 80 per cent of staff, and that on sexual orientation, for which the proportion was about half. Because of the partial nature of many responses, and to facilitate comparisons with the 2018 survey, data shown in the main body of the report have been recalculated to exclude 'not knowns'. Details of 'not knowns' are shown in the annex. Detailed tables showing data of each duty system are available on request.

Where the response base is less than 50, figures can be skewed due to the small sample size and care should be taken when interpreting percentages, as small differences can seem magnified. Throughout the report, percentages in figures and tables may add to more than 100 per cent due to rounding.

Information collected

For each role² and duty system³, the survey collected information on the numbers of staff broken down by:

- sex
- gender identity
- ethnicity
- sexual orientation

Information was also collected on the numbers of personnel leaving FRSs in 2018/19 and the numbers recruited from outside.

¹ In addition: (1) One service did not provide any information on Control staff as they were not covered by the Grey Book (2) Two services did not provide a breakdown of firefighters, so this was estimated using proportions observed in other respondents.

² Roles – area manager, group manager, station manager, watch manager, crew manager, firefighter (competent), firefighter (development), firefighter (trainee).

³ Duty system – whole-time, part-time, control, retained duty system.

All information was requested on a headcount, not full-time equivalent, basis.

Scope

The survey covered all personnel directly employed by FRSs at 31st March 2019 who were covered by the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services (Grey Book). This included temporary/fixed-term contract personnel who had been employed for over a year at 31st March 2019, and secondees whose salary was being paid by the FRS.

The survey excluded support staff, and any personnel covered by the National Joint Council for Brigade Managers of Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services (Gold Book), agency/casual personnel who had been employed for less than a year at 31st March 2019, personnel employed by outside contractors, and secondees whose salary was not being paid by the FRS.

Survey Findings

Non-retained workforce

This section covers three contract types, whole-time staff, part-time staff⁴ and control staff. The tables here show combined figures, but the annex has full breakdowns of each type of duty system.

A total of 30,209 staff were recorded, of whom 28,667 were whole-time (95 per cent), 1,310 control (4 per cent) and 232 part-time (1 per cent). By role, firefighters (competent) made up 52 per cent of the total workforce, followed by watch managers (16 per cent) and crew managers (15 per cent).

Sex

Overall, 90.3 per cent of non-retained staff were male, a proportion that varied between 95.3 per cent of group managers and 80.0 per cent of trainee firefighters. Among the largest group, firefighters (competent), 90.7 per cent were male and 9.3 per cent female. (Table 1)

Table 1: non-retained workforce by gender						
	Female		Male		Total	
	Nos	%	Nos	%	Nos	%
Area Manager	17	7.9%	198	92.1%	215	100.0%
Group Manager	31	4.7%	636	95.3%	667	100.0%
Station Manager	130	7.9%	1,519	92.1%	1,649	100.0%
Watch Manager	439	8.8%	4,536	91.2%	4,975	100.0%
Crew Manager	403	8.7%	4,209	91.3%	4,612	100.0%
Firefighter (Competent)	1,459	9.3%	14,164	90.7%	15,623	100.0%
Firefighter (Development)	340	17.1%	1,648	82.9%	1,988	100.0%
Firefighter (Trainee)	96	20.0%	384	80.0%	480	100.0%
Total	2,916	9.7%	27,293	90.3%	30,209	100.0%

⁴ Part-time personnel are those who are contracted to work less than the full 42 average hour week (but are not RDS employees).

Gender identity

Almost all non-retained staff had the same gender as their sex registered at birth (99.7 per cent), with only 80 (0.3 per cent) recorded as having a gender different to their sex registered at birth. There was little variation by role. (Table 2)

Table 2: non-retained workforce by gender identity						
	Gender same as sex registered at birth		Gender different to sex registered at birth		Total	
	Nos	%	Nos	%	Nos	%
Area Manager	215	100.0%	0	0.0%	215	100.0%
Group Manager	667	100.0%	0	0.0%	667	100.0%
Station Manager	1,649	100.0%	0	0.0%	1,649	100.0%
Watch Manager	4,957	99.6%	18	0.4%	4,975	100.0%
Crew Manager	4,598	99.7%	14	0.3%	4,612	100.0%
Firefighter (Competent)	15,575	99.7%	48	0.3%	15,623	100.0%
Firefighter (Development)	1,988	100.0%	0	0.0%	1,988	100.0%
Firefighter (Trainee)	480	100.0%	0	0.0%	480	100.0%
Total	30,129	99.7%	80	0.3%	30,209	100.0%

Ethnicity

Overall, 94.6 per cent of non-retained staff were white, 2.1 per cent were mixed, 1.6 per cent black, 0.9 per cent Asian, and 0.9 per cent of another ethnic origin. The proportion of staff who were white was lowest among firefighters (development) (90.1 per cent) and highest among group managers (98.8 per cent). (Table 3)

Table 3: non-retained workforce by ethnicity												
	White		Mixed		Asian		Black		Other		Total	
	Nos	%	Nos	%	Nos	%	Nos	%	Nos	%	Nos	%
Area Manager	207	96.4%	4	2.1%	1	0.5%	2	1.0%	0	0.0%	215	100.0%
Group Manager	659	98.8%	5	0.7%	2	0.3%	0	0.0%	1	0.2%	667	100.0%
Station Manager	1,596	96.8%	17	1.0%	6	0.3%	19	1.2%	11	0.7%	1,649	100.0%
Watch Manager	4,788	96.2%	87	1.7%	25	0.5%	39	0.8%	36	0.7%	4,975	100.0%
Crew Manager	4,416	95.7%	61	1.3%	36	0.8%	55	1.2%	44	1.0%	4,612	100.0%
Firefighter (C)	14,671	93.9%	339	2.2%	152	1.0%	309	2.0%	152	1.0%	15,623	100.0%
Firefighter (D)	1,791	90.1%	95	4.8%	35	1.7%	48	2.4%	20	1.0%	1,988	100.0%
Firefighter (T)	440	91.6%	26	5.3%	8	1.7%	4	0.8%	3	0.6%	480	100.0%
Total	28,567	94.6%	633	2.1%	265	0.9%	476	1.6%	268	0.9%	30,209	100.0%

Sexual orientation

A slightly higher proportion, 96.5 per cent, were recorded as heterosexual, 1.9 per cent as gay or lesbian, and 1.6 per cent as bisexual. The proportion of staff recorded as heterosexual varied between 98.5 per cent of group managers and 91.9 per cent of trainee firefighters. (Table 4)

Table 4: non-retained workforce by sexual orientation								
	Heterosexual		Bisexual		Gay or lesbian		Total	
	Nos	%	Nos	%	Nos	%	Nos	%
Area Manager	207	96.2%	2	0.8%	7	3.1%	215	100.0%
Group Manager	657	98.5%	3	0.5%	7	1.0%	667	100.0%
Station Manager	1,620	98.2%	7	0.4%	22	1.3%	1,649	100.0%
Watch Manager	4,843	97.4%	69	1.4%	62	1.3%	4,975	100.0%
Crew Manager	4,503	97.6%	43	0.9%	66	1.4%	4,612	100.0%
Firefighter (Competent)	15,050	96.3%	271	1.7%	302	1.9%	15,623	100.0%
Firefighter (Development)	1,851	93.1%	64	3.2%	73	3.7%	1,988	100.0%
Firefighter (Trainee)	441	91.9%	19	4.0%	19	4.0%	480	100.0%
Total	29,172	96.5%	479	1.6%	558	1.9%	30,209	100.0%

Leavers and recruits

Information was collected on the numbers of leavers from and recruits to FRSs over the financial year 2018/19⁵. The data are presented as turnover and recruitment rates which are the number of leavers/recruits in the year expressed as a percentage of the workforce at 31st March 2019⁶.

As with the workforce data, some of the data should be treated with caution because of the small numbers of staff in some roles/categories, and because the recalculation to remove 'not knowns' further reduced the base. In particular, no leavers or recruits were recorded for gender identity categories and hence no data are shown⁷.

Summary of turnover and recruitment

The overall turnover rate of non-retained staff was 6.9 per cent, slightly higher than the recruitment rate of 6.2 per cent. Turnover was highest for group managers (13.0 per cent) and lowest for firefighters (development) (2.9 per cent), while recruitment varied between 243.1 per cent for trainee firefighters and 0.6 per cent for watch and crew managers.

The turnover rate exceeded recruitment for all roles except firefighters (development) and trainee firefighters. The latter role accounted for 63 per cent of all recruits. (Table 5)

⁵ This excludes any moves within a fire service.

⁶ So that, for example, the turnover rate of female staff is the number of female leavers expressed as a percentage of female staff.

⁷ Note that two FRSs accounted for 22 per cent of all leavers and three accounted for 43 per cent of all recruits.

Table 5: non-retained staff - overall turnover and recruitment rates

	Leavers		Recruits		Base staff numbers
	Nos	%	Nos	%	Nos
Area Manager	26	12.1%	3	1.4%	215
Group Manager	87	13.0%	10	1.5%	667
Station Manager	208	12.6%	29	1.8%	1,649
Watch Manager	428	8.6%	31	0.6%	4,975
Crew Manager	244	5.3%	29	0.6%	4,612
Firefighter (Competent)	1,015	6.5%	337	2.2%	15,623
Firefighter (Development)	57	2.9%	252	12.7%	1,988
Firefighter (Trainee)	28	5.8%	1,167	243.1%	480
Total	2,093	6.9%	1,858	6.2%	30,209

Turnover and recruitment by gender

The turnover rate was higher among males (7.2 per cent) than females (4.5 per cent). Turnover was higher among men than women across all roles except trainee firefighters. (Table 6)

Table 6: non-retained turnover rates by gender

	Female	Male	Total	Base staff numbers
Area Manager	5.9%	12.6%	12.1%	215
Group Manager	9.6%	13.2%	13.0%	667
Station Manager	4.6%	13.3%	12.6%	1,649
Watch Manager	4.1%	9.0%	8.6%	4,975
Crew Manager	2.5%	5.6%	5.3%	4,612
Firefighter (Competent)	5.3%	6.6%	6.5%	15,623
Firefighter (Development)	2.6%	2.9%	2.9%	1,988
Firefighter (Trainee)	7.3%	5.5%	5.8%	480
Total	4.5%	7.2%	6.9%	30,209

The overall recruitment rate was higher among females (9.4 per cent) than males (5.8 per cent), although by role this was only true of firefighters (competent and development). For females, the recruitment rate exceeded turnover whereas for males turnover exceeded recruitment. (Table 7)

Table 7: non-retained recruitment rates by gender

	Female	Male	Total	Base staff numbers
Area Manager	0.0%	1.5%	1.4%	215
Group Manager	3.6%	1.4%	1.5%	667
Station Manager	1.5%	1.8%	1.8%	1,649
Watch Manager	0.2%	0.7%	0.6%	4,975
Crew Manager	0.2%	0.7%	0.6%	4,612
Firefighter (Competent)	2.9%	2.1%	2.2%	15,623
Firefighter (Development)	15.9%	12.0%	12.7%	1,988
Firefighter (Trainee)	180.2%	258.9%	243.1%	480
Total	9.4%	5.8%	6.2%	30,209

Turnover and recruitment by ethnicity

The overall turnover rate of non-retained staff was higher among BAME staff (9.5 per cent) than white staff (6.8 per cent), and this was true across all roles. (Table 8)

Table 8: non-retained turnover rates by ethnicity				
	White	BAME	Total	Base staff numbers
Area Manager	12.0%	14.8%	12.1%	215
Group Manager	12.5%	55.5%	13.0%	667
Station Manager	12.2%	25.1%	12.6%	1,649
Watch Manager	8.4%	12.8%	8.6%	4,975
Crew Manager	5.1%	9.8%	5.3%	4,612
Firefighter (Competent)	6.4%	8.3%	6.5%	15,623
Firefighter (Development)	2.8%	3.2%	2.9%	1,988
Firefighter (Trainee)	4.5%	21.0%	5.8%	480
Total	6.8%	9.5%	6.9%	30,209

The overall recruitment rate of non-retained staff was also higher among BAME staff (8.8 per cent) than white staff (6.0 per cent), although the opposite was true for several roles. For both categories, recruitment was lower than turnover. (Table 9)

Table 9: non-retained recruitment rates by ethnicity				
	White	BAME	Total	Base staff numbers
Area Manager	1.4%	0.0%	1.4%	215
Group Manager	1.5%	0.0%	1.5%	667
Station Manager	1.8%	2.0%	1.8%	1,649
Watch Manager	0.6%	0.0%	0.6%	4,975
Crew Manager	0.6%	0.0%	0.6%	4,612
Firefighter (Competent)	2.3%	0.7%	2.2%	15,623
Firefighter (Development)	13.2%	8.0%	12.7%	1,988
Firefighter (Trainee)	237.2%	303.8%	242.7%	480
Total	6.0%	8.8%	6.1%	30,209

Turnover and recruitment by sexual orientation

The overall turnover rate of non-retained staff was slightly higher among bisexual, gay and lesbian staff (7.8 per cent) than heterosexual staff (6.9 per cent), although the reverse was true of several roles, particularly managerial. (Table 10)

Table 10: non-retained turnover rates by sexual orientation				
	Heterosexual	Bisexual, gay or lesbian	Total	Base staff numbers
Area Manager	12.6%	0.0%	12.1%	215
Group Manager	13.2%	0.0%	13.0%	667
Station Manager	12.5%	19.8%	12.6%	1,649
Watch Manager	8.6%	3.1%	8.5%	4,975
Crew Manager	5.2%	6.6%	5.2%	4,612
Firefighter (Competent)	6.3%	10.8%	6.5%	15,623
Firefighter (Development)	3.1%	0.0%	2.9%	1,988
Firefighter (Trainee)	6.0%	3.7%	5.8%	480
Total	6.9%	7.8%	6.9%	30,209

The overall recruitment rate of non-retained staff was higher for bisexual, gay and lesbian staff (10.0 per cent) than heterosexual staff (6.0 per cent), and this was true for most roles. For heterosexual staff the turnover rate exceeded the recruitment rate, while the opposite was true of bisexual, gay and lesbian staff. (Table 11)

Table 11: non-retained recruitment rates by sexual orientation				
	Heterosexual	Bisexual, gay or lesbian	Total	Base staff numbers
Area Manager	1.4%	0.0%	1.4%	215
Group Manager	1.3%	14.3%	1.5%	667
Station Manager	1.8%	0.0%	1.8%	1,649
Watch Manager	0.6%	0.0%	0.6%	4,975
Crew Manager	0.6%	1.2%	0.6%	4,612
Firefighter (Competent)	2.1%	2.9%	2.2%	15,623
Firefighter (Development)	12.6%	13.6%	12.7%	1,988
Firefighter (Trainee)	249.1%	174.5%	242.7%	480
Total	6.0%	10.0%	6.1%	30,209

Retained duty system workforce

This section covers retained duty system (RDS) staff only.

A total of 18,183 staff were recorded, of whom just over a half (52 per cent) were in firefighter (competent) roles, 19 per cent were crew managers and 18 per cent were firefighters (development).

Sex

Overall, 93.6 per cent of RDS staff were male, a proportion that varied between 97.8 per cent of watch managers (excluding the small category of station managers) and 86.6 per cent of trainee firefighters. Among the largest group, firefighters (competent), 93.7 per cent were male and 6.3 per cent female. (Table 12)

Table 12: retained duty system workforce by gender						
	Female		Male		Total	
	Nos	%	Nos	%	Nos	%
Area Manager	-	-	-	-	0	-
Group Manager	-	-	-	-	0	-
Station Manager	0	0.0%	20	100.0%	20	100.0%
Watch Manager	32	2.2%	1,437	97.8%	1,469	100.0%
Crew Manager	97	2.8%	3,348	97.2%	3,445	100.0%
Firefighter (Competent)	593	6.3%	8,790	93.7%	9,383	100.0%
Firefighter (Development)	352	10.9%	2,882	89.1%	3,234	100.0%
Firefighter (Trainee)	85	13.4%	547	86.6%	632	100.0%
Total	1,160	6.4%	17,023	93.6%	18,183	100.0%

Gender identity

Almost all staff had the same gender as their sex registered at birth (99.9 per cent), with only 20 (0.1 per cent) recorded as having a gender different to their sex registered at birth. There was little variation by role. (Table 13)

Table 13: retained duty system workforce by gender identity						
	Gender same as sex registered at birth		Gender different to sex registered at birth		Total	
	Nos	%	Nos	%	Nos	%
Area Manager	-	-	-	-	0	-
Group Manager	-	-	-	-	0	-
Station Manager	20	100.0%	0	0.0%	20	100.0%
Watch Manager	1,469	100.0%	0	0.0%	1,469	100.0%
Crew Manager	3,436	99.8%	9	0.2%	3,445	100.0%
Firefighter (Competent)	9,378	100.0%	5	0.0%	9,383	100.0%
Firefighter (Development)	3,228	99.8%	6	0.2%	3,234	100.0%
Firefighter (Trainee)	632	100.0%	0	0.0%	632	100.0%
Total	18,163	99.9%	20	0.1%	18,183	100.0%

Ethnicity

Overall, 94.7 per cent of staff were white, 0.7 per cent were mixed, 0.2 per cent black, 0.2 per cent Asian, and 4.2 per cent of other ethnic origins. The proportion of staff who were white was lowest among crew managers (93.4 per cent) and, excluding the small category of station managers, highest among trainee firefighters (97.6 per cent). (Table 14)

Table 14: retained duty system workforce by ethnicity

	White		Mixed		Asian		Black		Other		Total	
	Nos	%	Nos	%	Nos	%	Nos	%	Nos	%	Nos	%
Area Manager	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	-
Group Manager	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	-
Station Manager	20	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	20	100.0%
Watch Manager	1,416	96.4%	6	0.4%	0	0.0%	1	0.1%	46	3.1%	1,469	100.0%
Crew Manager	3,216	93.4%	11	0.3%	8	0.2%	5	0.1%	205	6.0%	3,445	100.0%
Firefighter (C)	8,912	95.0%	78	0.8%	17	0.2%	21	0.2%	355	3.8%	9,383	100.0%
Firefighter (D)	3,040	94.0%	28	0.9%	11	0.3%	12	0.4%	144	4.4%	3,234	100.0%
Firefighter (T)	617	97.6%	5	0.7%	5	0.7%	3	0.5%	3	0.5%	632	100.0%
Total	17,218	94.7%	125	0.7%	40	0.2%	41	0.2%	759	4.2%	18,183	100.0%

Sexual orientation

RDS staff were overwhelmingly heterosexual, 98.3 per cent, with 0.9 per cent each recorded as bisexual and gay or lesbian. There was little variation by role. (Table 15)

Table 15: retained duty system workforce by sexual orientation

	Heterosexual		Bisexual		Gay or lesbian		Total	
	Nos	%	Nos	%	Nos	%	Nos	%
Area Manager	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	-
Group Manager	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	-
Station Manager	20	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	20	100.0%
Watch Manager	1,450	98.7%	6	0.4%	13	0.9%	1,469	100.0%
Crew Manager	3,397	98.6%	36	1.0%	13	0.4%	3,445	100.0%
Firefighter (Competent)	9,224	98.3%	76	0.8%	83	0.9%	9,383	100.0%
Firefighter (Development)	3,162	97.8%	28	0.9%	43	1.3%	3,234	100.0%
Firefighter (Trainee)	618	97.8%	8	1.2%	6	0.9%	632	100.0%
Total	17,867	98.3%	155	0.9%	161	0.9%	18,183	100.0%

Summary of turnover and recruitment

The overall turnover rate of retained duty system staff was 11.1 per cent, slightly lower than the recruitment rate of 11.5 per cent. Both were markedly higher than the rates for non-retained staff (6.9 per cent and 6.2 per cent respectively)⁸.

⁸ For RDS staff, note that four FRSS accounted for 25 per cent of all leavers and six accounted for 39 per cent of all recruits.

By role (excluding the small category of station manager), turnover was highest for trainee firefighters (24.4 per cent) and lowest for crew managers (6.4 per cent), while the recruitment rate varied between 201.6 per cent for trainee firefighters and 0.6 per cent for crew managers. The former role accounted for 61 per cent of all recruits. (Table 16)

Table 16: retained duty system workforce - overall turnover and recruitment rates

	Leavers		Recruits		Base staff numbers
	Nos	%	Nos	%	Nos
Area Manager	0	-	0	-	0
Group Manager	0	-	0	-	0
Station Manager	7	35.0%	1	5.0%	20
Watch Manager	117	8.0%	4	0.3%	1,469
Crew Manager	222	6.4%	19	0.6%	3,445
Firefighter (Competent)	1,099	11.7%	219	2.3%	9,383
Firefighter (Development)	411	12.7%	579	17.9%	3,234
Firefighter (Trainee)	154	24.4%	1,274	201.6%	632
Total	2,010	11.1%	2,096	11.5%	18,183

Turnover and recruitment by gender

The turnover rate of RDS staff was slightly higher among males (11.1 per cent) than females (10.1 per cent). Turnover was higher among men than women across all roles. (Table 17)

Table 17: retained duty system workforce turnover rates by gender

	Female	Male	Total	Base staff numbers
Area Manager	-	-	-	0
Group Manager	-	-	-	0
Station Manager	-	35.0%	35.0%	20
Watch Manager	3.2%	8.1%	8.0%	1,469
Crew Manager	4.3%	6.5%	6.4%	3,445
Firefighter (Competent)	10.4%	11.8%	11.7%	9,383
Firefighter (Development)	9.1%	13.2%	12.7%	3,234
Firefighter (Trainee)	21.6%	24.8%	24.4%	632
Total	10.1%	11.1%	11.1%	18,183

The overall recruitment rate was markedly higher among females (21.3 per cent) than males (10.9 per cent), and while the female recruitment rate exceeded the turnover rate, the opposite was true of males. Female recruitment rates exceeded those of males for all roles except trainee firefighters. (Table 18)

Table 18: retained duty system workforce recruitment rates by gender				
	Female	Male	Total	Base staff numbers
Area Manager	-	-	-	0
Group Manager	-	-	-	0
Station Manager	-	5.0%	5.0%	20
Watch Manager	3.1%	0.2%	0.3%	1,469
Crew Manager	1.0%	0.5%	0.6%	3,445
Firefighter (Competent)	2.8%	2.3%	2.3%	9,383
Firefighter (Development)	21.1%	17.5%	17.9%	3,234
Firefighter (Trainee)	181.5%	204.7%	201.6%	632
Total	21.3%	10.9%	11.5%	18,183

Turnover and recruitment by ethnicity

The overall turnover rate of retained duty system staff was higher among white staff (11.2 per cent) than BAME staff (7.9 per cent), and this was true across all roles except firefighters (competent). (Table 19)

Table 19: retained duty system workforce turnover rates by ethnicity				
	White	BAME	Total	Base staff numbers
Area Manager	-	-	-	0
Group Manager	-	-	-	0
Station Manager	35.0%	-	35.0%	20
Watch Manager	8.2%	2.3%	8.0%	1,469
Crew Manager	6.7%	2.4%	6.4%	3,445
Firefighter (Competent)	11.7%	12.6%	11.7%	9,383
Firefighter (Development)	13.2%	5.5%	12.7%	3,234
Firefighter (Trainee)	25.0%	0.0%	24.4%	632
Total	11.2%	7.9%	11.1%	18,183

The overall recruitment rate of retained duty system staff was also higher among white staff (11.8 per cent) than BAME staff (7.1 per cent), and this was of all roles except firefighters (development). The recruitment rate of white staff exceeded turnover, whereas the opposite was true of non-white staff. (Table 20)

Table 20: retained duty system workforce recruitment rates by ethnicity				
	White	BAME	Total	Base staff numbers
Area Manager	-	-	-	0
Group Manager	-	-	-	0
Station Manager	5.0%	-	5.0%	20
Watch Manager	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%	1,469
Crew Manager	0.6%	0.0%	0.6%	3,445
Firefighter (Competent)	2.4%	0.8%	2.3%	9,383
Firefighter (Development)	17.8%	20.0%	17.9%	3,234
Firefighter (Trainee)	202.3%	170.4%	201.6%	632
Total	11.8%	7.1%	11.5%	18,183

Turnover and recruitment by sexual orientation

The overall turnover rate of retained duty system staff was higher among heterosexual staff (11.4 per cent) than bisexual, gay and lesbian staff (4.4 per cent), and this was true of all roles except trainee firefighters. (Table 21)

Table 21: retained duty system workforce turnover rates by sexual orientation				
	Heterosexual	Bisexual, gay or lesbian	Total	Base staff numbers
Area Manager	-	-	-	0
Group Manager	-	-	-	0
Station Manager	0.0%	-	0.0%	20
Watch Manager	8.1%	4.2%	8.0%	1,469
Crew Manager	6.9%	0.0%	6.4%	3,445
Firefighter (Competent)	12.0%	6.1%	11.7%	9,383
Firefighter (Development)	13.3%	3.7%	12.7%	3,234
Firefighter (Trainee)	24.3%	27.0%	24.4%	632
Total	11.4%	4.4%	11.0%	18,183

The overall recruitment rate of retained duty system staff was higher for heterosexual staff (11.7 per cent) than bisexual, gay and lesbian staff (7.5 per cent), and this was true of most roles. The recruitment rate exceeded the turnover rate for both categories. (Table 22)

Table 22: retained duty system workforce recruitment rates by sexual orientation				
	Heterosexual	Bisexual, gay or lesbian	Total	Base staff numbers
Area Manager	-	-	-	0
Group Manager	-	-	-	0
Station Manager	0.0%	-	0.0%	20
Watch Manager	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%	1,469
Crew Manager	0.5%	0.7%	0.6%	3,445
Firefighter (Competent)	2.4%	2.0%	2.3%	9,383
Firefighter (Development)	18.0%	16.0%	17.9%	3,234
Firefighter (Trainee)	201.5%	204.1%	201.6%	632
Total	11.7%	7.5%	11.5%	18,183

Comparisons with 2018

Some comparison is possible with a similar survey conducted by the NJC for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services in February 2018, and which also received responses from all FRSs.

Changes in workforce size

Figure 1 shows changes in employment of non-retained staff by role. Overall, there was a 2.1 per cent increase, and most roles saw an increase. The largest were for firefighters (development) (87.0 per cent) and trainee firefighters (55.8 per cent). Firefighters (competent) saw a fall in numbers of 4.5 per cent.

Figure 1: non-retained workforce – change in employment (2018-19)

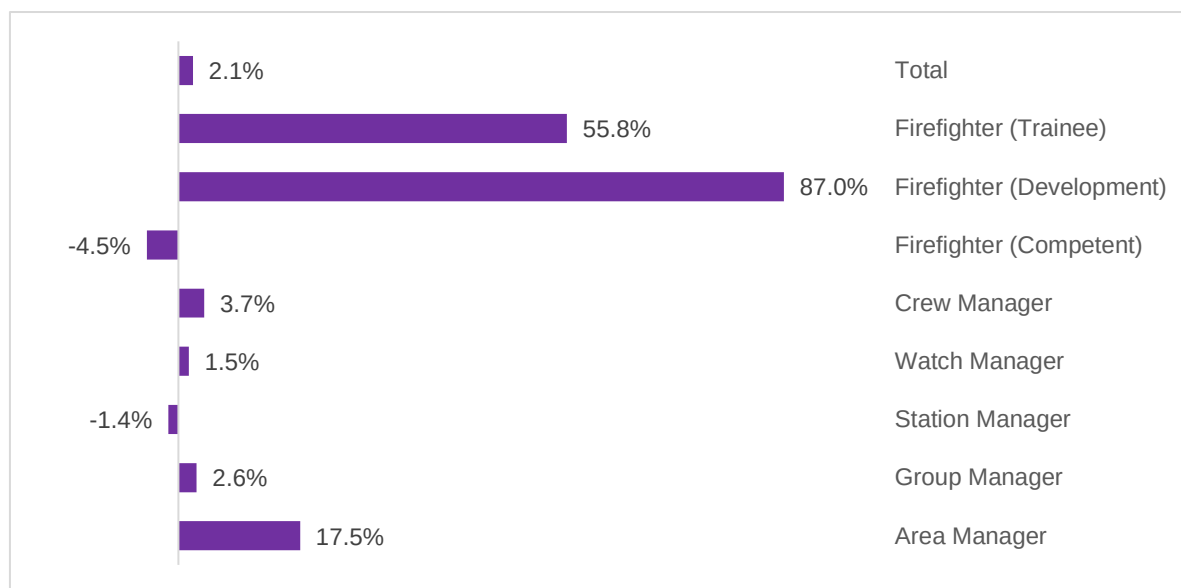
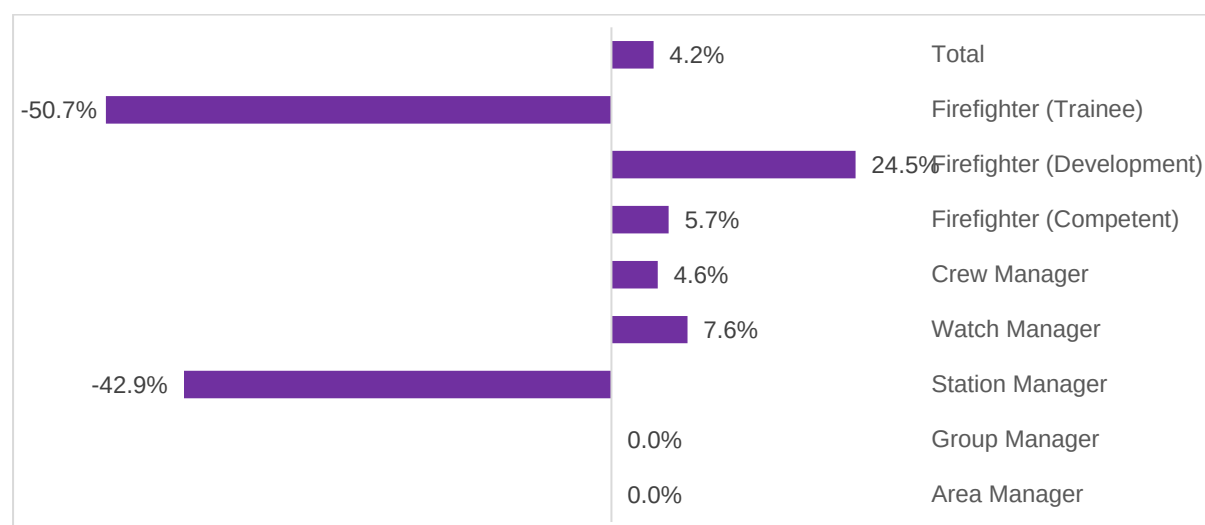


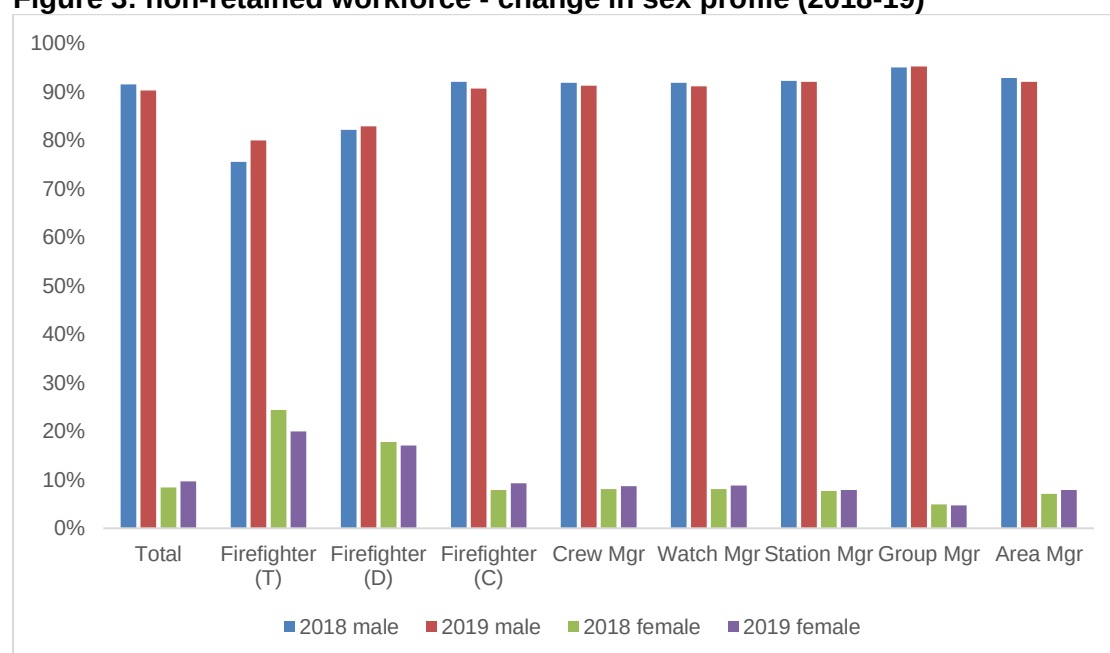
Figure 2 shows the equivalent picture for RDS staff. Overall numbers again increased, in this case by 4.2 per cent, and firefighters (development) by 24.5 per cent. Trainee firefighter numbers fell by 50.7 per cent.

Figure 2: retained duty system workforce – change in employment (2018-19)



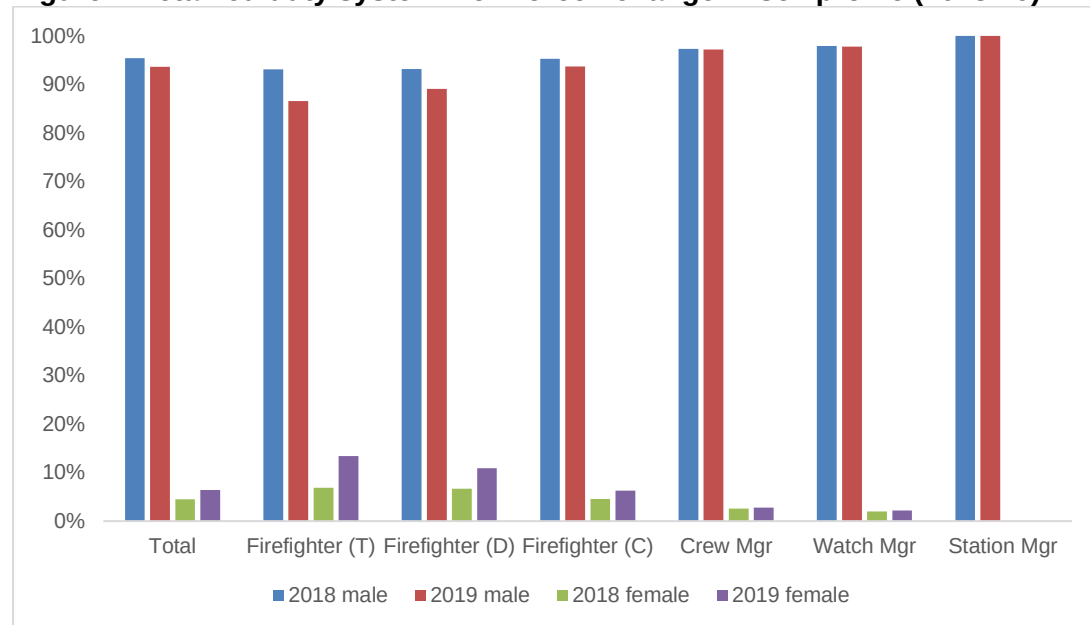
Overall, the proportion of non-retained staff who were male fell slightly from 91.0 per cent to 90.3 per cent. The largest increase in females was for firefighters (competent) (from 7.9 per cent to 9.3 per cent).

Figure 3: non-retained workforce - change in sex profile (2018-19)



Overall, the proportion of retained duty system staff who were male also fell slightly, from 95.4 per cent to 93.6 per cent. The largest increases in females were for firefighters (development) (from 6.7 per cent to 10.3 per cent) and trainee firefighters (from 6.9 per cent to 13.4 per cent).

Figure 4: retained duty system workforce - change in sex profile (2018-19)



Note: area and group managers excluded as there were no RDS staff in these roles.

There was no change in the ethnic minority profile of non-retained staff (95 per cent remaining white) while the proportion of RDS staff who were white fell slightly from 99 per cent to 95 per cent.

ANNEX

Tables in the main body of the report have been recalculated to exclude 'not knowns'. Tables A and B show these original 'not known' proportions for each duty system, role and data item.

Table A: proportion of workforce for whom information not known								
	Non-retained				RDS			
	Sex	Gender identity	Ethnicity	Sexual orientation	Sex	Gender identity	Ethnicity	Sexual orientation
Area Manager	0%	75%	10%	40%	-	-	-	-
Group Manager	0%	72%	12%	40%	-	-	-	-
Station Manager	0%	75%	12%	41%	0%	80%	15%	25%
Watch Manager	0%	78%	12%	44%	0%	80%	13%	54%
Crew Manager	0%	79%	14%	47%	0%	77%	15%	52%
Firefighter (C)	0%	81%	16%	52%	0%	78%	19%	50%
Firefighter (D)	0%	87%	16%	27%	0%	84%	24%	40%
Firefighter (T)	0%	85%	26%	38%	0%	91%	35%	49%
Total	0%	80%	15%	47%	0%	80%	19%	49%

Table B: proportion of leavers for whom information not known								
	Non-retained				RDS			
	Sex	Gender identity	Ethnicity	Sexual orientation	Sex	Gender identity	Ethnicity	Sexual orientation
Area Manager	0%	85%	15%	42%	-	-	-	-
Group Manager	0%	86%	13%	45%	-	-	-	-
Station Manager	0%	88%	10%	47%	0%	100%	43%	100%
Watch Manager	0%	87%	12%	51%	3%	100%	18%	55%
Crew Manager	0%	91%	18%	58%	4%	100%	26%	59%
Firefighter (C)	0%	87%	13%	57%	4%	100%	26%	58%
Firefighter (D)	0%	96%	9%	39%	0%	100%	25%	59%
Firefighter (T)	0%	86%	29%	29%	13%	100%	36%	51%
Total	0%	88%	13%	54%	4%	100%	26%	58%

Table C: proportion of recruits for whom information not known								
	Non-retained				RDS			
	Sex	Gender identity	Ethnicity	Sexual orientation	Sex	Gender identity	Ethnicity	Sexual orientation
Area Manager	0%	67%	0%	33%	-	-	-	-
Group Manager	10%	80%	0%	30%	-	-	-	-
Station Manager	0%	90%	3%	17%	0%	100%	0%	100%
Watch Manager	0%	77%	23%	39%	0%	100%	0%	50%
Crew Manager	0%	79%	7%	24%	0%	95%	5%	37%
Firefighter (C)	0%	89%	21%	45%	3%	95%	19%	57%
Firefighter (D)	0%	78%	19%	48%	11%	94%	51%	68%
Firefighter (T)	0%	87%	19%	31%	0%	82%	26%	41%
Total	0%	86%	19%	36%	4%	87%	32%	50%



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Inclusive Fire Service Group - Focus Group Report



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Introduction

This report provides an overview of the thematic analysis of a set of focus groups carried out independently by the Local Government Association (LGA) Research & Information (R&I) team on behalf of the Inclusive Fire Services Group (IFSG). It is divided into distinct sections that stand alone but relate to each other. There is a chapter for each of the different focus groups - Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME), lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, queer, inter-sex (LGBTQI) and female. Within each chapter the analysis is themed using the structure and topics as included in the IFSG 2017 strategy. Following this there is a section that highlights the cross-cutting themes across the three groups and a final section that provides an overview of perceived progress since the 2017 conversations.

Using the headings in the IFSG strategy has provided a useful architecture for analysis but it should be noted that groups placed different emphasis on different areas though all topics were covered using a semi-structured topic guide (see Appendix A).

Methodology

The LGA R&I team was commissioned by the National Joint Council (NJC) led IFSG to independently run a series of focus groups to capture the views of fire and rescue service employees on a range of equality and related issues. Three focus groups were held between 13 January and 16 January 2020. Given the nature of focus groups working with small numbers, the findings should be seen as an overview of the perceptions of participants and are not representative in any way.

LGA contacted Heads of Human Resources in each of the FRS's in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland on behalf of the IFSG and asked them to send out a request for participation in a series of focus groups. Each of the unions represented on the IFSG were also asked to bring this request to the attention of their members. The focus groups were for those employees of the fire and rescue service (both operational and non-operational) who identified as one of the following protected characteristic groups:

- BAME
- LGBTQI; and
- Female

Potential participants responded to this call by replying directly to the LGA R&I team and these responses were logged. LGA then randomly selected participants from this logged list. Six focus groups were arranged (two for each protected characteristic group) and a set of questions was developed to be used with all of the groups to ensure consistency of response.

These questions covered:

- experiences to date, of being employees in the FRS including reference to any bullying and harassment issues
- how these experiences had been shaped by their gender, sexuality and ethnicity
- negative experiences due to their gender, sexuality, ethnicity
- grievance and disciplinary issues

- career progression
- how representative their FRS is in terms of senior management composition of the firefighter force
- whether the FRS feels like an inclusive place to work
- whether current approaches to recruitment and retention encourage an inclusive approach and the support provided; and
- what their FRSs do well and what they could do better
- how their experiences have changed since 2017; and
- the extent they feel senior ownership and leadership lead by example.

The focus group methodology also provided the opportunity for participants to highlight any other issues that were important to them not covered in the generic questions.

This report provides an overview of issues in each of the three groups and there is a short conclusions section that highlights cross cutting themes from all groups. It should be noted that participation in the groups was confidential and no individual is named or identifiable.

There is also a final section that provides a brief overview of the changes since these focus groups were last held in winter 2017.

Focus Groups

BAME focus group

Inclusivity

All participants felt that over the last three to five years the fire service had become a more inclusive place to work. This was not necessarily to say that there had been material change but rather there had been a recognition from senior managers that the FRS had not been an inclusive place to work and that change was needed. But the extent to which change was taking place was seen to be dependent on individual FRS, the senior management within each FRS, attitudes and perceptions within the individual fire station context and whether employees were operational or non-operational.

At the strategic level, participants noted that there had been attempts to ensure greater inclusivity be it through the development of strategies or approaches to encourage greater understanding of the importance of inclusivity. Whilst there was limited direct awareness of the IFSG 2017 policy document itself, participants were able to identify some changes that had taken place at a strategic level that were in the spirit of the changes suggested. There was felt to be a greater understanding from senior managers of the importance of developing more inclusive approaches which was positive, but the actual implementation of this was far more complicated. Participants noted that the fire service was predominantly white and male and that, structurally, little progress had been made in changing this. The result of this was that BAME colleagues were proportionately a small group within a much wider FRS workforce and that having strategies for greater inclusivity actually made little difference especially when it was noted that the majority of employees had little experience of working or living in ethnically diverse communities and they brought specific cultures, beliefs and approaches into the workplace. No amount of policy development at a central level was felt to change this.

This is not to say that progress had not been made over the past three years or so as there were now very visible BAME individuals within FRS who were seen as role models, champions and spokespeople for BAME colleagues. Whilst this was welcomed by the group there was concern that as these individuals moved through the roles, moved to other FRS or retired from the FRS, there were few who could take their place and the progress made to date would be lost.

Specific mention was also made about the importance of context with regard to inclusivity in relation to an FRS HQ, the individual fire stations and whether colleagues were operational or non-operational. Generally, it was felt that HQ was a more inclusive place to work than in individual fire stations, though experiences of this were not uniform. Those participants who worked in non-operational roles noted that they frequently felt that white colleagues were given chances and opportunities to develop and progress far more than they were and that generally, there was not parity of esteem between operational and non-operational employees even at HQ. Within individual fire stations, it was noted that the degree to which they were, or indeed were not, inclusive places to work was dependent on the station managers and crews in each station. Whilst overt acts of a racist nature were felt to now be limited, there were still noted to be implicit behaviours that worked against the inclusivity agenda. Where issues were raised by BAME colleagues in terms of grievance and disciplinary issues with regard to inclusivity, the approach of the more senior FRS managers was to, as far as they could, avoid any mention of inclusivity and related issues, rather any issues were described as being due to other reasons (for example, colleagues simply not liking one another) rather than this being due to ethnicity. The perception was that there was a fear amongst more senior employees

both within fire stations and HQ to suggest problems and challenges were due to the issues relating to ethnicity as this could then result in more detailed and challenging investigation and it was also perceived as easier to try and 'sweep issues under the carpet' and put issues down to other reasons that could be dealt with through a quiet chat rather than anything more formal.

Participants also discussed whether, from both their perspective and from the perspective of other BAME colleagues, their fire and rescue service was becoming more inclusive in terms of both its facilities and equipment. Generally, there was felt to be a lack of understanding amongst FRSs as to why there was a need for changes with, for example, protective clothing. It was noted that positive development had been made with regard to the provision of clothing for female colleagues and that seemed to have been the focus of attention for the service. Where questions had been raised by, for example Muslim female colleagues as to whether there would be protective clothing suitable for them to wear over the hijab, there had been no response. Equally, when male Muslim firefighters had requested protective clothing appropriate to them being able to wear beards, this was also not taken forward. What was felt to be concerning was that uniforms were available to accommodate, for example, the hijab, but that the will was not there within FRSs to take this forward. Again, there was a feeling that whilst strategically there was a move for the fire service to be more inclusive, the actual lived experiences of BAME firefighters suggested more limited development. There was also discussion around the provision of specific facilities for BAME colleagues within fire stations to enable them to fulfil their religious observations - specifically the provision of prayer rooms. Focus group participants noted that where new fire stations had been opened diversity requirements had been considered and prayer rooms were available, but this was frequently not the case in older buildings and this was an issue that needed to be considered. Linked to this were issues relating to catering both within fire stations and at fire grounds. Frequently there were no separate cooking facilities available at stations and at fire grounds, the only catering available often took the form of refreshments that were not suitable for all - for example, bacon rolls.

The role of the unions with regard to shaping and supporting inclusivity within the FRS was discussed. Whilst it was noted for example that involvement as part of the IFSG, was seen to be positive, there was some concern that, as the unions were representative of the FRS employees across the board that was very white and male dominated and was perceived as working in the best interests of their largely white membership. There was mention of specific groups that had been formed to represent specific ethnic groups within the fire and rescue service for example the BEAM (Black and Ethnic Minority) section of the FBU. and the Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA), and the work that these groups were completing was welcomed as was the fact that they generally did receive support from senior colleagues and now had a higher visibility, but this was in the context of a predominantly non-ethnically diverse membership.

Recruitment

BAME participants had concerns about the recruitment process to the fire and rescue service in general as they felt that the ways in which people often joined the fire and rescue service did little to improve inclusivity. It was noted that structurally, with the retained and non-retained firefighters model, recruitment was complex. But it was felt that it was still too based on who those who were considering joining the fire and rescue service knew rather than what they knew. Recruitment to the service was, in some cases, felt to be nepotistic. Despite this, there had been attempts by individual FRSs to engage with their local communities and where these were more ethnically diverse, there had been engagement. Participants noted that the fire and rescue service was often able to appear more inclusive at recruitment and outreach events as they often included a more ethnically diverse group of colleagues and this had had a positive

impact on the understanding of the general population that firefighters were not always white. And whilst a more inclusive approach to recruitment was seen as positive, participants were uneasy as to what BAME colleagues joining the fire and rescue service would then experience as the service was not inclusive despite how it might have seemed at some of the recruitment events. If progress were to be made within recruitment it was felt that there had to be much greater diversity throughout the fire and rescue service than was currently the case.

Career progression

Career progression amongst BAME employees was seen to be complex as this encompassed issues relating to the type of role (non-operational and operational) as well as ethnicity. Colleagues who came from a non-operational context felt that they faced double discrimination in that they were not treated in the same way as firefighters and then issues associated with their ethnicity were layered on top of this. One participant described how non-operational employees were expected to already have the set of skills and knowledge required for more senior roles when going for promotion whilst operational employees were able to learn the skills required for more senior roles once they had been appointed and this was felt to be problematic. Allied to this were issues relating to ethnicity where non-operational participants felt they had seen white colleagues, especially white males, be promoted in advance of equally and suitably qualified BAME colleagues. In this, the non-operational structures were felt to be mirroring the culture and approach of operational employees.

With regard to operational colleagues, it was noted that opportunities for progression are, in theory, open to all employees but a perception exists that if applicants are BAME then the expectation is 'thirty percent higher' of what is required for white colleagues. The need to have to prove oneself in front of white colleagues was a recurring theme from the groups and it was noted that this was due to the lack of diversity within the fire and rescue service as a whole - the feeling that because one was part of a minority group more was expected and that the bar was set higher to achieve. Even when BAME colleagues did succeed and were successful in gaining promotion there was then a response from white colleagues that success was due to ethnicity rather than ability. Where this was felt to not be the case and where there was equity was with the fitness test required of all operational employees of the fire and rescue service. The ability to pass a test, or not, was felt not to be related to ethnicity in any way rather, the key feature was age.

Retention

Given the small number of BAME colleagues within the fire and rescue service, retention was seen as a key issue and mention was made of the concern amongst participants as to what would happen when BAME champions left their respective FRS as this could negatively impact other BAME colleagues still in service. Whilst the group acknowledged that people came into and left the fire and rescue service for a variety of reasons it seemed that BAME colleagues were leaving the service earlier and in proportionately greater numbers than their white colleagues. The reasons for this were felt to be that:

- BAME colleagues still experienced day to day challenges due to their ethnicity that were not being addressed
- Where BAME colleagues had raised issues of grievance and concern with more senior managers either little or no action had been taken and individuals felt that they had no option but to resign. Indeed, it was noted that at times, individuals who had raised grievance issues relating to their ethnicity had themselves then been accused of being the perpetrator and therefore had had little option but to leave; and

- Where there had been BAME colleagues who had acted as champions they had often left the FRS earlier than they could have done as they had felt worn down by battling for organisational and cultural change.

LGBTQI

Inclusivity

Participants noted that being LGBTQI in the fire and rescue service was still, at times, challenging though different for those who identified as gay to those who identified as lesbian. It was felt that it was more difficult for a gay man to be a member of the fire and rescue service as the number of out employees was still very small in relation to the wider male workforce. Female participants in the group noted that, from their perspective, it was easier for them to be out in the fire and rescue service as there were felt to be a greater proportion of female employees who identify as Lesbian than did not. This was especially the case for operational fire fighters. More generally, participants felt that the fire and rescue service overall remained hetero-normative and that there was still real reluctance amongst firefighters who were gay to come out to their colleagues. Again, the experience of female employees was different, and the fire and rescue service was felt to be more accepting of lesbian colleagues.

The awareness of the IFSG strategies amongst the group was generally high but there was a feeling that even though the strategy was in place, there was limited material change and impact and that policy had not readily translated into impact at a local level. There was now generally more support of LGBTQI diversity amongst some senior managers within FRSs. One service was highlighted as being very supportive, but this was not the case in all fire and rescue services. Though many senior managers had encouraged FRS participation at local and national LGBTQI events, there were still episodes of senior managers encouraging FRS employees who had come out to be discreet and not to draw attention to themselves. This approach was felt to be discriminatory as there was no similar advice given to straight colleagues. The experience of focus group participants with regard to senior managers led them to be concerned about the actual extent of understanding of what it was like to be LGBTQI in the fire and rescue service. Frequently, senior managers only became focused on LGBTQI issues when there was direct, indisputable and overt homophobic behaviour to which they had to respond. More generally, implied homophobia was something that senior managers tended to ignore. Where disciplinary and grievance issues relating to sexuality were raised, the response of more senior managers (especially within a fire station context) was to attribute to personal issues rather than due to sexuality.

Participants noted that the IFSG strategies had called for greater awareness and that training was the best way to do this. This said, reductions in budgets had resulted in training around diversity issues being reduced considerably with a minimal amount of time spent training employees on equality and inclusion issues. Of greater concern to participants was that new recruits into the fire and rescue service were having their training on inclusion and related issues reduced to a point where it was only briefly covered. This meant that generally, new employees of the FRS did not have a working understanding and knowledge of equality and diversity issues.

The role of the unions was felt to be key in developing the LGBTQI agenda going forward in that they had a major stake in developing mutually beneficial policies for all, in particular, ensuring that all employees of the fire and rescue service treated each other with dignity and respect. This said, there was some unease that those employees of the FRS that had become recognised champions for LGBTQI issues were being asked to lead the development of

strategy and policies when this should have been the role of relevant Human Resources (HR) colleagues.

Participants also highlighted issues that LGBTQI colleagues faced with regard to facilities both at fire stations and at fire grounds. There was real concern that the fire and rescue service did not understand, at all, the specific support needs of trans employees, especially around fire station sleeping and washing and toilet facilities. Older fire stations were not fit for purpose and so, for older properties, toilets had been reassigned as gender neutral and this was felt not to be appropriate by those employees of the FRS who identified as Trans. On the fire grounds, it was noted that, due to budget reductions, a number of FRSs had contracted out their fire ground catering facilities. These had been taken over by an organisation that had a publicly stated hetero-hegemonic belief structure that was at odds with an FRS equality and diversity policy. The impact of this was that some LGBTQI employees felt unable to accept refreshment from this organisation whilst on the fire ground. Concerns had been raised to senior managers, but these had been dismissed. Again, this was felt to be evidence of the dominant hetero-normative narrative within the fire and rescue service.

What was also evidenced, with specific regard to LGBTQI, was the difference between the individual services and HQ and fire stations. Even in FRSs with supportive senior managers, there was perceived to be a real difference between HQ and fire stations. Often fire stations, with smaller numbers of operational employees (especially where there were high proportions of non-retained colleagues) were felt to be less LGBTQI friendly than they could be.

With regard to the general fitness requirements for employees, sexuality was felt to have no impact on the extent to which people passed or failed, rather this was on physical ability alone.

Recruitment

Group participants noted that there was very little focus on recruiting from the LGBTQI community as the emphasis of recruitment activity was on ethnicity and gender. Some effort had been made by individual FRSs to encourage LGBTQI interest, but this frequently manifested itself as an FRS attendance at PRIDE and other LGBTQI events.

Career progression

There was concern amongst the group about career progression within the fire and rescue service more generally. A number of FRSs had recently made out of service appointments for senior managers, which meant that opportunities for both existing operational and non-operational employees were perhaps becoming more limited than before. Whilst those who had come from outside the service were viewed positively, there was concern that not having worked up through the roles meant that senior managers appointed from outside would not understand the pressures of being a firefighter. With regard to the impact of LGBTQI, there was no explicit barrier to promotion but rather there was felt to be an implicit bias against LGBTQI employees, especially if they acted as champions for the wider LGBTQI fire and rescue service community. For example, participants discussed that involvement in union related activity to support LGBTQI colleagues could have a negative impact on career progression. Senior managers could identify these individuals as being 'trouble makers' and would therefore promote others over them. More generally, participants noted that as the fire and rescue service was predominantly white, straight and male, promotion often went to this specific group and this did nothing to encourage or indeed develop diversity. Where this was different was felt to be in London Fire Brigade where the FRS was perceived as more inclusive and promotion was more open. Non-operational employees noted that they had less

opportunity to develop their skills and that there was less training available to them than their operational counterparts.

Retention

LGBTQI focus groups did not think that retention was affected by sexuality but did note that, for example, when leave around public holidays was being agreed, it was always the standard heterosexual-normative family unit (husband, wife and children) firefighters who were given preference. This could, in time, make LGBTQI employees more likely to leave the fire and rescue service as it was another example of being treated differently to the majority. Linked to this was that for many colleagues who come out, there was felt to be a need to be more resilient than other employees of the FRS, so as to be able to cope with being treated differently due to sexuality. It was not that this was overt but rather having to work within the warp and weft of a predominantly heterosexual environment was challenging.

Female

Inclusivity

Overall, the group felt that the fire and rescue service was now a more inclusive workplace for female employees than it had been even four to five years ago. There appeared to be a greater acceptance of female employees within operational roles and there were more women entering the fire and rescue service which was slowly having an impact on the culture. The fact that a number of very senior managers were female was felt to have provided a visible and tangible message that working in the fire service was open to women. This said, there was still felt to be a difference between the experiences of operational and non-operational employees, with those working in predominantly administrative roles perceiving that they were a less valued part of the fire and rescue service.

Though there had been these positive developments, gender was still felt to be an issue within the context of individual fire stations. Though there were more women entering the fire and rescue service, the numbers proportionately were still small, and it was often the case that a fire station might not have women based there at all or only one or two. In this context, group members noted that their male counterparts had been so used to working in all male environments they often did not know how to behave appropriately. Either they treated female colleagues as 'one of the lads', which itself was problematic as some of the behaviours exhibited had caused offence or other male colleagues were described as overprotective of female employees or awkward and nervous around them. Linked to this were the concerns that had been raised with female firefighters by the wives and partners of male firefighters who worried about the nature of their working relationships. All of this was felt unnecessary by focus group participants but felt that there was little that could be done about it.

A key issue for female employees had been the provision of both fire and rescue service uniforms and protective equipment that had not been gender appropriate. Over the last three or so years, protective equipment that was gender specific was now being provided though it was noted that this was not always the case during recruitment where female candidates were still being asked to take the physical entrance tests whilst wearing older style male kit. Participants noted that provision was now being made for women who were pregnant and also for those experiencing the menopause and this positive development was welcomed.

Where there were still issues faced by female colleagues was in fire stations that, on the whole, were not suitable for both male and female firefighters. Where new fire stations had been commissioned, separate and appropriate facilities had been provided for both males and

females. For older fire stations, the retrofitting of facilities was taking some time and often, female changing and sleeping facilities were created in spaces that had previously been used by male colleagues for other purposes. The result of this was that there was, at times, some ill will against female colleagues for the impact that their presence had on the physical environment within a station. More specifically, where fire stations had been adapted some female employees spoke about the inappropriateness of this adaptation with shower cubicles being gender neutral or female showers being located next to the male changing room. With regard to toilet facilities, the change of gendered to gender neutral cubicles was an issue with instances of female employees requesting gendered toilets. Focus group participants noted that the fire station buildings posed a challenge that would take some time to address.

Approaches to grievance and disciplinary issues were discussed. Operational employees of the focus groups felt that when employees reported gender related issues, they were dealt with effectively and appropriately and employees were aware of the relevant policies and procedures in place. For non-operational employees, the situation was more complex as though there were systems and policies in place there was hesitation as to the extent to which these were used, as the approach frequently taken by more senior managers was to ignore any gendered aspect and attribute it to personal circumstance rather than gender. Likewise, those female employees who had experienced discrimination were, at times, not able to fully report this. The reason for this was because of the associated stigma that was attached to colleagues who had raised such issues and the response from male colleagues that they should really become more resilient and not make an issue out of this. Much of the experience of female employees toward the disciplinary and grievance process was dependent on the particular senior manager involved. The quality, attitude and experience of the senior manager involved could shape the experiences and outcome of gender related disciplinary issues for female employees and there was a perception that a successful outcome was something that had to be battled for. Allied to this was uncertainty as to whether there was an HQ wide understanding of the issue as it was not clear whether data relating to the type of grievance were either analysed or indeed logged.

An issue that was raised by participants was the fitness test required of all operational employees. It was noted that it was perhaps more difficult for women approaching the menopause to retain the high levels of fitness required of them and that the fire and rescue service had to consider this going forward. Recently, a number of FRSs had appointed a fitness adviser whose role was to work with female firefighters so that they could remain operationally active for longer.

The role of the unions in supporting female firefighters was seen to be important. Often female employees felt more able to be open and honest with their female union representative than with their manager as it was perceived that they would be treated with greater empathy. The unions also had a key role in providing the structure for specialist female networks and support groups.

For non-operational employees, the role of the union was more contested. On beginning work in an FRS, non-operational employees were provided with details and information regarding union representation. This was welcomed, but there was some concern that unlike for example the FBU, the unions of which they were able to become a member represented workers across the public services, whereas it was a representative body for firefighters only.

Recruitment

The perception of the general public to female firefighters was felt to be a challenge that needed to be addressed as this did have an impact on recruitment. Examples were provided

of when during a fire incident, members of the public would speak with the more junior male firefighter than the female manager who was in charge. This was seen as symptomatic of a wider view held in society that firefighting was not a profession that females took part in, and this view was felt to impact on the recruitment of females into the fire and rescue service. All participants in the female focus groups noted that their FRS did target females through a range of activities including female only 'Positive Action' and 'have a go days' where potential recruits were offered the opportunity to use firefighting equipment. There was some unease that similar activities were not held for potential male recruits and this was not felt to be equitable. It was also noted that some FRSs were using local and social media to increase the visibility of female firefighters and therefore make the FRS more attractive to females as a career opportunity. Mention was made of the female firefighter apprenticeship scheme which was welcomed though there was concern about the twelve-month grace period after acceptance onto the scheme where participants were able to improve their fitness to the levels required.

Career progression

Participants felt that female employees were able to progress through the roles but there was a perception, amongst male colleagues, that any promotion was due to their gender rather than their ability. Linked to this was the concern amongst female operational employees that they had to be better at the role than their male counterparts to prove that they had the skills to achieve a more senior position. It was also felt that female employees had to be far more resilient whilst applying for roles and once in post if successful, as the number of female senior managers was small and therefore, they were more visible. Programmes such as 'He for She' were seen to be positive but there was unease as to why this type of programme was needed at all as career progression should not be impacted in any way by gender.

For non-operational employees, there remained concern about the inequalities of promotion where there was a perception that the skills expected for more senior roles had to be achieved before promotion which was not the same for operational employees. The gender composition of non-operational structures was also discussed and it was noted that there were far more male than female senior managers and where there were females, these had come from outwith of the FRS suggesting that there is little movement of female employees through the non-operational structure into more senior positions.

Retention

The fire and rescue service was felt to be putting policies and working patterns in place that would encourage retention of female employees. For example, provision was made for caring responsibilities (for both children and other relatives) as well as the introduction of part-time and other flexible working patterns. The speed at which these had been introduced was more problematic as frequently the timescales to which individual FRS worked to, were long. Allied to this, there was concern that even when policies were in place, employees only found out about them through word of mouth rather than through anything more systematic. The role of the individual manager was felt to be key here as it was their willingness, or not, to accommodate flexible working which affected whether employees were able to work more flexibly. More generally, retention of female managers was not an issue of concern as it was felt that the fire and rescue service had policies in place that encouraged female colleagues to remain. This said, the speed at which these policies had been introduced was not uniform.

Cross cutting themes

This section of the report highlights the key messages that ran across all three of the focus groups:

- Intersectionality (as in the issues being experienced across the protected characteristic groups) was raised as an issue - the challenges that were faced were not simply in relation to ethnicity, gender or sexuality but rather were a combination of factors. For example, issues faced related to being black and female or female and lesbian. There was concern that strategically, the fire and rescue service did not necessarily comprehend the importance of intersectionality when developing policy - rather it treated each protected characteristic as separate;
- Linked to the above, the fire and rescue service was felt to have made less progress around the equality and diversity agenda than other public services;
- There was a greater level of understanding amongst senior managers about issues relating to equality and diversity (hence the development of strategy) but how this played out at the fire station level was complicated;
- Direct knowledge of the 2017 IFSG Improvement Strategies was limited;
- There was an apparent disconnect between HQ that was putting the architecture in place for a more diverse and equitable FRS and the systems and structures on the ground;
- The fire and rescue service remained predominantly white and male and therefore any development around equality and diversity would take longer to effect real change;
- The scale of the financial challenge that the fire and rescue service was facing meant that training and support around equality and diversity issues was being reduced all the time. There was concern what the impact of this would be in the longer term;
- The outsourcing of services due to financial pressures (for example fireground catering) had been carried out without due process and checks taking place. The impact of this was that some providers of choice held views that were at odds with the FRS equality and diversity policies;
- Linked to the above, whilst senior managers were perceived to be more supportive there was little commonality in approach or specific standards that could be adhered to. The impact of this was that the extent to which protected characteristic employees experienced equality and diversity was reliant on individual senior managers rather than something more general and tangible;
- There was concern that where grievances and issues were raised regarding equality and diversity, the FRS response was often to ignore the protected characteristic element and suggest issues were of a personal nature;
- There was felt to be a more rapid turnover of protected characteristic employees and this was felt to be due to a cumulative set of pressures and challenges that this group faced;
- Employees who were Female, Black and LGBTQI noted that, despite the progress made, they still felt a sense of otherness, in that they were part of the fire and rescue service but were still viewed by their FRS and colleagues as being different;
- There was a lack of consistency with regard to provision of protective clothing and uniforms. Development had been made with some aspects of the kit, for example with protective wear for females and uniforms suitable for pregnant women. This said, there was felt not to be the will to provide protective clothing and kit suitable for firefighters to observe specific religious belief;
- New facilities coming on stream were felt to be suitable to accommodate the needs of a diverse workforce. Older fire stations were not as suitable and even when they had been retro-fitted, were not always fit for purpose. There was a linked concern that

where retro-fitting had taken place, there was a narrative amongst the predominantly white and male firefighters that the changes made had negatively impacted on their experience by reducing the space and facilities available to them;

- Members of protected characteristic groups were able to progress through the fire and rescue service but the extent of this was limited and there was concern that the general perception was that promotion of BAME, LGBTQI and female employees was due to their protected characteristic rather than their ability;
- All participants in the groups felt that they had to prove themselves in ways that white male colleagues did not;
- There was a real difference in experience among operational and non-operational colleagues with the latter group feeling that they were more disadvantaged due to the nature of their job;
- There were felt to be noticeable differences with regard to individual FRSs. It was felt that the London Fire Brigade was an example of good practice with regard to equality and diversity issues; and
- The role of individual champions and voices was felt to be very important in progressing the equality and diversity agenda but there was concern about what would happen when these individuals moved on.

Developments since 2017

This section provides an overview of the perceived developments around the equalities and diversity agenda since the previous set of focus groups were completed in 2017. These findings should be treated with some caution as the participants in the focus groups were not the same so direct comparison cannot be made. Rather, they should be viewed as the interpretation of the focus group facilitators as to what they heard in late 2017 and early 2020:

- The fire and rescue service had developed its thinking around equality and diversity but perhaps thinking was siloed in that it should ideally be a concept that was embedded in day to day working rather than a discreet set of activities, policies and processes;
- There was now greater visibility of strategies and policies to support those from protected characteristic groups than had been evident in 2017;
- Recruitment was still felt to be predicated on the white male model though some efforts had been made to engage with a more diverse set of recruits;
- There has been positive development around the provision of uniforms and protective clothing suitable for female firefighters but issues remained around fit for purpose equipment, for example with regard to protective clothing suitable for Muslim firefighters;
- Where new fire stations had come on stream, equality and diversity issues had been considered, although not always entirely to the satisfaction of employees, but older facilities, including those that had been retro-fitted were still not fit for purpose;
- There seemed to be an increased buy-in to the equality and diversity agenda amongst senior managers, but the extent to which real material change had taken place was not uniform;
- Experience of overt negative behaviours relating to gender, ethnicity and sexuality appear to have reduced but there is still some experience of implicit bias against protected characteristic groups;
- The composition of the fire and rescue service had not changed considerably since 2017. It remains white and male dominated and participants do not think that this will change over time as few recruits from protected characteristic groups are joining;
- The role of the relevant unions is important in developing equality and diversity but they can, at times, be perceived to impact negatively on progress given the composition of their membership;
- There remained a perception of otherness amongst protected characteristic group participants in that there was feeling that employees from these groups had to prove themselves more both during promotion activity but also in the day to day;
- There currently appears to be a greater proportion of protected characteristic colleagues leaving the fire and rescue service at an earlier stage than in 2017;
- There was a real sense amongst participants that the experiences of operational and non-operational employees was different and that was perhaps little parity of esteem; and
- There remains a dislocation between FRS HQ and individual fire stations.

Annex A: IFSG – Improvement Strategies Focus Groups (2020)

Focus Groups: BAME (13.01.20)
 LGBTQI (15.01.20)
 Female (16.01.20)

Introduction

Introduction will include an overview of the purpose of the session, confidentiality and the fact that no individual will be named or identified in any write up. And the focus here is on the changes that have taken place since the introduction of the Improvement Strategies from 2017 onwards.

Questions

- Q1) **What have your experiences been, to date, of being employees in the fire and rescue service?**
- Q2) **Have your experiences changed since 2017?**
- Q3) **How have these experiences been shaped by your gender / sexuality / ethnicity?**
- Q4) **To what extent do you feel senior ownership and leadership lead by example and to ensure that local strategies and initiatives become reality on the ground, thereby embedding inclusion as the norm?**
- Q5) **Have you experienced any negative experiences due to your gender / sexuality / ethnicity?**

Prompt – bullying and harassment

- Q6) **Do you think all employees are aware of, and understand, the relevant equality policies and where an issue is reported and found to be accurate that action is taken as a result?**
- Q7) **Do you think your career progression to date has been affected by your gender / sexuality / ethnicity?**

 If yes, how?
- Q8) **Do you think potential barriers are being removed to encourage promotion such as exploring the greater use of flexible working arrangements or similar enabling policies which may assist with improving diversity within management?**

Q9) Have you experienced difficulty in securing the required/appropriate facilities and/or equipment tailored to your needs?

Prompts: Gender specific Personal Protective Equipment
Gendered station/fire ground facilities
Prayer spaces etc.

Q10) More generally, do you feel the fire and rescue service is fit for purpose for all groups of employees including correct Personal Protective Equipment, uniform, policies and gender specific station and fire ground & workplace facilities?

Q11) Do you feel that your FRS is able to effectively deal with bullying and harassment in the workplace?

Prompts: How to have difficult conversations; and
How to deal with bullying and harassment.

Q12) Do you think your FRS monitors the use of discipline and grievance procedures and identifies and correct any problematic trends and tries to address issues early and informally where possible?

Q13) Do you feel that challenge (both up and down structure) is accepted and welcomed within all levels of your FRS?

Q14) Do you feel that your FRS does enough to encourage interest in promotion in general?

Prompts: Job swaps
taster weeks
acting-up/temporary promotions
upskilling (so not only career progression but skill progression also)

**Q15) Do you feel your FRS offers family friendly working policies/environment?
And has this changed since 2017?**

Prompts: Flexible-working arrangements, Job-shares etc.

Q16) Do you feel your FRS ensures all are aware of the fitness expectations of employees, and that support tailored to the individual is available to those who need it?

Q17) Do you think that current approach to recruitment by your FRS encourages diversity of applicants?

Prompt: Representative of the community it serves?

Q18) Does your Fire & Rescue Service undertake greater and early engagement with specific communities/schools/colleges and not just when recruitment is on the horizon?

- Q19) **What else could your FRS do to improve its ability to meet the needs of a diverse workforce?**
- Q20) **Is Union involvement recognised by management as an important factor in delivering improvement, particularly in respect of peer to peer involvement?**
- Q21) **Anything else that you wish to add**

Close and next steps



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Inclusive Fire Service Group Workshop Feedback Report

Monday 13 January 2020 - Bevin Hall, 18 Smith Square, Westminster SW1P 3HZ

Friday 17 January 2020 - The Queens Hotel, City Square, Leeds LS1 1PJ

Introduction

The Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG) joint secretariat held workshops with FRS equality and diversity officers and local union representatives to capture their experiences, comparisons and views going forward. Both sessions were opened with a joint secretariat presentation on the views expressed during the last round of workshops in 2017, explaining how the group had considered the views expressed and how these had influenced the formation of the improvement strategies.

General feedback (not specifically related to any of the strategies)

- In some cases, managers had not forwarded on the workshops invite to the relevant equality & diversity manager, but they had been captured through a separate communication.
- Information about the IFSG isn't always reaching the right people, sometimes PA's might be left to determine who these emails go to.
- CFOs in place at the time the strategies were launched may have moved on; in many instances this may have led to work not being passed on or progressed.
- How do the various interests on these matters fit together e.g. how does the IFSG sit in relation to National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) or other programmes?
 - Most felt that awareness in the sector around issues of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion was improved. But some were sceptical whether it would feel like change on the ground to some staff – has it failed to filter down from strategic/management level?

Promoting an Inclusive Culture

On promoting an inclusive culture some felt that all FRSs now acknowledged that this is of vital importance, but the amount of time and resources committed to solving these issues varied. Most major private firms are now treating inclusion as a risk critical part of their business. More needs to be done to achieve a truly inclusive culture, the right training is important and has a role to play in this, especially equipping managers with the right skills and awareness.

It was felt that levels of training on equality, diversity & inclusion (ED&I) issues across the UK was inconsistent, but that due to different area profiles across the country it would be difficult to deliver a single package/suite of training across the board. There was a need to centrally gather and share best practice amongst all UK FRSs. It was believed there are examples of good practice out there, but it needs to be shared.

There was recognition that many of these issues were a result of years of deep institutionalised behaviour and that we need to bring about a new culture. It will not be a quick fix and we cannot expect 'instant wins'.

There was some concern about the commitment to ED&I issues. In a context of decreasing funding and the renewed HMICFRS focus on core duties, this has seen the majority of ED&I issues relegated to PowerPoint style training sessions.

It was felt that the sector as a whole needed to be more open and up-front about:

- The importance of a good ED&I environment and why issues around this should be top of the agenda
- Working patterns & practices (e.g. job sharing, flexible working)
- Bullying & harassment issues and the scale of this in some services

It was felt that all policies, procedures and any changes to them should be Equality Impact Assessed (EIA). It was acknowledged that some FRSs were good at this, but it was not yet embedded as the norm. Also, the importance of early engagement in any decision-making process, ensuring this is genuine engagement and not just a 'box-ticking' exercise, was noted.

Some services encouraged an environment where challenge was genuinely welcomed, others did not. Whilst it was vital for this approach to be promoted and accepted from the 'top-down' it also needed to be from and ingrained within all-levels, i.e. sideways, and up the management structure too.

There was discussion about a disconnect between the experiences of WT & RDS employees. ED&I related policies and training were not as easily accessible for RDS staff compared to WT.

Recruitment

Overarching principle of “the workforce should reflect the community it serves”.

It is important to ensure the service is a suitable and diverse workplace at all times, not just during a recruitment phase. Recruitment and retention should be looked at together – not as separate issues.

Conversations were necessary with community leaders to inform our thinking as to what the barriers are to people from their communities joining the service. There was a need to build and foster these relationships to inform our thinking. Community engagement was vital in achieving this, ensuring better exposure of the UK FRS as a role genuinely accessible to all – thus ensuring people from underrepresented communities are more likely to consider it as a career.

A nationwide recruitment campaign, broader than just RDS, would be helpful to help FRSs pool resources. It could also be helpful to provide materials and maintain consistent engagement (i.e. not just during recruitment phases).

Many services are investing in apprenticeships and have started schemes, and this was welcomed by all. However, the approaches to apprenticeships differ greatly from service to service. Durham & Darlington run a scheme whereby apprentices (45% of the last intake were female) are given experience of both corporate and operational parts of the service, as well as:

- Amended fitness standards on joining but are then given dedicated support to achieve full operational fitness standard within 12 months of joining.
- Full-support by a dedicated apprenticeships manager for first two-years, they then spend their final year as a development level firefighter.

Flexible working policies differed greatly between FRSs, no set standard but all agreed that as a policy flexible working should be offered where possible. Serious conversations needed to be had around the current barriers to job-sharing - acknowledgement that it is difficult but by no means impossible to achieve, and the benefits of it could be great.

It was felt there is a need for a consistent standard of monitoring and analysis across the board to find out where people are dropping-out or are unsuccessful in the recruitment process. Many shared examples of easily identifiable barriers to recruitment that affect different communities, both of the following could be achieved within a relatively short time frame and alone should not rule someone ineligible for a position, for example:

- Some communities have lower levels of those with driving licences.
- A cadet fitting all other requirements but could not swim at time of application.

Some thought that the service as a whole should strive to comprehensively explain the term ‘positive action’ and ensure the differences between it and positive discrimination are understood due to the negative connotations associated with positive discrimination.

Progression/Promotion

All felt that nepotism is still a problem when going for promotion to management positions. Some ideas to prevent this included:

- Appropriate training on affinity & unconscious biases
- Interview panels of three
- Actively identify sources of potential conflicts/unfair advantages:
 - i.e. similar backgrounds, same social clubs or children going to the same school etc.

Historically promotion processes have evolved in some services, are not clearly written down and are different from service to service. They need to be published and communicated or else processes can feel secretive. A nationally set process that is equality impact assessed could be an effective tool and it would also allow for greater mobility between FRS (which could also assist with retention). The HMICFRS report in England made reference to the increasing pressure on promotion processes. The Royal College of Policing have nationally set criteria. Some attendees felt the service was unclear about what is required for different roles – the NFCC framework or promotion pathways etc?

Some attendees made positive reference to changes at London Fire Brigade (LFB) where operationally focused questions had been removed from promotion interviews given applicants would already have been determined competent at that level to be considered for the post. Instead, the main focus of the interview was focussed on behaviours and values.

Acting-up or temporary positions could be a useful tool if used correctly to support promotion as identified in the strategies. However, when used (as most still do) just on an ad-hoc basis and not as a development tool it was felt this can lead to a negative perception of acting-up arrangements. i.e. just because of not having enough staff to fill positions. There is also a need to recognise that not all employees will have ambitions for promotion, for example, many firefighters are happy at firefighter level. But more needs to be done to ensure those who are interested in progressing do not lose interest due to lack of faith in the process.

The appraisal process also tends to be very ad-hoc in many services. This is another useful tool for identifying and progressing talent to develop but it has to be used effectively. The HMICFRS report in England also raised concerns around promotion processes and how chances to identify talent are lost through ineffective performance management processes.

Retention

The issue of unfit PPE had still not been completely solved, there remained some problems with gender specific equipment but also with PPE fit for religious considerations, such as breathing apparatus (BA) suitable for beards, turbans etc. The view was that the army had procured suitable BA for these requirements, so it was something the service could achieve. There was concern that the image sold to females in respect of on the job experience during a recruitment phase, or at taster-days, didn't always accurately reflect the actuality of suitable equipment and/or appropriate facilities. The experience can be very different from initial perception.

Support for women to return to operational duties after returning from maternity leave could be improved by a national approach. An example was given of women returning to operational duties too early after giving birth and this causing health complications. Whilst the Grey Book contains the national maternity scheme, with the ability to improve policies by agreement at local level, there also needs to be better understanding of the impact of the menopause on female employees, whether operational or non-operational. All staff should be provided with information, including managers, to provide the right support. Some services had provided personal trainers to work with female employees and managers to better understand the symptoms and the impact on fitness etc. There was a need for national operational menopause guidance as it can be difficult for individual services to source information or support.

It was felt by some attendees that West Yorkshire FRS had examples of good practice: menopause champions, uniform changes and welfare packs on appliances etc.

Also, some attendees were aware that Chief Inspector Helen Smith (Greater Manchester Police) had detailed [her experience](#) of menopause as an operational police chief . The National Police Chiefs Council had also published guidance: [Management of Menopause Transition in the Police Service](#).

The problem of station and workplace facilities and whether they are appropriate for gender or religious considerations (i.e. separate toilets, changing & shower facilities for women, prayer rooms etc) was discussed. Although these things are now being considered in the design of newer buildings, it was felt that older facilities are harder to retrofit with these requirements and that there seemed to be little appetite to do this.

It was felt that serious conversations were needed about perceived barriers to job-sharing. It is difficult but by no means impossible to achieve. The issue of flexi-duty at Station Manager level is a big issue for progress, especially to those with caring responsibilities - could job sharing help alleviate this?

The importance of engaging with staff who are leaving the service is a very important vehicle for learning. The thoughts of those leaving, both positive and negative, need to be fed back in, analysed and used, where appropriate to inform change. It is paramount that lessons are learnt where possible to identify key issues and barriers that had prevented staying within the fire and rescue service.

What do you want the IFSG to do?

At the close of both sessions, attendees were asked if there was one priority that they would want the IFSG to take away and progress. Those with the most traction are indicated below:

- At the core of everything is culture - ingrained and outdated culture needs to be challenged and eradicated where it does not support inclusion.
- Further work needs to happen to develop 'inclusive leaders' in order to make sure leaders at the highest levels drive forward positive change throughout the organisation
- Recruitment-wise it was felt that FRSs were largely heading on the right track regarding new recruits, but they needed to crack the inclusion side of things to ensure the continued retention and progression of a more diverse intake of staff.
 - The vast amount of work getting people to apply is wasted if they do not feel welcome and do not stay with the service.
- Regular communications from the IFSG and other bodies (e.g. NFCC) to ensure that inclusion doesn't slip down the agenda recognising that consistency of approach would also be helpful
- Reinforcing the IFSG strategies would be helpful as they remain sensible and appropriate. In particular bullying and harassment remains a significant issue which needs to be challenged at all levels.
- Progress is being made but we need to be sharing best practice more as a sector.
 - How do we ensure good examples are signposted?