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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

28 March 2024

Circular NJC/2/24

Inclusive Fire Service Group – Revised Improvement Strategies

1. The Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG), a body led by the NJC for Local Authority Fire & Rescue Services, has reaffirmed its commitment to its original terms of reference, alongside a renewed focus and determination to support and promote the development of positive culture and inclusive behaviours in the service.
2. On reviewing the improvement strategies established previously, the group identified that beyond some shifts in emphasis, and noting that many of the same issues and headlines remain, only, minor amendments to the improvement strategies were required. The strategies have therefore been debated and agreed upon by the group and the Independent Chair, Professor Lynette Harris.
3. [The revised improvement strategies](#) were shared at the February meeting of the NJC, are available on the LGA website and are attached here.
4. The IFSG urges all FRSs to embed all aspects of these improvement strategies within their service and hopes they will be of use alongside other toolkits and guides that IFSG members have been producing, both independently and collegiately.
5. The group has also previously published a [statement of intent](#).
6. Further updates on the work of the group will be issued in due course.

SARAH WARD

BEN SELBY

Joint Secretaries

Inclusive Fire Service Group

Improvement Strategies

- Inclusivity should be embedded in every aspect of the fire and rescue service
- 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.
- Involvement from all unions represented across the fire and rescue sector must be recognised as an important factor in delivering improvement, particularly in respect of peer-to-peer involvement.
- Fire and Rescue Services should ensure the workplace is fit for purpose for all groups, recognising the diversity of employees, including correct Personal Protective Equipment and facilities on station and the fireground.

Promoting an inclusive culture

- 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.
- The time and effort it takes for all employees to support and sustain a reformed culture must be recognised as a key business as usual responsibility and embedded into organisational establishment profiling and planning, and when developing community risk management plans.
- 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.
- Fire and Rescue Services must ensure that the promotion of a culture where challenge is always accepted and welcomed as a positive contribution. This should be in both directions.
- Fire and Rescue Services should ensure that all employees are aware of, and understand, the relevant policies. Formal procedures need to be used properly and consistently, confidentially and with respect to all involved. 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.
- Fire and Rescue Services should monitor the use of discipline and grievance procedures strategically 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.
- Fire and rescue Services should ensure that data is collected frequently to reflect the full life cycle of an employee.

- Fire and Rescue Services should consider the creation of trained Equality and Diversity champions.

These are voluntary roles based on enthusiasm and commitment and irrespective of seniority. Champions play a central role in actively supporting the mainstreaming of equality and diversity initiatives and disseminating equality and diversity good practice, whilst also supporting the strategic development of initiatives to create an inclusive culture.

Consideration should also be given to the positive role Allies can play in creating a culture that is inclusive of everyone.

- 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).

Recruitment

- 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.
- 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.
- Fire and Rescue Services should ensure they have visible family friendly working policies supported by a greater use of flexible working arrangements.
- 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 their protected characteristic. This would be supportive to such individuals and also be helpful in terms of encouraging progression.
- 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.
- Fire and Rescue Services should keep under review recruitment policies and practices to ensure that diversity (in the broadest sense) within services can be positively enhanced by the recruitment process.

Progression

- Fire and Rescue Services should ensure that promotion processes which are fair and transparent are applied consistently and clearly explained to all employees.
- Fire and Rescue Services should develop employee support networks and meaningful mentor/coaching programmes.
- 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.
- Fire and Rescue Services should explore the greater use of flexible working arrangements which may also assist with improving e.g., the bottle neck at Station Manager Level given the extent of on-call commitment which for some may conflict with caring responsibilities.
- Fire and Rescue Services should keep under review their progression policies and practices to secure diversity among successful candidates achieving promotion.

Retention

- Fire and Rescue Services should keep under review expectations around fitness levels. They should be clearly explained with support and consideration given to the potential impact on protected characteristics (noting for example issues such as the menopause).
- 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.
- Fire and Rescue Services should consider how best to maintain the interest and commitment of employees through the variety of the work undertaken within the role.