

Positive Action Plan

2020-22

Increasing workforce diversity



HEREFORD & WORCESTER
HWFR
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Foreword

At this time, it is fair to say that all Fire and Rescue Services across the UK do not accurately reflect the diverse make-up and nature of their local communities. Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is no different in this respect – and although the reasons for this are often complex and frequently driven by external cultural stereotypes and influences, it is vitally important that we do something in order to change things for the better.

Positive Action is a key change tool when it comes to addressing this historic imbalance in our workforce, so that hopefully we can create a more inclusive working culture that both values and has insight into the experiences of people from all walks of life across the two counties – whether those experiences are shaped by someone's age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, cultural heritage, religious beliefs, disability or their socio-economic background.

Put in simple terms, having a workforce that is more representative of our local communities will only help us to deliver our services better.

What Positive Action is not about, however, is discarding or devaluing what we currently have. Rather it is more about building on our strengths and broadening our ability to better understand and appreciate the needs of the people we serve.

That is why I am championing this Positive Action plan.

Nathan Travis

Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive

What is positive action?

Positive action is a range of lawful steps we can take to minimise the disadvantages faced by people from under-represented groups or to meet their different needs. An example of this may be to help people from under-represented groups participate more fully in recruitment processes. Positive action is not positive discrimination which generally means employing someone because of a particular protected characteristic in spite of whether they have the right skills or qualifications. Positive discrimination is unlawful.

Taking positive action to increase representation within Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service (HWFRS) is beneficial to us all. As well as enabling us to recruit from a wider pool of talented, skilled people to create a more forward-thinking and positive working environment, positive action helps us understand the needs of the diverse range of communities we serve.



Who we are: Our core purpose, vision and mission are what drives and motivates our people to make the communities of Herefordshire and Worcestershire safer. Therefore having strong links with our communities is key and one way to enhance these links is by taking positive action.

Our People: Our People Strategy is a key pillar of our vision and sets out how we will support and value our workforce. We are committed to recognising and demonstrating equality and diversity across our workforce and through our services in the community. To support this, our aim is to increase the diversity of our workforce through positive action programmes to ensure we reflect the communities we serve.

Our Commitment: National statistics and our own employment monitoring data tells us that our operational workforce in relation to gender is not representative of the communities we serve. Only 7% of our Firefighters are women and only 4% belong to a minority ethnic group. This plan sets out our ambitions to increase the diversity of our workforce and how we propose to achieve those ambitions. We plan to expand our positive action activities over the next 2 years to position ourselves as a more attractive employer for a wide variety of people.

“Positive action is about creating a level playing field to enable people to compete on equal terms.”

What we believe in

Integrity

We will do the right thing and show fairness and consistency in our approach, taking responsibility for the decisions we make and the actions we take.

Teamwork

By working collaboratively, we can exceed expectations and go beyond the achievements of individuals

Honesty

We will be truthful in our actions and duties to build trust amongst our colleagues and within the communities we serve.

Openness

We will act in a way that is transparent and open to review and will welcome new or innovative ways of thinking.

Respect

We value the differences between individuals and create an inclusive environment which recognises everyone's experiences and opinions.



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Our values define what we stand for and describe how we work as an organisation. They provide a guiding compass as to how we work, communicate and interact with our communities, stakeholders, partners and colleagues and form the basis of everything we do.

CURRENT POSITION

OUR COMMUNITIES

49% Male

51% Female

4% BAME

population of Herefordshire
and Worcestershire
(Census 2011)



OUR OPERATIONAL STAFF

93% Male

7% Female

2% BAME



50% Male

50% Female

2% BAME

OUR SUPPORT STAFF



OUR FIRE CONTROL

63% Female

37% Male

0% BAME

In our Service overall, 16% of all staff employed are women. Our Support staff and Fire Control workforce composition is generally reflective of the communities of Herefordshire and Worcestershire. However, the number of women in operational roles is significantly low in comparison to the population of the two counties. Only 7% of Firefighters are women. Therefore, the composition of our operational workforce in relation to gender is not representative of the communities we serve.

With regards to ethnicity, 2% of all staff employed in the Service identify as belonging to an ethnic minority group. Within our Support staff workforce, this is 2% and 0% in our Fire Control. Within the operational workforce, 2% of employees identify as belonging to an ethnic minority group. In general terms, the composition of our workforce is mostly reflective of the communities we serve across the two counties. However, this could be improved upon in certain workforce areas (e.g. Fire Control).

The internal data we have in relation to other specific groupings such as sexual orientation and disability is not as extensive as the data we have on gender and ethnicity. We also have minimal formal data with which to compare these groups to in relation to the general population of Herefordshire and Worcestershire and the Fire and Rescue Sector. However, based on the data we do hold and the high rates of non-disclosure (particularly in relation to sexual orientation), we have enough reason to believe that we are under-represented by people with disabilities and LGBTQ+ people within HWFRS.

Plan Objectives

Based on our current position and supporting statistical information, this plan is underpinned by the following main objectives:

Recruitment

Recruit skilled and talented candidates through targeted activity and appropriate support and guidance, in particular to women and people belonging to an ethnic minority group in operational roles

Retention

Create a positive, inclusive organisational culture that recognises, respects and values diversity by improving staff understanding of positive action and the importance of diversity

Progression

Ensure promotion processes enable all individuals to compete on a level playing field with appropriate support and guidance

Community

Build positive relationships with communities resulting in a more effective service

Approach

The objectives will be met through a delivery framework supported by a number of departments with differing roles and seniority. The Service will continue to engage and involve representative bodies and staff groups such as our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Allies, our Women@HWFire network and the Organisational Development & Challenge Group (ODCG).

Governance and Monitoring

The Workforce Planning Group will provide strategic governance for the use of positive action and for all aspects of the plan. Delivery will be coordinated and managed by the Head of HR & Development; ensuring links are maintained with all key stakeholders.

This plan will be monitored by the Workforce Planning Group through regular monitoring and updating of the associated delivery framework. Regular updates will be provided to the Senior Management Board where appropriate.

The ODCG will provide support by acting as a critical friend in challenging our plans and processes in order to improve equality and diversity, consistency, transparency and outcomes.

The delivery framework contains measurable actions to embed the use of positive action and to support the Service's People Strategy, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion plan and Equality Objectives for the next 2 years. This will be reviewed regularly as required and reported on annually via the Employment Monitoring Report.

The Service will deliver positive action initiatives in accordance with Sections 158 and 159 of the Equality Act 2010 where appropriate.

What will success look like?

We will know we are delivering our plan when we see:

- An increase in applications from identified under-represented groups for operational roles;
- Increased recruitment rates of identified under-represented groups to operational roles;
- Improved retention rates for staff;
- Improved progression of staff from under-represented groups;
- Increased understanding and awareness of positive action by staff;
- Enhanced community engagement;
- A reduction in the gender pay gap.

Communication

The way in which the use of positive action is managed is crucial to develop an organisational culture that embraces equality, diversity and inclusion and advocates the use of positive action as a tool to achieving an effective service.

Staff will be encouraged to understand the capability and contribution that positive action can have, through appropriate and targeted communications. Engagement is required with managers and employees across the Service to ensure that everyone understands their role in mainstreaming equality and in driving local initiatives to support this.

Internal and external communications will be targeted towards encouraging people from all backgrounds to consider opportunities with HWFRS. Innovative methods will be utilised to attract and retain people belonging to under-represented groups and positive action initiatives will be developed, monitored and evaluated.

Activity will be underpinned by our Service values to create a consistent and supportive message to current and prospective employees.

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