East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service

Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021

Who did we talk to?
We understood early on that one of the key aims of our Inclusion, Diversity and Equality strategy would be to understand our workforce and our community better, so that we can be more effective and efficient with our resources and drive down risk in our communities, meeting our purpose of keeping our communities safer.

We anticipate that by doing this we will empower our staff encouraging openness and transparency and we will use information effectively ensuring that it influences our activities and supports us being connected with our communities.

Given this aim; it was natural for us in developing “Keeping our Communities Safer Inside and Out” that our Inclusion Strategy would listen to, consider and incorporate views of a wide range of stakeholders and experts.

Where did we start?

Our first consideration was to ensure that all the Assistant Directors were given the opportunity to add to the Strategy so that the “golden thread” of inclusion related to the whole business rather than it being something that one part of the organisation owned. The Assistant Directors fed back in on how the Inclusion Strategy could be improved and advised on how they would be able to implement it.

Early discussions were also held with Staff Network Leads and offered to Representative Bodies.

The Strategy was taken to the organisational Corporate Management Team (CMT) meeting on the 10th November 2016.

Minutes from that meeting explain the aim of the strategy to be “refreshed both in style and content with a view to being not only being published externally, but with a new focus on the promotion to our internal staff”.

The AD HR&OD provided CMT with some of the comments received following early discussions, CMT provided their initial feedback on the strategy, it was suggested the Inclusion & Diversity work already being carried out within the organisation continued and was supplemented to ensure an outward looking strategy, as well as an inward looking one.
It was also recommended that:

1) Reference be made to external influences and partners including the recent Adrian Thomas Review, professional standards and Fire Reform.
2) There was increased cross mapping between the Strategy and the Equality Impact Assessment
3) Language and content should be clarified to provide a clearer message.

These recommendations were taken onboard and implemented.

Next Steps

Following the meeting the I&D Advisor enhanced external consultation and encouraged the public to comment and contribute on the Strategy.

The strategy was given a headline position on our website and linked to Survey Monkey to record the feedback. In addition, the Strategy was circulated to key stakeholders within the community, using the same list of contacts as used for the IRMP with the addition of the Equality Forums with which the organisation engaged locally such as the East Sussex Equality Forum and Equality and Inclusion Partnership (Brighton and Hove) and nationally such as CFOA Equality Professionals Group. All those contacted were encouraged to respond either directly to the Inclusion and Diversity Advisor or complete their views anonymously online via our survey.

Internally, the I&D Advisor engaged across the organisation talking to staff at every level and across the service. She increased her time out of the office by 70% and remained working and raising the Strategy at a variety of locations across the service ensuring all Boroughs, SCC and HQ were reached. Discussions regarding the Strategy - its style, content and deliverability – occurred at many organisational meetings such as Borough Commanders and less formally with staff, both on 1:2:1 basis and as a group.

In addition, we ran a communications plan in respect of the Strategy advising staff of the document and their opportunity to comment on it. Our Principal Officers ensured that links to Inclusion and the Inclusion Strategy formed part of their engagement activities across the service.

They and others, including Fire Authority members, provided opportunities where we could and did circulate the Strategy for further opportunities to ensure stakeholder engagement with the Strategy.

Making it Public

The Survey on the website was originally placed 7-21 December 2016. This was the first time East Sussex Fire and Rescue has publicly engaged on our Inclusion and Diversity Strategy. We
wished to seek views on the change of style and content of the Strategy alongside the distinct shift to a greater focus on internal and external engagement.

As part of the engagement, respondents were asked for feedback on 11 questions. Questions 1-6 were about the content and style of the strategy, questions 7-11 explored the diversity of response. Unfortunately, although the response was extremely positive, it was in very small numbers. Although a cross-sectional response was received based on the respondents’ gender and age diversity, respondents were primarily white British, heterosexual and Christian.

In view of this outcome, we reposted the Survey in a headline position in the New Year. It remained on our website home page until 7th May 2017.

During this time although the responses to the Survey did not increase significantly we had over 200 hits to the Strategy. Therefore, increased activity to ensure feedback from minority groups was sought, via LGBT networks in Brighton and Hove, Interfaith groups from East Sussex, East Sussex Cultural Network, the Sussex Police Race Advisory Group and Diversity Lewes. We also encouraged stations to share it with their local contacts to increase circulation.

What was the response to the Survey?

Q1 - Is our draft Inclusion and Diversity Strategy easy for you to read?
Q2 - Do you agree with our approach to Inclusion and Diversity?

Q3 - Do you think the areas covered in our draft Inclusion and Diversity Strategy (our Equality Objectives) are the ones we should be focusing on for the next four years?

Q4 Is there anything else you think we could do to foster good relations and/or improve access of opportunity to our services for our community with regard to equality and diversity?
Q5 – Is there anything else we could do to promote equality of opportunity in the workplace with regard to equality and diversity?

During this time, our internal communication continued. The changes to the Strategy were agreed with our network leads and we achieved agreement with several our Representative groups. The Fire Brigade Union has had significant input in the strategy. We also have consulted on the strategy with national networks representative of minority groups; such as Stonewall and Women in the Fire Service alongside a range of professional equality experts from across the country but within the Fire Service and across the Public Sector.

**What we heard**

Over the course of our engagement activity we have spoken with a number of stakeholders including (but not exclusively):

- Our Staff, across work locations, roles and levels
- The public of East Sussex, Brighton and Hove
- ESFRS – Professional Women’s Group
- ESFRS – Disability Network
- ESFRS – LGBT Network
- Women in the Fire Service
- Asian Fire Service Association
- quiltbag
- Public Sector LGBT Consortium
- Kent Fire and Rescue Service
- Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service
- CFOA Equality Professionals Group
- Stonewall
- Diversity Lewes
- East Sussex Cultural Network
- East Sussex Equality Group
- Equality and Inclusion Partnership (Brighton and Hove)
- Race Advisory Group
- Sussex Police
Brighton and Hove City Council
East Sussex County Council
Lewes District Council

We had feedback which included statements that the strategy was “a powerful document that sets the direction of the Service” suggesting what we had produced was “overwhelmingly positive”. However, we also had some consistent messaging that suggested we:

1) Prioritise “inclusion” throughout the document
2) Simplify our language
3) Be a little more specific in certain areas
4) Ensure that staff could make links between what the Strategy aimed to achieve and their part in the delivery of that aim.
5) Ensure that inclusion related to the lifecycle of an employee

We have listened to our stakeholders and endeavoured to adopt these recommendations in the Strategy.

**Final Preparation**

As final preparation, we have recirculated the document to the Fire Brigades Union, and several other stakeholders for a final overview.

The response has been good with many of the participants responding extremely positively suggesting “we have captured the feedback effectively and are in a position to present a document that has been fully inclusive in the making”.