

Report to	North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority
Date	17 September 2018
Lead Member	Councillor Sue Lloyd-Williams
Lead Officer	Ruth Simmons, Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Contact Officer	Llinos Gutierrez-Jones, Human Resources Manager – 01745 535276
Subject	Inclusive Fire Service Group



PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To update Members on progress towards delivering the improvement strategies recommended by the National Joint Council for Local Authorities Fire Services (NJC) Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2 This report advises Members of progress in relation to the strategies that emerged from the work of the NJC IFSG, which were endorsed by the Authority in 2017.

RECOMMENDATION

- 3 That Members note the content of the report.

BACKGROUND

- 4 The NJC IFSG was formed in October 2015 to consider matters relating to equality, diversity and cultural issues such as bullying and harassment.
- 5 In June 2017, the IFSG issued a national circular which proposed a number of strategies for improvement and sought the support of both employers and employees in taking these forward at local level.
- 6 The circular was considered by the Authority's Executive Panel at its meeting on 17 July 2017. (Report attached at Appendix A). A full response to the circular was agreed and Councillor Sue Lloyd-Williams was nominated to lead the work programme.

INFORMATION

- 7 In the last twelve months substantial progress has been made against key strategies. The All-Wales People and Organisational Development Strategy has been produced jointly with the other two Welsh fire and rescue authorities. Other key initiatives have addressed recruitment from under-represented groups; staff training to both identify and challenge unconscious bias and implementation of the Blue Light Champions scheme sponsored by MIND, which provides mental health support for emergency services workers.
- 8 Councillor Lloyd-Williams chairs a cross-cutting group consisting of staff members, representative bodies and senior management. This group is tasked with both monitoring progress and promoting new initiatives in line with the agreed strategies. Future priorities are to enhance engagement with staff around the key areas and the delivery of work following further recommendations by the NJC IFSG.

IMPLICATIONS

Well-being Objectives	This report links to all Wales People and Development Strategy 2018-2021, NWFRS Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy and to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. This Act is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales.
Budget	There are no significant budget implications at this time.
Legal	All relevant legislation has been considered
Staffing	Resources will be required to undertake the strategies outlined in the report. Capacity may limit the Authority's ability to make progress.
Equalities/Human Rights/Welsh Language	All protected characteristics are covered within the report.
Risks	Not relevant

Mae'r ddogfen yma ar gael yn Gymraeg

Report to	Executive Panel	
Report no	EP/2017/07/10	
Date	17/07/17	
Lead Officer	ACFO Ruth Simmons	
Contact Officer	Llinos Gutierrez-Jones (01745 535276) HR Manager	
Subject	Inclusive Fire Service Group – Improvement Strategies	

PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To consider the improvement strategies proposed by the Inclusive Fire Service Group led by the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services (NJC).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2 The Inclusive Fire Service Group was formed in October 2015 by the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services to consider matters relating to equality, diversity and cultural issues such as bullying and harassment.
- 3 The group is independently chaired by Professor Linda Dickens and includes employer and employee representation from the National Joint Council and representation from the National Fire Chiefs Council, the Fire Officers Association and the Retained Firefighters Union.
- 4 The Group has engaged with special interest groups such as Stonewall, Asian Fire Service Association, Women in the Fire Service, Women in the Police Service, FBU women's, BME and LGBT groups, Unison, and GMB.
- 5 In early June 2017 the group issued a report (Circular NJC/8/17 Inclusive Fire Service Group – Improvement Strategies) which proposed improvement strategies and sought the support of employers and employees in taking them forward to deliver improvement at a local level.
- 6 Across the UK Fire Authorities and Chief Fire Officers have been asked to consider the proposed strategies in terms of how they can be taken forward in individual services confirming their support for the proposals to the Inclusive Fire Service Group by 28th July 2017.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7 Members are asked to
- (i) consider the equality, diversity and cultural improvement strategies proposed by the NJC group;
 - (ii) approve the response to Circular NJC/8/17;
 - (iii) nominate a member of the Fire Authority to lead on these matters.

BACKGROUND

- 8 The NJC Inclusive Fire Service Group remit is as follows:
- (i) the assessment of the current position in respect of equality, diversity, behavioural and cultural issues;
 - (ii) the identification of guidance in relation to any further strategies that could be used at local level to further encourage improvement; and
 - (iii) in respect of (i) above, to consider whether it is necessary to gather new monitoring data or whether there is sufficient monitoring data already available that can be drawn from e.g. the NJC survey, surveys conducted by the FBU, local employee satisfaction surveys, and other sources.
- 9 The Group has undertaken a substantial amount of work in respect of (i) and (ii) above:
- (i) The Behaviour and Cultural Survey - detailed research with fire and rescue services to assess the starting position (circulated to fire authorities - NJC/6/16);
 - (ii) Engagement with special interest groups;
 - (iii) Focus groups with female, BME and LGBT employees;
 - (iv) An all staff employee survey, whether uniformed or non-uniformed;
 - (v) Four regional workshops with Equality and Diversity Officers and local union representatives (FBU, RFU and FOA) who lead on or have an interest in that area. [Sue Jones, Equalities Officer and Parry Davies, FBU Representative, attended the national workshops in order for the group to tap into their practical experience in this area. This assisted the group in developing strategies to deliver improvements];
 - (vi) Two workshops with senior fire service managers (majority CFOs).

- 10 Consistent messages have emerged across the work undertaken, which has allowed the Group to be able to identify improvement strategies relating to four key areas: promoting an inclusive culture (which includes tackling bullying and harassment); recruitment; progression and retention.

INFORMATION

- 11 Historically NWFRS has sought to implement policies and procedures that reflect good employment practice including the promotion of an inclusive culture with robust equality and diversity themes whilst actively discouraging conduct such as bullying and harassment. NWFRS is committed to the aims identified by the Group, including:
- NWFRS seeks to promote an inclusive culture by engaging its employees and the public, taking into account different backgrounds and perspectives as evidenced by successive Strategic Equality Plans and public consultation prior to the implementation of Improvement and Wellbeing Plans. All NWFRS policies go through consultation before being reviewed by the Executive Group. Policies are distributed to department heads and representative bodies in order to obtain input and different perspectives. The CFO has a weekly brief that presents current and upcoming issues and invites comments from staff as part of the engagement strategy.
 - NWFRS tackled bullying and harassment through the development of robust policies and procedures. Bullying and harassment is not tolerated anywhere within the organisation. NWFRS has investigated allegations of bullying and harassment thoroughly and taken action in accordance with its disciplinary policy when those allegations have been found to be upheld. Employees are introduced to the Service's Core Values during induction. Employees' performance against those values are reviewed annually through performance appraisal. All employees are aware that behaviour which contravenes those values may be dealt with via the Service's disciplinary processes.
 - NWFRS utilises the UK FRS national recruitment and selection tools which are designed to identify individuals that exemplify integrity and value equality and diversity. The challenges of RDS recruitment have led to a number of initiatives across the region to engage with all members of the community. Employees from a variety of departments support community engagement events in preparation for and during formal recruitment programmes.

- NWFRS is committed to enhancing retention rates and administering transparent progression processes. Health, Safety and Wellbeing provision was reviewed and updated in December 2016 improving the employee experience, having a positive effect on wellbeing and it is envisaged that there will be a positive impact upon retention rates.
 - The Operational Resourcing Group has sought to involve employees and trade union representatives in the recruitment of new employees, for example, in delivering presentations at Recruitment Open Evenings. Promotion processes exemplify the principles laid down nationally and are designed and delivered on an All Wales basis. Employees preparing to compete for promotion are provided with written guidance and the opportunity to attend preparation sessions with the Training and Development team.
- 12 In demonstrating NWFRS support for this work and to build upon progress made thus far, it is suggested that the following actions are taken:
- to review its policies and procedures to ensure compliance with the aims of the Inclusive Fire Service Group.
 - to identify improvement strategies relating to the four keys areas that have been identified: promoting an inclusive culture (which includes tackling bullying and harassment); recruitment; progression and retention).
 - the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Group to lead the improvement strategies identified within this report and agree timescales for the action points identified. The Health, Safety and Wellbeing group are responsible for the overseeing of strategic health & safety management and promotion of workforce wellbeing.
 - North Wales Fire and Rescue Service to monitor progress against each of improvement strategies identified.
 - A behavioural survey questionnaire to be repeated to assess performance against the criteria identified at an appropriate point to be determined.

IMPLICATIONS

Wellbeing Objectives	This report links to NWFRS Health, Safety and Wellbeing strategy and to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. This Act is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales.
Budget	Unable to comment on budget implications at this time.
Legal	All relevant legislation considered
Staffing	Resources will be required to undertake strategies outlined in the report.
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	All protected characteristics are covered within the report.
Risks	Considered not relevant

IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES RECOMMEND BY THE INCLUSIVE FIRE SERVICE GROUP

In general:

(i) Inclusivity should be embedded in every aspect of the fire and rescue service.

NWFRS is actively undertaking this action and this continues to be an important objective. NWFRS has a Strategic Equality Plan 2016-2020 (complying with the legislation and measures the aspiration to achieve equality within all aspects of our Service)

Inclusivity is identified as a key component of everything that NWFRS does. The public sector Equality Duty requires that NWFRS has due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination;
- advance equality of opportunity; and
- foster good relations between different people when carrying out its activities

NWFRS seeks to embody the values of equality and fairness, as set out in its business plan. NWFRS seeks to engage its employees and the public on an inclusive basis, taking into account different backgrounds and perspectives. Doing this makes NWFRS a better organisation and the services provided are more comprehensive and targeted. This is reflected in the steps that NWFRS is already undertaking.

In alignment with the well-being goal of a more equal Wales, the Personnel and Organisational Development draft strategy (2018-2021) outlines that the Service will develop its employees in accordance with NWFRS' Core Values to build a culture that respects and values personal development and provides an understanding for employees of where they fit into the organisation. In doing so, the NWFRS can create an environment of value and cohesiveness.

As a result of the Strategic Equality Plan NWFRS has developed a set of overarching Equality Objectives; each of which will have its own specific actions. These objectives, and NWFRS' progress towards them, is monitored via the Equality Plan Annual Report – published on the intranet and Fire Authority website.

(ii) 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.

A paper was presented to the FRA and a nomination of a Fire Authority member to lead on these matters.

The Chief Fire Officer is HR lead at the National Issues Committee, the aims of which are to develop and implement improved arrangements for the strategic and co-ordinated delivery of collaborative work, one of which is the strategy mentioned in (i) above.

(iii) Union involvement should be recognised as an important factor in delivering improvement, particularly in respect of peer to peer involvement.

The unions play an important role in NWFRS. Some of the key roles include being able to assist with equality and diversity issues, and to champion equality and diversity within the union.

There are regular meetings (every 6 weeks) held with senior management and the union representatives to discuss local and national issues. In addition, policy documentation and strategic decision-making is consulted upon and union representations taken into account. NWFRS has strong and constructive relationships with the relevant unions and local officials, and this has been consistent over a lengthy period of time.

(iv) 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.

NWFRS supply firefighting PPE compliant or exceeding the relevant European, ISO and British Standards. PPE is largely procured on an all Wales basis and supplied in a variety of sizes to accommodate our diverse workforce. For corporate and workwear, the Service has embraced gender equality in the provision of clothing for male and female employees.

The Service has invested in new buildings which are fully compliant with disability and equality legislation. The NWFRS estate has had significant investment during the last 10 years which has included a capital programme of upgrading fire stations and other premises to comply with disability and equality legislation including the Equality Act 2010. This has included extending and reconfiguring buildings to provide modern and fit for purpose gender specific facilities and improving accessibility into buildings as far as practically possible.

Promoting an Inclusive Culture

(i) 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.

Strategic and policy documents highlight NWFRS core values. Staff appraisal questionnaires align to the Personal Qualities and Attributes framework. Pathways outline ILM and other equivalent management training at various levels from Supervisory Manager and above. The Executive Learning Platform and associated learning promote an inclusive leadership culture.

There is encouragement to continue with studies beyond awards to certificates and diplomas. Promotion boards and multi-level Assessment Development Centres assess people management skills against Personal Quality and Attributes with signposting of areas of improvement / development.

Promotion boards and Assessment Development Centres do not specifically develop people management skills. The subject of difficult conversations is not specifically taught although there are courses available such as the Welsh Union Learning Fund which covers informal discipline. ACAS conflict management courses are offered. There is greater emphasis placed on people and communication skills, personal resilience and decision making in Operational roles e.g. National Operational Guidance for Incident Command.

(ii) 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.

The aim of NWFRS is to eradicate bullying or harassment from the workplace. If bullying or harassment does occur, NWFRS will ensure that adequate procedures are readily available to deal with the problem and prevent its recurrence.

All employees are instructed to act in accordance with NWFRS standards of behaviour and core values, treating everyone with due dignity and respect.

NWFRS has policies and procedures with regard to advice and guidance on bullying and harassment. At inductions every member of staff is directed to the NWFRS's Core Values – these describe how we work and the standards that apply to the Service. All staff are expected to behave in accordance with these values or they may be subjected to the disciplinary process.

Relevant training and E-learning modules are mandatory (i.e Domestic Violence, Bullying and harassment). Training is provided to senior management by employment lawyers on unconscious bias to consider the risk and how it could permeate through the employee lifecycle.

(iii) Fire and Rescue Services should promote a culture where challenge is accepted and welcomed as a positive contribution. This should be in both directions.

NWFRS is committed to creating a working environment in which all staff and Service users are treated fairly and with dignity and respect. All staff are accountable for their own action and on behalf of NWFRS as an employer, all managers are accountable for the actions of their staff.

Recent staff engagement events have been facilitated by senior and middle managers to explore the challenges and benefits of new initiatives. New recruits are engaged at the beginning and end of all courses to outline core values and standards expected. E-learning modules are available to all staff to promote positive behaviours. Regular departmental meetings and 'out of office days' are programmed to provide discussion forums for team members.

(iv) Fire and Rescue Services should ensure that all employees are aware of, and understand, the relevant 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.

Professional and Service Standards Department was formally established in 2015 and its primary function is to ensure NWFRS provides the highest possible standard of service delivery. To do this it brings together a number of assurance and investigation work streams into one department, independent of mainstream service delivery and supportive of continual improvement.

A suite of relevant policies and procedures support the line management system and there are a number of alerts and reporting mechanisms through LearnPro.

Workplace audits provide assurance that the Health, Safety and Wellbeing of staff is being maintained and helps to identify good practice that could further enhance the Health, Safety and Wellbeing of our staff. Professional Service Standards and Human Resources staff have attained the BTEC Level 7 Advanced Professional Certificate in Investigative Practice – to equip investigators with the necessary knowledge, skills and procedures to ensure competency, consistency and best practice.

Any complaints of bullying and harassment are dealt with robustly in line with Service policies and procedures which are clear, transparent and consistent. Managers have received training and understand what is expected of them and why.

(v) 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.

Monitoring discipline and grievance statistics is a priority. The Service's ability to manage disciplines and grievances effectively is enhanced by accurate, timely and accessible information. Our reporting mechanisms aims to provide senior managers to quantify, monitor and manage any arising issues.

NWFRS meet this priority by:

- Bi-monthly investigation update meetings with principal officer and HR manager.
- Yearly report to Executive Group with statistical data and trends
- Yearly briefings with employment lawyers on arising issues, case law and recent legislation.
- Receive weekly HR and employment law bulletins from employment lawyers providing update on changes in case law/legislation.

(vi) 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 role Allies can play. In relation to LGBT for example, 'allies' is a term used to describe heterosexual people who believe that lesbian, gay and bisexual people should experience full equality in the workplace and use their role within the organisation to create a culture that is inclusive of everyone.

The appointment of Equality and Diversity Champions will be an important part of how the Service makes sure that we deliver on our equality and diversity objectives, by giving people from the different equality groups the chance to feedback to us on our work.

There are 10 trained Stonewall Allies within the Service (including a Principal Officer) and a dedicated telephone number and email for a LGBT Colleague Supporter.

The Service will look for volunteers that represent or support the different parts of the community we work with. Approving the establishment of Equality Champions will demonstrate senior leadership and support for equality and diversity matters and initiatives. The Champions support the progression of equality for all employees, including those with specific protected characteristics:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race
- Religion or Belief (including no belief)
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation

Production of a bilingual RDS Recruitment video containing female and BME firefighters as well as references to Service's attendance in support of LGBT Pride events. Human Resources and Training and Development departments work together to develop and deliver positive messages and initiatives regarding diversity, particularly during recruitment and selection process.

(vii) 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).

The Service has three fully trained mediators and guidance documents on Mediation available to all staff. ACAS mediation service is used as an external provider as and when required.

Recruitment

(i) There should be a national media campaign covering the full range of the modern firefighter role (similar to the current Army campaign) and what the fire service does in order to inform perception. It should:

- be supported by a website which would also include information on recruitment and potentially divert the interested person to their 'home' fire and rescue service.

- include information on selection (based on national guidance, not prescription) recognising that the skill set needs to be wider than operational ie people skills, and provide information on fitness requirements. This suggestion was seen, by far, as the most influential way to alter perceptions and improve diversity. It would be useful in terms of recruitment and retention. Recruitment because it would dispel the myth that the job is just about fighting fires and retention to avoid the job not living up to expectations.

NWFRS is in agreement with (i). However, the Welsh language standards must be taken into consideration, not only with regard to translation into Welsh but also in relation to language requirements for recruits, and in ensuring 'inclusivity' extends to Welsh speakers (although the Welsh language is not a protected characteristic it should be part of the wider consideration given to equality, diversity, cultural and behavioural issues).

All Wales processes are undertaken at a variety of stages for recruitment of WDS. The challenges of RDS recruitment have led to a number of initiatives to engage with all members of the community. Staff from a variety of departments support community engagement events on the build up to, and during, formal recruitment programmes.

A variety of work place apprenticeships are offered and advertised to a diverse demographic.

All Wales bilingual RDS recruitment video will incorporate all of the aspects of the role of the Firefighter (currently being undertaken).

(ii) 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.

NWFRS are fully invested in the apprenticeship programmes we have running across the Service, which offer key opportunities for development for young people across the region and which are helping to safeguard the future of our communities.

NWFRS has recruited two cohorts of Firefighter apprentices whereby positive action was undertaken to ensure sufficient females were recruited. 10 Apprentices Firefighters were recruited in 2015/16 and 11 Apprentice Firefighters this year (2017). Firefighter Apprentices embark upon a series of deployments that will provide them with experience in both operational and non-operational roles across the Service during their apprenticeship programme. These deployments will see them working within Arson Reduction, the Phoenix team, Professional and Service Standards – Health, Safety and Wellbeing, Human Resources – Fitness Advisor Support, Training and Development, Operations, and Community Safety.

NWFRS also offers work experience (both operational and non-operational), Duke of Edinburgh Award, Phoenix and Cadet schemes.

(iii) 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.

NWFRS attend community events and school/college fairs on a regular basis, as well as LGPT Pride events and will continue to review and evolve our process as and when required.

A combination of role models in operational and support staff attend the events to give a clear picture of the Fire and Rescue Service - demonstrating the diverse roles NWFRS have including Firefighters, HR Advisers, Physical Fitness Advisers, Apprentice Fleet Technician and Apprentice Firefighters.

Fire Prevention Work such as Arson Reduction Team and Road Traffic Collision awareness for young people allowed NWFRS staff exposure to a wide and diverse audience outside of recruitment campaigns.

Further work does need to be undertaken to ensure that awareness and development opportunities are introduced at an early age.

(iv) Fire and Rescue Services should ensure they have visible family friendly working policies supported by a greater use of flexible working arrangements.

Flexible working is on the rise, giving employees flexibility on where, when and the hours they work. The Service recognises the business benefits of a more flexible way of working and as a strategic tool organisations can use to improve performance and productivity.

There are a wide range of flexible working arrangements available to staff including a career break from between 6 months to 3 years. The Service has enhanced pay for employees on Maternity, Paternity and Adoption leave.

(v) 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.

NWFRS understands that it is important to use internal communications and engagement to support the organisation's strategy, as part of an integrated approach to strategic reputation management. An internal communications strategy will be developed and appropriate training delivered.

(vi) 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.

Public consultation was undertaken for the Strategic Equality Plan and contributed to the equality objectives. Legislation allows for the objectives to be changed at any time, so the Service is keen to maintain a level of ongoing engagement to ensure our objectives remain current. A proposal of RDS recruitment and retention initiatives for future consultations will be considered.

Progression

(i) Fire and Rescue Services should ensure that promotion processes which are fair and transparent are applied consistently and clearly explained to all employees.

The Service has an Assessment of Potential and Development Policy to deal with the management, administration and operation of the assessment and development of potential of staff. There is also guidance on Temporary Promotions for Wholetime Personnel Policy.

There is early engagement with staff to raise awareness of promotion rationales and availability of development /support. Tri Service collaboration for Assessment and Development Centres, technical tests and managerial courses. One to one feedback and engagement event facilitated for recent supervisory promotion process. As a Service, we are always looking to help our staff reach their full potential and we encourage everyone interested in progressing their careers and taking up new challenges to find out more about the opportunities available.

(ii) Fire and Rescue Services should develop support networks and meaningful mentor/coaching programmes. (Note - mentors/coaches do not need to come from the particular group eg a BME mentor for a BME crew manager).

Newly promoted middle managers and apprentices have assigned mentors.

The Training and Development Coaching and Mentoring Strategy is in draft although we currently have mentors for the apprentices and 3 recently promoted Group Managers. The Group Managers received a bespoke course from an external provider to introduce them to the scheme and a personal action plan.

The NWFRS Coaching strategy aims to provide managers with coaching skills to use as an integral part of their management style. The approach will have three strands to provide:

- a. All supervisory managers with coaching skills, through an e-learning training package.
- b. Selected middle managers and 'specialist' coaches with a more in-depth programme of training, accredited at Level 5.
- c. Development of selected strategic managers to coaching level 7. (future aspiration in Year 3)

It is envisaged that Coaching will be developed in partnership with cross sector agencies within the North Wales Training and Delivery Group and our partners across the Welsh Fire and Rescue Services.

(iii) 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.

The introduction of Appraisals and Pathways provides a framework to support succession planning.

Operational employees are provided with opportunities to temporarily perform roles before substantiation. Individual progression and development plans and Development to Competent programmes can target specific roles.

(iv) 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.

The flexible duty rota allows individuals and the Service to move across different rota days and shift patterns to accommodate both work and personal commitments. There are more people available during the week days which allows greater freedom of movement for this, with the limitation being the requirement to provide minimum officer levels for incident command.

The duty rota system is continuously under review due to changes and objectives of NWFRS being under constant assessment.

Retention

(i) Introduction of a national media campaign as set out under 'recruitment' should ensure that recruits are fully aware of the work of the service and the part they will play in that. Therefore they should not become disappointed or disengaged as they progress in their career.

NWFRS are in agreement with this suggestion.

The WDS operational role is reasonably clear with regards to the role and responsibilities however there are challenges associated with a full understanding of the Retained Duty System. NWFRS' Operational Resourcing Group has devised Open Evenings and a Communications Strategy, putting together the actions utilised in a recent RDS Recruitment, to include positive action events.

(ii) 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.

There is a Health and Fitness policy and accompanying guidance. The Service has appointed 3 Physical Fitness Advisers, who as well as offering nutrition and fitness programmes, undertake 6 monthly health and fitness reviews of operational employees (which includes weight, BMI, body fat percentage, blood pressure measurements and a suitable aerobic fitness assessment). Fitness expectations are clearly stated through selection processes and ongoing maintenance (step tests and medicals).

It is vital that the health and fitness of operational employees within NWFRS is assessed to identify any interventions which could assist or improve the fitness of the service.

NWFRS have drafted a guidance document, in conjunction with CFOA Occupational Health Group, with regards to Menopause. Guidance around maternity issues are covered in the Maternity, Paternity and Adoption policy.

(iii) As with recruitment and progression, Fire and Rescue Services should explore greater use of flexible working arrangements.

Response is as per heading "Recruitment" section (iv) above.

(iv) 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.

The information gained from an exit interview can develop learning points, increase productivity and engagement, thus reducing the high costs associated with turnover. Some examples of the value of conducting exit interviews include shortening the recruitment process, reducing absenteeism, and reducing possible litigation if issues mentioned in the exit interview are addressed.

NWFRS offers exit interviews to departing employees. The Human Resources Department monitors responses and liaises with the relevant department if there are any arising issues. All exit interviews are recorded on the relevant form and also on the Management Information System for generic reporting.

(v) 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.

Employees will be encouraged to participate in the formulation of decisions and in decision taking. An appropriate level of employee participation will improve their understanding of the strategies being undertaken and will influence them to increase their commitment to both the strategies and NWFRS in general.