

TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Item No. 09

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE: 3 FEBRUARY 2014

SUBJECT: STONEWALL WORKPLACE EQUALITY INDEX 2014

JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER AND THE PERSONNEL ADVISOR

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the result of the 2014 Stonewall Workplace Equality Index (WEI) and to provide details of the Authority's standing in the Index.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Since it was founded in 1989 Stonewall has worked ceaselessly to place sexual orientation equality in the mainstream political agenda and to achieve equality and justice for LGBT people. One method which Stonewall use to assist with its work is the WEI which benchmarks and ultimately showcases Britain's top gay friendly employers.
- 2.2 Research indicates that people deliver their best when they can be themselves at work. Inclusive work environments which encourage loyalty, teamwork and maximise personal contributions are key to top performing organisations.
- 2.3 Every year the Authority participates in the WEI Top 100 employers to measure its performance in relation to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) equality to ensure continuous improvement is achieved.
- 2.4 Members have consistently demonstrated the Authority's commitment to achieving equality of opportunity and removing discrimination or prejudice on any grounds including sexual orientation and this is evident through working with Stonewall and taking part in the WEI.

3. WEI SUBMISSION PROCESS

- 3.1 Taking part in the WEI involves completing a comprehensive on-line questionnaire and extensive supporting evidence, demonstrating how the Authority supports LGBT equality both in the workplace and community.
- 3.2 The WEI questionnaire is divided into specific categories and requests information and evidence regarding; policy and practice, staff engagement, staff development and support, monitoring, supplier policies, community engagement, Pink Plateau (details requested re out LGBT staff and their level in organisation) and innovative development of LGBT related initiatives.

- 3.3 The submission process is extremely thorough. Entries are marked by two teams and those organisations in the Top 100 are marked a third time to verify their score.
- 3.4 As part of the process, LGBT employees are encouraged to complete a separate feedback questionnaire about their experiences of working within the organisation. Responses are completed on-line anonymously and submitted directly to Stonewall.
- 3.5 It is worth noting that during 2013 Stonewall undertook a 5 year review of the WEI (having run the Index for 10 years) and are planning on changing the process and launching a new Index for 2015.

4. WEI TOP 100: OUR JOURNEY

- 4.1 In 2010, the Authority was placed just outside the Top 100 ranked at 101st in the Index. A detailed improvement action plan was created and taken forward by equality staff assisted by the then recently formed LGBT Network. This work led to an impressive increase of 41 places to 60th position in 2011 and the prestigious title of joint number one Fire and Rescue Service in the country.
- 4.2 The Authority retained 60th place in 2012 and was hailed the Top Fire and Rescue Service in the Index. This was an equally impressive achievement as there were a number of changes to the WEI; the questions were more probing to challenge and reward employers who could demonstrate leadership and tangible progress.
- 4.3 In 2013 The Authority saw a substantial improvement in its position in the Index, moving up 32 places and being awarded 28th position and was the only Fire and Rescue Service in the Top 100 employers list. By sharing best practice the Authority was able to drive improvement in the fire sector, working with four other Fire and Rescue Services who as a result gained entry into the Top 100.
- 4.4 Every year the Index is reviewed in terms of its design and scoring mechanism and participation increases year on year making it an on-going challenge to attain a place in the Top 100. 2014 saw a record number of entries from hundreds of organisations in different sectors across the country including multi-national corporations.

5. WEI 2014 RESULTS

- 5.1 The Chief Fire Officer is delighted to report that the Authority has once again seen an improvement in its position in the Index, gaining a total of 187 points (an increase of 23 points since last year).
- 5.2 As a result the Authority has moved up 20 places achieving 8th position in the 2014 Index and is also the first Fire and Rescue Authority to make it into the top 10 which is an outstanding achievement.
- 5.3 This is now the fourth consecutive year that the Authority has been hailed as the Top Fire and Rescue Authority in the country ranked 4th in the Top Employers by sector list as a top public sector employer and sector leader.

6. STAR PERFORMING NETWORK

- 6.1 As part of the WEI assessment process Stonewall also recognizes 'Star Performer Network Groups' - employee network groups which make an invaluable contribution to the experience of LGBT staff in their organisation and beyond.
- 6.2 The Authority's LGBT Network have been selected as a Star Performing Network in 2014 and included on their list of 75 networks from various organisations praised for their approach. As a result the Authority is able to use the Star Performer logo, in addition to the Top 100 logo, to promote its achievement.
- 6.3 The Star Performer logo is awarded based on the achievements and activities of the network group, and how it links into the wider organisation. The award is based on information provided in the WEI submission, and looks at criteria such as size of active membership, impact on the organisation as a whole, support to individuals - including around career development, and innovative ways of supporting and engaging with staff.

7. RECOGNITION

- 7.1 The Authority's placing generated significant interest from the national press and LGBT media including a feature in The Times and Out Magazine. Interviews with LGBT employees and senior management featured on BBC Radio Newcastle and Look North with further coverage in the local press.
- 7.2 Stonewall stated that very few organisations already in a high position in the Index achieve such a significant increase and the Authority's placing is particularly impressive given the challenges brought about by the current financial climate.
- 7.3 Stonewall specifically praised the Authority for the extensive amount of work carried out during the year to promote LGBT equality, the valuable contribution of members of the LGBT network. They were particularly impressed with the research commissioned by the Authority with LGBT employees and community members and the.
- 7.4 The Authority's achievement for 2014 is due to the commitment of Members, employees and their representative bodies, and their determination to make a real difference for LGBT people.
- 7.5 A feedback meeting will take place with Stonewall in early 2014 and development areas identified will be included in an improvement plan for the forthcoming year and further guidance in respect of the new Index will be sought in preparation for the 2015 submission.

8. FINANCIAL INFORMATION

- 8.1 There are financial implications in relation to membership of Stonewall and provision has been made within existing budget headings in order to ensure the actions contained within the Stonewall improvement plan can be achieved.

9. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Taking part in the WEI demonstrates that the Authority is clearly committed to LGBT equality. Participation leads to improved equality outcomes both in the workplace and in the community ensuring inclusivity and equality for LGBT people.

10. HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no health and safety implications in respect of this report.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 The Authority is recommended to:

- a) Note the content of this report;
- b) Receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The under mentioned Background Papers refer to the subject matter of the above report:

- Stonewall Top 100 Employers 2014, The Workplace Equality Index, www.stonewall.org.uk/WEI2014