

MEETING: 26 MARCH 2012

SUBJECT: STONEWALL WORKPLACE EQUALITY INDEX

REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Authority of the result of the Stonewall 2012 Workplace Equality Index (WEI) Top 100 Employers and to provide details of the Authority's standing in the Index.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 As Members have consistently demonstrated, this Authority is committed to achieving equality of opportunity and removing discrimination or prejudice on any grounds including sexual orientation and one of the ways in which this aim is pursued is through working with the organisation Stonewall and participating in their WEI.
- 2.2 Stonewall was founded in 1989 and, since its inception, has worked ceaselessly to place sexual equality on the mainstream political agenda and to achieve equality and justice for lesbians, gay and bisexual (LGB) people. One method which the organisation uses to assist its work is the WEI which benchmarks and ultimately showcases Britain's top employers for LGB people.
- 2.3 In 2010, the Authority was placed just outside the Top 100 ranked at 101st position. A detailed action plan was developed and the Diversity and Equality Advisor worked closely with the Employee Advisory Group to progress all of the improvement actions identified.
- 2.4 As a result of the above the Authority was able to submit a stronger entry for 2011 leading to an impressive increase of 41 places to 60th position. The Authority also secured the prestigious title of joint number one Fire and Rescue Service in the country, alongside West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service.
- 2.5 This year was Stonewall's eighth WEI. Every year the Index is reviewed in terms of its design and scoring mechanism and participation has increased year on year making it an on-going challenge to attain a place in the Top 100 list. Over 370 organisations submitted applications to be included in the Top 100 index.

3 WEI SUBMISSION

- 3.1 Taking part in the WEI involves submitting a comprehensive questionnaire and supporting evidence, demonstrating how the Authority supports LGB people.
- 3.2 The WEI questionnaire is divided into specific categories and requests information and evidence regarding; policy and practice, staff engagement, staff

Creating the Safest Community

development and support, monitoring, supplier policies, community engagement, Pink Plateau (details requested re out LGB personnel / level in organisation); innovative / development of LGB related initiatives and staff feedback (from LGB personnel within the organisation).

- 3.3 In addition to the WEI, LGB staff are encouraged to complete the separate feedback questionnaire, which asks about their experiences working within the organisation. A unique code is provided for the organisation and supplied to LGB staff to ensure complete confidentiality and anonymity. Responses are completed on line and submitted directly to Stonewall.

4 WEI 2012

- 4.1 In 2012, there were a number of changes made to the WEI. The same topic areas as described in 3.2 above were included however, the questions were more probing to challenge and reward employers who could demonstrate leadership and tangible progress.
- 4.2 The Index criteria was fully revised and updated to include the new provisions of the Equality Act 2010. The criteria set new benchmarks in tackling discrimination through talent management, supplier policy, training and monitoring and assessment placed greater emphasis on the outcomes and impact of diversity work.
- 4.3 Effective employee engagement attracted more points than written policy this year and employers were asked to demonstrate how they engage their heterosexual staff in LGB equality, and for evidence of the work they are undertaking for their lesbian and bisexual employees as groups with distinct needs.
- 4.4 Participation in the Staff Feedback Survey attracted more points to give greater weight to the views of individual employees. In addition employers were able to nominate themselves for more awards categories, recognizing individual contributions and innovation.
- 4.5 Stonewall had also improved navigation, functionality and usability of the submission process, providing greater control over the presentation of evidence.

5 WEI 2012 RESULTS

- 5.1 This year there were over 360 entries from a range of organisations across the country and the changes as described in section 4 above have had a significant impact on the scores which have seen a drop on average across the board creating a very different Top 100 in 2012.
- 5.2 The entry score into the Top 100 list was 130 points and the Chief Fire Officer is pleased to report that the Authority successfully scored 148 points retaining a place in the Top 100 and maintaining 60th place. Stonewall advised that this was an excellent achievement particularly given the changes to the Index and increased competition.

PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

5.3 In addition to this achievement, the Authority no longer shares 60th place and is the only Fire and Rescue Service in the country to be placed in the Top 100 list, viewed by Stonewall as the best performing Fire and Rescue Authority in the country.

5.4 Congratulations were received from colleagues across the Fire and Rescue Sector:

"I was delighted to see Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service represented once again in the recently published Stonewall Workplace Equality Index Top 100 Employers for 2012.

I know that this recognition reflects Tyne and Wear's strong commitment to equality and diversity matters, and is a significant success – not least given that the index criteria were more demanding and competitive this year. Please convey my congratulations to all." Bob Neill MP.

"Just wanted to congratulate you and your team at Tyne and Wear on making the top 100 once more, and further being the only FRS to have made it!! well done". Watch Commander, Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service.

"Just wanted to drop you a quick line on behalf of the FBU to congratulate you and the team in Tyne & Wear on being the highest rated fire & rescue service in the top 100 employers of the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index and the only FRS to make the top 100. We appreciate the work and commitment necessary to meet the requirements of the Index and this can only go to benefit all employees of your organisation not just those who identify as being LGBT. Once again thank you for your continued support of LGBT issues and the FBU looks forward to continuing work on a mutual basis to progress all equality issues." Regional Secretary, Fire Brigades Union.

5.5 The Authority's achievement for 2012 is due to the commitment of Members and employees and their determination to make a real difference for LGB people. The complete Top 100 can be viewed at www.stonewall.org/workplace.

6 IMPROVED ACCESS TO SUPPORT

6.1 Stonewall recently changed the structure of how they manage their accounts in order to improve access to support for member organisations. The Authority will no longer be supported by the London office. From January 2012 our new account manager will be based at the Edinburgh office. Key conferences and seminars that usually take place in London will now be replicated in Edinburgh which is clearly more accessible, saving on resources in terms of attendance.

7 NEXT STEPS

7.1 A benchmarking meeting will take place with Stonewall in early 2012 and any feedback / development areas discussed will be included in an Improvement Plan for the forthcoming year.

7.2 The 2012 Stonewall WEI Action Plan will be progressed by the Diversity and Equality Advisor and Sexual Orientation Employee Advisory Group with a view

to making all of the necessary improvements required in preparation for the 2013 WEI and an aim to improve the Authority's position even further.

- 7.3 Diversity and Equality personnel will review and explore the good practice provided by our Stonewall representative to identify any aspects that may be adopted by the Authority.

8 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 Research shows that people work 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.
- 8.2 Organisations that achieve inclusivity for all become employers of choice in competitive markets, attracting and retaining the best talent.
- 8.3 The organisation may risk its ability to achieve a diverse workforce, which reflects the community it serves should it discontinue supporting Stonewall. It is therefore essential that this work continues and performance is improved, participating in future WEIs to demonstrate the Authority's on-going commitment to LGB people.

9 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are financial implications in relation to membership of Stonewall of £1,500 and provision has been made within the existing Diversity and Equality budget. There are no additional costs with regard to the work place index.

10 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Taking part in the WEI shows a public commitment to our LGB colleagues, service users and future employees. It demonstrates that LGB people can feel safe and valued as a member of the organisation and as a member of the community the Authority serves.
- 10.2 Working towards the improvements outlined in the WEI Action Plan may lead to policy development / changes to practices and processes and therefore Equality Impact Assessments will need to be carried out.

11 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

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

12 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12.1 The Authority is recommended to:
- a) Note the content of this report;
 - b) Support our continued commitment to Stonewall;
 - c) 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 2012, The Workplace Equality Index.

