

TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Item No. 06

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE: 11 FEBRUARY 2013

SUBJECT: STONEWALL WORKPLACE EQUALITY INDEX 2013

JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER AND THE PERSONNEL ADVISOR

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 By participating in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index (WEI) Top 100 employers, the Authority demonstrates a clear commitment to lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) equality in the workplace and community.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the result of the Stonewall 2013 WEI and to provide details of the Authority's standing in the Index.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 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. One of the ways in which this commitment is demonstrated is through working with the organisation Stonewall and participating in their WEI.
- 3.2 Stonewall was founded in 1989 and, since its inception, has worked ceaselessly to place sexual orientation equality on the mainstream political agenda and to achieve equality and justice for LGB people. One method which the organisation uses to assist its work is the WEI which benchmarks and ultimately showcases Britain's top gay friendly employers.
- 3.3 In 2010, the Authority was placed just outside the Top 100 ranked at 101st position. A detailed action plan was developed with a number of improvement actions identified. Working with the then recently formed Equality Action Groups, staff were able to improve practices and procedures focussing on LGB employees and communities. In 2011, these improvements led to an impressive increase of 41 places to 60th position and the prestigious title of joint number one Fire and Rescue Service in the country, alongside West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service.
- 3.4 In the 2012 Index the Authority retained 60th place and was hailed the Top Fire and Rescue Service for equality. This was an equally impressive achievement as in 2012 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.

- 3.5 This year was Stonewall's ninth 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.

4. WEI SUBMISSION

- 4.1 Taking part in the WEI involves submitting a comprehensive on-line questionnaire and supporting evidence, demonstrating how the Authority supports LGB equality both in the workplace and community.
- 4.2 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 LGB staff and their level in organisation); innovative development of LGB related initiatives.
- 4.3 As part of the WEI, LGB staff are encouraged to complete a separate feedback questionnaire, which asks about their experiences working within the organisation. A unique code is provided for the organisation and supplied to participants to ensure complete confidentiality and anonymity. Responses are completed on-line and submitted directly to Stonewall.

5. WEI 2013 RESULTS

- 5.1 As in previous years there was an increase in entries in the 2013 Index with 376 organisations from different sectors across the country participating. This year the entry score to gain a place in the Top 100 list was 137 points. The Authority successfully scored 164 points (above the average score of 157 points across the Index) securing a place in the Top 100.
- 5.2 The Chief Fire Officer is delighted to report that the Authority has seen a substantial improvement in its position in the Index, moving up 32 places and being awarded 28th position. For the third consecutive year the Authority has also been awarded the prestigious title of Top Fire and Recue Authority and is recognised as the best performing Authority in the country in this equality field.
- 5.3 Stonewall believe that the progress made by the Authority is outstanding given the challenges brought about by the current financial climate. Last year the Authority was the only Fire and Rescue Service in the Top 100 list. By sharing best practice during 2012 the Authority has driven improvement in the fire sector, working with four other Fire and Rescue Services who as a result have gained entry into the Top 100 this year.
- 5.4 Congratulations were received from a range of individuals and organisations:

“Very proud that TWFRS is in the Top 100 employers – at no 28 – a credit to all the staff and their public service.” Nick Forbes, Leader of Newcastle City Council

“Just wanted to extend my congratulations to you and the rest of the team at TWFRS at your achievement in the Stonewall WEI. You should be extremely proud in reaching 28th in the top 100, being the highest performing FRS and one of just 5 fire services in the top 100. It demonstrates your continued commitment to equality issues and especially the LGBT agenda, well done.

Your participation in the index and as a Stonewall Champion whilst rarely receives acknowledgement or recognition continues to be appreciated by those of us who identify as being LGBT and sends a strong and powerful message to staff and the public on the Service commitment to equality.” Pete Wilcox, Regional Secretary, Fire Brigades Union, North East Region

“Brilliant news for a brilliant service.” Tom Woodwark.

“Not just compliant, way beyond that to ensure harmonious environment for LGBT staff.” CICI Equality (Celebrate Identity and Challenge Intolerance).

5.5 The Authority’s achievement for 2013 is due to the commitment of Members, employees and their representative bodies, and their determination to make a real difference for LGB people. Stonewall were particularly impressed with the innovative LGBT related conferences created and hosted by the Authority and the significant increase in participation from employees in the staff questionnaire.

5.6 The complete Top 100 can be viewed at www.stonewall.org/workplace.

6. NEXT STEPS

6.1 A benchmarking meeting will take place with Stonewall in early 2013 and any feedback or development areas discussed will be included in an improvement plan for the forthcoming year. Staff will also review and explore the good practice provided by our Stonewall representative to identify any aspects that may be adopted by the Authority.

6.2 The 2013 Stonewall WEI Action Plan will be progressed with a view to making all of the necessary improvements required in preparation for the 2014 WEI to improve the Authority’s position even further.

7. FINANCIAL INFORMATION

7.1 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 Action Plan can be achieved.

8. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 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.

8.2 Working towards the improvements outlined in the WEI Action Plan may lead to policy development and changes to practices and processes and therefore Equality Impact Assessments will need to be carried out.

9. HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

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

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 The Authority is recommended to:

- a) Note the content of this report;
- b) Consider congratulating the core team on this achievement;
- 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 2013, The Workplace Equality Index.