

MEETING: 28 FEBRUARY 2011

SUBJECT: THE STONEWALL WORKPLACE EQUALITY INDEX

REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the result of the Stonewall 2011 Workplace Equality Index 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 Workplace Equality Index.
- 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 Workplace Equality Index (WEI) which benchmarks and ultimately showcases Britain's top employers for LGB people.
- 2.3 This year was Stonewall's seventh WEI. Participation in the Index has increased on previous years making it more challenging than ever before to attain a place in the Top 100 list.

3 WORKPLACE EQUALITY SUBMISSION

- 3.1 Taking part in the WEI involves submitting a comprehensive questionnaire, complete with supporting evidence, demonstrating how the Service 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 development and support, monitoring, supplier policies, community engagement, Pink Plateau (details requested re out LGB personnel / level in organisation); innovative / development LGB related initiatives and staff feedback (from LGB personnel within the organisation).
- 3.3 In addition to the WEI, LGB staff were 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.

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4 PREPARATION FOR ASSESSMENT

- 4.1 Following the publication of the results of the 2010 Index, in which this Authority was ranked just outside the top 100 at 101st position, each Fire and Rescue Service that had participated undertook a benchmarking meeting with their Stonewall representative. Diversity and Equality personnel from Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service met with a Stonewall representative in January 2010 to discuss performance, highlight areas of good practice as well as key development areas.
- 4.2 Further to this a detailed Stonewall WEI Action Plan was produced which contained all of the areas for improvement and an Action Plan was presented to the Sexual Orientation Employee Advisory Group in April 2010.
- 4.3 The Diversity and Equality Advisor worked with the Employee Advisory Group to progress all of the improvement actions identified including reviewing and developing our Pride event, revisiting the content of the Stonewall Employers Guide and the establishment of an LGB e-network. As a result, the Authority was able to submit a stronger entry for 2011 with evidence to demonstrate its progress and achievements over the past year.

5 WORKPLACE EQUALITY INDEX RESULTS

- 5.1 With the results now published, the Chief Fire Officer is pleased to report that Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority has achieved a significant improvement in performance in the WEI for 2011. The Authority has been ranked in 60th position in the top 100 Index and has also secured the prestigious title of joint number one Fire and Rescue Service in the country, which is shared with West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service.
- 5.2 This impressive increase of 41 places from 101st position in 2010 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 NEXT STEPS

- 6.1 A benchmarking meeting with Stonewall is scheduled for February 2011 and any feedback / development areas discussed will be included in an Improvement Plan for next year.
- 6.2 The 2011 Stonewall Improvement Plan will be actioned by the Diversity and Equality Advisor with support from the Sexual Orientation Employee Advisory Group with a view to making all of the necessary improvements required in preparation for the 2012 WEI and an aim to improve the Authority's position even further.
- 6.3 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.

7 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 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.
- 7.2 Organisations that achieve inclusivity for all become employers of choice in competitive markets, attracting and retaining the best talent.
- 7.3 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.

8 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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

9 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 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.
- 9.2 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.

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) Endorse 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:

Creating the Safest Community

PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

- Stonewall Top 100 Employers 2011, The Workplace Equality Index.