

Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Cultural Development Lead Member Report 2025/2026

RBFRS has been actively working to meet its obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty as outlined in the Equality Act 2010. The primary focus of this duty is to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, and encourage positive relationships between diverse groups. In 2022, RBFRS set four equality objectives to support the organisation to meet this, and the Service has continued to make sustained progress against these objectives.

Objective One: Increasing the diversity of staff at all levels - We recognise the value that a diverse workforce brings and will take action to increase the diversity of job applicants, seeking individuals with the right behaviours and skills to help us reflect and engage with our local communities.

Wholetime Firefighter Apprentices

In 2025/2026, the Service welcomed one cohort of Wholetime Firefighter Apprentices and an On Call to Wholetime transferee cohort. Across these intakes, sixteen new firefighters joined the Service:

- 25% were female.
- 6.25% were from an ethnic minority background.
- 25% reported having a disability

While there is more progress to make before RBFRS is fully reflective of the local community, these figures demonstrate continued commitment to widening representation.

Positive Action – Recruitment

The Summer Internship Scheme completed its fourth successful year, welcoming four interns aged eighteen from ethnic minority groups currently underrepresented within RBFRS. Interns undertook a five-week programme across Corporate Services, operational stations, Prevention, and Protection teams.

Feedback from both interns and staff was extremely positive. Notably, one of the four interns has since applied for a Wholetime Firefighter Apprenticeship highlighting the scheme's impact as a long-term talent pipeline. The scheme will continue into 2026.

RBFRS continued its partnership with the Leonard Cheshire Change 100 Scheme, supporting disabled individuals or those with long-term conditions into meaningful employment.

For 2025/26:

- Three interns joined teams across Communications and Engagement, Business Support, and Information Governance.

- Several previous Change 100 interns have returned to RBFRS in other roles.

This reflects the organisation's long-term commitment to supporting staff with disabilities and long-term conditions.

Positive Action – Progression

RBFRS continues to invest in the development and progression of women across the Service. This year:

- Six women attended the Women in the Fire Service (WFS) National Training and Development Weekend, gaining skills, networking opportunities, and exposure to sector-wide best practice.
- RBFRS also secured places for women on WFS Leadership Development Programmes, supporting confidence, capability, and leadership progression.

These initiatives form a key part of RBFRS's ongoing commitment to supporting female staff into development and promotion.

Objective Two: Leadership and corporate commitment - We will support our organisational leaders to understand their role in tackling inequalities and demonstrating inclusive behaviours, in line with the Behavioural Competency Framework. This commitment means we will be strong and visible in our leadership and ensure that all staff and members of our local communities have confidence in our commitment to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion.

Equality Objectives

Development of the next set of Equality Objectives has been a major focus for 2025/26.

- Staff feedback groups informed the initial drafting.
- Objectives were presented to Fire Authority in November before undergoing a ten-week public consultation.
- Feedback was reviewed and the objectives refined ready for approval in April 2026.

Disability Confident Leader Status

RBFRS continues to hold the highest level of accreditation under the Disability Confident scheme. This demonstrates strong commitment to removing barriers faced by disabled people and ensuring accessible and inclusive recruitment and employment practices.

Preparatory work is underway ahead of the revalidation in early 2027, including further improvements to workplace accessibility.

Collaboration and Partnership Work

RBFRS continues to benefit from memberships with:

- Business Disability Forum
- Inclusive Employers

These partnerships offer learning resources, consultancy support, and best-practice guidance, helping the Service progress its EDI and disability inclusion ambitions.

Our People Strategy, Culture Plan and Behavioural Competency Framework

The 2025 launch of the new Behavioural Competency Framework has strengthened alignment between EDI principles and organisational processes. The Safe, Supportive, and Inclusive values are now embedded into recruitment, promotion, and performance management and other processes across the organisation.

Equality Monitoring

Quarterly EDI data dashboards are produced including workforce data, progression data, training and access to development opportunities and support:

- Identification of gaps and disparities
- Evidence-based decision-making
- Compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty

Enhanced recruitment monitoring now allows RBFRS to track trends and ensure fair, transparent processes and target positive action interventions.

Objective Three: Improving our service delivery by creating strong links with our community - We will connect and communicate with our diverse local community to develop meaningful and sustainable links, which help us to increase our understanding of their needs. We will ensure that we tailor our prevention, protection, and response activities accordingly and target the most vulnerable people with the greatest risk.

Across Berkshire, watches have continued to demonstrate meaningful engagement with diverse communities, helping improve trust and understanding. Highlights include:

Engagement with the South Asian Community

- Newbury Red Watch attended the Holi Festival of Colours, strengthening ties with local Hindu families.
- Newbury Blue Watch supported the Thatcham Diwali Market, sharing fire safety advice during the Festival of Lights.

Partnership with the Hong Kong Community

- Theale Green Watch delivered three engagement events for Reading Hongkongers, sharing safety advice and answering questions in a warm, community-focused environment.

Supporting LGBTQ+ Inclusion

- Caversham Road White Watch and Bracknell Green Watch attended Reading and Bracknell Pride, promoting safety messages and recruitment opportunities.

Supporting Older Residents

- Wokingham Road Green Watch participated in an Age UK coffee morning, offering fire safety guidance and referrals for Safe and Well visits.

Charity and Family Engagement

- Theale Red Watch hosted a visit for families supported by the Rainbow Trust.
- Maidenhead Red Watch engaged with families at the Alexander Devine Children's Hospice.

Youth Engagement and Inclusion

- Bracknell and Ascot Red Watch visited Bracknell and Wokingham College, meeting with the Cobras SEN basketball team.
- Caversham Road watches also supported sessions with Gabriel's wellbeing group and attended a community day at The Atrium Health Club.

Community Support and Volunteering

- White Watch Slough led a successful Christmas food donation initiative for Slough Foodbank.
- Theale Red Watch volunteered at Englefield's 5 A Day Garden, supporting a programme that provides therapeutic gardening and employment opportunities for people with additional needs.

Events Procedure Review

During 2025/26, RBFRS commenced a review of the Service's Events Attendance Procedure to ensure that engagement at events is strategically targeted, proportionate, and aligned with organisational priorities.

The review focuses on:

- Ensuring event attendance supports RBFRS's strategic objectives, including prevention, protection, and recruitment.
- Prioritising engagement with communities and groups most at risk.

- Strengthening consistency and decision-making around event attendance requests.
- Ensuring resources are used effectively to deliver the greatest preventative and community impact.

This work will continue into 2026/27.

Objective Four: Building on our inclusive culture - We will continue taking action to ensure we have a culture where everyone feels valued and is treated with dignity and respect and support all staff to the creation of an inclusive working environment.

EDI and Cultural Awareness Training

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Cultural Awareness training continued to be rolled out to all staff. This full day in person course is for all staff and aims to provide staff with a deeper understanding of:

- Equality and discrimination
- Unconscious bias
- Culture and identity
- Practical ways to create an inclusive workplace.

Duty to Prevent Sexual Harassment

Following the introduction of the Worker Protection Act 2023 the Service continues to review the Risk Assessment and complete identified actions including the roll out of the Sexual Harassment Prevention Training to all staff. At the end of the 2025/26, 75% of the organisation have received the in-person training.

Staff Networks

To further support RBFRS' journey to building an inclusive culture the Neurodiversity Network meets bimonthly and has provided a dedicated supportive space for neurodivergent employees and allies to come together, share resources, and promote awareness of the strengths and challenges associated with neurodiversity. In addition, the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Network continue to operate meeting quarterly to promote and champion Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion across the organisation and in the community. It is a space to promote learning, raise awareness and create tangible change in the EDI space at RBFRS.

Ride Along

The expanded Ride Along programme, supported by a new booking app, enables non-operational staff to join crews at live incidents, supporting One Team culture and cross-role understanding.

Online Learning

To further support staff development and understanding of EDI related to matters, all e-learning packages are under review, this includes an Introduction to EDI, EDI for Leaders, and Equality Impact Assessments. A new Sexual Harassment package has been created.

In addition, several lunch and learns have been hosted both internally and through the NFCC these have been attended by staff across the Service.

Awareness Raising

The Service continues to support different celebrations and events throughout the year raising awareness behind their history and how to support colleagues that are celebrating. The service attended Pride events across the county in the summer to show their support for the LGBTQ+ community as well as an opportunity to share important prevention information and information with regards to the roles available within the organisation. Articles have featured on Siren and The Shout to provide further education throughout the year on events such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month, Eid, Neurodiversity Celebration Week, Diwali, and many more.

Looking Ahead

Looking ahead to 2026/27, RBFRS will begin the transition towards its new Equality Objectives for 2026–2030 and will focus on shaping the supporting Equality Action Plan. This period will provide an opportunity to reflect on progress to date and set priorities that continue to support an inclusive and respectful working environment.

The Service will maintain its commitment to meeting its statutory responsibilities, including the prevention of sexual harassment, while continuing to promote a culture in which everyone feels safe, valued and supported at work.

RBFRS will also look to build on existing positive action activity, including continued involvement in the Summer Internship programme, to support engagement with individuals from underrepresented groups.

Alongside this, the Service will continue to work with communities across the county, with an emphasis on developing sustainable relationships that help reduce risk and support the attraction of a diverse workforce over the longer term.

Cllr Wendy Griffith

Lead Member Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Cultural Development