



**AVON**  
FIRE & RESCUE

# Diversity Inclusion, Cohesion, and Equality (DICE) Strategy - 2023 -2026



**PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING**

## Introduction

### Going beyond Service ambitions

Avon Fire & Rescue Service (AF&RS) has a mission to improve public safety through prevention, protection, response, and resilience as well as ensuring Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion and Equality (DICE) is embedded in our organisational culture and is at the heart of our decision-making. We are committed to aligning this strategy with our Dignity & Respect Policy and Service Values to be: Inclusive, Transparent, Respectful, Ambitious, Courageous and Honest. We are also committed to aligning our Values with the [NFCC Core Code of Ethics](#) and this strategy will outline what we will do to make this happen. We are all different, but together #WeR1.

### The legal background

It is our view as a Service that work on DICE is morally the right thing to do, as well as helping us to do our jobs better. However, it is important to be aware of the laws that govern work on DICE and our responsibilities under them.

The main law that underpins our work is the [Equality Act \(2010\)](#), law which sets out specific protections to stop people being discriminated against today and provides a framework for ways organisations can address areas of inequality.

Within the Act, there are nine protected characteristics referenced to consider when preventing discrimination or addressing inequality. These are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sexual orientation
- Sex

You can find more out about the protected characteristics on the [Equality and Human Rights Commission website](#). While we use the nine characteristics as a basis for much of our work, it is not the exhaustive list of the types of diversity that exist, and we as a fire and rescue service will consider all diversity in our decision-making.

Within the Equality Act (2010), we have a [General Equality Duty](#). This means that public sector employers like us, must:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act (2010).
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
- Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it.

The way we achieve those three duties is up to us as an organisation. However, under the Act we are required to do some specific things to demonstrate how we are meeting the General Equality Duty. These include:

- setting at least one equality objective which is specific and measurable,
- publishing information about our employees and people who are affected by our policies and practices,
- and producing an annual gender pay gap report.

As part of this strategy, we will set some new equality objectives.

## Definitions of DICE

- **Diversity:** Acknowledging the fact everyone is different, and has different experiences, skills and needs.
- **Inclusion:** Valuing the strengths that diversity brings and removing barriers to accessing opportunities.
- **Cohesion:** Strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds, with a common vision and sense of belonging for all.
- **Equality:** Giving everyone equal access to an opportunity. This does not mean treating everyone the same but is about applying fairness and impartiality.

## Why is DICE important?

AF&RS provide services to an increasingly diverse population of over 1 million people in our service area. Understanding and working with our communities to provide the best Service is essential. When planning work on DICE, it's important to understand the context and background of where you're planning to do work. This means:

- Improving our knowledge about the demographic make-up of our Service area and using the information and data to ensure our communities are supported in the best way (Annex 1 details our community as it looks today).
- Building sustainable relationships with community leaders and supporting networks across our Service area to ensure we put the interest of the public, the community and service users first.
- Ensuring we make our decisions objectively based on evidence, without discrimination or bias.

## How does AF&RS work on DICE?

The DICE team consists of non-operational and operational staff who:

- Work collaboratively with stakeholders across the organisation to ensure that due regard is undertaken through both the development and implementation stages of projects, policies, and practices before and during the decision-making process.
- Actively manage organisational culture, by upskilling all staff on inclusive behaviours and raising awareness of unique differences.
- Research, monitor and analyse both internal and external demographic data to understand and manage diversity and inclusion within our workforce and improve our engagement with our communities.

## Inclusive Leadership

Delivering improvement relies upon the unified, coordinated, and sustained effort of leaders at every level across political and officer roles. Adopting and promoting the NFCC Core Code of Ethics and Service values is a vital element of setting the expectations of employees and leaders and will provide the underlying principles for effective organisational culture change. This will be the basis on which AF&RS is led and all employees operate.

The strategic lead for DICE is the Chief Fire Officer, with full support from the [Service Leadership Board](#). However, the successful delivery of DICE objectives is not one team or person's job - it is the responsibility of every member of staff to understand and promote DICE and contribute to building a diverse and inclusive working environment, with strong cohesion among staff and equality of opportunity for all.

Therefore, the following strategy is not owned by DICE but the organisation as a whole and each department will be responsible for delivery, report, and evaluation.

## Purpose of this Strategy

[Our Service Plan](#) sets out our direction as an organisation for three years from 2023-2026. Under this plan we have two strategic priorities - **Making our communities safer** and **Making our Service stronger**. What follows are our plans as a Service that focuses specifically on DICE, aligned with those two strategic objectives and the general duties that are a part of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).

## The Strategy

This strategy supports the Service in embedding DICE into our organisational culture and ensuring that it is at the heart of our decision making. Our Service values, Core Code of Ethics, and our general duties (Public Sector Equality Duty), underpin all the work we're doing and it's everyone's responsibility to understand them and live them day-to-day. To support organisational contribution towards embedding DICE and improving our culture, all staff will have a DICE objective as part of their PDR.

The results from our 2021 culture survey, highlighted improvements in staff upholding good values whilst supporting colleagues, encouraging collaboration and inclusion and challenging toxic, inappropriate behaviours. This is encouraging for all staff, our stakeholders, and communities, and enhances our chance to collectively empower change and create a positive and inclusive place to work. However, changing organisational culture takes a long time and we recognise that there is more work to be done.

## Making Our Communities Safer

The DICE team supports the Service with accessing all people in the communities within our service area particularly those who are most vulnerable, have protected characteristics and/or who may experience social and cultural disadvantages for example because of marginalisation and systemic discrimination. We understand that this may impact on their ability to access information and services we provide thus increasing the risk of danger to life, health, and well-being. The DICE team therefore works with prevention and protection teams to ensure that all people in our diverse communities are identified, their voices are heard and are given equal opportunity to access our services, which will help **make our community safer**.

## Supporting Prevention and Protection.

We will work collaboratively with Prevention and Protection managers and staff in their continual understanding of communities, ensuring we provide them with information to allow them to engage with our diverse communities and target their interventions. We will review progress periodically until the DICE strategy is reviewed in 2025.

### What we are going to do:

- Raise awareness within AF&RS about our communities by conducting regular research to produce insight reports and statistical and demographic information about our local populations.
- Ensuring the statistical information on populations is presented in an accessible format that is available to anyone in the organisation who needs it.

- Ensuring we are communicating and working collaboratively with key agencies such as Police, health care professionals and Local Authorities, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) focus groups and community-based organisations to build an Avon-area network of communication, support, and collaboration. This will ensure our services are accessible to and effective for all members of our communities.

An example of this is our on-going work with SARI, Bristol City Council and other local authorities in our service area, and network groups such as the South Gloucestershire Race Equality forum to identify and engage with people and groups in our communities that are seldom heard, to ensure they have equal access to our services.

## Building strong links with communities across our Service area.

We will continue to build relationships with community groups, to open channels for reporting emerging risks within our communities. We realise that past engagement with communities across all our Service area has not been as consistent and effective as we wished. For example, much of our community engagement work over the past four years has been focused on the City of Bristol as this is where the heart of our diverse communities exists. Due to employing a small DICE team we have faced challenges with providing sufficient outreach to all of our Service areas in line with our Service Plan. However, with expansion of the DICE team including the introduction of a new Community Engagement Officer (DICE) role, we will increase our reach knowledge and engagement within all the communities we serve.

We will focus our work on building common ground and trust, removing barriers to access and removing stereotypes internally through DICE awareness training and further development of effective community engagement initiatives. This will **make our community safer** by making it easier for our staff to deliver local awareness and education campaigns promoting our key community safety messages.

### What we are going to do:

- Work with Corporate Communications to ensure important information and insights about community groups is effectively disseminated across the Service using external communication methods and internal digital channels.
- We will continue to develop and promote our community and partnership database by ensuring contact details for community leads are current and accessible. This information is available to all AF&RS staff through our Microsoft Teams channels and Intranet.

- We will maintain consistent contact with existing networks, educational establishments, and other key partner organisations by supporting community-based activities and implementing DICE principles. We will liaise with our key stakeholders and community networks to seek new and emerging groups and where feasible organise introductory meetings in person.
- Work with our Prevention teams to ensure the Prevention and Protection materials and resources are appropriate for everyone in our communities. We will advise Prevention teams on providing materials that are accessible to people whose first language may not be English or verbal and ensure that we pay due regard to Neurodiversity.
- We will consult and work with local authorities and EDI specialist organisations across our Service area, including SARI, the Vassal Centre, BSWN and neurodiversity specialists to seek advice and gain best practice on the use of other appropriate formats such as digitally based and easy read literature.
- We will impact assess and if necessary, revise our literature to ensure that we have translations for the most common languages spoken in our service areas.

## Promote AF&RS as an employer of choice using the power of external events.

We will encourage and support AF&RS staff to ensure they have the right skills and knowledge to increase visibility and effectively engage with all the communities in our four service areas.

### Why are we doing it?

- Analysis of our recruitment and workforce monitoring data informs us that our workforce does not reflect the demography of some of our most diverse communities we serve in the way we would like.
- Attendance and visibility at key events will help to build trust, exchange key information about each other, dispel myths and stereotypes and embed purposeful and sustainable relations.
- This will help keep our community safer by fostering good relationships between communities and AF&RS, which will increase knowledge and awareness, trust, and likelihood to engage with us on safety interventions and recruitment initiatives.

## What we are going to do:

- DICE will work with HR to ensure effective community outreach and use of positive action is understood and embedded across the organisation and that we include all staff to undertake these activities to ensure all contact with the community is seen as a potential opportunity to encourage people to consider a career in the fire service.
- We will work with Corporate Communications to inform all staff of diversity and inclusion celebratory event dates that attract large numbers of diverse audiences and encourage attendance and participation where possible.
- We will liaise with operational crews to plan activities and resources needed to engage in a meaningful way. Where appropriate, the DICE team will support crews with face-to-face briefings or training to maximise opportunities at events.
- We will continue to support our key partner organisations in the planning and delivery of recruitment and discovery events across our Service area which will further increase our visibility and engagement with diverse communities.
- DICE and AF&RS staff regularly attend our key partners recruitment and discovery events and are present at annual community events for example, Bristol, Weston-Super-Mare and Bath Pride march celebrations and St Paul's Carnival. We will continue to use these events to ensure AF&RS is promoted as an inclusive employer of choice.

## Creating a diverse and inclusive workforce that reflects the communities we serve.

We will continue our focus on increasing the diversity of our workforce by engaging with under-represented and marginalised groups and establishing links with community-based organisations. Using our relationships, we will gain a better understanding about the challenges that prevent individuals from these communities accessing and participating in social, economic, and political life including accessing work with us. Building and sustaining strong relationships with these diverse communities will help us access a wider the talent pool which in turn will help us create a workforce of the future. Annex 2 details our Service as it looks today.



## Why are we doing it?

- We currently have a workforce where there is an underrepresentation of staff with protected characteristics compared to our local population. In addition to having a legal and moral duty to improve this, research on the benefits of having diverse and inclusive workplaces, shows that organisations that employ diverse teams are better performing.
- We also know there are certain stages in our recruitment processes where particular groups are disproportionately unlikely to succeed, despite us carefully evaluating our recruitment processes. We will continuously review our recruitment processes and explore ways of identifying and removing barriers to access such as using positive action where appropriate and upskilling recruiters with unconscious bias training.
- Improving our relationship with our local communities, understanding their needs and the barriers to opportunity they may face will help us to achieve the above outcomes and potentially improve our workforce diversity.
- This will help **make our service stronger** by allowing us to access the widest possible pool of talent and **keep our community safer** by building confidence in AF&RS amongst those groups we work with.

## What we are going to do:

- We will continue to meet with new and existing community groups and voluntary organisations with a specific focus on supporting people with protected characteristics for example women, people from ethnic minority backgrounds and people with disabilities, to gather feedback about their lived experiences in particular relation to historic inequalities and barriers to employment.
- We will use a People Impact Assessment (PIA) to identify barriers in the recruitment process and mitigate any adverse impact these may have on applicants.
- Using the information from research and consultation we will target specific support for these groups for accessing our recruitment opportunities - for example discovery days and application form support workshops.
- We have reviewed and updated our Diversity Monitoring Form which we will use to collect information about the protected characteristics of our candidates and update our workforce database.

- We will continue to monitor workforce diversity statistics for disparities and inequalities and use the information to target under-represented groups when recruiting.
- We will have built strong working relationships with key groups in our service area and will continue to use the success of these partnerships as templates for engagement with other protected groups throughout the duration of this strategy.
- We will work in collaboration with HR and Corporate Communications to develop specific support interventions for underrepresented groups and periodically conduct reviews on these using a combined impact assessment to measure for effectiveness and success and identify any impact on the recipients.
- We will produce an annual monitoring report outlining the workforce diversity breakdown during every year of this strategy.

## Equip all our staff for success in understanding DICE and provide support for culture change.

We will develop a new mandatory face to face DICE and culture change training package in collaboration with HR, Learning and Development and external partners. This mandatory training will be delivered by the DICE team and rolled out across the service to all staff. This training will complement our equalities e-learning course, which all staff required to complete and pass.

### Why are we doing it?

As we strive to make further progress on improving our culture, we understand the importance of providing DICE training for all AF&RS staff to gain a deeper understanding of the benefits of an inclusive work culture and setting a positive example for treating everyone with civility and respect.

It is clear from the inspections and feedback from staff that we need to continue to upskill our workforce on understanding issues around DICE and the inequalities people with protected characteristics experience. This will **make our service stronger** by improving behaviours and fostering better relationships between different groups.

## What we are going to do:

- We will use the recommendations from the culture survey results, HMICFRS inspection reports and internal audit findings to identify areas for concern and ensure the training is designed to address key areas for improvement such as, identifying, challenging, and reporting inappropriate behaviour.
- We will look at existing best practice from other UK Fire and Rescue Services' partner agencies and equality networks to understand what kind of training works and develop a plan from this research, to identify training needs for specific areas of concern, for example discrimination and harassment.
- As members of the Bristol Equality Charter, South Gloucestershire Race Equality Network (SGREN) and associates of various equalities groups in other Avon unitary authorities, we will continue to contribute to and identify best practice from the Bristol Equality Network to identify and tackle gaps in equality for all communities across the Avon area.
- We will seek to become members of appropriate Diversity Equality and Inclusion (DEI) specialist organisations, such as Employers' Network for Equality and Inclusion (enei), to support our work with embedding our service values, DICE principles and achieving our cultural change objectives.
- We will explore signing up to charters and achieving accreditation regarding diversity and inclusion. Gaining memberships with such organisations will help us develop and shape our training to ensure it is as effective as possible in addressing key DICE and culture issues and upskilling our staff with the knowledge they need.
- We will work collaboratively with all our departments to ensure they incorporate best practice measures to ensure all recruitment methods are fair, equitable and free from unconscious bias and discrimination.
- We will ensure that all staff have access to equality support networks such as the Asian Fire Service Association ([AFSA](#)) and Women in the Fire Service ([WFS](#)) using promotion and signposting.
- We will trial the new DICE training with a series of pilots at operational fire stations across our Service area in early 2023. We will use evaluation and feedback from the pilot sessions to review impact and effectiveness and make any necessary adjustments to the content to ensure it meets the needs of all our staff.

## Making our policies fitter for the future.

We will continue working collaboratively with the Transformation Team to develop Combined Impact Assessment (CIA) tool to ensure key existing policies are free from adverse impact and maximise positive impact on those that are affected by them.

### Why are we doing it?

Feedback from our culture reviews informed us that certain policies can be very strongly worded, and further work is required to implement more appropriate language on some of the key issues. While policies and guidance do not solve all problems, they are key tools in supporting AF&RS staff to do their jobs, ensuring all staff have access to support when they need it. Having the best policies will **make our service stronger** by allowing us to support staff as well as we can in challenging times, as well as in good.

### What we are going to do:

- Identifying key policies to develop and update using the CIA process and provide advice to policy owners on mitigating and/or maximising any identified impact on AF&RS staff or our community members.
- Review and re-launch our guidance on supporting staff through the menopause and providing current information to raise awareness and break stigma.
- Develop new guidance on how to support transgender staff and service users, and for leaders on how to manage staff transitioning in the workplace.
- We will look at existing best practice from other fire and rescue services and organisations in the public and private sectors and use staff forums and support networks knowledge on these areas to draft guidance. We will consult with key stakeholders from across the organisation to help us get the content and language around our menopause guidance right.
- We will deliver this work throughout the duration of this strategy and review progress annually.

## Ensuring the data, we produce is accurate and transparent.

We will continue to review and improve the way we collect and present staff demographic data, based on feedback from key stakeholders. We have recently updated our Diversity Monitoring Form and to enable candidates and staff to confidentially inform us about their protected characteristics, which will help to produce accurate data and reports about our workforce.

### Why are we doing it?

Data outlining the diversity of staff based on protected characteristics is key in helping us to make rational, evidence-based decisions. We need to make sure this data not only is as up to date as possible, but also reflects our workforce in a way that is accurate and in a format the public can understand. We are sharing best practice with our key partners and stakeholders and gaining knowledge on the best way to achieve this.

We also know that a high proportion of our staff are not confident with providing us with monitoring data, which prevents us from making our approach to some things evidence based. Having the right data presented in the right way will **make our service stronger** by allowing us to make evidence-based decisions.

### What we are going to do:

- We will look at other organisations and other fire and rescue services best practice on data and consult with the public on how they want us to refer to different groups in our data presentation.
- We will also conduct research using the Office for National Statistics and other data organisations to make sure our categories reflect future trends in data reporting.
- We will continue to consult with key staff network groups and run a campaign around why we collect monitoring data. This will include myth-busting, and a call to action for staff to complete their self-reporting diversity monitoring form on our HR system.
- We use the Census 2021 information and results when fully available to ensure our systems reflect the new data categories we decide to use.

## What will success look like?

Success of the strategy will depend on leaders at all levels, and departments, identifying how they will embed DICE principles into day-to-day business, contribute to, and support the work required achieve the goals set by this strategy. Whilst we will not be able to measure all the work on DICE using quantifiable metrics, we can identify areas of success through:

- A workforce that is more reflective of the communities that we serve
- Reduced grievances relating to protected characteristics
- Greater participation in the completion of Diversity monitoring forms
- Increased completion rates of CIAs for any Service change proposals

We will continue to analyse the results and staff feedback from the cultural survey in 2021, and make improvements highlighted as key areas for concern and ensure that the recommendations are followed and implemented as a result of work within this strategy.

We will also continue to cross-reference DICE actions with His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services ([HMICFRS](#)) inspection action plans, Internal Audits and the Culture Change action plan.

We specifically wish to see improvements in the following to evidence that our DICE approach is working:

### Bullying, harassment, discrimination, and prejudice

- Adherence to the zero-tolerance approach to bullying, harassment, discrimination, and prejudice and the Dignity and Respect policy that underpins this.
- Review how the Service responds to intelligence on potential cultural issues such as incidents, complaints, and whistleblowing procedures, standards breaches, grievances, and disciplinary cases, how this is recorded, and how effectively such equality data and analysis informs policy making and processes.
- Consider the best ways to identify malicious or vexatious claims of bullying, harassment, discrimination, or prejudice to protect those subjected to them.
- Ensure managers at all levels are equipped with the tools to tackle bad behaviour - and that senior leaders can be courageous in challenging and rooting behaviours that do not align too the Service values and NFCC Core Code of Ethics, leading by example.
- Offer adequate support to those who report bullying, harassment, discrimination, or prejudice.

- Implement more and better workplace learning that encourages people to consider their behaviour through others lived experiences.
- Create awareness campaigns that encourage all staff to raise any issue in relation to bullying, harassment, discrimination, and prejudice and introduce more safe spaces like the Ethnic Minority Forum and Neurodiversity Network, where employees can share their experiences in confidence.

### A more diverse workforce

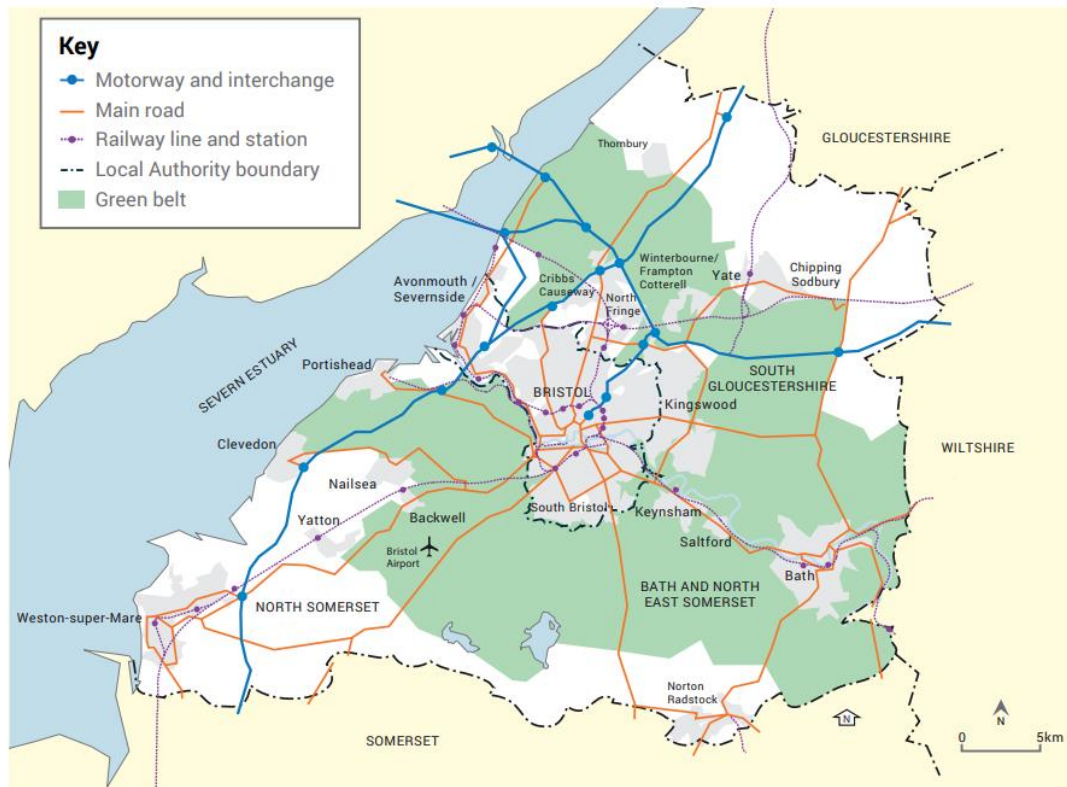
- Consider ways to better convey the importance and organisational benefits of diversifying the AF&RS workforce - and of the difference between positive action and positive discrimination
- Continue to work towards creating inclusive working environments at all levels across the service to ensure employees from "*different*" backgrounds are fully included and not isolated.
- Review and revise our Behaviour Framework and communicate the necessity for all staff to adhere to it and utilise it as a tool for monitoring their own behaviour and challenging inappropriate behaviours from others.
- Harness the possibilities offered by 'organic' changes to the AF&RS workforce, using newer members of staff as allies and advocates for culture change.

### Future planning

This strategy will be reviewed and updated annually, making any revisions as required. In collaboration with the team who will produce the new Service Plan, we will produce a new DICE strategy to align with the Service Plan in 2026.

## Annexe 1: Our Communities

We work across four Unitary Authorities - Bath & Northeast Somerset (BANES), Bristol, North Somerset, and South Gloucestershire - which have a population of over 1.1 million people.



Almost half of our communities live in the City of Bristol, which is the largest urban area in the Southwest region. Across our service area, there is diversity of many different types. For instance, in Bristol at least 16% of people are of an ethnic minority background, compared to 3% in North Somerset. When looking at age, the population in BANES and North Somerset is significantly older than that of Bristol and South Gloucestershire.

Many aspects of this diversity are important when considering how to deliver our services. For example, in Bristol 9% of people do not use English as their main language.

To do large-scale analysis of our population we have been using the last Census, conducted in 2011. However, the 2021 Census results will be released incrementally over the next 3 years. In the interim, we will continue to use other data sets from Local Authorities, Central Government and third sector organisations.



## Annex 2: Our Service

Data analysed on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2023, shows 78% of our workforce is male with this figure increasing to over 90% when looking at operational firefighters (both wholetime and on-call). Our corporate staff are more equally gender balanced - with women making up 56% of their staff, whilst women in our control room account for 72%. Only 22% of our staff are younger than 36, and 41% of our operational staff are aged 46 or over.

Staff from ethnic minority backgrounds make up only 2.7% of our workforce compared to 16% of our [service area](#) and represent just 3% of all managers in the Service. Fewer than 1% of our staff identify as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (LGB), and we do not have any openly Trans staff. Less than 2% of our staff have declared a disability, with over 55% of staff failing to give an answer to that question. 22% of our staff are Christian, 27% do not have religious beliefs and 42% did not provide an answer to that question.

However, looking at workforce monitoring statistics only gives one part of the context. Over the last four years, the Service has been evaluated by several external parties. Firstly, we had a [statutory inspection from the Home Office](#) in July 2017, after which we commissioned an independent cultural review which was published in April 2018. We were [inspected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services](#) (HMICFRS) in July 2018 and finally in 2021, we conducted a cultural survey re-rerun to measure our progress against the actions and recommendations from the first culture survey.

All four reports gave a clear sense that we have work to do to improve our diversity and organisational culture - both in how we work together and how we treat each other. In 2019 we published an aspirational plan to direct and support our culture change, entitled '**Making Avon Fire & Rescue Service a better place to work**'. We created a working action plan to ensure the areas for concern raised in the culture survey would be addressed. The culture change plan featured a total of 52 actions of which 42% were completed. All remaining actions will be reviewed and dependant on progress status will be incorporated into the next iteration of the plan for 2023 - 2026.