Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Annual Report

April 2025 to March 2026

Alternative Formats

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Welcome to the 2025- 2026 Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (ED&I) Annual Report.

Foreword

As Chief Fire Officer of Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service, I am proud to introduce this Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I) Annual Report. It provides an open and honest account of the work undertaken across the Service to ensure that equality, fairness and inclusion are embedded in everything we do—for our workforce, and for the communities we serve.

Merseyside is a diverse and vibrant region, and it is essential that our Service understands, reflects and responds to the needs of all our communities. Equally, we must ensure that everyone who works for Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service feels respected, supported and able to perform at their best. ED&I is not an additional activity; it is central to operational effectiveness, good leadership and public trust.

This report demonstrates how our commitments under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty are translated into practical action—through workforce development, prevention and protection activity, community engagement, training, and governance. It highlights areas where we have made positive progress, including improved representation, strengthened cultural competence, and meaningful engagement with partners and community groups. It also reflects our willingness to challenge ourselves, to learn, and to recognise where further work is required.

As operational leaders, we have a responsibility to ensure that our policies, decisions and behaviours align with our values. Creating a respectful and inclusive culture supports safety, strengthens teamwork, improves decision-making and ensures that we are better equipped to meet the evolving risks and challenges facing Merseyside.

Looking ahead, we will continue to build on this work through clear equality objectives, a refreshed ED&I strategy, and robust action planning aligned to our Community Risk Management Plan. Our focus will remain on achieving real and measurable outcomes—ensuring that Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service is a modern, inclusive organisation and a trusted service for all.

Nick Searle

Chief Fire Officer

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service



Introduction and Governance of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority is proud to publish this report as a reflection on the work delivered across the organisation in pursuit of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (ED&I) excellence. This report presents the public and other stakeholders with success stories about the work we do on a day-to-day basis to ensure that the services we deliver provides our diverse communities with confidence that we are addressing their needs.

Delivery of our Equality Objectives is overseen by the Strategic Leadership Team, with clear ownership assigned to designated senior responsible officers for each objective.

Progress is monitored through:
- Quarterly performance reporting
- Internal governance boards
- Scrutiny by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority

This ensures robust challenge, transparency and continuous improvement.

Therefore, as part of our commitment to delivering services and employing staff in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, and in line with the responsibilities placed on the Authority by the Act, we have established five equality objectives below which contribute to eliminating discrimination, harassment, and victimisation; advancing equality of opportunity; and fostering good relations.

1. Create a strong Inclusive organisation that is positive to rising to the future challenges we face
2. Ensure that people from diverse communities receive equitable services that meet their needs
3. Reducing fires and other incidents amongst vulnerable people in the protected groups and deprived areas

4. To continue to evolve the Service's cultural competence based on community insight so that all staff can undertake their role recognising the value of difference. This strengthens our approach to Equality (equity), diversity and inclusion, meaning our staff are well equipped to engage with our diverse communities and are sensitive to their needs.
5. To continue to aspire for equality, diversity, and inclusion excellence; measuring ourselves against best practice and benchmarking tools within the Fire & Rescue Service and other sectors

This report also demonstrates our commitment to ensuring compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and the Public-Sector Equality Duty (PSED) in relation to:

1. Publishing, at least annually, information to demonstrate our compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and the PSED.
2. Preparing and publishing one or more specific and measurable objectives that help to achieve the aims set out in the PSED.
3. Publishing equality information and the objectives in a manner that is accessible to the public.

ED&I is embedded in each area (Function) of the organisation, with ED&I priorities included in Functional annual plans and our Station Plans, which in turn become part of our Service Delivery Plan. This ensures we are incorporating ED&I at all levels of the organisation, supporting not only our staff but understanding and knowing the communities that we service.

In addition, ED&I has been an integral part of the work on our leadership message, which sets out our Vision, Purpose, Aims and associated behaviours. Furthermore, the Fire Standards and Fire Service Core Code of Ethics have also provided other ways of ensuring ED&I and the associated ED&I objectives are an integral part of the business of MFRS.

Discussions on ED&I matters form the basis of regular equality engagement meetings with the Representative Bodies (trade unions), Staff Inclusion Networks, and a variety of other stakeholders to ensure that they are aware of the ED&I

developments and have an opportunity to contribute to the consideration of the ways in which ED&I influences the provision of our fire and rescue services.

Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) are carried out on policies, strategic plans, and service delivery (including changes). EIAs play a crucial role in the design of services and enabling the Service to measure outcomes but also demonstrate due regard.

EIAs are attached to the governance documents to be considered when approved by the Authority and they are published on our website www.merseyfire.gov.uk with Authority papers.

Equality Objective 1 - Create a strong Inclusive organisation that is positive to rising to the future challenges we face

At MFRS we produce a detailed report, analysing of our workforce and employment data each year. This report also includes our Gender Pay and Ethnicity Pay Gap reporting for 31st March 2026. The Equality Analysis Workforce & Employment Data Report, 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026, report can be found on our website.

Key highlights of the report include:

- As of 31st March 2026, data shows that we had 95 female firefighters (an increase of 11 since March 2025) which represented 15.3% of our total firefighters. Nationally the percentage for female fighters is 10.4% (March 2025)
- As of 31st March 2026, we had 21 women in the roles of Crew and Watch Manager, representing 10.1% of supervisory managers.
- Figures produced from the Fire Statistic returns for the Home Office (published March 2025) that nationally firefighters from an Ethnic Minority background, equates to 7.49% firefighters. By comparison in MFRS we currently have 48 (7.8%) of firefighters from an ethnic minority background.
- In 2025-26 we had 14 members of staff representing 3.9% of the our support staff are from an Ethnic Minority background. Which is a slight decrease of 2 when compared to 2024-25.
- When the 2025-26 gender pay gap[1] is compared to the previous year the gap has reduced from 8.3% to 6.4% overall. For Support Staff the gap has decreased slightly from 10.2% during 2024/24 to 9.6% during 2025/26. For operational staff, the gender pay gap has decreased considerable from 7.3% during 2024/25 to 5.5% during 2025/26.
- When looking at the 2025/26 Ethnicity Pay Gap figures, the mean gap is 5.0% or £1.00 per hour. For operational staff only, the gap is 4.4% and for support staff

[1] The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017 came into force on 31st March 2017. The regulations stipulate that organisations that employ more than 250 people must publish a report on their gender pay gap. There is a slight difference in the regulation for public sector organisations, in so much as we must publish an annual "snapshot" of our gender pay as of the 31st of March each year in our annual report.

the gap has increased to 6.3%. This is based on a total of 950[2] staff in scope for this exercise; 870 (91.6%) were White British / Irish (or non-ethnic minority) and 80 (8.4%) were from a ethnic minority background

While headline figures show gradual improvement in representation, analysis highlights ongoing challenges: female representation in operational roles remains significantly below the Merseyside population baseline, indicating continued barriers to entry and progression, while ethnic minority representation also remains low compared to the local population, particularly in operational roles; in addition, pay gap data suggests structural factors are influencing outcomes, including representation at senior levels and the distribution of roles. To address these issues, we are reviewing recruitment pathways and outreach strategies, strengthening positive action initiatives, monitoring progression and promotion outcomes by protected characteristic, and undertaking deeper intersectional analysis to better understand overlapping inequalities. This analysis will inform targeted interventions for 2026–2027.

[2] A number of employees weren't included in the Ethnicity Pay Gap Figures because they were not "Full Pay Relevant". This means that, for the reasons detailed below an individual did not receive a full month's salary for the reporting period.

- Staff who joined the service part way through the pay period
- Staff who left the service part way through the pay period
- Staff in receipt of childcare vouchers
- Staff on maternity leave
- Staff with deductions for unpaid leave / jury service
- Staff with deductions for half/no pay due to sickness

Equality Objective 2 - Ensure that people from diverse communities receive equitable services that meet their needs

Engaging with Communities

2025-26 saw the publication of our revised 'Reaching all communities on Merseyside Guidance (version 3). Engagement is a very important part of our service delivery, and the booklet has been updated to ensure that staff get more insight and information about the diverse communities and faith groups across Merseyside.

Some of our community engagement highlights this year includes:

- Merseyside Inclusive Sports Tournaments Games (MIST) 2025: Staff attended the event held at Anfield which is organised by Daisy UK, a local disability-led charity which was founded in 2004. The tournament is designed to bring together individuals of all abilities and was a great opportunity for our staff to take part as a team, to compete, show support for a local charity and promote a culture of inclusivity.
- Following the tragic attack at Heaton Park Hebrew Congregation in Manchester. MFRS took immediate action to assess potential risk and provide reassurance to our communities, by attending a series of community Stakeholder Engagement briefings, and priorities reassurance safety measures, including letters from CFO Nick Searle to members of the Jewish Community. Our protection and Prevention team invited community members to an open day at Belle Vale Community Fire Station offering Home and Business fire safety advice
- Open day at Southport Islamic Society Mosque; Our Community Engagement Advisor represented MFRS at organised by the light foundation in partnership with the mosque in Southport. The event was attended by members of the local community, Merseyside Police, the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Lord Lieutenant and leaders from different faiths.
- Our engagement activity is increasingly focused on improving outcomes rather than solely increasing participation, and as a result of targeted engagement we have improved trust and visibility within underrepresented communities, increased uptake of fire safety messaging in community

settings, and strengthened partnerships with faith and community organisations. In 2026–2027, we will introduce measures to assess changes in service uptake following engagement activity, gather community feedback on the accessibility and inclusivity of services, and evaluate the extent to which identified risks are reduced within targeted communities.

ENGAGING WITH OUR POLISH COMMUNITIES

During the summer staff from MFRS participated in a couple of community events, which provided wonderful opportunities for us to connect, engage and strengthen our relationships with our Polish communities.

The John Paul II Polish Saturday School Family Fair took place in. The event attracted families from across Merseyside. Our operational staff were delighted to attend the event and were on hand to provide information about the role of the fire service, our equipment and fire safety advice/ awareness and prevention.

The event provided opportunities to break down any cultural barriers and allowed the staff to gain a greater understanding of the communities we serve.

The Head Teacher contacted MFRS to pass on her heartfelt thanks for supporting the event and to award the Service with a 'Friend of the Polish Saturday School certificate', saying: "Having the fire service on site made everyone feel much safer and truly added to the positive atmosphere of the day".

The Polish Summer Kick-Off Festival took place in July. Despite the soaring temperatures, it was a wonderful opportunity to connect with members of our Polish community especially as both the Fire Safety Officer and Firefighter who attended are bilingual; meaning any communication barriers were immediately overcome!

Our staff were able to provide information about the Service and also took the opportunity to encourage people to build a career with MFRS. They able to inform people about the opportunities available and to advise people that MFRS is an equal opportunities employer and is committed to representing the communities we serve.

Equality Objective 3 - Reducing fires and other incidents amongst vulnerable people in the protected groups and deprived areas

Our Prevention Function provides reassurance, support, and advice. Alongside our partners, we protect the most vulnerable and reduce inequalities.

Evidence shows that fire risk is not evenly distributed. Vulnerable individuals, including older people, those with disabilities, and those living in deprivation, are at increased risk of fire-related harm.

Our approach is therefore data-led and targeted, ensuring that prevention activity focuses on those most at risk, particularly where protected characteristics intersect with socioeconomic vulnerability.

Key highlights include:

- Through completing 50,236 **Home Fire Safety Checks 2025-26 (HFSC)** we continue to ensure interventions to keep people safe in their home. Home Fire Safety Checks and Safe and Well visits are targeted and we use data collected in line with protected characteristics[3] to support our future planning activity.
- In terms of **Safe and well visits,** on 91.8% of occasions the occupier of the dwelling told us their ethnicity. 6.1% of Safe and Well visits have been conducted in homes where the resident identifies as Ethnic Minority compared to a Merseyside Ethnic Minority of 8.3%. It should be noted that Safe and Well visits primarily target the over 65's and according to the 2021 Census, the over 65 Ethnic Minority population is 2.27% of the total, therefore the 6.1% achieved reinforces the effectiveness of the approaches taken.
- **Youth engagement activities** and engaging with the young diverse population shows continuing progress and success. In terms of the work of

[3] As detailed in the Equality Act 2010 are: Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Race, Religion or belief, Sex, Sexual orientation and Pregnancy and Maternity

the **King's Trust** engage with young people 16-25 who are not in employment or education. There were more young men attending than young women , with 58.4% being men. In addition, 13.3% were from a LGBTQ+ background and 64.4% considered themselves to have a disability.

- In terms of the **Fire Cadets** (for teenage participants); the majority 94.4% White British/White Irish, with 33.3% of participants being young women and 22.2% considered themselves to be disabled.
- Evaluation of training demonstrates a significant increase in staff confidence and knowledge in relation to ED&I and the Core Code of Ethics; however, our focus is now shifting from knowledge acquisition to behavioural change, and to support this we will introduce follow-up assessments to evaluate long-term retention, embed ED&I behaviours into performance and appraisal processes, and monitor workplace indicators such as grievances, feedback, and staff survey results, ensuring that training translates into meaningful cultural change across the organisation.

Detailed reporting and analysis of our Home Fire Safety Checks and Safe and Well visits can be found in our Equality Analysis Workforce and Employment Data Report for the period 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026.

Older Persons Day 2025
Staff from across MFRS visited hundreds of over 65s on 1 October as part of Older Person's Day.

Fire crews, vulnerable persons advocates, support staff and Authority members all spent time in the community, offering fire safety advice and fitting free smoke alarms.

Over 1,000 homes were visited on the Wednesday. 581 home fire safety checks were carried out on the day and 381 new smoke alarms installed. Teams also managed to identify 114 high risk individuals - all are now safer from fire than they were previously. We also hosted an afternoon tea celebration on Friday 3rd October at Service Headquarters for 46 over 65s from across Merseyside.

As well as the afternoon tea, there were various fun activities such as boules, mini-golf and a painting class with Elaine Law. The afternoon tea was welcomed by ACFO Ged Sherridan and was hosted by the Prevention team with Kev Johnson hosting the quiz! The day ended in a fun karaoke session which had older people and our staff dancing the day away!

Equality Objective 4 - To continue to evolve the Service's cultural competence based on community insight so that all staff can undertake their role recognising the value of difference. This strengthens our approach to Equality (equity), Diversity and Inclusion, meaning our staff are well equipped to engage with our diverse communities and are sensitive to their needs.

This year has seen the Service deliver a wide variety of events and training to support our staff in understanding the communities of Merseyside, recognising difference and help strengthen our approach to ED&I while ensuring all our staff are equipped and trained to the highest standards.

Highlights this year include:

- In April we hosted an uplifting and empowering event for around 150 women from across the service. The day was a celebration of the incredible contributions women make in the Fire and Rescue Sector. Guests were treated to motivational keynote speakers, panel discussions and an afternoon of workshops designed to showcase the varied opportunities and skills within the Fire Service
- She Inspires Event – MFRS proudly attended the event with more than 240 children, from primary and secondary school across the region. Our firefighters and Water Safety team were on hand to share insights into their roles and the wide range of careers available.
- Fire Behaviour training: our prevention advocates and arson team attended our Training and Development Academy (TDA) to take part in bespoke Fire Behaviour Training. The training consisted of theory behind fire behaviour and an opportunity to experience the effects of smoke in a domestic setting.
- Multi Agency Training; An exercise involving 8 fire appliances, Merseyside Police Matric team, NWAS advanced paramedics, Northwest Air Ambulance and Highways agency took part in a motorway training exercise to test operational procedures, incident command and control and inter-agency coordination. The successful exercise demonstrated not only the capabilities

of our new cutting-edge facilities at TDA but also the strength of collaboration working across the emergency service.

- An exercise was during the summer with staff from Crosby Community Fire Station, the RNLI and the Coastguart. The training was a walk and talk through each of the organisation's equipment and approaches. The training helped everyone involved understand each other's roles, develop relationships and communication skills, while helping the development of further joint agency scenario training.
- Learning Lunches: the ED&I team are looking at new ways of sharing learning with staff across the service, and one way is through the sharing of 'lived experiences'. The team have hosted two learning lunches with external guest speakers who have shared their different lived experience. Responses and feedback was positive from staff, so further sessions will be delivered in 2026-27

Training

In May 2025 we started the delivery of our new face to face mandatory training to all MFRS Staff. The training looks at 3 key areas, Equality Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I), MFRS Values and Core Code of Ethics. The ED&I training builds on from our E-learning package and is a refresher for many of the staff following on from the package that was delivered until December 2022. All training is delivered in a workshop format and has been designed to start conversations, to assist everyone in their understanding and share examples of when they have demonstrated our values or the core code of ethics. The feedback received from participants shows that the workshop style and sharing lived experiences is being well received and is assisting staff to understand and remember the different elements.

During the training period May 2025 – 31st March 2026

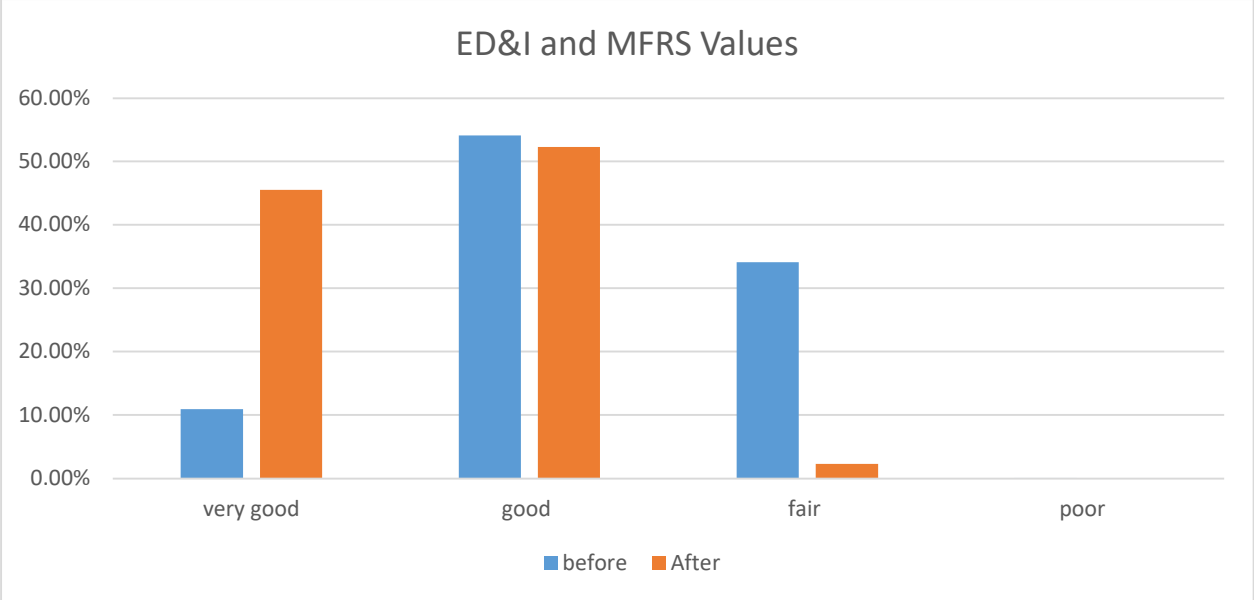
- Engaged with 546 staff
- EDI and Values training has been completed by 345 staff have completed
- Core Code of Ethics training has been completed by 335 staff

Our feedback and evaluation of the training look at a number of areas including knowledge before and after the session and if people think they can apply the learning to their day-to-day role.

The graph below shows how our staff responded when asked what their knowledge of the Core Code of Ethics was before and after the session



The graph below shows how our staff responded when asked what their knowledge of the ED&I and Values was before and after the session



When asked if staff felt that they were able to apply the learning from the workshops to their day-to-day roles 99% of participants responded that they could in relation to the three workshops.

Evaluation of training demonstrates a significant increase in staff confidence and knowledge in relation to ED&I and the Core Code of Ethics; however, our focus is now shifting from knowledge acquisition to behavioural change, and to support this we will introduce follow-up assessments to evaluate long-term retention, embed ED&I behaviours into performance and appraisal processes, and monitor workplace indicators such as grievances, feedback, and staff survey results, ensuring that training translates into meaningful cultural change across the organisation.

Safe Evacuation of Kirkby High-Rise Blocks
Two 14 floor residential tower blocks, consisting of a combined number of 166 flats and situated on Roughwood Drive, Kirkby. Problems with fire safety provisions started to be highlighted in 2017 and MFRA Protection Department has worked tirelessly with different Responsible Persons to continue to make these buildings safe to live in.

Protection worked in partnership with Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council, Merseyside Police, NWAS, the Local Resilience Forum, our own operational crews and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to keep residents safe and to give clear and regular communications and support to residents so that they had plenty of warning of the need to leave and adequate time and help to find alternative accommodation, as well as reducing the impact on resources of emergency services and the local council.

Equality Objective 5 - To continue to aspire for equality, diversity, and inclusion excellence; measuring ourselves against best practice and benchmarking tools within the Fire & Rescue Service and other sectors

As an organisation we continue to aspire for excellence and measure ourselves against best practice. This section outlines some of the work undertaken.

The key highlights include:
Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority are honoured to have been awarded Disability Confident Leadership Status (Level 3).

As an employer becoming a Disability Confident Leader we are demonstrating to our staff and the wider communities of Merseyside that we have a real commitment, to supporting people with disabilities, not only through the services we provide but also through our recruitment, workplace adjustments, health care, Mental Health Support and the breadth of cultural initiatives we provide to our staff.

As an organisation we have a wide range of Staff network Groups which include our Neurodiversity, Health and Wellbeing and New Disability Networks and our Building Accessibility working Group who help to improve everyone's work experience, promote equality and diversity, and influence organisational policy. Each network is supported by a member of our Strategic Leadership Team who act as senior sponsors to help, support and promote the work of our network.

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service awarded 'Client of the Year'.

At the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) Awards, (the most respected in the construction and property industry). The awards celebrate outstanding individuals and organisations who are leading the way in delivering exceptional projects. Winning "Client of the Year" is not just a win for MFRS - it's a testament to the hard work and professionalism of everyone who contributes to our estates, facilities, and development programmes.

Among the projects highlighted were:

- The new Training and Development Academy and Aintree Fire Station at Long Lane, a state-of-the-art facility that enhances firefighter training while also prioritising sustainability and innovation.
- Community fire stations that are designed not just for emergency response, but to support local engagement, public safety education, and resilience in the wider community

MFRS Hosted Armed Forces Covenant events

This year we have been able to host two events in our on going support of the Armed Forces Covenant. The first was a breakfast event, welcoming colleagues from across the Northwest and further afield, to our state-of-the-art Training and Development Academy, to talk about the Covenant and offering support to other members of the scheme.

Armed Forces Covenant Defence Relationship Manager Jan Cox said, “Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service’s commitment and support to the Armed Forces Covenant goes back many years and we value not only their commitment to the Covenant, but their advocacy and support of other organisations. “As a Gold Award member, their contribution and dedication to supporting all who continue to serve, have served and volunteer is invaluable”.

The second event was hosting the national conference ‘The Unseen Enemy’ for the Armed Forces Gambling Support Network. The purpose of the event led by Beacon Counselling Trust is to raise awareness, prevent harm and increase support associated with gambling related harm within the armed forces and veterans community.

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service is committed to supporting the Armed Forces community more widely through the Armed Forces Covenant. The Covenant is a

promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or who have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly.

Outstanding Apprenticeship Project.
At the National Fire Chief Councils National Apprenticeships awards firefighters from recruit course 01/25 received the award for Outstanding Apprenticeship project. The firefighters from the recruit course walked a collective 147 miles representing the distance for Merseyside to the incident ground in Bicester in honour of Martyn Sadler and Jennie Logan who tragically lost their lives in operational duty.

The group successfully raise over £7000 for the Fire Firefighters Charity.

Closing Statement & Summary

This ED&I Annual Report demonstrates the continual work taking place across the organisation to create a welcoming and inclusive environment for everyone. In addition to complying with our statutory obligations, we invest significant time, effort and dedication to initiatives and activities to increase diversity, inclusion and belonging in the organisation.

Looking ahead, we remain focused on building upon progress made over the past 12 months. Our priorities for the coming year include:

- ED&I Action Plan (by Q2 2026)
- Publish a refreshed ED&I Strategy with measurable targets (by Q3 2026)
- Deliver a fully costed ED&I Action Plan with quarterly reporting (by Q3 2026)
- Review ED&I governance structures to strengthen accountability (by Q4 2026)
- Expand staff engagement initiatives, including Learning Lunches and lived experience sessions, with evaluation of impact

Progress against these priorities will be reported publicly in our next annual report.

We are proud of the progress we have made, but we know there is always more to do. With the continued support of our staff, partners, and communities, we will keep working to ensure that Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service is not only a great place to work, but also a service that reflects and respects diversity of the people we serve.