



# **7<sup>th</sup> AFSA National Conference, Park Royal Hotel, Stretton Road, Warrington, WA4 4NS**

**26<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> November, 2015**

## **Conference Synopsis**

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS) hosted the 7<sup>th</sup> AFSA National Conference 2015. The conference was opened by James Joyce, Chair of Cheshire Fire Service Authority.

Once again AFSA with the support of CFOA, corporate members the sponsors NHS Employers and Captia enabled the AFSA executive to deliver a high quality conference.

The conference attracted 167 delegates representing 30 different organisations including members from Local Government, NHS, Police, Ambulance and the Voluntary sector. Once again, the organisers had succeeded in bringing in a number of eminent speakers and presenters, to provide academic, regulatory and examples of innovative professional excellence.

The Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service team, and Mr Paul Hancock, Chief Fire Officer, deserve our thanks and gratitude for their warm welcome and superb hospitality. The credit also goes to the members of the AFSA Executive, who were involved in the planning and organising of a very successful conference. And here is a quote on the LinkedIn from a first time attendee, Wayne Roe:

*'This week I had the pleasure of attending the annual [Asian Fire Service Association](#) conference hosted by Cheshire Fire & Rescue. Being the first time I had been to such an event, if I'm being honest I didn't really know what to expect. I can honestly say it was*

*spectacularly fun and insightful, and it's easy to see why their conferences are growing year by year.'*

## **Day 1- 26<sup>th</sup> November 2015**

**Welcome: Mr James Joyce, Chair of Cheshire Fire Service Authority –** Welcomed the delegates to the conference, emphasising the commitment of Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service to fairness and diversity, and how pleased he was that Cheshire were hosting the conference.

**Vice – Chair of AFSA, Diane Dunleavy** opened the conference on behalf of the Chair, Mehrban Sadiq, and acknowledged the work of the AFSA team in organising the conference. She specifically acknowledged the work of Mohamed Jogi, who had continued to work throughout the year. She highlighted the work of AFSA in making a unique contribution to prevent agenda and saving lives.

**Vice – Chair of AFSA, Mohammed Ali** - highlighted the diversity of organisations gathered at the conference to share ideas and best practice, and bring about the change necessary for greater diversity and professional excellence.

The first speaker of the conference was **Paul Deemer – Head of Diversity and Inclusion at NHS Employers**- Introduced the concept of VUCA – Volatility, Uncertainty, complexity and Ambiguity, that often weighs on individuals and organisations in an ever-changing world. He proposes that to counter the effects of VUCA, you need another VUCA, which is: Vision, Universality (Values), Clarity of purpose, and Agility (adaptability, ability/willingness to change).

He quoted Albert Einstein's maxim, *'Insanity is doing same thing over and over again and expecting different results.'*

The second speaker was **Susan Johnson, Commissioner, Equality and Human Rights Commission** – related her personal journey as the only female Chief Fire Officer, and working in a challenging environment of the CFOA, which was exclusively made up of middle-aged males. This experience had put her in a good stead for her work in the commission. She covered the findings of the *'Is Britain Fairer'* report of the commission, and said that further reports based on regions of England, Scotland and Wales will be published in the New Year. One of the key findings was that income inequality was quite evident in the poverty rates; a household with an ethnic minority person as its Head was nearly twice as likely to be poor (41.9%) than a household with a white person as its Head (24.5%). On the positive side, the gap in employment rates between men and women was narrowing, and so was the gap in educational achievement between white and black pupils (Pakistani, Bangladeshi and African-Caribbean and other black).

The findings of the report cover a comprehensive range of aspects of income, human rights, health and care, and Justice and security.

In response **Daryl Oprey** – On behalf of CFOA, said that the findings of the report will be considered and dealt with in a positive way.

Similarly **Jagtar Singh, AFSA National Officer** emphasised that diversity and inclusion initiatives benefit all by giving an example from the NHS: Investigation into

the high rates of advanced breast cancer among Asian women revealed that Asian women had an extremely low rate of presenting themselves for routine screening. As a mitigating measure, when a mobile screening unit was cited in the area, many white women living in the area who may not have opted to travel to the hospital also benefited from this. He reminded all members of the AFSA pledge - 'I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do something that I can do. What I can do, I will do.

***Workshop 1- Perceived Weirdness – How to manage yourself when you are different: Antonio Belgrave, Positive Deviance***

The workshop highlighted the importance of working on your strengths, and identifying where your aspect of being different can help you to achieve great results.

***Workshop 2 - SAFARI – South Asian Fire Attitudes Research Initiative, Natalie Parkinson and Jonathan Hyams, Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service.***

A research project in Telford and Wrenkin area, using students and volunteers for interviewing members of the South Asian communities with regard to their attitudes to fire service career, fire safety at home and at work. The research findings were based on a sample of 200 people from across the Hindu, Sikh and Muslim communities in the area. The research findings signposted a number of areas for further investigation, and action.

***Workshop 3 – ‘Diverse Voices – Engaging Employees in an Increasingly Diverse workforce Being: Ramya Yarlagadda, Policy and Research Officer, IPA***

Ramya presented a challenge of engaging with a very diverse workforce, and how effective engagement can help with clarity of purpose and achievement of organisational goals.

***Workshop 4 – ‘The Impact of Unconscious Bias, on the creation of your ‘organisational community of purpose’, Clive Taylor, Indigo You.***

The workshop demonstrated how unconscious bias can lead to perverse outcomes for organisations, even when they have Equality and Diversity policies and procedures in place.

The third speaker was ***Tracy Myhill, Chief Executive, Welsh Ambulance Service, ‘Breaking Barriers and Adding Difference to the Ambulance Service’***

Tracy spoke with considerable wit and humour of her experience as a female gay Chief Executive amongst middle-aged men, and how she found that the service was neither diverse nor friendly towards BME or other minorities. There were significant number of champions, and how she sought to support them and change things. Tracy’s presentation was received well by all delegates due to the humble manner of her presentation, and the frankness of her sharing a very personal journey of coming out during a very difficult time for her family and employers. Tracy enabled delegates to see at first hand that leadership based on values works. Tracy also committed to supporting her BME paramedics more in the future. The AFSA enabled Tracy to see the partnership working, and the commitment to charity her staff and the staff of other NHS trusts were delivering; particularly, the first aid training work in India that Dennis Moss led on in 2015.

***AFSA National Officer Jagtar Singh and Diane Dunleavy, AFSA vice Chair –***

Summarised the day and also updated delegates with regard to early key findings of the Fire Service Equality Middlesex University Report. The key messages emerging from the research were that Equality and Diversity were clearly dropping of the agenda of some FRS; and that the early indication of the Middlesex report was that the Fire Service now had a lack of a central strategy, and that it was having an adverse impact. The research was showing that the dropping of targets was having a major impact on FRS commitment to deliver clear ED outcomes. Jagtar reflected on Susan Johnson's comment, that when in 2004 she was appointed she was first woman CEO, the expectation was that many more would follow. However, the FRS still only has one CEO in Ann Millington. Jagtar said that in 2001, when he was appointed Deputy CFO, the FRS had four BME principal officers. Now the service has none; and there is no one in the pipeline to reach board level in the next few years. The service has to look at board diversity seriously as the NHS is doing at the moment, and Jagtar recommended that CFOA HR and ED committees should look at the NHS Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) and adopt its own measure and standard on race.

## Day 2 – 27<sup>th</sup> November 2015

***'Safety and Inhumane behaviour, What Can Psychology Offer'- Professor Narinder Kapur, Visiting Professor of Neuropsychology Research Department of Clinical, Educational and Health Psychology, University College, London***

The first speaker of day 2 was **Professor Narinder Kapur** – By a series of video-clips of research and actual events, professor Kapur explained how bias affects professional judgement, and why sometimes people behave in inhumane ways. He gave examples of experiments in 'Bystander Effect', Zimbardo Prison, Solomon Asch Compliance Effect and Milgram Electric Shock experiments. He explained how blindly following authority and group behaviour, can result in individuals committing inhumane acts contrary to their nature. He quoted Birke, 'For evil to triumph over good, is that good men do nothing'. In the modern world, it also means if good women do nothing. The psychology offers explanations for individual and group behaviours, and can assist in developing strategies to counter the effect of unconscious bias.

The second speaker was **Dr Sabrina Cohen-Hatten, Deputy Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade** the title of her presentation was **'The Psychology of Incident Command'** Dr Cohen-Hatton explained how her personal journey began as a female fire fighter, and how having entered the service with only two GCSEs, she went on to achieve her doctorate. The decision to research the decision making in incident command was actually precipitated by an actual tragic incident. She stressed how the modern world of IT and mobile phones had created an environment of high stakes, high scrutiny and low practice (due to the excellent work of the fire service in prevention of fires), and why it is important to evolve best practice. She had looked at 6 Fire and Rescue Services, analysed 33 incidents and 1095 decisions. The Incident Command decision-making model is now part of the National Ops Guidance.

The third and fourth speakers **Angela Ditchfield, Specialist Nurse Organ Donation & Mary Secole Awardee & Des Pritchard, Former CFO East Sussex FRS** **'It's About Time – Our Community Started to Talk About Organ Donation'** – Des explained the desperate health care situation in Africa and how his charity was dealing with the issues. Furthermore Angela highlighted that there was disproportionate number of Asian people on the waiting list for organ-transplant and a dearth of organ-donors on the list. She showed how a project aimed at increasing the organ donation awareness amongst the young Asian people in Lancashire had resulted in more people signing up. Clearly, more needs to be done to reduce this gap.

**'AFSA Supporting Charities Home & Abroad' – Dennis Moss (Welsh Ambulance Service & AFSA Volunteer) and Ricky Lawrence (London Ambulance), Mohammed Ali, AFSA West Yorkshire FRS** – Dennis and his team had travelled to the villages in Bihar and Jharkhand in India and scoped their desperate need for water; the wells were drying up, and they did not have the capacity to dig deeper wells. Dennis, Ricky and the teams raised funds and established 6 water-wells; Dennis, Ricky and Parvinder also provided first-aid training to 10 schools and local communities following a tragic incident where a 15 year old boy had died, mainly because that no one had been first-aid trained.

Mohammed Ali and team had raised funds and assisted Punjab Rescue, the largest emergency and humanitarian service in Pakistan. Health and Safety awareness of this service was extremely poor, and Ali and his team undertook a scoping exercise in 2014-2015. Following which they undertook training syllabus verification and promote accreditation. They also delivered much need basic equipment, mainly uniforms and safety boots, donated by the West Midlands Fire Service.

***Legal Workshop - Effective Consultation in Public Services & Employment Law update – Alessandra Gettins, Senior Lawyer, and Ania Slinn, Associate, Capsticks***

Alessandra provided an excellent update on employment law with reference to recent decisions of the tribunals and appellate authorities, covering sick leave, compensation, whistleblowing, disclosure etc. All delegates agreed that they would benefit from a full day briefing from Capstick on the matters discussed during the workshop, including a mock employment tribunal. They also agreed that this standalone session should be repeated every year.

Ania provided a very comprehensive presentation on public consultation covering Equality Act considerations, Engagement, what form should Consultation take, and practical tips. The message was explained with reference to actual cases where public bodies were legally challenged with respect to what they did or omitted to do with regard to public consultation. Capsticks highlighted in the two sessions that all FRS need to have clear media policies and consultation strategies. The Capsticks team facilitated delegates to discuss the difference between consultation and negotiations. The message was clear that organisations should declare up front if they are consulting on a number of options; and if the board have a preferred way forward that they have agreed. By the end of the sessions, delegates had greater understanding and clarity on what makes good consultation, and the pitfalls of applying media policies.

***Workshop 1 – ‘Business Safety & Support & BME Businesses’ – Wendy Kenyon, & Gary Keen Merseyside FRS supported by Harminder Bains West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service***

This workshop highlighted the importance of working in partnership with the businesses to improve compliance, rather than using punitive measures as a preferred approach. There was noticeable willingness to comply, but often assistance was required in understanding what had to be done to be compliant. Wendy highlighted that the interim report had not yet been approved by CFOA; and that once approved, MFRS with CFOA would be looking to work with AFSA and other stakeholders, to take the recommendation further in building tool kits for FRS and carrying out further research. Harminder highlighted the issues of faith and fire safety, and promoted the need for FRS to be more culturally and faith aware, when issuing advice and enforcing compliance. It was agreed that this approach and recommendations would help to reduce the inequalities of enforcement found during the MFRS workshop.

***Workshop 2 – ‘Fire and Health Natural Partners’ – Mike Larkin – Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service*** – Mike provided a historical perspective on how the service moved from reactive mode of operation to proactive mode, and the policy of fire prevention became a success story. Since 2000, following the prevention initiatives,

there has been a 30% reduction in fatalities and 55% reduction in non-fatal hospital casualties. This has led to 29% reduction in fire incidents in Cheshire in the last five years alone. The public funding being forever under the microscope, the government may perceive that there is spare capacity and cut funding. However, this may have an impact on prevention work. Since the NHS and the Fire service are in the business of saving lives, a number of joint initiatives have been taken that aim at Health and Safety, and utilise any spare capacity.

***Workshop 3 – How to Create Social Value in a Changing Society, to support sustainability of local communities, Richard Dickins, Director, Making it Happen.***

Richard spoke about the importance of how social value has transformed the way money is spent on local public services. It does this by requiring the people in charge of putting in place our public services (commissioners) to think about more than just how to design these services and who will provide them. Public authorities must also consider how the new services could have an even further reaching impact on the local community.

***Workshop 4 – ‘The Blue Light Programme – Supporting our Emergency Services’, Clare Ford and Sharon Hastings, MIND***

The speaker highlighted the worrying data from the mental health charity Mind has found that nearly 9 in 10 (87 per cent) emergency services staff and volunteers surveyed have experienced stress, low mood and poor mental health at some point while working for the emergency services. Despite the greater prevalence of mental health problems among emergency services personnel, Mind’s research indicates that they are less likely to take time off sick as a result. Just 43 per cent of emergency service workers and volunteers surveyed said they have taken time off work due to poor mental health.

The final session of the conference was titled ‘***New Mind-sets for New Times***’ – ***Maurice Duffy, CEO Blackswan*** – Maurice provided an uplifting and inspiring presentation on positive attitude, and values-driven personal goals. He quoted a number of maxims, ‘Ego is not your amigo’, ‘Listen like a genius’, ‘Filter out the negative’, ‘Be the first to give’, to elucidate his points on changing your perspective to contribute to the changing world around you. This session was well received by all; and considering that it was at the end of day two, it was encouraging to see that over 100 delegates remained to hear Maurice talk about how we can all be the change we wish to see in others (Gandhi). He also provided many tools to illustrate how this can be done. Maurice also offered to run workshops that would focus on helping individuals and organisations to change Mind-sets.

***Final Words – CFO Paul Hancock, Cheshire FRS*** – Paul thanked the attendees for coming to Cheshire, and engaging in a very successful AFSA conference. He said that he was proud to have hosted the conference, and the dialogue and learning which it generated, will help to inform future policy and procedures of the fire service. He praised the AFSA executive for planning a very professional and diverse learning event. He also congratulated all the award winners from the Thursday awards dinner.