



Essex County Fire & Rescue Service

Positive Action Workshop

11th November 2022

Post Workshop Report

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1. Background

The event delivered on the 11th of Nov 2022 was designed in partnership between JS Associates, Essex County Fire & Rescue Service & the Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA).

Essex County Fire & Rescue Service is committed to developing an organisation that is reflective of the diverse communities that it serves. To achieve this, ECFRS is proud to use Positive Action to support candidates from underrepresented groups.

We know that '*Positive action*' is an umbrella term used to describe taking targeted steps to improve equality in the workplace. For example, taking action to try to improve gender, ethnic, LGBT or disability representation as well as seeking to bring a broader range of voices within the organisation. It is also a term that is commonly used across the employment journey & managing talent management from recruitment, selection and development at all levels of the organisation.

At the same time– positive action also attracts more than its fair share of misunderstanding.

The purpose of the events was as follows:

- To bring diverse expertise and voices to the table to discuss positive action.
- Discuss what works, and what doesn't? how far you can take positive action? what are some of the alternatives to positive action, and what are the key foundations to ensure positive action works?
- Bring together large employers from across the public sector & private sector such as the Police, Ambulance and the NHS.

This event therefore addressed the following key questions:

- What is meant by positive action in the workplace & the fire and rescue service?
- Why is positive action so important?
- What does the law say about positive action & how to lawfully implement positive action measures including latest case law and guidance?

- What are the potential pitfalls relating to positive action?
- What are examples of lawful positive action that work?
- What tops tips on workplace positive action that can help you set the foundations for implementation.
- How can we mobilise and work together to make positive action work?

The following programme and agenda was developed to help shape the day.

Programme & Agenda	
10:00 – 10:15	Welcome & Introductions, Collette Black Assistant Chief Executive - People, Values and Culture Essex Fire & Rescue Service
10:15 – 10:45	Keynote 1: The law & positive action & how to lawfully implement positive action measures including latest case law and guidance. Nicola Greene, Capsticks Solicitors
10:45 – 11:15	Armistice Remembrance
11:15 – 11:30- Break & Networking	
11:30 – 12:15	Keynote 2: The power of recruitment & outreach using traditional and modern methods of community engagement, <i>Divya Patel, London Fire Brigade</i>
12:15 – 13:00	Group work session 1 – What have we learnt from the morning session so far & positive action? – Facilitated tabletop group work <i>Jagtar Singh, JS Associates</i>
13:00 – 13:45 - LUNCH & NETWORKING	
13:45 – 14:15	Case Study 1 – Workforce Positive Action & Bedfordshire Police <i>Mike Chand, Bedfordshire Police</i>
14:15 – 15:00	Case Study 2 – Workforce Positive Action & the NHS, <i>Jaz Kaur, NHS</i>
14:45 – 15:15	Panel session involving case study speakers & others
15:05 – 15:45	Group work Session 2 –Based on what we have heard and discussed today how can we work together to make positive action work at Essex County Fire & Rescue Service – Facilitated tabletop group work, <i>Jagtar Singh, JS Associates</i>
15:45 – 16:15	Feedback from the group work
16:20 – 16:30	Summary & Close

This paper therefore set out the following:

- 1. Key Observations and commentary from the workshop**
- 2. Evaluation of the workshop**

2. Observations and commentary from the workshop

Keynote 1: The law & positive action & how to lawfully implement positive action measures including latest case law and guidance. *Nicola Greene, Capsticks Solicitors*

As the first speaker she highlighted the following key points:

- Under **section 158 of the Equality Act 2010**, the law provides that positive action is lawful provided it can be shown it has been taken to: (a) enable or encourage people who share a protected characteristic to overcome or minimise a disadvantage related to the characteristic (b) meet the needs of people who share a protected characteristic where those needs are different to those of people who do not have the characteristic, or (c) Enable or encourage people who share a protected characteristic to participate in an activity in which their participation is disproportionately low, i.e.; where they are under-represented.
- In practice this means positive action was all about addressing pre-existing social inequalities, supporting people who are disadvantaged due to a protected characteristic and providing support to people who might need it - giving them confidence, experience and opportunity to put themselves forward for a suitable role.
- Under section 158, the employer must 'reasonably think' that there is an imbalance of opportunity, or some form of disadvantage faced by those from a protected group. The action taken by the employer must also be a proportionate means of achieving one of the specified aims. This means that you must be able to show that any positive action has been reasonably considered as an appropriate way forward and will not discriminate against others.
- Examples of positive action activities includes: (a) targeted advertising in specific media outlets (b) stating in job ads that applications from target group candidates are welcome (c) providing internships / open days for the target group (d) providing training opportunities for the target group
- In addition support with driving licence and also considering socio economic factors needs to be considered.

See [Briefing](#) and short [video](#)

Keynote 2: The power of recruitment & outreach using traditional and modern methods of community engagement, *Divya Patel, London Fire Brigade*

The second speaker highlighted the following key points:

- Highlighted the power of '**community outreach**' and how this can raise awareness of career & apprenticeship opportunities the LFB have to offer, to attract talent and a diverse applicant pool. In addition, helped Increase successful applications from under- represented groups. Finally encourage young people to consider a career in the fire service, including LFB Fire Cadets

- Last Fire Fighter recruitment resulted in 46% from BAME background being appointed.
- She highlighted LFB research which indicated 'perceived barriers for women', such as level of danger, no career progression/development/ variety, monotonous – lack variety long term, not physically strong enough, 'I couldn't do that' – aspire to what you see. In addition, 'genuine barriers for women' - working in a predominately male environment. this job does not suit every woman, shift pattern, flexibility around family life/care responsibilities, driving license, pay
- In terms of successful interventions to increase applications involving women – she highlighted (a) Digital marketing (Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok, Google ads) (b) Fitness sessions with tailored training plans and (c) Firefighter experience days
- The speaker then highlighted many assumptions about why those from ethnically diverse groups may not want to join fire service... her research indicated only 7% said that family reaction or cultural perceptions would be a barrier to them applying to be a firefighter (b) the higher a person's academic achievement the less likely they are to consider a career in the fire service- This is not an Asian thing- all groups including White! (c) Asians –family perception is not a barrier. Asians said they want career progression
- The research indicated key themes that would motivate people from BAME backgrounds to apply for the fire service -: wanting to saving lives, feeling proud of what I do, help others, make a difference, save lives, job security
- In terms of 'perceived barriers and ethnic minorities' – (a) Fear of getting burned- highest (b) there is no career development opportunities', (c) variety of roles limited once in (d) too physical (e) 'I couldn't do that' – aspire to what you see
- In terms of 'genuine barriers' (a) 83% never considered it or know very little about fire service (b) they have previously applied and failed (c) expected to shave beard (d) family concern for safety (e) lack of representation (f) knowing someone in LFB (g) family duties (Asian) (f) (g) salary and (H)shift system
- Interestingly the research indicated little variation across different ethnic groups. In addition, perceived racism did not come up as a potential barrier- this may change when we publish cultural review
- Twice as likely to apply if you are from a Black background than Asian due to social and cultural norms
- In terms of what works to attract BAME applications the research highlighted the following – (a) referrals from staff/word of mouth (b)community/employment events (c) digital targeted marketing

Case Study 1– Workforce Positive Action & Bedfordshire Police Mike Chand, Bedfordshire Police

The third speaker of the day provided a case study of how Bedfordshire Police continue to implement Positive Action.

- Positive Action starts with the Chief Constable, it is that golden thread that runs right the way through the Organisation
- Positive Action is about creating a culture where everyone feels confident and supported, whether that is joining, staying or thriving in the police
- We all know that everyone should have the same chance to join the police/Fire Service, thrive during their career and want to stay. Positive Action is helping us to recruit and support officers from a broader base so that we fairly reflect the people we serve. That is better for us as individuals, better for us as a team and better for our communities.
- We have seen that our Services are not representational of our diverse communities, which includes communities within communities. It is the acknowledgment that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression, and we must consider everything and anything that can marginalise people race, gender, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, privilege and power. PA can support a person to be their best authentic self by.
- Positive Action is not just about recruitment, it is also about Internal Culture
- We need to all recognise that we are not all the same and in order to progress the Organisation we need to embrace 'Difference'.

Case Study 2– Workforce Positive Action & the NHS, Jaz Kaur, NHS

The final speaker of the day highlighted the following in respect of positive action:

- Our systems and process are riddled with discrimination and bias, designed to maintain the status quo.
- She highlighted key intervention ranging from (a) model employer 40% target for visible leadership (race) (b) bespoke development programmes (race & Gender) (c) race specific mentoring (d) enhanced awareness of HR systems and processes building on social stereotypes (e) race & disability specific buddying (f) allocating disproportionate (on paper) resource to community specific advertising (g) understanding role requirements workshops (race & gender) (h) on point Interviewing skills (race & gender)

3. Evaluation

(a) Content

How satisfied were you with?					
	satisfied		not satisfied		
The pace and timing of the event	5(36%)	4(47%)	3(5%)	2(10%)	1
The format and the structure of the event	5(30%)	4(30%)	3(21%)	2(10%)	1
The time available for discussion /Q&As	5(30%)	4(30%)	3(21%)	2(10%)	1
Overall satisfaction of the event	5(47%)	4(30%)	3(21%)	2	1

Summary

- 83% of those who completed the evaluation form scored either 5 or 4 in terms of timing and pace of the event
- 60% of those who completed the evaluation form scored either 5 or 4 in terms of format and structure
- 60% of those who completed the evaluation form scored either 5 or 4 in terms of time for Q&A
- 77% of those who completed the evaluation form scored either 5 or 4 in terms of overall satisfaction of the event.

(b) The discussions, activities, advice, guidance, tools and support provided by JS Associates today has helped me

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Better understand Positive action and my role	52%	26%	21%		
Stay up to date with the latest thinking & importance of positive action	58%	31%	5%	5%	

Summary

- 78% of those who completed the evaluation form stated they either strongly agreed or agreed that following attendance at the event they better understand positive action
- 89% of those who completed the evaluation form stated they either strongly agreed or agreed that following attendance at the event they are up to date with latest on positive action.

(c)The discussions, activities, advice, guidance, tools and support provided by JS Associates today has helped me

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Helped my thought process of how best to use and apply positive action to improve organisational effectiveness.	47%	47%	6%		

Summary

- **94%** of those who completed the evaluation form stated they either strongly agreed or agreed that following attendance at the event it has helped them in terms of how to apply positive action.

(C) My participation at the event has enabled me to:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Make useful connections with others who could be partners in designing and applying positive action	47%	36%	6%		
I now feel more confident that I have the Knowledge, skills and the support to apply positive action	47%	42%	10%		
Share knowledge/good practice with others about positive action	47%	42%	10%		

Summary

- **83%** of those who completed the evaluation form stated they either strongly agreed or agreed that following attendance at the event they now have connections with people they can work on positive action with.
- **89%** of those who completed the evaluation form stated they either strongly agreed or agreed that following attendance at the event they feel confident that they have the knowledge and skills to support and apply positive action.
- **89%** of those who completed the evaluation form stated they either strongly agreed or agreed that following attendance at the event they feel enabled to share their knowledge with others about positive action.

Describe in 20 words or less what your experience was like being at the event

“A very though provoking events gave clarity to the subject that needs greater awareness”

“Good conversations- good comms & useful speakers”

“Positive, energising and insightful”

“Enjoyable and informative, good range of speakers and case studies”

“Good event, would have liked more time to discuss”

“Nothing new stating much of the obvious, lack of challenge or time to share challenging views, use of Ideation non existent”

“It felt a bit chaotic & some areas were not covered in enough detail”

“A very useful session with lots of takeaways to consider”

“Good session on current thinking on positive action in public bodies”

“Constantly engaged in interesting discussions”

“I felt comfortable, welcomed and included clear and concise information and relaxed environment, real and easy-going real-life sessions”

“Overall, a good positive experience, good information to take away”

“Very positive, educational event & networking opportunities”

“Good pace, well structured, covered broad subject matter”

“A really good event sharing practices and listening to other journeys, positive day and looking forward to next event”.

“I found the day very informative, and it increased my knowledge of positive action”

“The day in general provided plenty of discussion points and questions that me and my team will now go away and start asking”

What would have improved your experience?

“More time for Q&A, the conversations were leading to others which had to stop”

“I enjoy a tighter time keeping element but that is just a personal preference”.

“Experience from millennials to understand their experience in regard to positive action and their experience of ED&I”.

“More time for table discussions and more time for the employment lawyer and other colleagues, less bias of thought”

“Remove the table discussions and more time for the speakers also discussion on neurodiversity”

“I think it was great”

“Better time keeping and more peer-to-peer interaction”

“Understanding equality action/positive discrimination”

“Spending more time with Jagtar”

5. What did you enjoy most from the event?

“The presentation from the LFB & positive approach”

“Connections made and spending time with like minded people”

“The case studies”

“The multitude of speakers/experts who work at the frontier of this space”

“It gave me the opportunity to generate ideas in my head – I am more of a reflector to group work areas and work form me”

“The LFB speaker was excellent”

“Good session on current thinking on positive action in public bodies”

“Speakers present, very good and strong delivery”

“Networking and learning from different sectors”

“everything”

“Relaxed and informative”

“Demonstrated actions that have worked from keynote speakers”

“Networking/professional speakers”

“It was good to listen to the other partners with how they have improved their services & knowing we are on a positive way forward”

All the discussion and talking points amongst the different services (public +emergency)

Feedback/ Testimonial: Share your experience of the event and a brief testimonial of how it might have benefited you.

“AFSA never disappoints. Their delivery and subject knowledge are always engaging. This event was no different. Well done to all involved”.

“I feel empowered to make suggestions & recommendations within my service as a result of communication today”.

“A really energising, interesting and insightful event that has given me lots to think about & take back to my organisation”.

“Firmed up my legal understanding and has provided food for thought to provide better recruitment process”

“Great speakers, networking, comfortable and welcoming environment”

“Great event to learn more about positive action and get more understanding about the equality act, interest case studies and great group interactions”

“Good discussion and positive collaboration”

“This has really led nicely from my recent ED&I training”

“The day allowed me to see more relevant case studies, so that I can learn from these examples”