

## Our Commitment to Inclusion and Equality in 2021

### Introduction

Creating an environment in which every member of our team at Essex County Fire and Rescue Service can flourish, is essential to us delivering the very best service we can to the people that live, work, and travel in Essex.

In this report, we will share what we did throughout 2021 to support our aim to be an inclusive employer, because when we include everyone, we create the opportunity for differences to be understood and proudly celebrated. We believe that every employee has the right to be treated fairly and inclusively with kindness, equality, dignity, and respect. We are committed to providing a supportive and inclusive working environment to promote this.

We want colleagues to feel valued and contribute to our vision to be one of the best Fire and Rescue Services in the Country. We know that diversity enables greater creativity and innovation if people can be open and honest about their strengths, experience, and knowledge. This is why we promote a positive culture; every one of our colleagues is unique, so it is important that they feel that they can be themselves, that way, they are more likely to speak up and share their thoughts, needs, or perspective, highlighting what others may not have considered or be aware of. This is how diversity adds real value to our service, improving how we do things, informing our policy, practice and decision making and expanding our collective knowledge so that we provide equal access, opportunities, and outcomes and get it right for our communities.

### Our Values

Promoting a positive culture within our Service is supported by our values:

- We work as One Team
- We are always professional
- We are courageous in all that we do
- We are open, honest, and trustworthy
- We value the contribution of all

### Our Fire and Rescue Plan

Our Fire and Rescue Plan confirms that promoting a positive culture in the workplace and continuously improving the diversity of our workforce are key priorities for our Service. It also states that we will work in collaboration with our partners, make the best use of our resources, develop, and broaden the roles and activities we undertake and be transparent, open, and accessible. By doing so, we will help the vulnerable to stay safe, improve safety on our roads and provide the right services for all our communities through our Prevention and Protection activities and when we respond to incidents.

Our Fire and Rescue plan can be found by following this link: [Fire and Rescue Plan](#).

## Our Public Sector Equality Duty

We commit to providing an equal service because it is the right thing to do. However, as a Public Service, we also have a legal duty to do so. The Equality Duty was developed in order to harmonise the equality duties and to extend it across the protected characteristics. It consists of a general Equality Duty, supported by specific duties which are imposed by secondary legislation. In summary, our Service must, in the exercise of our functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

These are sometimes referred to as the three aims or arms of the general Equality Duty. The Act explains that having due regard for advancing equality involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages experienced by people due to their protected characteristics
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low

The Equality Duty covers the nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. Public authorities also need to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination against someone because of their marriage or civil partnership status. This means that the first aim of the duty applies to this characteristic but that the other aims (advancing equality and fostering good relations) do not apply.

[Public Sector Equality Duty - Click here for further information](#) .

## Our Equality Objectives

As part of our Equality Duty, we set equality objectives to continuously improve and monitor our progress. Our current objectives are:

1. To improve the recruitment, retention, progression, development, and experience of the people employed by Essex County Fire and Rescue Service to enable the organisation to become an inclusive employer of choice.
2. To promote and encourage employees to voluntarily declare their self-classification diversity data to ensure ECFRS actions as an employer are evidence led and improvement focused.
3. To improve the mapping, quality, and extent of equality information in order to better facilitate compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty in relation to service delivery including IRMP additional activities.

4. To review the equality impact of key organisational policies for differential impact in areas such as: recruitment and selection, learning and development, absence management, modified duties, talent management, appraisal, disciplinary and grievance.
5. To ensure that all staff are treated with dignity and respect and have a workplace that is free from harassment and bullying by changing the culture of the organisation to one that is genuinely inclusive. All employees are high performing because we value their differences, which includes gender or gender identity, race, or religion, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, pregnancy, caring responsibilities, or membership of a trade union.
6. To seek external review, challenge, and accreditation of ECFRS' actions as an employer by actively participating with relevant equalities standards and benchmarks including the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework.

In this report, we will provide an overview of our progress against our objectives, and our activities to deliver our Fire and Rescue Plan and provide an equal service to our communities.

## Our Progress

### **1. To improve the recruitment, retention, progression, development, and experience of the people employed by Essex County Fire and Rescue Service to enable the organisation to become an inclusive employer of choice.**

#### **Taking Positive Action to grow diversity in our Service**

We proudly promote a culture of inclusivity in our recruitment processes and take positive action as described in section 158 of the Equality Act 2010 to attract greater diversity to our vacancies, to continue to grow the skills, knowledge and lived experience in our workforce.

Like all Fire and Rescue Services in the Country, our workforce does not currently reflect the diversity of our communities in our County. However, by promoting a positive culture, actively engaging with our communities, sharing activity and progress, and taking opportunities to reach younger people throughout the County, we can make a difference to the diversity of people we attract to our varied roles, including our apprenticeships, cadet opportunities and voluntary positions. In 2021, this action resulted in more diverse squads of new firefighter recruits than in previous years.

By working with our partners across Essex, who share this ambition, we improve our diversity of thought enabling greater creativity, problem solving and understanding, so that we get it right for the people of Essex, now and in the future.

in 2021, we worked with J S Associates to conduct a review and make recommendations to further improve the way that we attract and recruit. The review team was joined by representatives from our recruitment and inclusion and diversity teams and our employee networks to identify recommendations for us to action and embed.

Our Inclusion and Diversity team welcomed a new member in April 2021, we expanded our team to include an apprentice who is adding great value to our work and improving our collective diversity, experience, and perspective, increasing our ability to be inclusive by design and provide an equal service.

Our learning and development team welcomed our first intern via the [Leonard Cheshire Change 100 programme](#) during the summer of 2021. The Change 100 flagship programme provides paid work placements, professional development and mentoring for university students and recent graduates with a disability or long-term health condition.

Within our Fire and Rescue Plan we prioritise collaborating with our partners to make the best use of our resources; we are working in collaboration with the Fire and Rescue Services in the East of England to achieve our shared goal to increase the diversity within our workforces and to maximise opportunities and share learning and resources. This work is supported by our Regional Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Forum, Chaired by our Inclusion and Diversity Partner.

## **Leadership**

Leadership in our Service is underpinned by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Leadership Framework. We commissioned a bespoke Leadership Development Programme, aligned to the framework which we delivered throughout 2021.

The Leadership Framework aims to:

- Strengthen leadership and line management to support organisational change and improved community outcomes
- Develop cultural values and behaviours which make the fire and rescue service a great place to work for all our people
- Develop ways of working that can respond to service needs
- Provide excellent training and education to ensure continuous improvement of services to the public
- Continue to support the health and well-being of all our people
- Strengthen our ability to provide good service by diversifying our staff and creating a fair and equal place to work

Leadership is important at every level of our service as we need to be adaptable to the evolving requirements of a 'modern fire and rescue service'. Our leaders need to be capable and compassionate with a willingness to collaborate so that together, we continue to improve the services we deliver to our communities.

The NFCC Leadership Framework can be found by following this link: [NFCC Leadership Framework](#)

Our workforce Equality Data and Gender Pay Gap analysis demonstrate a lack of diverse representation amongst our people that lead others, lead a function, or lead the Service.

We are taking positive action as outlined in the Equality Act 2010 to encourage participation in leadership development opportunities by colleagues from our underrepresented groups, via our employee networks and line managers.

In 2021, we supported two colleagues to participate in 'Leading Greater Essex' a leadership development pathway provided in partnership with other public service providers in the County, both colleagues represent diversity that we currently lack in roles that lead others or a function.

## **Progression**

Our leadership, resourcing, and succession pools (LRS) enable us to develop our people so that we have people ready with the right skills at the right time. The LRS approach is inclusive by design. The process begins with self-assessment and the development of a portfolio of evidence. Assessment takes place each month via a variety of methods enabling colleagues to demonstrate their strengths. We have access to coaching for all employees, 360-degree feedback, secondment, and development opportunities. We are continuing to encourage diverse participation in the LRS process.



### Learning and Development

We provide access to a range of learning and development opportunities on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion, many of which are made possible due to working in collaboration with our partners.

During 2021, these included:

- Neurodiversity awareness
- Inclusive Leadership workshops
- Biases and Blind spots for our selection interview assessors
- People Impact Assessments
- Embracing Difference Together Conference hosted by Kent Fire and Rescue Service
- Webinars throughout the year hosted by Inclusive Employers
- Lunch and Learn Sessions hosted by the NFCC
- Podcasts created by the NFCC

Our employee networks, in collaboration with our partners employee networks created online learning events that could be accessed by all employees for:

- International Women's Day
- International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT)
- Black History Month

As Corporate Members of AFSA, we accessed the following learning events:

- Webinars throughout the year
- Multi Faith Summit
- Winter Conference - Shaping Inclusion through inclusive workplaces and community engagement
- Disability Summit

**Exit Interviews**

We reviewed our approach to gather information from our leavers to inform our continuous improvement by helping us understand the employee’s reasons for leaving. All employees that leave our Service are provided the opportunity to have a conversation with our people partners to discuss their experience during their employment and any contributing factors to their decision to leave. The number of completed exit interviews remains low and we maintain a focus on increasing this.

**2. To promote and encourage employees to voluntarily declare their self-classification diversity data to ensure ECFRS actions as an employer are evidence led and improvement focused.**

Over the past year, we have encouraged all colleagues to update their equality information on their HR records to improve our ability to understand the diversity of our workforce and monitor our people processes for equality. Our workforce equality data informs our People Impact Assessments, the process we use to achieve our duty to have due regard for advancing equality, for our employees as outlined in the Public Sector Equality Duty.

In addition, Workforce Equality Data enables pay gap analysis as part of the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017. **Our Gender Pay Gap Report can be found here (link or appendix) once finalised**

The table below confirms how many colleagues have not stated their equality information and the percentage of the workforce this represents.

Category	% of people not stated
Gender	4%
Ethnicity	19%
Sexual orientation	28%
Religion or belief	27%

*Figure 1 - Data as of 10 January 2022*

In addition, 64 (4%) of our employees have confirmed that they have a disability.

**3. To improve the mapping, quality, and extent of equality information in order to better facilitate compliance with the public sector Equality Duty in relation to service delivery including IRMP additional activities.**

Our Fire and Rescue Plan states that we will help vulnerable people to stay safe. To enable us to understand who the most vulnerable people in our communities are, we are improving the data and information we collect in our Prevention, Protection and Response activities, so that our actions are evidence led and allow us to address any inequalities that are identified.

Our Operational and Community Risk team and Inclusion and Partnerships Manager, a role that we introduced in September 2021, are helping us to achieve our priorities and improve the data and information we gather to reduce vulnerability and risk of harm.

Working with our partners across Essex, as a member of the Safer Essex Board and Community Safety Partnerships, we can improve the information we can access and increase our understanding of community needs and risks.

More information on our Prevention, Protection and Response activity and progress is provided in this report under 'Our Activities'.

**4. To review the equality impact of key organisational policies for differential impact in areas such as: recruitment and selection, learning and development, absence management, modified duties, talent management, appraisal, disciplinary and grievance.**

We refreshed our approach to demonstrate our due regard to our Equality Duty by introducing a new People Impact Assessment process in 2021. We undertake People Impact Assessments, also known as Equality Impact Assessments, to improve inclusivity and advance equality in our policies, practice and decision-making and remove or minimise any disadvantages that may be experienced by people due to their protected characteristics. We identify opportunities and actions to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.

Our improved workforce equality information is assisting us to assess the impact of our people processes and policies and measure whether they provide equality of opportunity, access, and outcome for our people.

**5. To ensure that all staff are treated with dignity and respect and have a workplace that is free from harassment and bullying by changing the culture of the organisation to one that is genuinely inclusive. All employees are high performing because we value their differences, which includes gender or gender identity, race, or religion, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, pregnancy, caring responsibilities, or membership of a trade union.**

**Our Employee Networks**

Our employee networks provide peer support and offer an opportunity to gain from lived experience, perspective and expertise which informs our policy, practice and decision making. Networks provide a way for us to understand the needs of people that are underrepresented within our service and aid our retention. We value the voice of our people and encourage feedback and contribution from everyone.

Our networks are open to all colleagues, regardless of personal identity with encouragement for allies to participate, to aid learning and understanding.

Chairs of our networks can be contacted in confidence by any individual that requires specific support or guidance, in addition to line managers and our Inclusion and Diversity team.

The Employee Networks that we have are:

- Being - our LGBTQ+ network
- Women's Forum
- Ethnic Minority Forum
- Christian Union

To further gain from individual perspective, we trialled reverse mentoring with employees from our network groups and Service Leadership Team members, the benefits and learning have informed the development of a reciprocal mentoring programme to be launched in 2022.

We are also members of the following national fire and rescue networks and membership organisations:

- Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA)
- Women in the Fire Service (WFS)
- Inclusive Employers
- Business Disability Forum

### **Communication**

In April 2021, we shared our first monthly e-newsletter, 'Inclusion Insights' via email with all colleagues, so that we are all able to contribute to the culture that we create for each other and continually learn and develop together.

Each month, we have a different topic in the spotlight and share a range of information and guidance as well as self-directed learning and development opportunities such as webinars, podcasts, and videos.

Throughout 2021, the topics that we featured were:

- Racial Equality
- Disability
- LGBTQ+
- Neurodiversity
- Public Sector Equality Duty
- Black History Month
- International Men's Day

We rounded up the year with a summary of our achievements so that all colleagues could feel proud of the improvements we had made and how much we had learned.

In addition to our newsletter, our Corporate Communications team regularly feature personal stories shared by colleagues, internal news articles and social media posts to support and highlight awareness dates.

In 2021, these included Holocaust Memorial Day, Race Equality Week, LGBT History Month, International Women's Day, Trans Day of Visibility, International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT), Dementia awareness week, Deaf awareness week, Mental Health awareness week, Dyslexia awareness week, Black History Month, International Men's Day, and World Aids Day.

### **Dignity at Work**

Dignity and respect are essential elements to promoting a positive inclusive culture, some of our colleagues' volunteer as a Dignity at Work Supporters to support all colleagues to uphold our dignity at work policy and ensure our workplaces are free from unacceptable behaviour.



Dignity at Work Supporters can be contacted directly and provide a listening ear if colleagues have any questions or wish to discuss unacceptable behaviour they have experienced or witnessed.

We know how difficult it can be to speak up, so it is important that we provide a range of ways that people can do so comfortably. Our Dignity at Work Supporters can help colleagues to address matters of concern in the way that feels right for them, in addition to line managers and our people services team.

We will not tolerate bullying, harassment, victimisation, or discrimination, we want all colleagues to have a positive experience at work. In addition to our Dignity at Work Policy, we also have Grievance and Whistleblowing policies.

## **Working Well Together**

We have continued to work well with our representative bodies, recognising common interests and joint purposes. We have engaged, consulted, and negotiated where appropriate. We have been committed to early discussion of emerging issues and have 'kept talking' so there are no surprises. **As an outcome of this we have been able to publish 14 updated or new policies in 2021** - (Annual Leave, Attacks on Fire Service Personnel, Job Evaluation, Wellbeing Matters Policy, Leavers Policy, Equality & Diversity (update), Attendance Policy, Shared Parental Leave, Time off for dependents, Paternity Leave, Organisational Change, Transfer Policy (Green Book only), Lone Working, Code of Conduct (inc. Code of Ethics).

## **6. To seek external review, challenge, and accreditation of ECFRS' actions as an employer by actively participating with relevant equalities standards and benchmarks including the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework.**

We have continued to utilise the Local Government Association Framework to guide our action. An update against our progress in delivering this can be found at **Appendix 2**. We continue to be a Disability Confident Leader.

In addition to this in late 2021, we applied to become accredited by the Inclusive Employers Standard. The standard is an evidence-based accreditation tool which is the benchmark for workplace inclusion. It covers all protected characteristics and wider inclusion and diversity issues. At the time of writing, we are awaiting feedback.

As part of Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) programme, we were inspected in Autumn 2021, we await formal feedback. The inspection and judgement criteria require us to demonstrate how well we ensure fairness and diversity. The act of preparing the Inclusive Employers Standard submission and considering the HMI judgement criteria has been invaluable.

## **Our Activities**

### **Valuing Neurodiversity**

Neurodiversity is the concept that all humans vary in terms of our neurocognitive ability.

Everyone has talents and their own struggles. However, for some people the variation between those strengths and weaknesses is more pronounced, which can bring talent but can also be disabling.

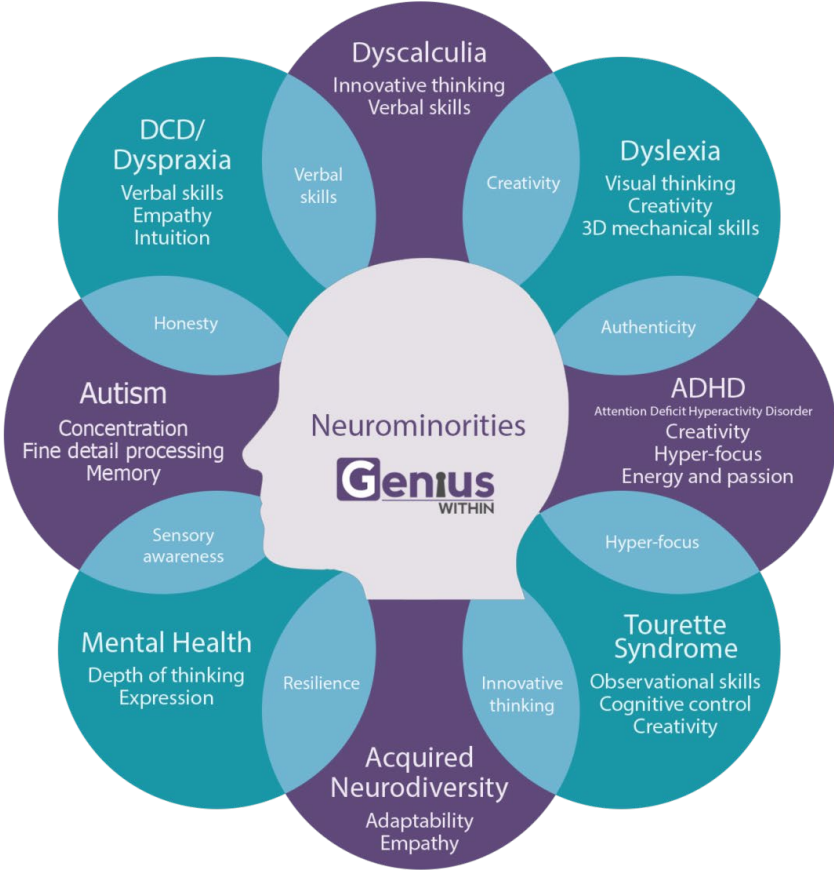
Neurodiverse/neurodivergent people tend to find some things very easy and other things incredibly hard. This usually leads to an inconsistent performance at school or work.

Neurodiversity can be a competitive advantage when the individuals are in the right environment, making use of their strengths, instead of constantly trying to overcome challenges. To achieve this, we must create inclusive spaces to work and learn that reduce disabling factors and amplify diverse abilities.

We are using the term neurominority to refer to neurodiverse/neurodivergent conditions which typically include ADHD, autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, and Tourette syndrome. We also recognise that any neurocognitive profile that is not “neurotypical” could be included as a minority group, which might include intellectual disabilities, mental health conditions, acquired brain injury or more.

(Genius Within 2022) *What is Neurodiversity* available at: <https://www.geniuswithin.org/what-is-neurodiversity/> (Accessed: 7 January 2022)

[Our thanks to Genius Within for their guidance and expertise, more information can be found on their website by following this link.](#)



**Neurodiversity in the population:**

- 90% of disabilities are invisible
- 5% of the population have ADHD
- 1-2% of the population is autistic
- 10% of the population are dyslexic
- 5% of the population are dyspraxic
- 1-2% of the population have Tourette Syndrome

- 7 % of the population have mental health needs
- 5% of the population have an acquired brain injury

During 2021, we worked with Genius Within to provide webinars to educate our colleagues about neurodiversity and help line managers understand how they can provide a supportive environment for colleagues that are neurodivergent. The webinars were recorded and are available on our intranet for all colleagues to access.

In addition, we introduced coaching by Genius Within for any colleagues that would benefit from their expertise as part of our coaching and mentoring provision. Coaching by the team of expert coaches at Genius Within helps colleagues to perform at their best in their existing role, prepare for progression, develop their leadership skills, or adjust to a new role.

### Digital Accessibility

We introduced our Digital and Data Strategy in 2021 and aim to combat digital exclusion by reducing complexity, embracing accessibility tools, and elevating the capability of our people. As a public sector organisation, we are committed to meeting the Public Sector Bodies Accessibility Regulations.

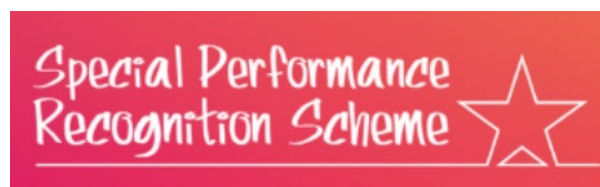
To inform delivery of our Digital and Data Strategy and benefit from the lived experience of our people, we created our Digital Accessibility Group to help us understand the needs of our people and introduced a new Digital Skills Officer role to help support our people to improve their digital skills.

We aim to be a digital and data driven service, embracing technology and information to deliver evidence-based decisions and efficient processes. Good technology and data enable our people to deliver improvements.

We commit to ensuring that everyone is empowered which means we provide tools and education to ensure skills, capability, and accessibility.

Our Digital Accessibility Group includes people with varying digital skills, disabilities and neurodivergence in a range of roles, meeting regularly, the group also provides peer support, education, and feedback in a similar way to our employee networks. Many of our colleagues have experienced periods of working in isolation or in smaller teams due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with most of our support colleagues working from home. Working virtually in groups, making use of the technology available provides an opportunity for connection and reduces isolation contributing to improved individual well-being.

### Reward and Recognition



Our monthly **Special Performance Recognition Awards** are about recognising and valuing our people and making them feel proud of what they have achieved in their day-to-day work. Colleagues nominate other colleagues for their good work.

The awards recognise individuals or teams who have made a significant contribution and enhanced the values of our Service, by participating in projects, programmes, activities,

initiatives that have had a positive impact on our colleagues or communities, and can be as a result of improving inclusivity, taking action to meet diverse needs or activities to understand and reduce inequalities.

There are two levels for our monthly awards, Bronze and Silver. The recipients of the silver award will be put forward for the Annual Gold award.

Bronze Award – Significant Contribution

Silver Award – Outstanding Contribution

Gold Award - The Gold is awarded to a recipient selected from the Silver Awards given during the year representing category 'Outstanding Contribution of the Year'. This will be presented at our Annual People Awards.



Our annual **Celebrating our People Awards** are a great way for us to recognise colleagues in the following categories:

- **Employee of the Year**
- **Team of the Year**
- **Unsung Hero**
- **Inspirational Leader**
- **Excellence in Innovation**

And for the first time, we introduced our new **Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Award** in 2021.



Two of our colleagues were shortlisted at the **Excellence in Fire & Emergency Awards** in 2021, Donna Bentley was shortlisted for the **Most Influential Woman in Fire** award and Matt Hill was shortlisted for the **Most Influential LGBT+ Individual in Fire** award.

In addition, our Service, Essex Police, and the Ambulance Service were shortlisted for the **Emergency Services Collaboration of the Year** award for the joint **International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) conference** that we held in May 2021.

## **Our Prevention Activities**

We recognise the importance of prevention activity that complements the Fire and Rescue Plan. We focus on providing an effective and efficient service which includes live safe, be road safe, be water safe and safeguarding as areas of focus. We target prevention activities at the most vulnerable to manage risk.

Our Prevention team includes the role of an Inclusion and Partnership manager. This role informs and educates the prevention space, ensuring all staff recognise that inclusion, diversity, and equality is everybody's responsibility, and supports the principles of inclusion by design, where all are considered.

By working together, we are creating an environment where inclusion begins where it should do, at the start of everything, so that it is not considered as a bolt on or somebody else's responsibility

### ***Case study - Safe Well Secure.***

This multi organisational community engagement activity, developed by ECFRS, provides an opportunity for collaborative action in a targeted approach. By working together and identifying areas of need, it provides a joined-up approach of resources and services that would be of benefit to the community it is engaging.

The completed EIA highlighted the need to consider the impact of digital exclusion, particularly for those in rural areas. Digital exclusion can emerge through many variables and in some instances can be a choice rather than situation.

However, age and disability can be common key factors that influence this type of exclusion. The need to consider this possibility, so that there is no disadvantage in the services offered through this engagement activity electronically, putting particular protected characteristic groups at a disadvantage, has now been included in the concept.

Paper based solutions are included to support the electronic digital methods used, as well as solutions to offer and assist individuals in becoming digitally included.

### **Inclusive Data provides intelligent Data**

ECFRS recognises that data plays a huge part in the recognition of risk. Evidence of facts provides the foundation of targeted intervention, where engagement in influencing behavioural change and awareness can reduce avoidable and unnecessary incidents from occurring.

Inclusive data provides intelligent data. Often discovered outside of the fire environment this data offers valuable insights into areas of opportunities, where early ECFRS intervention is identified in the prevention space.

Commonly gathered by organisations that work in the voluntary and charitable sectors the information that the inclusive data provides offers a valuable insight into diverse groups that may only present themselves in crises to ECFRS, rather than before the event.

By heat mapping its own measures of vulnerability and risk with this intelligent data ECFRS can populate meaningful targeted activities, aimed at the groups identified to reduce the existing or emerging risk.

**Case study - ECFRS's involvement with the North East Essex Asset map steering group.**

The group is made up from several voluntary, charitable and health services partners working together from a wider health and social care system perspective, with the aim of improving the health and wellbeing of people.

Shared information showed an increase in local food bank access by a particular age and group. ECFRS already recognises that food and fuel poverty can significantly increase the risk of home fires developing. This data sharing enabled ECFRS to develop an approach by engaging with a group that was previously considered low risk.

**Working in the sensory loss environment**

**Essex Cares Ltd (ECL).** Developed in 2016 ECFRS has a strong established relationship with ECL the commissioned service for Essex County Council for Sensory Loss support. We were one of the founding members of the Essex Sensory Action Alliance developed by ECL. Safe & Well Officers and members of the information booking team became sensory champions. community builders in the community risk team also received the training. ECL is also carrying out an audit on accessibility for the referral booking process utilised by us, however due to COVID restrictions impacting on availability this has yet to be completed.

**Blind Veterans UK.** Since 2017 we have worked Blind Veterans UK, by raising awareness of services to support those affected by visual impairment.

In 2021 this relationship was revisited and resulted in a reduction in face-to-face services (due to COVID), which led to bespoke fire safety sessions being delivered to those with visual impairment. This has since developed into a partnership agreement with reciprocal arrangements benefiting us both with staff / volunteer training and referrals. We were invited to guest speak at the regional meeting held by Blind Veterans UK in December, where an overview of our sensory journey was given, and we used it as an opportunity to signpost other FRSs to visual impairment support.

**Support 4 Sight (S4S).** Since 2017 we have worked with S4S in various engagement opportunities in the NW of Essex, most noticeably in the multi-agency Safe Well Secure activities that took place across the Uttlesford District in 2018. During 2021, we delivered several online fire safety awareness sessions to those supported by S4S and promoting the Safe & Well service.

**Dementia**

**2021 was a productive year for collaboration in the dementia environment in Essex between ECFRS & Essex Police (EP).**

- Our Dementia lead supported their counterpart at EP in developing their Dementia strategy
- Both ECFRS and EP were consulted on for the Essex, Southend and Thurrock Dementia Strategy 2022 - 27.
- The Emergency Tri Service role piloted in the Dengie peninsula by ECFRS attended the local Dementia Action Alliances (DAA) and represented both organisations.

- Both organisations are currently working with representatives from the Alzheimer's Society ECC, Southend and Thurrock unitary authorities supporting a joined-up approach for the launch of the Guardian Angel device from Dementia Buddy. This device is used to support people who may become disorientated or lost and would find it difficult to return to their homes unaided. The launch took place on 17 January.

During 2021 we revisited our Dementia Action Alliances plan and pledges following consultation with Dementia Voices, a group of individuals living with the effects of dementia, giving valuable contributions which resulted in our plans and pledges being further developed to ensure that there is a generic approach to delivering our services through our Prevention, Protection, and Response streams.

The plan informs and provides clarity of the recognition of the impact dementia has and sets out 4 actions for ECFRS.

*Action 1* - Raising awareness of dementia amongst our staff and taking an active role in encouraging everyone in Essex to help create Dementia Friendly Communities.

*Action 2* - Raising awareness of home safety visits and other prevention activities available to help reduce the risk of fires in the homes of people living with dementia. Also, ensuring that families and carers are aware of the fire risks associated with the care and protection of people living with dementia in their homes.

*Action 3* - Promoting the educational and information resources available for those caring for people with dementia, advocating the use of assistive technology, that can enable people to stay independent, safe, and well in their own homes for as long as possible.

*Action 4* - Continue to encourage all ECFRS staff to become Dementia Friends.

***Dementia Action Alliances.*** Our membership of the PAN Essex Dementia Action Alliance has enabled us to connect with various alliances from across Essex. To date, we have attendance at 13 of the 14 groups. We are actively engaging with the fourteenth group to attain membership.

Attendance at these meetings is supported across the prevention department by Community builders, Community Safety Officers, Tri service officer and the Inclusion and Partnership manager.

We actively collaborate in many ways in the dementia environment, from forming part of steering groups, consulting others in their approach, and assisting in evolving and refreshing the local DAAs.

***Dementia Connect.*** We deliver our online fire safety awareness session to the regional Dementia Connect team (run by the Alzheimer's Society).

This session raised awareness of the common risks in the home care environment of emollient creams and home oxygen use and provides information on the referral process we have in place for those who would benefit from the Safe & Well visit. This in turn enables Dementia Connect to utilise their knowledge in assisting those they support by making them aware of our services to help reduce avoidable risk and harm in the home environment.

We have also registered as a referrer to the Dementia Connect service. Individuals we recognise as benefitting from their services during our Safe & Well visits, are signposted, or with the individual's permission, referred through to Dementia Connect.

**Essex Multi Faith and Inclusion Dementia Group (EMFIDG).** We have been actively involved throughout 2021 within the EMFIDG. By supporting its activities and growth this network group has enabled us to become more informed and connected within the faith environment of Essex.

*Case Study - We were invited to attend a cultural event, the annual Durga Puja Festival run by Sankalpa.*

Sankalpa (meaning our pledge) are a community organisation based in Chelmsford that promotes cultural values amongst South Asian communities in Essex. The opportunity for us to attend was extended by one of the group organisers during a meeting between us and a Clinical Care Commissioning group discussing opportunities in health support, where we may be able to connect with its services.

Les Nichol BEM, one of our Community Builders, attended the event to raise awareness of our services and provide information on key fire safety messages to the attendees.

In his report of the event Les stated "*As with all Festivals they were noisy, fun, and very inclusive, I was made of course very welcome had the opportunity to speak to so many members of the organisation.*"

**Intergenerational Dementia Engagement Alliance (IDEA).** IDEA is a new alliance whose aim is to launch by the end 2021/early 2022 by ECC working towards developing a dementia friendly generation through its Essex 'Healthy Schools' Programme. This integrated approach across Adult Social Care and Children and Families to dementia through the delivery of the Healthy Schools programme, will include dementia-related project activities as part of schools' best-practice to create dementia-friendly generations and will involve a range of organisations that also have opportunities of engagement with pupils.

It will be a countywide opportunity to discuss/support intergenerational dementia programmes of activity within the DAA's across Essex. We will form part of this alliance in these meetings.

Our education team meets approximately 30,000 pupils a year through its engagement opportunities in school visits and is exploring ways of supporting this programme through these opportunities. There are also discussions of incorporating dementia into the successful fire cadet programme we run at various locations across Essex.

### [Helping the vulnerable stay safe](#)

Vulnerability can present itself in many ways for an individual.

With vulnerability comes an increase in risk, with an increase in risk comes the potential of serious and in some instances fatal harm to individuals.

We seek to help identify and reduce the numbers of those more vulnerable in our communities, to support and signpost where we can, to mitigate the vulnerability and help reduce the potential of vulnerability emerging.

### **Case study - ECFRS's involvement within the Community Assets Steering Group of Mid Essex.**

We presented our fatal fire findings report from the beginning of 2021 to November end 2021 to the group. The report explained the commonalities which had occurred in some of the fatal incidents, noticeably mental health and learning disabilities. These commonalities were also identified as a concern from other group members through their services and support.



An emerging risk had been identified which has led into a focused approach of collaborative working, supporting this group of vulnerable persons, where significant life events have impacted on their support and capacity to remain safe.

Like us, vulnerability does not discriminate, that's why we continually seek opportunities to work with organisations that support those more vulnerable, particularly those connected to diverse groups in our communities who may be disconnected from our services.

### ***Case study - Robotic Pets Partnership***

Following on from a Dementia network event, where we were offering support, a charitable organisation shared it was experiencing problems in the storage of some robotic pets it had been given funding for.

They could not take delivery as they had no space to place the items to then start assessing and giving the pets to recognised at risk individuals. The robotic pets were being given to people experiencing dementia, loneliness, and anxiety. There was also evidence from a study that they reduced slips, trips, and falls from occurring.

We recognise that these factors also contributed to higher risk of fire to individuals. A partnership agreement was put in place where we provided the storage of the pets. Individuals that were assessed and given a pet by the charitable organisation were signposted and referred to us to receive a Safe & Well visit.

### **The ECFRS Fire Safety Awareness Session**

We launched this virtual session was launched in September 2021.

Its aim is to raise awareness to individuals who support those more vulnerable and who receive some form of care or support in their home environment, to the fire risks in that environment and services available from us.

It presents on the common factors of fires in the home and explains the benefits of engaging with us through our home fire safety checks and Safe & Well visits.

Aimed at professionals, organisations, and family carers the session delivers in a person-centred approach, that provides a clear understanding for those attending, to enable confidence in recognising risks and signposting to support.

To date over 120 individuals from a range of organisations (and family carers groups) have attended the sessions.

- Age UK Volunteers
- Blind Veterans UK
- Carers first
- St Luke's Hospice - family carers group
- CVSU
- Social prescribers
- Peabody
- Thurrock well homes

- Millbrook Healthcare