

Women in the Fire Service
National Executive Committee - Notes
29 April 2021 at 10.00 via Zoom

Attending: Julie King (Chair), Caroline Anderson (Vice Chair), Alex Johnson (Liaison and Partnerships), Nicola Lown (Regional Support and International), Gina Gray (Executive), Sara Hall (Executive) Miriam Heppell (Co-opted) for items 8.2 and 9, Jenny Nangle (RR North West), Hannah Lodder (RR Wales), Bex Sims (RR East Midlands), Caz Whiteman (RR Yorkshire & Humberside), Serena Benassi (RR London), Jo Dawson (LR Nottinghamshire), Nicole Smy (LR Essex), Deb Davies (LR Hereford and Worcester), Gabi Ahnger (LR Warwickshire), Kasey Grainger (LR Cumbria), Kim McNeil (LR Devon & Somerset), Sue Mallinson (LR Gt Manchester), Paula Lyons (LR Greater Manchester) Peggy Male (LR West Midlands), Nicola Bottomley (LR Gloucestershire), Deborah Brown (LR Northumberland), Amy Hatley (LR Northumberland), Helen Chadwick (LR Staffordshire), Karen Smith, WFS Administration Manager and Nathalie Holden, WFS Marketing and Communications Officer

1. **Apologies:** Dany Cotton, Cheryl Rolph, Sara Slater, Divine Zake, Lynsey McVay, Carley-Jo Rackley, Fleur Wilks, Jenny Nangle, Lisa Howsden, Jan Morris, Felicity Lynch

JK welcomed everyone to the meeting in particular those attending for the first time.

2. **Notes on last meeting -13 January 2021** were agreed as a true record.

3. **Matters arising**

Item 7 - Regional reports – as there were so many ideas and initiatives it was decided to create an excel spreadsheet which could be updated after every meeting to be shared.

Item 8 - MOU/Articles – changes presented at the AGM were actioned and agreed. In addition the fee changes and introduction of a Super supporter – the new membership application will give the option to choose to give an additional voluntary donation.

Item 13 - Commitment for HeforShe – will be discussed later in the meeting.

4. **WFS Gifts and Hospitality** – none were declared.

5. **Chairs Report – JK**

Since our last meeting much has happened and I can't help but feel positive for WFS and for society as a whole. In relation to the pandemic, it certainly feels that we are taking steps forward as we continue to see the number of cases drop and vaccinations increase although we remain ever cautious as we are reminded on a daily basis the human tragedy that this has been and my heart goes out to all those in India now who are suffering on an unimaginable level.

In relation to WFS the most significant thing that has happened is the return to full time work for Karen and Nat having been on furlough and I know I have said on a number of previous occasions but your support, dedication and flexibility through the toughest of times is greatly appreciated and we are delighted to have you back.

This year's international women's day was a fantastic celebration with so much going on across the UK and the world and I know that a number of individuals and services took part in various events – there are simply too many to mention here, but what a heartening experience and I hope we can keep the momentum going.

We have now delivered our third virtual event which is aimed at middle managers, the next one is on the 13th May and the feedback so far has been really encouraging. We are also looking to reintroduce our women's development programme and are about to go out to the market with an invite to tender and we will keep you updated with progress.

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At the end of March, we hosted our first ever virtual AGM with 35 people attending, a new experience for us all but a really positive meeting with many commitments of support coming from the meeting.

Nat will have circulated a PowerPoint and some helpful hints on how you can support WFS through your services and to individuals, which hopefully you found useful, please do get in touch with her if you have any questions.

Finally, I wanted to update you on some new corporate members who have joined us recently; Kent, Merseyside, Northern Ireland, Northumberland and Staffordshire with North Wales joining soon which brings our total membership to 45 which is a great achievement and of course helps future proof this wonderful organisation.

6. Treasurers Report

In the absence of Sara Slater (Treasurer), JK read out the financial position up to March 2021. The balance on the current account as at the end of March was £9,544 and the reserves account £87,839. The forecast to the end of the financial year is a further £4,437 net expenditure which would result in the forecast total bank balance of £92,945.

Nothing significant to report, the new payroll process is working fine and a way forward with Cheryl's departure is taking shape for continuity of managing the finances. Financial year-end is tomorrow so following the month end reconciliation the accounts will be prepared by the external accountant.

7. Regional Reports

Caroline Anderson – 2022 Training and Development event booked for 10-12 June although dependent on the future circumstances and numbers allowed. The Events Management Team have their first meeting scheduled for 5 May.

Alex Johnson – Virtual Positive Action Sessions, following a Facebook message asking for volunteers to discuss delivery of virtual positive action sessions, 20 people attended a meeting offering support and commitment. This will be a 6-week programme with 6 themes. Anyone wishing to help can contact Alex.

Jo Dawson (Nottinghamshire) Has not done loads as out of service on secondment but has spoken with new On Call and wholetime FFs, as well as three transferees about WFS. Also had positive feedback about the WFS Choose to Challenge events. Also commented later that we had rolled out positive action presentation to all staff to address the 'she only got the job because they are female', and believes this has gone down well in my absence.

Kasey Grainger (Cumbria) – recently promoted to Watch Manager. Since last meeting has set up a WFS women's group for ops/non ops and to date has 42 members. Launched on IWD. The uptake was superb and information shared with other services. The group have rough terms of reference but if any other groups could share an example with KG that would be helpful. Hope to get more members to empower other people. Closed group but then opened out. Main focus to

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educate all the service. Also invited Sellafield and BAE systems and is hoping to persuade to become Corporate Membership.

Helen Chadwick (Staffordshire) – Staffordshire have just signed up as Corporate Members. Also hoping to set up network within Staffs/terms of reference starting from scratch and welcome advice and help.

Bex Sims (Derbyshire) – Five recruits passed out/1 silver axe, another course with 2 females. Closed recruitment for January and February. IWD was shared with Yorkshire.

Gina Gray (Hampshire) – not been active for a couple of months. Some ladies in Hants have stepped in and providing new ideas. Some challenges to tackle with recruitment. Looking at menopause policy in Hampshire and sharing information. It would be more beneficial if one policy could be adopted for all to use rather than having several. AJ thought this could be something to consider but other services can't be forced to adopt. JK - People programme – model policies. Try to collate and co-ordinate and JK to take through the people's programme. HMIFRCS. CW - FBU women's section also has policies. GG offered to co-ordinate and put together other policies. If anyone has access to a policy, please share with GG.

Nicola Bottomley (Gloucestershire) - Head of L&D, few cultural issues around women in the FS and BA. HeforShe – campaign looking to join. L&D trying to get people to focus on more vulnerable groups and starting to work. Setting up women's support group, some red tape through county council.

Deborah Brown/Amy Hatley (Northumberland) - Northumberland recently joined as Corporate Member. Both really pleased to be local reps. Ask for EDI review. Lots of enthusiasm.

Debs Davies (Hereford and Worcester) – working hard, Women at HWFire – managed to secure junior officers surcoats achievement which has taken years to pursue. Recruitment, positive action, one silver axe. EDI officer now, open group to all women. Implemented Buddy scheme. IWD received some negative feedback re why is it only for women? Younger Junior officers not confident, have the imposter syndrome feeling. Ran a session with scenario to help. Sara Hall has management committed for the virtual event for middle managers. Also met with Warwickshire – starting own group senior managers board supportive. Would like joint working, also welfare packs – to go on appliances.

Sue Mallinson/Paula Lyons (Greater Manchester joint LR) - Launched Women's network in Greater Manchester and Dany Cotton supported the event – 98 people attend. Persuaded to go to wider audience through council. Paula was previously in Hampshire, and moved to Manchester feeling differently. 20+ service, historical not wanting to get involved but women are changing.

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Hannah Lodder (Wales) – finding it difficult to connect as Wales is such a large area, needs to start again with more people to help support. New E&D officer who hopefully will be able to help.

Nicole Smy (Essex) – recruited Lynsey Gymer to support as LR. Women's Forum had a few relaunches, survey last September to ask on what to focus on and from responses have created an action plan. Several initiatives to work on and identified recruitment as the biggest. Also working with other emergency services, Police and Ambulance. Already held a meeting with Alex supporting.

Caz Whiteman (South Yorkshire) – Held an International Women's Day event with 500 participants attending throughout the day. Uroosa Arshid, UK's first hijab-wearing Firefighter was Inspirational Speaker and Dany Cotton. Planning for women's network and internal staff groups. Also positive action sessions and providing sanitary packs on appliances.

Peggy Male (West Midlands) - ladies' forum welfare and female packs. Recruitment, constantly recruiting, young trainees mixed bag. WFS presentation really helpful to show new recruits. PPE quite a few issues but are looking into these.

Gabi Ahnger (LR Warwickshire) – still trying to get off the ground with Warwickshire and looking at how to support women better. First steps with Facebook group to start conversations. Support is available from Senior Managers. The WFS Choose to Challenge event amazing and positive feedback. Would like to consider taking the idea into Warwickshire promotion process. Sara Hall has been really supportive with some collaboration on training.

Kim McNeil (Devon & Somerset) – Caroline has been working on recruitment. Information provided by NH was really good. Question has been asked on how do people get support from WFS. First route via WFS or via Facebook where lots of people offer support with any issues. Thanks for coaching session. HR is going through a rough time with forthcoming changes. DSFRS have various coaches who offer support, and Women to Work are excellent with free sessions on offer.

Welfare packs – welfare pod designed about 6 years ago, KM invited to attend discussions on setting this up and she was the only female. KM attends the talks for wholetime recruits always mentions WFS regardless of whether there are any women on course.

Long Covid is affecting many staff with fatigue and tiredness. Trying to get fitness levels up is very difficult. KM provides welfare cards weekly giving tips, information of NHS page. Firefighters Charity are putting together a programme for residential and online Coaching to help, with time management skills.

Serena (London) – IWD good turnout. Consider National IWD events with other services sharing the workload. SB unable to do much as having to isolate at home

however is still trying develop the women's group. SB feels there is still some historical issues between WFS and the Women's section with FBU and would welcome some communication to help with this. Buddies are active in LFB now.

Nicola Lown – International rep for WFS. Also Secretary for CTIF and they are holding 30 minute once a month discussion forums in different countries. The most recently held was a discussion on maternity and breast feeding.

NL asked when the new membership fees would begin. KS informed the committee that a new membership system is in progress. All members will be informed as soon as this is complete.

8. WFS Policies

8.1 Awards

JK presented the amended version of the Awards Policy which had been circulated to the committee prior to the meeting. The committee AGREED the policy.

There would be no awards for 2021, with plans to commence in September 2021 with promoting and opening nominations at the beginning of 2022.

8.2 Disciplinary Policy (Members)

Miriam Heppell presented the Disciplinary policy which came about after discussion at a NEC meeting on behaviour. The policy is aimed around members of the NEC and not employees. This includes corporate, individual and NEC members. The policy provides a consistent and fair approach which can consulted if ever a need. The committee AGREED the policy.

9. HeforShe

At the last NEC meeting the committee agreed to look at signing a pledge to HeforShe. The suggestion to include four commitments, publicise and ensure WFS commit to these. To also promote the movement on the website and social media, to improve gender equality. To make contact with the United Nations for PR and collaboration. AJ suggested including the NFCC. The committee AGREED and MH to prepare pledge for the next meeting.

10. Virtual events

The Choose to Challenge virtual events are going well, three already held with the next to be held in May and June. New scenarios needed and more people to help facilitate. Request for any real life scenarios to be forwarded.

Currently working towards plans for a Training and Development Event on 10-12 June 2022. Events Management Team meeting on 5 May. Committee asked if dates can be publicised, this was agreed so services can budget.

11. WFS Annual plan 2021/2022

The Annual Plan for 2021/2022 is in progress.

12. AOB

CA and KS have a zoom meeting with Scotland, who are hoping to hold a virtual event towards the end of the year in collaboration with WFS

Request for a WFS face to face meet up in September – AJ suggested venue in Derbyshire, off junction 28 on M1, details to be confirmed.

SH – asked if WFS could have a Wikipedia page. The procedure is quite completed and a page would need to be created by an external organisation or expert on Wikipedia write ups, can't be written by WFS or associated people.

KMc reminded WFS that Amy Webb's last day at DSFRS was 6 May.

Women's Development programme – notification has gone out requesting tenders for the Women's Development Programme.

NH recently sent an update on Marketing and Communications, if not received contact Nat. The committee are encouraged to promote the signing up to the newsletter and directing people to the jobs board. NH is currently creating a spreadsheet of women's groups to include on the WFS website.

Dates of next meetings:

- 17th September at 10.00 am
- 2nd December at 10.00 am