

Members' Engagement with Equality and Diversity

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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1 Purpose of Report

This report highlights the need to evidence elected Members' engagement with Equality and Diversity (E&D) as an outcome of the E&D Framework Gap analysis and feedback on Shropshire Fire and Rescue Services 2009 submission to the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index.

2 Recommendations

In order to improve Members' engagement in Equality and Diversity and, in doing so, provide evidence of the same, the Committee is asked to agree:

- a) Distribution of an annual Members' Equality and Diversity Engagement survey in order to collate relevant activities on an annual basis, to start in September 2010;
- b) A subsequent annual report to the Authority on Members' Equality and Diversity activities during the preceding year;
- c) To recommend to the Fire Authority that it support Members' attendance at Equality and Diversity training; and
- d) To recommend to the Fire Authority that it support Members' representing the Authority at relevant community events.

3 Background

Members noted the report at their meeting on 27 May 2010 on analysis of gaps in meeting standards within the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework 2009. This identified that among key gaps in the ability of the Service to comply with the criteria for the 'Excellent' level is evidencing the personal leadership and impact of Authority Members on equality and diversity outcomes in local communities.

A similar gap has been identified in feedback from Stonewall on the Service's first submission to their Workplace Equality Index.

The Coalition Government has recently made clear that it does not intend to insist on Fire and Rescue Services' demonstrating adherence to national targets or frameworks for Equality and Diversity, preferring a local approach which can demonstrate responsiveness to local needs. Within this new ethos the need to demonstrate local commitment to good Equality and Diversity practice and community engagement is likely to become even more important in evidencing local accountability.

4 Areas of Engagement and Good Practice

From the outcomes of both of the above analyses, the main areas, in which the Service needs to provide better evidence of engagement and good practice include:

- Evidence of attendance at community cultural diversity and equality events, such as the Cultural Diversity Day in the spring run by Shrewsbury Action against Racism, the Rainbow Film Festival, Telford Pride, and similar events;
- Evidence of engagement in other community events, organisations or initiatives which, while not primarily focused on Equality and Diversity, nevertheless raise related issues. Examples might include membership of Citizen Advice Bureau management boards, support for local disability groups, etc;
- Evidence of Members' engagement with Equality and Diversity issues through their local advice surgeries and correspondence with electors;
- Evidence of membership of any related groups or campaigns, either locally or nationally;
- Evidence of outcomes from Members' engagement in Equality and Diversity work, for example the impact on public awareness of engagement in local dispute resolution, or changes in the attitudes and/or procedures of local agencies as a result of case work;
- Evidence of engagement in other statutory agencies dealing with Equality, Diversity and related issues. Examples might include membership of Local Strategic Partnership groups, local authority committees and sub-committees, etc; and
- Evidence of non-Shropshire Fire Authority training and development in Equality and Diversity and related subjects.

5 Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this Report

6 Legal Comment

The majority of the provisions of The Equality Act 2010 will come into legal force on 1 October 2010. This Act replaces the existing anti-discrimination laws with a single Act of Parliament and brings in new concepts relating to discrimination as well as expanding on the types of behaviours, which might amount to discrimination. It is recommended that the Fire Authority understands its responsibilities under the Act, and that it continues to give emphasis to equality and diversity work, thereby reducing risks of legal challenge. Legal Services are available to provide technical support regarding the new Act if required.”

7 Equality Impact Assessment

A preliminary Equality Impact Assessment has been completed.

8 Appendices

There are no appendices attached to this report.

9 Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report.

Implications of all of the following have been considered and, where they are significant (i.e. marked with an asterisk), the implications are detailed within the report itself.

Business Continuity Planning		Member Involvement	*
Capacity		National Framework	*
Civil Contingencies Act		Operational Assurance	
Efficiency Savings		Public Value	
Environmental		Retained	
Financial		Risk and Insurance	
Fire Control/Fire Link		Staff	
Information Communications and Technology		Strategic Planning	
Freedom of Information / Data Protection / Environmental Information		Equality Impact Assessment	*
Legal	*		

