

# Attainment of Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government

## Report of the Chief Fire Officer

For further information about this report please contact Alan Taylor, Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260225 or Louise McKenzie, Assistant Chief Officer, on 01743 260205

### 1 Purpose of Report:

To notify Human Resources Committee of the Service's recent successful external assessment at Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government and to provide a copy of the draft report resulting from the assessment, together with management comments.

### 2 Recommendations

The Human Resources Committee is asked to note the contents of the report, the draft assessment report (attached at the appendix) and the responses submitted to that report.

### 3 Background

The main aim of the Equality Standard is to improve outcomes in employment and service delivery in the public sector through implementing performance management practices e.g. measurement and monitoring. This aim was given greater emphasis when the Standard was revised in 2006 to address the six equality strands: age, disability, gender, race, religion/belief and sexual orientation and a new requirement for external assessment was introduced.

Under the previous Best Value reporting regime, indicator 2a referred to 'the level of the Equality Standard for Local Government to which the Authority conforms'. Currently levels 1 and 2 of the Standard are achievable by self-assessment. Level 3 is achievable by external assessment following submission of a self-assessment document. Where organisations have achieved Level 3, it is possible to self-assess against Level 4 and then have a further external assessment to achieve Level 5.

The Equality Standard for Local Government (page 27), published in May 2007 defines that to achieve Level 3 of the Standard an authority will have to demonstrate:

- That it has implemented a strategy for participation of designated community, staff and stakeholder groups in setting objectives of employment and service delivery
- That it has set equality objectives across the authority for race, gender and disability for employment, pay and service delivery based on impact assessments and participation strategy
- By March 2009 it has set equality objectives across the authority for sexual orientation, age, religion or belief for employment, pay and service delivery based on impact assessment and participation strategy
- That equality objectives have been translated into action plans with specific targets
- That it is developing information and monitoring systems that allow it to assess progress in achieving targets
- That action on achieving targets has started
- Progress has been verified through self-assessment and scrutiny and has been validated externally through an accredited assessor

#### **4 Results of the External Assessment**

The external assessment took place on 5 August 2008 when two assessors spent one day interviewing staff either individually or in small groups.

The assessors provided initial feedback together with their verdict at the end of the day and as Members are aware, they confirmed that we satisfy and are operating at level 3 of the standard.

The feedback they gave at the time is summarised below and a draft of the full report subsequently provided to us in October 2008 is attached for members' information.

During their feedback session the assessors stated that:

- They are satisfied that we are at level 3 and doing well. They did not identify any gaps in any areas or aspects of concern.
- We have good engagement, we are well thought of with our partners and regionally. Everyone interviewed well and represented the service well.
- They wanted to give us some preliminary comments on some developmental areas, and stressed these were for further development and not ones that we were not undertaking already, these are as follows:

- a) Already doing lots of consultation, engagement and scrutiny and this is working well, but could take this up a notch, particularly the scrutiny aspect, they also referred to the new framework for public sector (LAAs)
- b) Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs). It is good that we have been reviewing the process and making improvements and this will bear the fruit in the future. It is still process driven and they would like to see more outcome based targets
- c) Involvement and skills of Members. We are doing work here, but a specific member development programme plan around Equality and Diversity was suggested
- d) Training. We have good processes about raising awareness the next step is to focus more on behaviours
- e) Looking at how risk assessment and EQIAs fit together and work towards integrating these
- f) Employment targets. We are running 2 recruitment schemes (wholetime and retained), it would be good to write up the rationale for these and give to Communities and Local Government, why we have local targets and how we achieve these
- g) Monitoring and integration in terms of service delivery. We should focus more on how we think we are doing in this area

## **5 Feedback report**

In October 2008 we received a draft feedback report from the assessment team to comment on. The annotated report subsequently returned to the assessors is attached to this report for Members reference and information. We are now awaiting their response and the publication of the final report.

## **6 Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications to this report. The majority of the costs of the external assessment will be met by funding attained through the regional Capacity Building Funding Bid to support Services working towards Level 4 (or equivalent) of the standard by 31 March 2009.

## **7 Legal Comment**

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

## 8 Equality Impact Assessment

This report provides information about the result of an assessment process. An Equality Impact Assessment is therefore not required.

## 9 Appendices

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service Equality Mark Level 3 Assessment and Validation Report, October 2008

## 10 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.

Balanced Score Card		Integrated Risk Management Planning	
Business Continuity Planning		Legal	*
Capacity	*	Member Involvement	
Civil Contingencies Act		National Framework	
Comprehensive Performance Assessment		Operational Assurance	
Efficiency Savings		Retained	
Environmental		Risk and Insurance	
Financial	*	Staff	*
Fire Control/Fire Link		Strategic Planning	
Information Communications and Technology		West Midlands Regional Management Board	
Freedom of Information / Data Protection / Environmental Information		Equality Impact Assessment	*

# Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service

## Equality Mark Level 3

### Assessment and Validation Report

#### Final Report

**October 2008**

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## **1. Introduction**

The following report is based on the findings of an assessment and validation carried out for the Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service (SFRS) to examine its claim to have achieved Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government (BVPI 2a). The assessors concluded that Level 3 has been achieved and the Service has put in place systems that can support continuing improvement in the development of equality management.

The report has two purposes. The first is to provide a formal assessment against the elements of Level 3 of ESLG. The report, therefore, sets out the methodology used in the assessment and presents the findings of the assessors in relation to the elements of Level 3 of the Equality Standard. The second is to provide qualitative comments and recommendations; to provide critical support for future improvement in equality policy and practice and the maintenance of a well established equality improvement process. The report provides a brief discussion of the assessment methodology followed by a review of Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service using the documentary review of corporate policies, reports and recent inspections and assessments. Section 4 comments on Level 1 and Level 2 achievement, Section 5 contains the formal assessment for Level 3 and Section 6 identifies some of the areas for review and improvement at Level 3 in order to consolidate achievements at this level and for the continuation of equality improvement.

At the time of this assessment and report a number of changes and revisions were underway, and are continuing in a number of areas of relevance to the Fire and Rescue Services in England. These include a review of the Equality Standard for Local Government by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), and their proposal to introduce a further Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) which will be administered through the IDeA; and the introduction of the National Strategy for Equality and Diversity for the

Fire and Rescue Services and changes outlined to the National Framework for the Fire and Rescue Services that is closely aligned to the Equality Standard for Local Government. Where it is relevant to do so, the assessors have commented on the implications of the changes and the proposed changes in the context of this assessment. The IDeA has not yet concluded the establishment of the EFLG and public authorities are continuing to work with the Equality Standard. Organisations will have the option to 'migrate' Equality Standard assessments that have resulted in the achievement of an Equality Mark award to the EFLG if they so wish.

## **2. Methodology**

The formal level 3 assessment consisted of three interrelated parts:

- A critical examination of the SFRS equality self-assessment and a sampling from a portfolio of documents supplied by SFRS
- Interviews with staff, senior officers and external partners to 'test' the self assessment, corporately and by individual department
- Examination of documentary evidence for consistency with self-assessment and interview findings

Conclusions about the level reached are arrived at through qualitative examination of findings from all three parts of the assessment.

### **2.1 Achieving Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government**

To achieve Level 3 of ESLG, SFRS has to show that each business/planning unit within the Service has developed equality service objectives and set out targets and related performance indicators. SFRS will also have reviewed its employment/human resource, pay and 'service delivery' practices. This will enable a SFRS to set realistic employment and (equal) pay targets.

Objectives and targets should be based on robust equality impact assessments. Equality impact assessments should be shaped by good quality



data collection and analysis, stakeholder input and the results of existing or specifically commissioned consultation.

SFRS should show that it has developed the capacity consistently to monitor action taken to achieve equality objectives and targets. It should be able to demonstrate also that it has undertaken sufficient consultation both internally and externally to be able to understand the needs of all its stakeholder groups. Finally SFRS should be able to show that equality improvement action (action to achieve targets) has actually started.

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## 2.2 Formal Assessment at Level 3

A numerical rating system is used in the formal assessment to support findings for each element of Level 3 of the Equality Standard. The scoring system is straightforward and is consistent with the approach taken by the Audit Commission in Best Value Reviews and the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)<sup>1</sup>. Scores are 4,3,2,1 with 4 being highest and 1 being lowest. The scores summarise a qualitative judgement of the SFRS performance in relation to that element. To achieve Level 3 an organisation should get an average score of 3 with no elements scored at 1 or 0.

SFRS has met this criterion. The scores assigned have taken into account the contents of the self-assessment document, documentary evidence and results of interviews with managers and stakeholders. The quantitative part of the assessment assigns an organisational wide score to each of the Level 3 elements.

Good performance	= 4
Strengths outweigh weaknesses	= 3
Weaknesses outweigh strengths	= 2
Poor	= 1

<sup>1</sup> The Best Value and CPA framework has now been revised. Best Value Performance Indicators have been replaced by National Performance Indicators and a new system of Comprehensive Area Assessments has been introduced. The framework and its implementation are still under consultation.

No evidence for performance = 0

### **3. Context**

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) is one of the smallest services, set within the County of Shropshire one of England's largest inland counties. SFRS provides safety services for the local authority areas of Shropshire County Council and the Telford and Wrekin unitary authority, a mixture of almost half and half rural and urban areas (55% Urban and 45% rural). The area's population contains a higher than average retired population mostly established within Shropshire County and there are falling rates for children aged 5 and under. The Black and Minority Ethnic groups account for 1.22% of the whole for the county and over 5% for Telford and Wrekin<sup>2</sup>. The largest ethnic groups are from Asian backgrounds, with the majority living in Telford or Wellington. In recent times there has been an influx of newer communities into the county from Eastern Europe. Overall the population levels for Shropshire have grown much faster than regional and national averages. Shropshire has a low wage economy with over 5% of the population working in agricultural industries<sup>3</sup>. Telford has a manufacturing employment base, and also has some of the more significant areas of deprivation with unemployment rates for Telford and Wrekin shown to be higher than the County and Shropshire averages.

#### **3.1 Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service**

The Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority was initially established in 1998, following a local government re-organisation. SFRS has 23 fire stations. Of these 19 are staffed solely by retained fire personnel, 1 by whole time staff and the remaining 3 by both retained and whole time staff. SFRS headquarters are based in Shrewsbury. The Service responds to incidents across the whole county area. The Service protects the public through fire prevention, protection emergency response to incidents such as fires, road traffic accidents and other accidents. In its preventative role the Service

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<sup>2</sup> Based on 1991 Census projections

<sup>3</sup> Based on 1991 Census data

provides home fire safety checks, educational and diversional services for young people, and contributes to wider community safety through local and regional partnerships. The Service has led on many innovative initiatives in fulfillment of its wider community role, and of particular note are the additional employment of bilingual community fire safety advocates and the purchase of outreach vehicles, a migrant workers campaign specifically targeting newer migrant communities, particularly from Eastern European EU member states, which has successfully attracted European Funding enabling the service to learn from exchange visits to Polish Fire Services. The service has made resources available to engage with vulnerable and at risk groups through locally funded and supported projects – again these are too numerous to mention but some examples include, engaging with the Stop Watch Theatre Company to provide targeted theatre productions for year 8 school children on the dangers associated with arson and other preventable incidents; training specialist teams to deal with the higher risk of flooding in the area and working in partnership with other organisations in the area to improve road safety.

**Comment [N1]:** This statement is not factual, as funding not linked to migrant communities, the Exchange programme is separate European funding. Can you reword.

The service is led by a Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, The Assistant Chief Officer and the Assistant Chief Fire Officer. The management structure of SFRS is as follows:

**Comment [N2]:** A large part of the organizational structure is missing and so doesn't reflect whole service – we have inserted for you

- Chief Fire Officer:
- Deputy Chief Fire Officer
- Principal Accountant
- Corporate Services Manager
- Treasurer

- Deputy Chief Fire Officer:
- Head of Fire Prevention
- Head of District Performance
- Head of Convergence
- Head of Operational Response

Assistant Chief Officer:

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Human Resources Manager (HR and Equality & Diversity functions)  
 Development Manager (includes corporate training and development function)  
 Training Manager (included Deputy Training Manager and Driving/Training Instructors)

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- Assistant Chief Fire Officer:
- Information, Communication and Technology Manager
- Programme Manager
- Head of Risk Management
  
- Head of Resources:
- Equipment Contracts Manager
- Contracts Manager
- Fleet Contracts Manager
- Facilities and Procurement Officer

The Service works to five Strategic Aims which are underpinned by twenty corporate objectives. Strategic aim 5 and Corporate Objectives 18, 19 and 20 sets out commitment to equality and diversity:

Strategic Aim (5)	Corporate Objectives (18,19,20)
<b>Provide a Service committed to the highest levels of Equality and Diversity</b>	Provide and promote an equitable service to the communities of Shropshire and other stakeholders
	Provide a just and dignified place of work for all employees, Members and visitors
	Recruit promote and retain a workforce representative of the community that we serve

### Approach to Equality Management

SFRS has worked with the Equality Standard for Local Government for many years as a means of embedding equality throughout the service. In addition

the Service has a history of striving to increase the representation of under-represented groups and this has resulted in the Service being able to analyse and prioritise what is possible. For example, recently the Service has recognised that in order to increase the numbers of female fire fighters that this would be achieved by increasing the opportunity for women to apply for roles into the Retained Duty Staff System (RDS). The service has carried out research to in order to understand the issues for female recruitment, and has set itself an ambitious target of 30% female recruitment to the RDS.

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The commitment to achieving level 3 is made through the Services' Corporate Plan and is regarded as an important improvement priority, to meet the Services' strategic aim of 'providing a service committed to the highest level of Equality and Diversity'. The corporate plan is available as a wall mounted poster and appears on stations and departments. Staff are reminded of the commitments made and are encouraged work accordingly.

The Service plays a lead role in regional projects and partnerships and is keen to share good practice.

The Service has put in place a range of structures for enabling the embedding of equalities into corporate management and service delivery planning. The Service has in place an equality impact assessment process that covers seven equality areas (gender, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief and carers). The Service has put considerable resources into ensuring that staff have been trained to carry out impact assessments. Each directorate is required to include a statement on the completion of impact assessments in their prioritisation plans.

A steering group made up of directorate and departmental representatives, supported by the Equality and Diversity Officer, provides the leadership and corporate steer for the organisation. This group helps to identify which actions arising from completed impact assessments should be prioritised and the resource implications before these are included in the Equality Action Plan. This process enables the Service to engage with equality planning at a

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number of levels, and involves officers from across the Service in strategic planning and prioritising. It also helps the service to understand where there are gaps, and these are addressed.

The Service has in place three statutory equality schemes for Race, Gender and Disability. All Fire and Rescue Services are required to produce an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) and the Service uses the IRMP to inform its responses, strategic and service specific to address risks to vulnerable and 'at risk' groups. This provides the Service with a good understanding of the communities and groups in its area of service. There are some gaps in knowledge and this is commented on further in this report particularly in relation to community engagement and impact assessment. A more detailed look at the IRMP is also set out below.

#### Integrated Risk Management and Equality Outcomes

The Fire and Rescue Services Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008 – 2018, published in May 2008, sets out a ten year plan for improving equality and diversity in the Services'.

The strategy sets out five priority areas that are directly linked to the Equality Standard for Local Government, working across the five levels:

- Leadership and promoting Inclusion
- Accountability
- Effective Service Delivery and Community Engagement
- Employment and Training
- Evaluation and Sharing Good Practice

As well, there are a number of specific areas identified within the strategy document that are linked directly to the National Framework for Fire and Rescue Authorities, these are:

Ensure that their **Integrated Risk Management Plans** and all other plans, policies, practices and procedures are effectively equality impact assessed and appropriate action is taken to remove or mitigate any adverse impact

Produce, and at least annually review, an action plan for implementation of the Strategy, and report to the Members of the Fire and Rescue Authority on progress

Carry out and record individual performance reviews annually for each member of staff which include an assessment of performance against agreed annual objectives, including equality and diversity objectives

Provide annually to Department for Communities and Local Government evidence of progress on equality and diversity for publication in the Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Report including:

- statistical information on recruitment, progression and retention of employees across all diversity strands, and
- qualitative information on policies, procedures, practices and processes which support equality and diversity as evidence of progress made

This review is important to consider from a number of angles. Firstly the National Fire and Rescue Services Equality and Diversity Strategy makes it clear that the Audit Commission will assess Fire and Rescue Authorities performance in implementing the requirements of the strategy through the Fire and Rescue Service Performance Assessment Framework. Scores within Direction of Travel statements for equality and diversity will be additionally linked to progress against the Equality Standard, and the indications are that Fire Authorities/Services will not be assessed as having

*'improved strongly'* if they have not reached (at least) level 3 of the Equality Standard.

This is confirmed in the Audit Commissions performance Assessment Guide 2008, where it states in respect of Key Lines of Enquiry, that for a fire and rescue authority / service to be improving strongly:

*'..The FRA should have improved its Equality Standards level since fire CPA. If the FRA is not scoring at "3" for the Equality Standards then you should question attainment at this level'<sup>4</sup>.*

The assessors view is that Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service has a well developed approach to IRMP. The Service has already taken the opportunity to seek to ensure that the aims of the Equality Strategy are embedded in its own policies, plans and targets. As part of its continuing self assessment, there is scope for the Service to further undertake a review of its current activities and approach to equality and diversity and its activities concerning its IRMP. Although there is good evidence to show that the Service is utilising a range of information to inform priorities and targets, there are currently two simultaneous sets of activities being carried out – these are the EIAs and the IRMP. The observation of the assessors is that activities relating to vulnerable groups and those at high risk of harm are well integrated within the IRMP process, as this is its primary function. A clear process groups, based on a detailed local analysis, is in place for assessing the likely impact of procedures on these. However, although there is an acknowledgement of the available data from the IRMP and the EIAs – there is not the detailed cross referencing between the two systems, which could make for a more efficient and better use of resources. The impact assessments do not appear to effectively inform the IRMP, and neither is the information/assessment carried out within the IRMP process integrated effectively into the impact assessment processes, or indeed the three equality schemes. The critical observation made here is that whereas the priorities developed within the IRMP are very

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<sup>4</sup> Para; 25, Page 14



clearly service and outcome focused; the majority of the actions within the equality schemes are those that are process oriented in nature.

A further observation of risk management strategies made by the assessors, concerns carrying out detailed equality impact assessments on aspects of the strategic responses to safety and preventative measures. For example, we would recommend that the Service carries out an impact assessment on their Home Fire Safety programme. The programme aims to target interventions such as fitting of fire alarms and carrying out fire safety checks to certain groups. In carrying out a full and detailed impact assessment of such a programme, the Service should ensure that it makes use of the full range of data available about all of the communities in its locality. Without this detailed analysis the Service cannot be sure that it is targeting interventions at those most at need, as opposed to those identified as vulnerable groups to be targeted.

**Comment [N3]:** Please note that this has already been completed and was sent with the evidence, please can you review this paragraph.

In addressing these issues, the Service will be better placed to more evenly address the six equality strands and identify the needs of the widest range of (equality) groups within the Shropshire region, and base interventions on 'evidence' as well as 'perceived' risks. Both of these elements are important in managing risk and targeting resources.

Aligned to this area of development is the approach that has been developed by SFRS for using their performance management systems to track responses to performance targets and monitor outcomes. This is a sophisticated approach to performance management and enables managers to have an 'at a glance' performance management system in place into which information can be regularly fed and updated. This allows SFRS to monitor performance centrally and cohesively. This should provide an important mechanism for tracking equality achievements over time, and support a more detailed self-assessment. In developing the performance management framework, all of the above issues raised, need to be observed in relation to developing and maintaining such a centralised performance system to ensure that equality targets are, a) properly mainstreamed and b) are developed from

output/process driven targets to ones that are outcome orientated and can be tracked in terms of actual difference made in relation to priority and range of equality groups.

**Comment [N4]:** Our performance management process is mainstreamed, could you provide a clarity on what you require here

### 3.2 External Reports

The last Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) was carried out by the Audit Commission of Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority (FA) in 2005. This assessment judged the overall performance of the FA to be 'Good'. In Audit Commission Direction of Travel reports 2007, Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service was reported to be performing well in priority areas and in relation to the national framework – and was held up as an example of good practice, by the Audit Commission, as:

*'consistently one of the best performing services with regard to the numbers of injuries, deaths, calls to false alarms and malicious fires'*

A number of areas of good practice were cited as part of this by the Audit Commission, including, reducing the risk of fire in rural areas of Shropshire, 'Keep Warm, Keep Well' programme, and community safety in rural areas. However of equality progress the Audit Commission commented:

*'Equality and diversity in the service matters.... (however)... the service needs to reflect the communities it serves and draw skills from all sections of the community – not just traditionally attracted to working for it. .... Overall the fire service is making limited progress in improving equality and diversity, it currently performs poorly and there is more work still to be done'.*

Of community engagement, the Audit Commission commented:

*'The fire service has a high level of public respect (and) ... is meeting people who have not traditionally engaged with the service. (However) The service needs to be able to interact well with all groups in its community if it is to be effective in terms of reduced incidents and improved safety. The speed of*

*change in local communities means that the service has to find new ways of engaging particularly with those who are at a greater risk of fires'*

These comments reflect our findings. However, we are also able to observe the progress that the Service has made in striving to change these and improve equality outcomes – in employment and service delivery. The self-assessment undertaken by the service, together with the challenges posed by this assessment have helped to identify areas for improvement, and, importantly have shown where strides have been made in relation to a clearer focus on embedding equality organisationally.

The Service is moving strongly in the right direction, and the assessors would endorse the Audit Commissions view of a high level of commitment to equality improvement and outcomes at every level of the organisation, backed up by clear direction and leadership.

The remainder of this report sets out the achievements made against the various levels and cross cutting areas of the Equality Standard for Local Government. Each of these areas is individually analysed and scored. A summary of the areas for review and improvement are included after each analysis. A further section providing overarching observations and recommendations is also provided

#### **4. Achievements at levels 1 and 2**

##### **4.1 Formal assessment for level 1**

During the level 3 formal assessment and validation Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service demonstrated that it had met the criteria for level 1 achievement. It had committed to a comprehensive equality policy and was committed to achieving equality in race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age and religion or belief through:

- a commitment to improving equality practice at both corporate and departmental level

- earmarking specific resources for improving equality practice
- commitment to complying with all relevant legislation
- equality action planning and equality target setting within all departments and service areas
- involvement of stakeholders
- a commitment to a fair equal pay and employment policy
- carrying out impact assessments
- progress monitoring
- audit and scrutiny

#### **4.2 Formal assessment for level 2**

During the level 3 assessment and validation Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service demonstrated that it had met the criteria for level 2. The Service demonstrated:

- that it has developed systems for self-assessment, scrutiny and audit as a basis for continuous improvement
- that it has engaged in equality impact assessments
- that it has undertaken a self assessment across the Service
- that it has engaged in consultation with designated community, staff and stakeholder groups
- that it has engaged in the development of information and monitoring systems
- that it has engaged in an equality action planning process for employment, pay and service delivery

### **5. Formal assessment for level 3**

#### **5.1 Evidence**

For achievement of level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government ('the standard') Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service is required to have met the following criteria:

- that it has implemented a strategy for the participation of designated community, staff and stakeholder groups in setting objectives of employment and service delivery
- that it has set equality objectives (across the service) for employment, pay and service delivery based on impact assessments and consultation
- that equality objectives have been translated into action plans with specific targets
- that it has developed information and monitoring systems that allow it to assess progress in achieving targets
- that action on achieving targets has started

These general activities and developments translate into the four substantive areas of the standard:

- Leadership and Corporate Commitment
- Community Engagement and Accountability
- Service Delivery and Customer Care
- Employment and Training

Interviews undertaken with managers and key staff demonstrated a high level of awareness of equality and diversity and of the Equality Standard.

Where specific examples of good practice are referenced in the report this simply reflects the areas sampled for documentary review and staff interview. It is not meant to imply that good practice does not exist in other parts of the Service.

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service provided a clearly set out Self-Assessment document together with a range of supporting documents. Additional information was provided by managers and other staff during the on-site visit and interviews.

## 1 Leadership and Corporate Commitment

**a) Ensure consistency of Corporate Equality Scheme with statutory equality schemes**

**b) Develop a system and timetable for reporting the results of impact assessments**

### **SFRS can demonstrate that:**

- the Service has in place a Corporate Equality Action Plan and has developed equality schemes for Race, Gender and Disability. These are consistent with statutory requirements
- there is strong and consistent leadership and support from the Service to equality improvements. The Service has worked with the Equality Standards' framework for a number of years as means of progressing equality and diversity objectives and service planning throughout the fire Service and that this commitment has been backed up by practical support and resources. The Chair of the Fire Authority and the Chief Fire Officer are the Services' equality champions along with a specific member champion for Equality and Diversity.
- the commitment is well communicated throughout the organisation and staff interviewed showed a high level of awareness and commitment to the organisational aims and objectives for equality and service improvements, particularly in relation to vulnerable groups
- high level planning and policy documents have an explicit reference to the Equality Standard and have established equality objectives
- there is a well developed approach to risk assessment
- actively participates and is a member of a range of partnerships concerned with equality improvement for specific groups
- the Service is working with other regional Fire Services towards level 4 of the Equality Standard
- each department has a Equality Action Plan in place

- the Corporate Equality Action Plan lists the priorities for each equality strand, prioritises a three year programme for carrying out impact assessments; and sets out where the actions will be reported on

### Areas for improvement and review

- Equality schemes are weak on service based targets and these should be reviewed
- Equality impact assessments should be regularly carried out on Integrated Risk Management Plans, as per the National Fire Equality and Diversity Strategy

**Comment [N5]:** Please note that Impact Assessments have been completed on our IRMP

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- a) Ensure that all departments and service areas set targets based on equality objectives devised through completed impact assessments and participation of designated community, staff and stakeholder groups
- b) Equality objectives and targets for sexual orientation, age, religion and belief to be set by March 2009
- c) Establish corporate guidelines for information gathering and equality monitoring

#### SFRS can demonstrate

- it has developed materials – including guidance and training for understanding and working with the Equality Standard, carrying out (equality) impact assessments, and for self-assessment
- key staff engaged with impact assessment have been provided with specific training, and refresher training as appropriate
- all departments are required to carry out impact assessments as routine
- consultation is carried out with stakeholders and partners

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- the Service is engaged in consultation and partnership activities with a range of organisations (statutory, community and voluntary)
- it has developed systems for data collection, consultation and analysis in line with the IRMP data collection and management requirements
- has reviewed and refined its guidelines and impact assessment formats as appropriate, after consultation and staff feedback
- managers have a clear view of what they should be developing and feel supported with this
- the Equality Standard features as a clear improvement target within corporate plans
- the Service has incorporated six equality strands into their equality action plans and impact assessment framework (gender, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief)

#### Areas for improvement and review

- include training on equality impact assessments, incorporating aspects of 'evidence based' equality objectives/targets for service delivery, as well as the more general approach to 'adverse impact'
- greater involvement of stakeholders is required in undertaking impact assessment and arriving at equality objectives
- although the service works to the six equality strands featured in the Standard framework, improvements are needed to address gaps in setting clear objectives and targets based on impact assessment
- other areas of the Service focus on 'vulnerable groups' which, as already mentioned above, may lead to gaps in service or policy provision targeted evenly across the equality strands. This should be addressed as a priority

**Comment [N6]:** Can you provide clarity on this point, vulnerable groups include those made vulnerable by whatever means and so is more inclusive than the equality strands.

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**Ensure that all departments and service areas set targets based on equality objectives devised through completed impact assessments and participation of designated community, staff and stakeholder groups**

**SFRS can demonstrate**

- it has played a leading role in working in partnerships with other public agencies and forums
- it has demonstrated a good working relationships with a range of community organisations, and is well regarded by such organisations.
- it has actively engaged with a range of stakeholders including those representing Disabled, LGBT, Ethnic Minority and youth groups consistently
- as well as local partnerships, the Service has played a key role in developing and learning from Fire Services in other European cities
- It has a well established reputation for leading on aspects of Community Safety and Safety initiatives for rural communities
- It can demonstrate working with partners to set local and regional targets through the Strategic Partnerships and CDRPs'

**Areas for improvement and review**

- create joint approaches to strengthen existing and support new initiatives with new and under-represented groups
- effectively engage and use information relating a range of stakeholders and partners to inform and develop the equality impact assessment process
- consider planned equality impact assessments on home safety and other safety and preventative programmes to support improved targeting of groups at greatest risk of needs
- share good practice arising out of these with other fire services/authorities across the region

**Comment [N7]:** As per previous comment – already completed

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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**Establish mechanisms for ensuring that equality targets are delivered by contractors through contract management**

**SFRS can demonstrate**

- that a Procurement and Asset Management Strategy in place with specific reference to equality and diversity requirements; and Ethical Purchasing policy is also in place as is a Supplier Approval Policy
- staff are issued with a Procurement Handbook
- a member champion for Procurement has been appointed with responsibility for equality and sustainability issues related to procurement
- external contracts are subject to the service’s procurement procedures and contract policies, and a ‘risk evaluation’ is carried out on all service contracts
- external contractors are required to demonstrate that they have an equality policy in place

**Areas for improvement and review**

- consider and carry out and (equality) impact assess procurement strategies and functions and consider applying this in particular to those areas that are outside of Firebuy regime
- regularly monitor and assess the effectiveness of the risk assessment for service contracts

**Comment [N8]:** Please note that a full impact assessment is currently being completed on our procurement processes

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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**Ensure completion of equality action plans at departmental and service level incorporating performance indicators**

### **SFRS can demonstrate**

- directorate plans are required to have attached schedules detailing the equality impact assessments and improvement priorities, and Equality schemes actions
- the equality steering group is involved in supporting and prioritising equality targets
- all departments are engaged in impact assessment activity and actions are set out within the three equality schemes and the equality plans
- there is engagement in the self-assessment process at departmental as well as corporate level. The self-assessment process has identified strengths and weaknesses

### **Areas for improvement and review**

- consider a review of self-assessment through challenge with stakeholder groups
- as already mentioned above, the Service should consider a review of the targets and outcomes drawn through the IRMP as against those arrived at through the equality impact assessment process. At present the targets and actions that are contained in the equality schemes are largely process outputs. We would expect to see these being refined and developing over time.

Should there be a mark after this section, as it appears to be missing?

**Adopt where appropriate national targets/performance indicators as prescribed by Government departments or by the Audit Commission**

### **SFRS can demonstrate**

- that it has adopted national targets where appropriate
- that it is following the Fire Authority National Service Framework

- national performance indicators are being used to measure progress
- approach to IRMP is in line with national guidance

**Areas for review and improvement**

- that the Service takes account of and incorporates the National Equality Strategy for the Fire Service as outlined in the introductory sections above

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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**Comment [N9]:** At the time of writing our self assessment report we were still waiting for clarification on some of the targets held within the strategy from the CLG, the action plan had been taken to one of our Committees

**Comment [N10]:** We would like to challenge this score

**Implement systems for reviewing progress and revising the Corporate Equality Scheme and departmental action plans**

**SFRS can demonstrate**

- it has review processes in place for the statutory equality schemes and departmental action plans (part of Corporate Equality Action Plan and have ensured that it is included in the Business Planning Process.

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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**Comment [N11]:** Please not that it looks like the end of this sentence has not been completed.

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**Comment [N12]:** As there are no improvement areas can you clarify why we have only scored a 3

**a) Members and senior officers endorse action plans as appropriate (with analysis by department)**

**b) Link action planning to performance management and Best Value processes**

**SFRS can demonstrate**

- senior management is actively involved in the development and support of equality action planning
- interviews with senior managers and Members and by documentary evidence indicated that support for equality improvement work is both well-informed and actively pursued

- the Chief Fire Officer and senior officers consistently communicate clear messages for driving improvements through mainstreaming equality and consideration for community groups, vulnerable and at risk groups
- the Equality and Diversity lead officer has provided effective management of the equality and diversity developments and the organisational approach to managing and working with the Equality Standard
- the involvement of the equality steering group in supporting prioritisation of equality objectives and targets is a strength
- a performance management framework is being embedded that will enable the organisation to track progress against equality targets

**Area for review and improvement**

- to develop Members’ ability to influence strategic decisions around equalities, and to understand the role of equality improvement in service improvement
- regularly review training and development needs of those charged with responsibility for driving the equality agenda – to include linking equality impact assessments to risk assessment, strategic programmes and equality groups
- outcomes from the actions need to be fed back internally and externally, both for learning and to contribute to the next round of action planning
- ensure performance management framework takes account of equality and diversity developments and is adapted accordingly
- ensure performance management system is able to track outcomes related to service improvements as well as process (quantitative) outcomes

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>4</b>
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**Action on achieving targets has started, and SFRS is:**

**SFRS can demonstrate**

- It has developed strong systems that are in place to progress equality improvement, including corporate steering group, impact assessment and self-assessment format
- It is developing a performance management process that tracks performance targets across all departments, corporate and service areas
- It has carried out regular self-assessment and scrutiny
- Equality objectives and targets are set out within separate equality action plans as well as the equality schemes
- Risks assessments are carried out for vulnerable groups and targets set accordingly

**Areas for improvement and review**

- equality impact assessments should be drawing out where gaps in data in relation to target groups/hard to reach groups/six equality strands exist. This should be used to inform risk assessment and set targets for safety and prevention programmes
- areas of good practice from IRMP and the safety/prevention programmes should also be utilised across the organisation to inform wider equality objectives and target setting

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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2. Community Engagement and Accountability

- a) Develop a strategy for all designated community, staff and stakeholder groups to participate in the development of equality objectives, service design and employment practice**
- b) Make public all service level and employment objectives and targets for consultation and scrutiny**
- c) Make all service level and employment objectives and targets available for consultation and scrutiny**

#### **SFRS can demonstrate**

- it has ensured that information relating to equality objectives is made widely available
- it uses a range of formats to communicate with staff, stakeholders and partners
- Community Safety 'Prevention' Media Strategy has been developed (2008-2011) and this aims to get across messages about the Services' corporate aims, objectives and ambitions, as well as messages about safety under the themes of 'Keeping Shropshire Safe'
- it has an internal scrutiny system in place, led by the corporate equalities steering group
- partner organisations are aware of the Services' equality and diversity targets and are engaged in scrutiny activities
- has adopted methods for communicating with 'newer' communities from Eastern Europe
- have engaged a bilingual Community Fire Support Advocate

#### **Areas for improvement and review**

##### **SFRS can demonstrate**

- the scrutiny role of members should be further strengthened to support performance management and the development of service targets

**Comment [N13]:** This line needs deleting

- particular focus should be given to communicating with external stakeholders from groups that are 'hard-to-reach' e.g. isolated communities such as religious minorities (building on the work already being established through the bilingual Community Fire Safety Advocate)

**Comment [N14]:** There are a host of other activities taking place throughout the organization that connect to our hard to reach groups, the bilingual worker is not the only person that does this, if you require more information on this please let us know, for example with our vulnerable persons officers, work undertaken locally on stations and watches, through equalities groups, specific projects. You may wish to review this paragraph in light of this.

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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### **Make provision of language services appropriate to designated consultation and scrutiny groups**

#### **SFRS can demonstrate**

- provides information in a range of formats and languages as appropriate, and has introduced a 'pay as you go' Language Line facility
- have appointed a bilingual Community Fire Safety Advocate for provided targeted support to vulnerable/at risk groups in Wellington
- has worked in partnership with Sensory Impairment Teams, and the Fire Prevention Team works specifically to target learning disabled groups, for example through the providing pictorial information; and that it has appropriate language provision in place during consultation, Home Safety checks and other projects
- Community Safety have provided information to employers with migrant workers (considered at high risk)

#### **Areas for improvement and review**

- the Service should review through monitoring and evaluation how well its language support mechanisms are meeting the needs of its dispersed minority communities and service users



- the Service should consider the range of language support provided in areas other than Fire Safety
- evaluate the service provided by the bilingual Community Fire Safety Advocate and use results to inform setting equality objectives based on good practice methodology
- evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives such as the Information Kiosk (partnership project) for impact on key equality groups and priority groups

**Comment [N15]:** We have already considered this and in line with government direction we must also take into consideration value for money.

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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**Consultation is systematically built into equality impact assessment, self-assessment and the equality planning process**

**SFRS can demonstrate**

- consultation is built into the development of the equality schemes
- it has a wide degree of general engagement with diverse communities
- regularly carries out consultation with staff, including changes to employment terms and conditions
- consistently works with a range of partners to gain access to targeted groups, for example those at risk of drug or alcohol abuse
- partner organisations and stakeholder groups, feel consulted appropriately about particular initiatives of interest (similar views also expressed during interviews)
- the Service continuously strives to improve consultation and engagement with groups, stakeholders and changing communities

**Areas for improvement and review**

- enhancement of the equality impact assessment process should in turn provide more targeted areas for consultation, and consultation should be more systematically built into these processes

- Refer also to comments made elsewhere in this report about distinctions between ‘vulnerable/at risk groups, and more general equality stakeholder groups, as these comments and observation also apply to this section

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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### **Involve designated community, staff and stakeholder groups with scrutiny procedures**

#### **SFRS can demonstrate**

- that it takes a lead at a regional as well as a local level in supporting the development of Local Area Agreement targets, and in community planning
- the Corporate Equality Steering group, is consulted on and feeds into the strategic planning processes; setting targets and identifying resources
- Directorates are involved in a range of activities designed to gauge community and stakeholder views

#### **Areas for improvement and review**

- Ensure the involvement of external stakeholders in the scrutiny of impact assessments and service plans as this is currently an area of weaknesses
- Ensure that consultation and scrutiny activities are consistent across all equality strands and across all Directorates
- Monitor and evaluation the results of consultations to inform decision making at a strategic level

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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## Consultation on equality to be linked with the continuing development of community strategies

### SFRS can demonstrate

- it works closely with regional partnerships in the development of regional priorities
- Community Safety Directorate has a focus on community cohesion through its key outcome indicator of 'A Cohesive Shropshire'
- SFRS is a member of the Local Strategic Partnership, and operational officers meet regularly with officers from other organisations including the Police and Ambulance Service in order to share and maintain local knowledge and understand local needs

No areas for improvement have been identified; please provide information why a score of 4 has not been given.

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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**Comment [N16]:** Challenging as per comment above

## Publicise how, when and where actions on targets will start

### SFRS can demonstrate

- It has in place a well-structured equality action planning structure with defined officer responsibilities
- It has a clearly laid out self-assessment document
- equality improvement action is embedded in the risk assessment and operational methods of the Service
- actions are specified in the equality schemes and these are well publicized
- the Corporate Plan is prominently placed within the organisation and provides a clear view of the targets to be achieved – including actions against the Equality Standard

## Areas for review and improvement

- The Service could do more to make information about the nature of its equality improvement work explicit within the IRMP planning process
- the Service could collate and distribute reports or use other methods to provide consistent feedback to customers once a consultation is completed
- the Service should work towards consistency across all six equality strands, as a minimum

**Comment [N17]:** Please note that all of our results are published on our website.

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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### 3. Service Delivery and Customer Care

#### **Equality objectives and targets developed within each department/service area for race, gender and disability based on completed impact assessments**

#### **SFRS can demonstrate**

- it has produced Race, Disability and Gender Equality Schemes and that service areas have developed equality action plans that take account of the equality schemes
- the equality Steering Group helps prioritise actions and assesses resources implications arising from equality impact assessment

#### **Areas for improvement and review**

- Currently equality scheme targets are heavily biased towards process targets, and the schemes are light on service based outcomes focused objectives and targets. Comments relating to the improvement of the equality schemes are made elsewhere in this report and should be noted.

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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**Equality objectives and targets developed within department/service area for sexual orientation, religion and belief and age by March 2009**

**SFRS can demonstrate**

- SFRS has consistently worked across a number of equality strands including sexual orientation, religion and belief, and age
- Impact assessments are carried out across all six equality strands specified in the Equality Standard framework
- managers understand the expectations by senior management, as expressed in the Corporate Plan, that they will embed equality and diversity in their services' operations
- managers have an explicit target within the Corporate Plan for achieving (level 3 of) the Equality Standard
- each department has a equality action plan in place, and conducts equality impact assessments
- departments work to their own specific equality programmes aimed at addressing areas of risks – e.g. anti-social behaviour amongst young people, migrant workers working and living in areas of high deprivation
- SFRS is a 'learning organisation' and takes part in activities designed to improve service delivery and awareness
- the Services' Equality Steering Group communicates well with senior management and acts as a conduit for conveying equality messages across all Departments.

**Areas for improvement and review**

- equality targets should be consistently shared and tested with representative groups of stakeholders

- the Service keeps its internal structures for managing equality under review, and periodically assesses their effectiveness
- regularly reviews and refreshes the role of the Equality Steering Group
- Outside of employment, the equality objectives for sexual orientation, age, religion or belief are less well developed and this needs to be addressed – particularly as the Service is now working towards level 4 achievement

**Comment [N18]:** Please note that the role of the steering group has already been reviewed and it is within the terms of reference that this is done on an annual basis

**Comment [N19]:** We would like to make you aware that we do have objectives with regard to age which have been in place for many years

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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### **Service plans specifically address the importance of barriers to accessibility and reasonable adjustments in the provision of services**

#### **SFRS can demonstrate**

- that it takes steps to comply with reasonable adjustment responsibilities
- it has a disability equality scheme in place, and undertook detailed consultations including focus group activities in its preparation
- targeted fire prevention and fire safety services aimed specifically towards disabled and older people, providing personalised advice where required
- risk assessments are carried out for age and disability
- the Service has been accredited with the 2 ticks symbol for commitment to good practice in employing disabled people, and has signed up to the 'Positive about Disabled People' charter to encourage job applicants from the disabled community
- a report on disability statistics will be produced at least every three years on the Shropshire county, and this would be publicised throughout the Service
- Introduced a bilingual outreach worker to address accessibility issues for cultural, race and religious reasons, along with two vulnerable person's officers who remove barriers to accessing the service.

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## Areas for improvement and review

- although the Service consulted with disabled groups in the preparation of the disability equality scheme, the assessors would recommend that the Service now focuses on and increases its energies in involving disabled stakeholders more fully in the review and preparation of future schemes, and in scrutiny processes
- there appears to be a stronger emphasis on individual disability. The disability equality scheme should be used to develop a broader understanding of disability in relation to service planning and delivery, and to systematically embed disability equality into the Services' processes and outlook
- strengthen and improve approaches to Equality Impact Assessments (as described above), to start moving from largely process objectives and targets, to those that are motivated towards improving service outcomes – this should support the organization in gaining a much greater understanding and awareness the range of barriers prohibiting access to services across all equality groups, as well as, physical access issues for disabled people
- the same comments and suggestions above would apply equally across all equality strands
- appraise current training provision and where needed make improvements that ensures that above issues are covered adequately

**Comment [N20]:** We feel that this statement contradicts one of the statements in the demonstrates section (bullet point 2)

We would like further clarity on some of these points as a number of improvement areas have been identified.

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>2/3</b>
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## Allocation of appropriate resources to achieve targets

### SFRS can demonstrate

- it has devoted resources, financial and staffing, to support equality improvement across the whole organisation, and across operational and non-operational departments
- it has linked priorities for equality and diversity to the Medium Term Financial Planning and the delivery of the Strategic Aims and Corporate Objectives. This has included the identification of additional growth funding and increased resources for Equality and Diversity for 2008/09
- a dedicated senior officer post has supported the drive to make equality improvements and work consistently to the Equality Standard framework
- Appropriate resources have been allocated to ensure the provision of equality training and development for staff and members
- It makes commitments to supporting regional partnerships and targets through Local Area Agreement, Strategic Partnerships and other partnership forums
- it works in partnership with other regional Services' to support the equality and diversity agenda regionally

#### **Areas for improvement and review**

- No specific areas identified, and the only comment to make here is to ensure that the levels of resources are periodically reviewed and sustained as appropriate. The self-assessment is a useful tool and this should be continuously developed to provide the organisation with the necessary evaluation, gap analysis and insights for ensuring continuous improvement

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>4</b>
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#### **Establish structures of responsibility at departmental level to progress action plans**



## SFRS can demonstrate

- the Corporate Equality Action Plan sets out lines of responsibility for delivering on the plan and is attached to each Directorate Plan as Appendix B.
- there is a dedicated corporate equality steering group with responsibility for equality actions in each department, advised and supported by the equality manager
- the equality steering group monitors progress against the Equality Standard and equality action plans
- there is a clear corporate lead from the Chief Fire Officer and Senior Officers
- a competency based appraisal programme is in place that supports equality objectives
- a performance management system is being embedded and continuously improved upon. It supports the monitoring and effective functioning of these structures and processes across the organisation. Appropriate training, guidance and support has been provided to staff that are expected to work with the system
- HR undertakes the Cultural Audit (part of national requirements) and has incorporate the results into the IRMP

## Areas for improvement and review

- more clearly define equality action planning in departmental plans
- align IRMP with other equality objectives and broaden actions to encompass range of equality strands (as described in sections on EIA and IRPM above)

**Comment [N21]:** We do feel that this is very clear, as it is included in all Directorate Business Plans

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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**Comment [N22]:** We would like to challenge this score, see comments above

**Set timetable within action plans to for creating/adapting information and monitoring systems within service areas**

Comment [N23]: Typo?

**SFRS can demonstrate**

- it has developed information and monitoring systems that can capture performance in relation to vulnerable and equality groups
- that it has in place corporate guidance and support which supports the establishment of effective monitoring and evaluation to take place
- it has identified areas for improvement within the Self-Assessment document
- it has identified that it will seek its own regional targets for complying with the Fire and Rescue Services Equality and Diversity Strategy

**Areas for improvement and review**

- systematic reporting of specific equality improvement outcomes using existing intelligence and data systems and shared with stakeholders where appropriate
- systematic reporting of specific equality improvement outcomes should be consistent across all equality strands and group

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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**For agencies delivering service on behalf of SFRS, include within contracts requirements to deliver an effective and appropriate service, fairly and without unlawful discrimination**

**SFRS can demonstrate**

- it has a Procurement and Asset Management Strategy in place, that includes specific references to equality and diversity

- there is in place a range of policies and procedures that set out the requirements for contractors to comply with equality laws and ethical practices
- all contractors are assessed appropriately before awarding contract takes place
- SFRS periodically and consistently monitors agencies and contractors, using the results to inform further improvements

**Areas for improvement and review**

- ensure managers' performance in specifying contracts, evaluating Pre-Qualification Questionnaires and tenders; and contract monitoring matches input on guidance and training provided

**Comment [N24]:** We do have processes and procedures in place and can demonstrate this

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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**Comment [N25]:** Like to challenge this in light of above comments

**Establish monitoring of contracts to ensure equal employment and equal service delivery targets**

**SFRS can demonstrate**

- that external contracts are subject to the service's procurement and contract policies

**Areas for improvement and review**

- As above

**Comment [N26]:** As above

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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**Comment [N27]:** As above

**Start action on departmental and service area targets**

**SFRS can demonstrate**

- all departments are actively engaged in progressing equality actions

**Areas for improvement and review**

- equality improvement objectives need to be reviewed and refreshed as appropriate and take account of the issues raised in this report

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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**4. Employment and Training**

**Complete employment section of Corporate Equality Plan and ensure consistency with equality scheme/s**

**SFRS can demonstrate**

- it has in place a Corporate Equality Action Plan and three statutory equality schemes

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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**Comment [N28]:** We would like to challenge this score, we cannot see any further areas where this can be improved.

**Set employment equality targets for recruitment, staff retention and workforce profiles for race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief and age**

**SFRS can demonstrate**

- has set stretching targets for the recruitment and retention of underrepresented groups
- the Service has made changes to the Retained Duty Scheme to improve the representation of female fire fighters
- HR systems have been upgraded to provide better information on recruitment
- HR has in place a 3 year plan for carrying out EIAs'
- SFRS participated in the development of the West Midlands regional People Strategy, and the Equality and Diversity Strategy
- SFRS s' People Strategy is linked to the National Fire and Rescue People Strategy
- SFRS monitors recruitment and retention data

#### Areas for improvement and review

- the Service should consider establishing targets across all of the equality strands. These are currently weak for sexual orientation in particular
- it should equality impact assess its positive action work

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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**Comment [N29]:** This has already been completed and was provided as evidence.

**Comment [N30]:** We would like to challenge this score as we feel that we have shown good performance in this area

#### Establish that (equality) policies and procedures are part of the staff handbook and are understood by staff

##### SFRS can demonstrate

- equality principles are clearly stated in employment literature available to all staff
- interviews indicated a good understanding of the way in which SFRS is working on equality improvement in employment and service delivery
- managers and staff have taken part in a range of equality training

- specific resources and information is targeted at operational staff

### Areas for improvement and review

- carry out regular reviews of policies and procedures

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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**Comment [N31]:** We have a set procedure that has been in place for many years with regards to reviewing our policies and procedures which ensures that these are reviewed on a regular basis – evidence can be provided.

**Comment [N32]:** We feel that this is a strong area for the Service and would challenge this score.

**Conduct an equal pay review and plan for equal pay adjustment (see note at appendix 1) – we are unclear whether this particular appendix is for SFRS as it clearly states Cheshire Fire, please provide clarification on this.**

### SFRS can demonstrate

- the service is bound by and complies with nationally negotiated terms and conditions
- non-uniformed job evaluations are carried out using the Gauge system
- operational posts are evaluated through the process of ‘rank to role’

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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**Ensure that staff and members are aware of (equality) action plans and the implications for service employment**

### SFRS can demonstrate

- managers have a clear understanding of action plans and the need for equality improvement targets
- senior staff have a clear understanding of their own responsibilities for equalities and feel that equality is part and parcel of their job

### Areas for improvement and review

- improve training and development opportunities so that the organisation can now move forward with better and more structured EIAs' leading to less process driven and more outcome based targets in equality action plans

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>4</b>
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**a) Provide training for all staff on the detailed implementation of the Equality Standard including action plans and updates on legal and other developments**

**b) Training is provided for managers on the implementation of the standard with partners and contractors**

### SFRS can demonstrate

- managers receive training on the Equality Standard and equality improvement work, including impact assessments
- contractors are obliged to provide evidence of a commitment to equal opportunities in policy and practice

### Areas for improvement and review

- training and coaching should be provided for managers in actively monitoring contracts for relevant equality **outcomes**
- current training provision is reviewed in line with statutory changes and the Fire Service National Equality Strategy

**Comment [N33]:** We believe that where appropriate this is actioned.

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>4</b>
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**Training for all staff involved in recruitment is consistent with the standard and consistent with the training arrangements set out in the equality scheme/s<sup>5</sup>**

**SFRS can demonstrate**

- it has an established system in place for staff training and this meets the requirements of the statutory equality duties and the Standard
- it provides recruitment training for managers at operational and non-operational levels
- the effectiveness of training is evaluated through participant feedback

**Areas for improvement and review**

- delivery of training on data collection and monitoring to all staff involved in monitoring
- delivery of training to reflect all six equality strands and these are adequately covered

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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**A system of guidance and training relevant to short listing panels and interviewers is in place**

**SFRS can demonstrate**

- all staff involved in recruitment and selection of staff and promotion via assessment and development centres (which are used for all levels of

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<sup>5</sup> This relates to statutory requirements as well as any specific policy obligations set out in the schemes



staff) receive training which follows a nationally agreed process for recruitment

- SFRS have used innovative training methods such as participation in Diversity Action Theatre Training, a multi-agency training partnership

### Areas for improvement and review

- delivery of training to reflect all six equality strands and these are adequately covered

SCORE	3
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**Comment [N34]:** All staff that undertake interviews are given training which includes the 6 strands of diversity and ensures that no discriminatory practices are undertaken, and we have been providing equality training for interviewers for many years. Evidence is available on request.

**Comment [N35]:** We wish to challenge this mark in light of comments above

**Appraise competency/behaviours to ensure that managers and staff are capable of implementing the Equality Standard, including the new strands of sexual orientation, religion or belief and age**

### SFRS can demonstrate

- it has trained managers to carry out Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs)
- equality training is consistent with the corporate objectives and Corporate Equality Plan
- equality training includes making use of best practice elsewhere

### Areas for improvement and review

- the impact assessment process, however, need to be more robust, and should be integrated with risk assessment; this may require some retraining
- the Service should undertake an assessment of training needs to ensure that it can determine the extent to which managers/staff are

**Comment [N36]:** Please provide us with further guidance on how this can be achieved

implementing the Equality Standard framework across all equality strands; and where training gaps are identified put in place an action plan or programme to address these

- all staff have equality and diversity awareness training
- that it is embedding competence for delivering on equality objectives within the employee appraisal system
- SFRS should consider extending training/engagement opportunities for stakeholders, partners and others in order to communicate a greater understanding of the process amongst such groups, and facilitate greater scrutiny

**Comment [N37]:** This contradicts a statement below which demonstrates that we do give staff training – this statement to be removed.

**Comment [N38]:** As comment above

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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### **Build equality objectives and targets into management appraisal mechanisms**

#### **SFRS can demonstrate**

- All staff have equality and diversity awareness training
- that it is embedding competence for delivering on equality objectives within the employee appraisal system

#### **Areas for improvement and review**

- Ensure that all (six) equality strands are covered effectively as part of the appraisal performance framework
- Assessment of the impact of equality content of appraisals on the development of equality objectives and targets

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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**Provide information and training on action plans to support the scrutiny process**

**SFRS can demonstrate**

- elected members are involved in the scrutiny of the Services' approach to equality and diversity and the Equality Standard
- equality schemes are subjected to member scrutiny
- regular progress on equality action plans is reported through the Equality and Diversity Steering Group

**Areas for improvement and review**

- as has been suggested elsewhere in this report, the provision of information and training could be broadened to facilitate greater scrutiny from stakeholders and partners

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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**a) Ensure that Local Government Workforce Strategies address equality issues**

**b) Start action on employment and pay targets**

**SFRS can demonstrate improvements and actions in a number of areas, some of which are highlighted below:**

- it has implemented job evaluation and pay review
- it has implemented and impact assessed a range of HR policies designed to improve equality outcomes
- it has implemented measures designed to improve the recruitment of underrepresented groups, and has taken positive action to redress gaps and anomalies

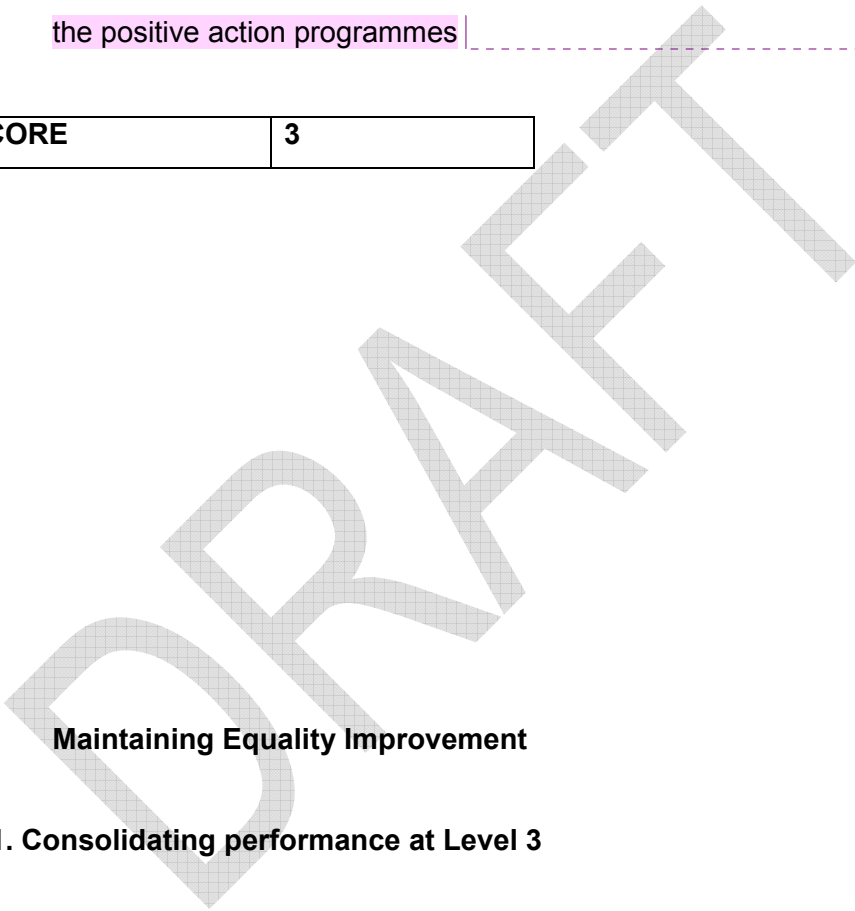
- it has implemented positive action measures designed to improve the retention of underrepresented groups – for example improved facilities at Fire Stations, Access Audits to remove barriers for disabled staff, and the introduction of the Childcare Voucher Salary Sacrifice scheme

**Areas for improvement and review**

- carry out impact assessment to determine the success or otherwise of the positive action programmes

**Comment [N39]:** Please see previous comment regarding positive action

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>3</b>
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**6. Maintaining Equality Improvement**

**6.1. Consolidating performance at Level 3**

In discussing what will be required to move forward to Level 4, we have outlined a range of actions that should be undertaken to consolidate Level 3 work. The SFRS should:

-Review its equality documentation with a view to strengthening it so that it reflects the way that the Service actually plans and works.

-all plans should contain much more explicit equality content and the equality content should be clearly integral with the Equality and Diversity Plan and with the equality schemes, and the action plans arising from EIA

-It is important that the Service's emphasis on 'vulnerable groups', which is clearly important to the way in which the Service thinks about equality in service provision, is also understood in relation to its wider equality improvement work. We would suggest that the IRMP is looked at alongside the impact assessment process. All (six) equality strands should be considered equally in practice as well as during policy formulation

-SFRS may want to consider that risk assessments should have an *explicit* equality impact element that takes into account the broader range of equality strands. This can also be published as a separate EIA report, and form part of the self-assessment process. This will support the requirements set out in the National Equality and Diversity Strategy for the Fire Service.

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-We would suggest that the scrutiny and engagement processes require further 'opening up'. Currently the SFRS has shown good processes in place for consulting and working in partnerships, particularly around innovative projects. However, engagement in scrutiny by stakeholders, partners and elected Members is weak. Members' involvement in leadership and scrutiny of equality work should be enhanced so that Fire Authority members as a whole can make effective judgments on equality-related matters; as well as appointing Equality Member Champions to take a specialist interest. In relation to stakeholders a number of comments are already elsewhere in this report to improve stakeholder scrutiny. In summary we would suggest that in order to enhance scrutiny by stakeholders and members, the Service may want to consider additional training and support to enable stakeholders to engage in scrutiny more effectively, and also consider whether the roles of those participating in various groups and forums could be enhanced.

**Comment [N40]:** We have a specific committee that involves scrutiny, we would recommend reviewing this whole paragraph, please contact us if further clarification is required

**Comment [N41]:** You may wish to reconsider this comment, we already have a member champion for E&D, and it is part of their remit to ensure members understanding in this area.

-A number of comments have also been made in relation to improvements required to equality impact assessments. This is important at a number of

levels – to ensure legal compliance, consistency of approach and support the development of outcome based targets. Impact assessments are currently of variable quality. As well as uncovering ‘adverse impact’, impact assessments should support the setting of objectives and targets based on ‘evidence’. The IRMP process is a good example of evidence based target setting and as suggested it would be helpful to look at the way in which IRMP and EIA are approached. There is an over-reliance on process targets contained within the Equality Schemes and this needs to be addressed.

**Comment [N42]:** Please note that our impact assessment process was changed (prior to the audit) and has improved the quality and consistency of these and training has been provided to support these changes.

**Achieving Level 4 – we would like this whole section to be reviewed as it clearly refers to another FRS and not Shropshire throughout this section. The feedback regarding level 4 is of great importance to SFRS as this will help advise us on progression to level 4.**

To achieve level 4 of ESLG the CDDFRS will have to show that it has achieved progress against the level 3 targets that it set for race, gender and disability, and, that by 2009<sup>6</sup> it has achieved progress across the Authority for sexual orientation, age, religion and belief.

As well as the two criteria set out above the general requirements for level 4 that the Service will have to demonstrate are:

- it has developed information and monitoring systems that will allow it to assess progress in achieving targets
- it is measuring progress against targets and effectively using its information and monitoring systems
- equality monitoring reports are being produced at specific intervals and circulated to designated consultation and scrutiny groups
- it is using the self assessment process to review and revise targets and its monitoring and consultation systems

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<sup>6</sup> Criteria set out in the Revised Equality Standard Guidance – 2007, IDeA/Centre for Local Policy Studies

- self assessment includes the involvement of designated staff, community and stakeholders groups and seeks external validation through community involvement, peer review or expert opinion
- it has continued to carry out impact assessments for new policies and where gaps are identified through self assessment
- it has initiated a new round of action planning and target setting
- monitoring systems are providing useful information towards specific targets

In general and taking account of the evidence so far presented by the CDDFRS, the assessors feel that the CDDFRS is well placed to proceed to level 4 of the Equality Standard.

## 7. Conclusion

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service is to be congratulated on reaching Level 3 of the Equality Standard. The Service has shown a commitment to improving its approach and outcomes to equality, and has directed resources to support these aims. The three elements of the assessment: the self assessment document, the supporting evidence and the interviews provided a consistent view of the Services' achievements and the areas where it needs to make improvements. In particular it should be noted that during interviews staff were enthusiastic about improving the way in which they deliver services to communities and those most vulnerable and at risk. In addition the Service has shown leadership in the community and amongst its peer group and has demonstrated this through the number of initiatives that are supporting safety, and community cohesion principles, particularly for young people, older people and those that are often isolated and in rural settings. The Service has taken account of the need to support newer communities and migrant workers in the region. Staff are acutely aware of the Services aspirations and aim to meet these.

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It is important that all service areas have substantive outcome oriented objectives and targets, the means to deliver on these targets and that they are able to monitor and report on progress. This is critical to maintaining progress.

The Service should communicate the National Equality Strategy and its implications widely across the organisation and start its implementation. We believe that the Service already has a regional profile that would enable it to exchange good practice at Regional Board level.

The assessors recommend that Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service should receive the Equality Mark Certificate for level 3 achievement.

## **8. Acknowledgements**

Thanks are due for efficient organisation of documentation and interviews to Natalie Hill

## **9. Assessors**

This assessment was conducted and carried out by Dr Julian Clarke, and Ms Nasreen Kaleem, Centre for Local Policy Studies. All enquiries should be directed to:

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[Appendix 1 – as per previous comments](#)



Fire and Rescue service pay is determined nationally by two bodies, the NJC for local government Fire (uniformed staff) and the NJC for local government services (corporate staff). These are joint Employer/trade union organisations. Individual Services have no involvement at local level with the pay structures and respond to national systems.

It is not clear whether national structures deliver equal pay or whether current pay structures have been equality impact assessed as is required by statute. Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service should consider, with partner fire Services/Services and with national equality team, initiating an equal pay review of current pay structures.

DRAFT