

Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-2018

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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1 Purpose of Report

This report brings to Members attention the recently launched national Equality and Diversity Strategy for the Fire and Rescue Service for the next ten years; the main areas covered by the strategy, and our responsibilities as defined by it.

2 Recommendations

The Fire Authority is asked to:

- a) Note the introduction of the national Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-2018; and
- b) Approve the draft action plan and ask the Service's Equality and Diversity Steering Group to populate the detail including defining responsibilities and timescales with a view to these then being incorporated into the Corporate Equality Plan as appropriate.

3 Background

A national equality and diversity strategy has been in development for some time and the Authority participated in the consultation exercise on the draft strategy at the beginning of 2008. The final strategy was launched at a national event in London on 28 May 2008 which was attended by the Chair and the Chief Fire Officer.

The strategy is available in full at:

communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/equalitydiversitystrategy

and a copy will be available to Members at the meeting.

The vision for the strategy (taken from page 6 of the document) is that:
'We will make fairness and inclusion fundamental to everything we do to ensure:

- *That we reduce the impact of fire and other risks on all the communities we serve, by effective prevention, protection and emergency response;*
- *That our workforce better reflects the diversity of the communities we serve; and*
- *That all our employees are equally respected and valued.'*

It is pleasing to note that within the strategy it is recognised that the impact of fire is grossly disproportionate in some communities (e.g. that an estimated 30% of fire deaths are people with limited mobility). As well as being outward looking the strategy also focuses inwards at the composition of the workforce and notes that 3.2% of the Fire and Rescue Service workforce are from minority ethnic backgrounds compared with a national average working population of over 12%, and that very small numbers of women are operational firefighters (3.1%).

To summarise the strategy is divided into 5 priority areas:

- 1. Leadership and promoting inclusion**
This section establishes the importance of positive leadership at all levels including Members of Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) and states that senior managers must demonstrate their commitment to equality and diversity through their personal behaviour and by making resources available to deliver change
- 2. Accountability**
It is clear that Members and employees will be held accountable for delivering the strategy
- 3. Effective service delivery and community engagement**
Here the focus is on tailoring services to meet the needs of the people we serve through sustained dialogue with them and assessing the impact of the policies, plans and procedures through the use of Equality Impact Assessments
- 4. Employment and training**
This section refers to aiming to recruit, develop and retain a workforce which better reflects the diversity of the local community and to provide sustained commitment to staff development
- 5. Evaluation and sharing good practice**
Evidence will be collected and analysed to ensure continuous improvement and the best use of resources.

Each of the priority areas clearly sets out the activities required at a national, local and individual level to ensure that the aims and objectives of the strategy are delivered. Those activities required at a local, i.e. Fire Authority level, are shown in the appendix.

4 Links to the National Framework

Whilst the new National Framework Document (NFD) is currently still under debate the Fire Authority have, since the advent of the 2004 Fire and Rescue Services Act, to have regard to the NFD. In addition to implementing the Strategy, the key requirements of the proposed NFD for the Fire and Rescue Service are that Fire and Rescue Authorities will:

- a) Ensure that their Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs) and all other plans, policies, practices and procedures are effectively equality impact assessed and appropriate action is taken to remove any adverse impact
- b) Produce and at least annually review an action plan for implementation of the strategy, and report to Members of the FRA on progress
- c) Carry out and record individual performance reviews annually for each member of staff which includes an assessment of performance against agreed annual objectives, including equality and diversity objectives
- d) Provide annually to Communities and Local Government (CLG) evidence of progress on Equality and Diversity for publication in the Fire and Rescue Service Diversity Report including:
 - Statistical information on recruitment, progression, and retention of employees across all diversity strands
 - Qualitative information on policies, procedures, practices and processes which support equality and diversity as evidence of progress made

5 What targets have been set?

The document goes some way to setting equality and diversity targets for FRAs in terms of employment. These are set out below and against each target our current performance is shown had we been measuring in this way previously. Members will note that some targets will be stretching for the Authority to achieve and that further investigation and guidance is required before targets can be set for other areas identified in the National Equality and Diversity Strategy.

We are currently working on target setting and regional workshops will be held over the summer to provide advice and guidance in setting equality targets.

- a) **By 2013 a minimum of 15 per cent of new entrants to the operational sector to be women.**

Our position:

Over the period 1 April 2003 – 31 March 2008 the number of women into operational posts was:

8.16% into the Wholetime Duty System (4 women)

3.7% into the Retained Duty System (4 women)

This is a total of 5.09% women into operational recruits over the 5 year period.

The target to achieve 15% of new entrants into operational posts will be a stretching target for the Authority; this will be particularly stretching for our retained duty system posts.

It will require the Service to increase recruitment of women by 10% over the five year period, requiring the service to achieve around 4 – 5 female recruits each year.

- b) **By 2013, recruitment of minority ethnic staff across the whole organisation to be at the same percentage as the minority ethnic representation in the local working population**

Our position:

The Ethnic minority breakdown in the County is currently 2.66% of the whole population; we are currently unable to obtain statistics on the working age population of this number.

The authority is currently unable to give statistics on the 'white other' category but can confirm that into operational posts the percentage of Black or Minority Ethnic recruitment is 3.82%. This can be split into wholetime recruits at 6.12% and retained duty system at 0.92%.

Work is currently ongoing to ascertain the working age population of minority ethnic population to include the white other category and to obtain statistics for our non uniformed posts.

- c) **FRAs with very low minority ethnic working age populations and low recruitment requirements may set a target in terms of individuals recruited over the five year period rather than a percentage of total recruitment.**

Our position:

The definition of minority ethnic now includes all applicants, recruits and employees who count themselves as falling within 'Other White, Mixed, Asian, or Asian British, Black or Black British, Chinese or other ethnic group' in accordance with the National Census Classifications.

When the statistics have been obtained a decision can then be made regarding whether individual targets are required.

d) By 2013 parity in rates of retention and progression between minority ethnic and white employees and between men and women

Our position:

This is a new area of information collation for us and reporting systems are currently being investigated for this area.

e) In addition we can set our own target or targets to measure the proportion of all applications received which come from under-represented groups (attraction targets)

Our position:

New recruitment monitoring system is now in place and we are currently investigating how to utilise these systems to report on information in this area.

f) Each FRA will set its own minority ethnic recruitment targets

Our position:

We will await the guidance promised by CLG through Regional Workshops and we will prepare for these sessions by taking information with us regarding, if possible, the figures for each retained station as we need to understand how this will be measured.

6 How will progress be monitored?

As well as the measures set out at paragraph 4 above, the Audit Commission will assess performance in implementing the strategy through the performance assessment framework. FRAs will not normally be assessed as improving strongly without reaching level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government.

Progress against workforce diversity targets will also be measured and monitored by CLG based on the annual report that FRAs will be required to submit and the annual assessment by the Audit Commission.

7 Action planning and reporting

Actions required at national, local (FRA) and employee level are set out in full in the strategy. The actions required by Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority are appended in the draft action plan. Members are requested to approve the draft action plan and ask the Service's Equality and Diversity Steering Group to populate the detail including defining responsibilities and timescales with a view to these then being incorporated into the Corporate Equality Plan as appropriate.

Actions required to meet the requirements of the strategy will be incorporated into the Corporate Equality Action plan and this will be reviewed quarterly by Audit and Performance Management Committee. We will produce an annual submission to the CLG/Audit Commission as required by the strategy (page 19).

8 Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications of this report at this time. This may need to be revised as action takes place to implement the Corporate Equality Action Plan where the activities to meet the requirements of this strategy will be recorded and monitored.

9 Legal Comment

The National Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-2018 forms part of the National Framework Document which falls under the Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004. In addition, achieving the objectives set out in the Equality and Diversity Strategy will assist in the Service's legal compliance with a range of anti-discriminatory legislation.

10 Equality Impact Assessment

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the national strategy by the CLG.

11 Appendix

Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-2018 Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service Draft Action Plan

12 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	*

Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-2018 Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service Action Plan						
Leadership and Promoting Inclusion		STATUS	TARGET DATE	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER		
Develop an action plan for the delivery of the Strategy covering all strands and all areas of the organisation and reviewed annually.						
Report progress to Members at least annually						
Review progress against equality schemes.						
Ensure all are aware of and understand the Core Values.						
Ensure Members and CFO's have been appropriately trained.						
Ensure leaders are able to develop their skills.						
Ensure resources for HR and E&D functions are sufficient to deliver fair and effective employment practices.						
Ensure all managers are aware of their role in promoting E&D and of their obligation to do EQIA's.						
Ensure that E&D is properly considered in procurement.						
Consult with Representative Bodies to develop a partnership approach.						

Accountability						
Require a report to be made to Authority Members, at least annually, on the implementation of the Equality and Diversity Strategy and statutory equality schemes.						
Report to Communities and Local Government annually by the end of September on improvements to service delivery and employment practice, including progress against the employment targets.						
Make evidence available to the public annually on improvements to service delivery and employment practice, including progress against the employment targets through the website.						
Ensure that all employees (including the Chief Fire Officer) have annual performance appraisals with annual objectives including for equality and diversity.						
Demonstrate compliance with employment and equalities legislation and specifically the public duties for disability, gender and race and review progress in the Integrated Risk Management Plan.						
Ensure that bullying, harassment, unfair discrimination and unacceptable behaviours are dealt with fairly, quickly and transparently.						
Seek regular peer review (at least once every three years).						

Effective Service Delivery and Community Engagement						
Ensure quality of service to all sections of the community.						
Identify and take account of the needs of the full range of communities it serves.						
Assess the impact of all new policies, plans, procedures and practices to ensure effective service delivery to all communities, tailored to their needs.						
Review all policies, plans, procedures and practices regularly.						
Ensure that the Integrated Risk Management Plan takes full account of the needs of local communities and that all aspects of the planning process have been effectively equality impact assessed.						
Implement procedures to ensure progress review for service delivery in the Integrated Risk Management Plan.						

Engagement						
Consistently communicate progress on service delivery to all local communities, including targeted communication.						
Ensure complaints are dealt with quickly, fairly and transparently.						
Work with partner agencies and community advocates within local communities to improve/create new ways of communicating with community groups.						
Monitor and take action on community perceptions and satisfaction identified through surveys, complaints procedures, etc.						

Training and Awareness						
Provide all employees with appropriate training and development to build skills and confidence in delivery a service which is effective in meeting the needs of all local communities and is in accordance with legal requirements						
Communicate clearly and consistently with staff to raise awareness and understanding of local community issues and the actions needed to address them.						

Employment and Training						
Undertake awareness campaigns and positive action to support and encourage applications from currently under represented groups.						
Use national processes for recruitment, development and promotion of staff.						
Review and equality impact assess employment policies, practices and procedures to ensure they are robust fair and effective, using monitoring data including information derived from exit interviews.						
Assess all aspects of the working environment (including equipment, travel, training, clothing, facilities, food, etc) to ensure all employees receive the support and tailored resources necessary to work to the best of their ability.						
Where necessary, Fire and Rescue Authorities will undertake equal pay audits as required by the Equal Pay Act and take steps to ensure staff are paid appropriately for undertaking work of equal value.						
Carry out annual individual performance reviews based on the relevant role maps for all employees (up to and including CFO), including equality and diversity objectives, to provide evidence of fair progression.						
Provide all employees with training and development on equality, diversity and fairness issues including those relating to harassment, bullying, unfair discrimination and unacceptable behaviours.						
Provide training for all managers, and where necessary Fire and Rescue Authority members, on handling grievances and disciplinary cases and on tackling bullying, harassment, unfair discrimination and unacceptable behaviours.						
Communicate regularly with employees to raise awareness and understanding of workforce equality and diversity issues for the Fire and Rescue Authority and the actions needed to address them.						

Evaluation and Sharing Good Practice						
Collect and submit to Communities and Local Government qualitative and quantitative evidence of improvements to service delivery for inclusion in the annual Equality and Diversity Report for the Fire and Rescue Service.						
Collect and submit to Communities and Local Government evidence of improvements to employment practice in relation to all staff, including progress against the employment targets and in respect of all other roles where monitoring is required, for all diversity strands for inclusion in the annual Equality and Diversity Report.						
Review, monitor and evaluate policies, practices, plans and procedures to assess their impact on equality, diversity and fairness (ie undertake robust equality impact assessment).						
Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of processes and procedures for dealing with bullying, harassment, unfair discrimination and unacceptable behaviours.						
Undertake employee and community surveys, in partnership with representative bodies, to measure perceptions of the Fire and Rescue Service as an employer and service provider and to assess the level of effective engagement with employee and community representatives.						
Ensure that the provisions for collection and storage of personal information are secure and that the organisational culture encourages and supports members of staff to disclose personal diversity data.						

Reporting and Recognition						
Recognise and celebrate local and national achievements.						
Work with local, regional and national partners to promote and share good practice.						
Communicate clearly and consistently with employees to raise their awareness, including on the reasons for action on issues of equality and diversity, on progress made and of successes.						