

**Regional  
Equality and Diversity  
Strategy  
2008-2009**

# 1. Introduction

This strategy sets out the East Midlands Fire and Rescue Services' first Equality and Diversity Strategy. It sets out the regional approach to promote equality and diversity in the delivery of services and its treatment of citizens and employees of the Service. Prioritised actions are set out in an Action Plan 2006-9 appended to this strategy document.

## 1.1. Equality and Diversity Overview

Within the East Midlands, Equality and Diversity is a key objective across the five Services. A great deal of work has been carried out to progress the equality agenda, however, it is important to recognise that there are real and significant challenges ahead for Fire and Rescue Services before we can claim to have mainstreamed equality and diversity through everything we do and the services we deliver to the community.

There is a clear recognition that the Fire and Rescue Service can only function through the collective effort of all elected members of the Fire Authorities, managers, employees and recognised Trade Unions, regardless of their role within the organisation. The intent of this strategy is to ensure that the equality agenda is advanced for the benefit of all staff, and that the contribution of all team members is recognised and valued in equal measure.

The Regional Strategy will inform and complement local level Corporate Equality Plans. In setting a regional strategy it is recognised that each authority may have slightly different equality priorities, but through consultation it is expected that the main key themes will reflect the needs of all five authorities.

## 2. Drivers for the Strategy

An Equality and Diversity strategy needs to be considered in the context of what is currently happening across the Fire and Rescue Service in the East Midlands region in particular and against the backdrop of the public sector more generally.

- The Thematic Review 1999 the need to have fairness and equality in the Fire and Rescue Service formally documented.
- National Framework Document 2006/08 - sets out a comprehensive programme of reform.

Equality and Diversity plays an integral part in the National Framework vision. It states in section 5.2 that 'Fire and Rescue Authorities must ensure that all members of staff are treated fairly and afforded equality of opportunity.'

The National Framework Document places an emphasis on the production of an equality strategy as part of the regional Human Resources strategy, which should include stretching targets for improvement. The Framework also describes an expectation that across HR functions, including equality, regional structures of delivery should be developed.

Special consideration must be given to the needs of the Retained Duty System, especially in the areas of recruitment and retention in conjunction with the trade unions.

- **Partnership Working**

In order to reduce the potential that exists for duplication of effort, we will be working, wherever practicable, as a regional group. Regular meetings and sharing of information and resources will be a fundamental principle of the Regional Equality Strategy.

- **Equality Standards for Local Government**

All 5 Fire and Rescue Services in the East Midlands Region are committed to working towards levels outlined in the Equality Standards. The Standards recognise the importance of fair and equal treatment in local government services and employment and have been developed primarily as a tool to enable local authorities to mainstream equalities throughout the service.

- **Race Equality Scheme**

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 came into force in 2001 in response to the MacPherson Report following the death of Stephen Lawrence. The amended act imposes upon public authorities the duty to promote race equality. Under the specific duty is the requirement for authorities to prepare and publish a Race Equality Scheme.

- **Disability Equality Scheme**

The Disability (Public Authorities) (Statutory Duties) Regulations 2005 require that public authorities including Fire and Rescue Services must develop and publish a Disability Equality Scheme.

As with gender and race, the Equality Scheme must outline general and specific duties to eliminate discrimination against disabled people.

- **Gender Equality Scheme**

The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 was amended by the Equality Act 2006. It requires authorities to promote equality between women and men and eliminate unlawful sex discrimination and harassment. This means the public sector, including Fire and

Rescue Services must develop policies, design services and have employment practices with the different needs of women and men in mind.

As with race and disability, the Equality Scheme must outline general and specific duties to eliminate discrimination on grounds of gender.

- **Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)**

All Fire and Rescue Services underwent an assessment in 2005, carried out by the Audit Commission. The aim of the assessment was to establish how well the authorities were being run. Within the assessment was an equality and diversity self-assessment diagnostic. New principles have now been established for assessment. These are focused around our customers, their opinions and our people.

- **Best Value Performance Indicators**

The Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) set a range of 8 BVPIs that relate to equality issues.

- **Legislation**

Over the next few years the Fire and Rescue Service will face some of its biggest challenges in terms of Equality and Diversity. Significant changes in employment legislation will continue to have a major impact, in particular the introduction of legislation relating to age.

- **Local Equality Plans and Objectives.**

Each individual authority has its own corporate equality plans and objectives. Where possible these should link with the regional strategy, however it is accepted that local priorities exist.

### **3. Our Values**

The Core Values set nationally play a major part in providing and delivering the Fire and Rescue Services of the East Midlands regional Equality and Diversity strategy. Our “mission” is about what we do and our “values” are about how we do it. Through our shared values, visions and goals, each individual within each Fire and Rescue Service understands what the region as a whole is striving to accomplish. Our values encourage us to unite in effective performance towards our common goal.

We value...

- Service to the community
- People
- Diversity
- Improvement

## **SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY** by...

We value service to the community by.....

- Working with all groups to reduce risk
- Treating everyone fairly and with respect
- Being answerable to those we serve
- Striving for excellence in all we do

## **PEOPLE**

We value all our employees by practising and promoting...

- Fairness and respect
- Recognition of merit
- Honesty, integrity and mutual trust
- Personal development
- Co-operative and inclusive working

## **DIVERSITY**

We value diversity in the service and the community by...

- Treating everyone fairly and with respect
- Providing varying solutions for different needs and expectations
- Promoting equal opportunities in employment and progression within the service
- Challenging prejudice and discrimination

## **IMPROVEMENT**

We value improvement at all levels of the service by.

- Accepting responsibility for our performance
- Being open minded
- Considering criticism thoughtfully
- Learning from our experience and consulting others

## **4. Key Themes**

The main themes underpinning the Equality and Diversity strategy are summarised as follows:

- a) Promote and develop cultural change and encourage strong and committed leadership. Explore avenues for a regional approach to encourage and effect culture change sharing costs, resources and ideas.
- b) Promote collaborative and joined-up working across the region.
- c) Support and promote positive action initiatives that target under-represented groups.
- d) Equality Schemes and Equality Standards for Local Government will mainstream the equality agenda. The Standard sets 5 levels of achievement and will mainstream the equalities agenda.
- e) Ensure compliance with Race Relations Amendment Act 2000, Disability Discrimination Amendment Act 2005 and the Equality Act 2006 by developing and publishing Equality Scheme. Equality Impact Assessments will review of all polices/functions across the whole service.
- f) Ensure compliance with amendments to existing legislation and the introduction of new legislation.
- g) Support the directions already established to create a Fire and Rescue Service which understands and responds to community needs.

## 5. Delivering of Key Themes

- a. Promote and develop cultural change and encourage strong and committed leadership. Explore avenues for a regional approach to encourage and effect culture change sharing costs, resources and ideas.**

Cultural change is integral to the success of equality and diversity within the modernisation agenda. Within the region we have a regional equality statement, with robust individual policies in place in each of the five Services. The region has invested heavily in a programme of development for supervisory managers to equip them with the tools, knowledge and confidence to challenge and deal with unacceptable behaviour in the workplace, and such training will form an integral part of future development programmes.

### Action

- Promote and Develop Cultural Change via the implementation of a regional equality training programme
- Work in partnership to deliver new methods for a culture change programme.
- Share best practice in the development of equality and diversity training.
- Training for Managing Equality and Diversity to be made available to all RDS personnel.
- Explore terminology i.e. use of the term 'Retained Firefighter' Instead use terms Firefighter (RDS) or Firefighter (WDS).

## **b. Promote collaborative and joined-up working across the region.**

Partnership Working is one way we can achieve the aims and objectives, under the Regional Equality and Diversity Strategy. This will increase community engagement, improve our service delivery, plus develop best practice for the Fire and Rescue Service regionally and nationally.

### Action

- Set up a structure and dates of regional meetings for the year.
- Develop other means of communication and sharing of best practice e.g. joint seminars
- Develop a process for involving community safety advisors in the work of the region.
- Explore external funding opportunities via existing community partnerships to develop initiatives to promote equality and diversity across the Region.
- Extend our approach to collaboration with other agencies.

## **c. Support and promote positive action initiatives that target under-represented groups.**

Since the Thematic Review and the National Framework, plus the creation of recruitment targets, positive action initiatives have formed a major part of the Equality Officers' role. Linking into recruitment teams, initiatives have taken different forms, from awareness days aimed at under-represented groups to joint ventures with other uniformed services and attendance at job-fairs. Positive action has seen results in an increase in the number of applicants from under-represented groups we are receiving for operational posts; however, there are still a relatively small number of applicants from under-represented groups who are coming through the selection process itself.

Positive action initiatives have previously tended to focus almost exclusively on wholtime recruitment. The needs of the Retained Duty System should be addressed with the same commitment.

It is important that in recruitment events, Services emphasise and encourage applications from all under-represented groups, regardless of their race, sex, age, disability, religious belief or sexuality.

#### **Action**

- Support and promote positive action initiatives that target under-represented groups for recruitment to all parts of the Service.
- Linked to Service need, explore the creation of a regional positive action team.
- Develop a range of possible initiatives for regional use that support positive action.
- Monitor individual services' representation and share good practice to improve.
- Examine the creation of a peer-mentoring scheme for under-represented groups.
- Regional and local Positive Action Awareness Events to attract under represented groups to RDS.

#### **d. Equality Standards for Local Government**

The Equality Standard for Local Government ('the standard') was introduced as a best value performance indicator for local government in 2002. This indicator, BVPI 2 (a), replaced the Commission for Racial Equality indicator for race equality and broadened the scope of equality monitoring to include gender and disability as well as race. The Equality Standard for Local Government has been recently reviewed and revised. It's scope and implementation have been broadened to incorporate up-to date legal and policy developments for equality. The standard now incorporates six 'equality strands' of gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, age and religion & faith or belief.

The process for working with the standard is set out as five levels of achievement:

- Level 1: Commitment to a comprehensive equality policy
- Level 2: Assessment & Consultation
- Level 3: Setting objectives and targets
- Level 4: Systematic monitoring of achievement
- Level 5: Substantial progress and achieving and reviewing outcomes

In addition, the standard works across four substantive 'cross-cutting' areas or themes, which are, Leadership & Corporate Commitment, Consultation, Community Involvement & Engagement & Scrutiny, Service Delivery & Customer Care, Employment and Training.

#### Action

- Review each authority's self-assessment process. Establish regional self-assessment best practice.
- Assess requirements for level three. Identify gaps in achieving level three and undertake external assessment to verify achievement.
- Assess requirements for level four. Identify gaps in achieving level four
- Assess requirements for level five. Identify gaps in achieving level five and undertake external assessment to verify achievement.

#### **e. Ensure compliance with Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, Disability Discrimination (Amendment) Act 2005 and the Equality Act 2006 by developing and publishing Equality Schemes.**

The above Acts require that Equality Schemes must meet both the general and specific duties outlined in the general guidance documentation which supports the relevant legislation.

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is a fundamental feature of the specific duty. Authorities are required to list all functions and policies and develop a programme to assess each by means of an EIA to eliminate unlawful discrimination. The results must be reported annually.

Sharing information on the process and results will provide support and understanding to regional partners.

#### Action

- Develop Equality Schemes to include race, disability and gender.
- Identify the process used for EIAs - assess best practice from a combination of all.
- Explore regional process for EIAs.
- Compare and contrast policies or functions where full impact assessments are being carried out.

**f. Ensure compliance with amendments to existing legislation and the introduction of new legislation.**

Legislation in the area of equalities is constantly evolving and changing. It is essential that Fire and Rescue Services keep abreast of new requirements, legislation and best practice to ensure compliance and limit possible claims against the Services.

Collaborative working across all five Services will support the introduction and implementation of new legislation and best practice methods of working.

**Action**

- Two annual meetings of Regional Equality Advisors to update and share information about new legislation and best practice within each Service.
- Report to the Regional Equalities meeting twice yearly outlining progress and shared practice.

**g. Support the directions already established to create a Fire and Rescue Service which understands and responds to community needs.**

In December 2002, guidance on community cohesion produced by the Local Government Association (LGA), Home Office, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Commission for Racial Equality and the Inter-Faith Network was issued. This highlights the importance of understanding the nature of our communities we serve.

Community cohesion is important to the success of strategies and initiatives which aim to improve the quality of people's life. It is to a large extent built locally and to do this, local authorities and their partners should be prepared to invest in understanding their communities.

As a region, we are working hard to develop local strategies to help improve the quality of life and the opportunities available to their communities. Community Safety is at the heart of the modern Fire and Rescue Service. Ensuring fire safety education reaches the whole of the region is essential to our aim of reducing fire deaths. Equality and Diversity plays an essential role in ensuring barriers to communication are removed.

**Action**

- CFOA Regional Community Safety Group to link to CFOA regional Equality Forum to assist community cohesion.
- Equality Officers to work alongside Community Safety teams to improve communication.
- Community Safety staff to continue to engage in partnership working with under represented groups.