



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham
Fire and Rescue Authority

REVISED FRAMEWORK FOR EQUALITIES WITHIN THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Agenda Item No:

Date: 19 February 2010

Purpose of Report:

To present to Members the revised framework for equalities within the Fire and Rescue Service, and to seek approval for proposed amendments to the terms of reference for the Strategic Equalities Board.

CONTACT OFFICER

Name : Frank Swann
Chief Fire Officer

Tel : 0115 967 0880

Email : frank.swann@notts-fire.gov.uk

**Media Enquiries
Contact :** Elisabeth Reeson
(0115) 967 5889 elisabeth.reeson@notts-fire.gov.uk

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Since its introduction, the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) has been required to report on its performance against the equalities agenda against the Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG). Performance indicators were largely devised from the best value framework, along with specific recruitment and retention targets for FRSs.
- 1.2 As the ESLG was devised primarily for local government, the FRS nationally had sought a sector specific framework so that its own performance could be measured accurately. With the ESLG being superseded by the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG), the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) in partnership with the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) have produced the new Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework (FRS EF). This Framework recognises and addresses the equality and diversity objectives which are a priority for the FRS. Copies of the Framework have previously been circulated to all Members of the Authority.

2. REPORT

The Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework

- 2.1 In principal the FRS EF is the same as the local government framework, but it has been adapted to suit the FRS agenda. It is an outcome focused framework and is based upon the same principles as the EFLG and includes the use of three achievement levels. These are:
 - Developing;
 - Achieving;
 - Excellent.
- 2.2 As Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) was at Level 2 of the former ESLG, it will automatically be placed within the 'developing' category.
- 2.3 Within the Framework are five areas of priority. These have been cross-mapped with the National Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-2018. This ensures that the performance of the Service can be reported back to Communities and Local Government (CLG) as part of their annual process. The priority areas of performance are:
 - Leadership and promoting inclusion;
 - Accountability;
 - Effective service delivery and community engagement;
 - Employment and training;
 - Evaluation and sharing good practice.

- 2.4 It is the intention of the Framework that the three levels should represent a continuous part of improvement. The IDeA recommend that all FRSs should aspire to reaching 'excellence'. Equally, even though those Services at Level 1 and 2 of the former ESLG have been migrated to the 'developing' category, there will be some elements that FRSs will need to address to fully comply with each new category. This is due to the different focus of the Framework and its correlation with the National Strategy.
- 2.5 Assessment against the new Framework will be undertaken through a process of 'self' and 'peer' assessment. FRSs through migration may legitimately claim performance at the 'developing' level. For a Service to claim 'achieving' and 'excellent' levels, self assessments will require validation by an IDeA Diversity Peer Challenge.
- 2.6 The Diversity Peer Challenge which previously applied to Levels 3 and 5 of the ESLG has been revised to provide a means of benchmarking achievements against the FRS EF. It will consist of two parts:
- A review by IDeA accredited FRS peers of the Service's own self-assessment, including appropriate supporting evidence;
 - An on-site visit by three peers to conduct interviews and focus groups with employees, Councillors and other stakeholders.
- 2.7 FRSs who have acceptable evidence of current performance at the 'achieving' and 'excellent' levels will be awarded a certificate by CFOA or IDeA and will be entitled to use a relevant FRS EF seal. In order to ensure that this performance is current, and to encourage continuous improvement once a Service reaches either 'achieving' or 'excellent', they will be re-evaluated at least every three years.

Strategic Equalities Board

- 2.8 In 2008 Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire and Rescue Authority completely revised its approach to the management of the equalities agenda from the strategic level through to delivery of service. These changes had been driven by the introduction of the new Equality and Diversity Strategy and publishing of a national survey report of ex-firefighters.
- 2.9 At its meeting of 5 September 2008, the Fire Authority agreed to a revised terms of reference and a revised structure for the delivery of the equalities agenda. Since this time much of those recommendations have been put in place, however with the publication of NFRS's own Single Equality Scheme, and the FRS EF as detailed in this report, it would be appropriate to amend the terms of reference.
- 2.10 It is therefore proposed that the Strategic Equalities Board's terms of reference are revised to include reference to the new Framework and the Single Equality Scheme, as per Appendix A of this report. It is also proposed that the ACFO Risk Response, who chairs the Employee Action Group and

Equalities Steering Group, is also included on the membership list to improve the reporting process.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no specific financial implications as a result of this report, however as and when the Service wishes to undertake its peer assessment process, budgetary provision does need to be made.

4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

In line with the revised approach to the equalities agenda agreed in 2008, the Service has now put in place a team to support the Equality and Diversity Officer. Additionally, a number of positive action initiatives and internal training have taken place. If the Service is to progress against the new FRS EF, it will need to maintain this commitment.

5. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The FRS EF is the measure by which the Service can judge its delivery to those under-represented within both the Service and the community. The Framework tests the commitment and achievement of the Service from Elected Members through to all employee levels. By progressing against this Framework, the Service will be ensuring that it is an employer of choice for all, as well as being able to demonstrate its delivery of service is equal to all.

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

There are no specific crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

8.1 As a public body Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service has both general and specific legal duties to promote equality of opportunity and eliminate discrimination for service users and employees. Failure to comply with such requirements may not only lead to prosecution but could also:

- Reduce the Service's ability to protect and serve the community because of a poor understanding of its needs;

- Cause detriment to employees who may not have the equality of opportunity to develop their potential; and
- Damage the standing and reputation of Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service.

8.2 The Service's performance against the FRS EF will form part of the audit process along with CLG targets within the national strategy for the recruitment and retention of staff. Through the Audit Commission's process of inspection the Service will struggle to achieve better performance results until it achieves the 'achieving' category.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 9.1 Note the introduction of the FRS EF and its contents.
- 9.2 Approve the proposed amendments to the terms of reference of the Strategic Equalities Board.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION (OTHER THAN PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS)

- Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework.

Frank Swann
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

STRATEGIC EQUALITIES BOARD TERMS OF REFERENCE

Frequency of meetings : Quarterly

Overall Objective

To ensure that Nottinghamshire and Nottingham City Fire and Rescue Authority sets and maintains its strategic direction in relation to equality and diversity in order to reduce disadvantage, discrimination and inequality of opportunity, and to promote equality in terms of the people it serves, its workforce, the partners it works with and the services it delivers.

Proposed Role and Function

- To oversee NFRS’s discharge of its statutory responsibilities in relation to race, disability and gender and other relevant areas of equalities legislation and/or guidance that may arise in future.
- To monitor and apply scrutiny to the Service’s progress on its Single Equality Scheme.
- To monitor and apply scrutiny to the Service’s progress against the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework.
- To act as a group for consultation at member level and champion training at member level.
- To inform and support the work of the Equalities Action Group.
- To report progress back to the Policy and Strategy and Performance Committees as appropriate.

Proposed Membership

5 Elected Members – to include Chair and Vice Chair of the Authority
Chief Fire Officer
Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Equality and Diversity Officer
ACFO Risk Response/Chair of Equalities Steering Group