



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham
Fire and Rescue Authority
Policy & Strategy Committee

FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY STRATEGY 2008-2018 CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Agenda Item No:

Date: 1 February 2008

Purpose of Report:

To present to the Policy and Strategy Committee Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service's response to the Communities and Local Government consultation on the proposed Equality and Diversity Strategy for Fire and Rescue Authorities.

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Fire and Rescue Service must engage with and understand the needs of the communities it serves and plan and deliver its services to take account of those needs. Equality and diversity are therefore central to the effective protection of the public through fire prevention and emergency response.
- 1.2 To ensure that the Fire and Rescue Service meets its obligation, Communities and Local Government (CLG), in conjunction with key stakeholders, have developed the Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-2018 which is currently out for consultation. The Equality and Diversity Strategy is presented as a ten year high level national strategy, which seeks to meet the challenge of bringing real, radical and lasting change to the Fire and Rescue Service in England.

2. REPORT

- 2.1 Over the past ten years since the Thematic Review of Equality and Fairness in the Fire Service (1999), significant progress has been made in improving service delivery to diverse communities. However, the strategy identifies there are still key areas of progress required. Notably:
 - The impact of fire is grossly disproportionate on some communities (39% of fire deaths are people with disabilities;
 - Very small numbers of staff are from minority ethnic backgrounds (3% compared to a national average working population of over 12%);
 - Very small numbers of women are operational firefighters (2.8%);
 - Women and staff from minority ethnic backgrounds are less likely to be promoted;
 - The number of gay or lesbian fire and rescue staff who feel able to be open about their sexuality at work is less than 10% of the national average.
- 2.2 The Strategy's aim is to address these issues, improve the way we treat each other and also improve the effectiveness of the relationship with the public. It seeks to draw together and build upon existing work both within the Service and elsewhere. The Strategy sets out a vision for the Fire and Rescue Service and the goals which must be met by 2018.
- 2.3 Key to the strategy are specific targets for the recruitment and retention of staff. Whilst previous targets have aimed to measure change and the overall composition of the workforce, the draft strategy for 2008-2018 considers new targets depending on progress. Subject to the consultation, the targets to be met are:

- Women (operational roles) to reach (from 12% up to 18%) of recruits by 2013. (Comments on the appropriate level within this range are sought from consultees);
- Minority ethnic staff to reach (either option 1, the same percentage as in the local working population, or option 2, the percentage in the local working population, plus 5%) as a percentage of recruits by 2013. (Comments on whether the first or second option should be adopted, and if option 2 is preferred, the appropriate level within this range, are sought from consultees);
- Fire and Rescue Authorities with a very low minority ethnic working age population (eg: below 2% and low recruitment requirements (eg: less than 20 people/year) may set a target in terms of individuals recruited over the five year period, rather than a percentage total recruitment.
- Parity in rates of retention and progression between minority ethnic and white employees, and between men and women, by 2013.

2.4 The Strategy seeks a response to these proposed targets by 6 February 2008 and poses six key questions to assist in formatting a response. These questions are:

The Strategy

1. Do you consider that the Strategy sets out the actions which will deliver change. If not, why not? And what would you wish to change?

Targets and Monitoring

2. Do you support the principle of recruitment, retention and progression targets and consider that they will drive improvement on workforce diversity? If not, why not? And what would you propose should be put in place?
3. What are your views on the level at which recruitment targets for women in operational roles and ethnic minority staff should be set (within the ranges proposed), in order to be challenging but achievable, and likely to motivate action?
4. Do you consider robust monitoring of all strands of diversity achievable and likely to motivate action?

Guidance

5. Are there areas covered by the Strategy for which you consider specific guidance for the Fire and Rescue Service is required (in addition to existing guidance developed for the Service or for the public sector in general).

6. We (CLG) would also welcome comments that you may have on the accompanying Impact Assessment (ie: is there anything specific required from CLG to collect additional information on, ie: costs/benefits).

2.5 In consideration and response, Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service has formulated a submission responding to the questions raised by CLG (attached at Appendix A).

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no additional quantified costs to Fire and Rescue Authorities that have been identified by CLG as a consequence of the good practice contained within the draft strategy.

4. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

The draft Equality and Diversity Strategy will have an impact on the recruitment and retention of under-represented groups within Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service. Specific targets have been suggested and the Service will be required to report against these targets.

5. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The Strategy has been subject to a full and detailed equality impact assessment, so there is no further requirement for Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service to conduct such a process. The full impact assessment is contained within the consultation document.

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

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

7. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Failure to improve the Fire and Rescue Service's performance in this area will fail to change the diversity of the workforce or its culture. This will restrict significant improvements in engagement with all parts of the community and restrict effective service delivery.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Policy and Strategy Committee consider and approve the proposed submission (Appendix A) from Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service to Communities and Local Government on the consultation on the Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-2018.

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

- Fire and Rescue Service Circulate 52/2007;
- Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-2018 (consultation).

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Response to the Consultation on the Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-2018

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January 2008

RESPONSE TO FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY STRATEGY 2008-2018

General Comments

Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the consultation and the reviewed commitment to this issue is welcomed. The fact that the Strategy is intended to be concise and strategic is also welcomed.

However, NFRS is disappointed that the overall approach does not strengthen the focus on the operational/business case. NFRS believes that to make the cultural advances for greater diversity, a change from the solitary focus on employment targets towards a more fundamental understanding of the benefits diversity brings to a modern public service is required.

There are also concerns regarding the understanding of the equality legislation and the practical improvements required.

In response to the questions raised, our particular comments are as follows:

Targets

NFRS supports the principle of targets as these can act as a spur and a means of measuring progress in both employment (recruitment, retention and progression) and service delivery and believes that SMART targets should lead to improvements in both of these areas. However, comments are sought on the ranges proposed without scope for discussing these ranges and the reasons for maintaining them. In abandoning the current targets before the current ten year period is over, could be unhelpfully interpreted as an admission of failure.

For instance, the target relating to the employment of women in operational roles of between 12 and 18% by 2013 is simply unachievable, given that the current female operational workforce is 2.8% and the current target is set at 15%. This target obviously was not SMART and so it is suggested that perhaps the range of 12-15% is reconsidered, or a variation of targets be set. These could include attraction of applications, recruitment and progression. Clearly with Services changing their establishment, such an approach would give a more defined view of individual Services' performance.

Additionally, we feel the CLG strategy should consider in more detail the equal opportunities publication "How to set targets for gender equality". There are elements within this publication which show good practice that could enhance the proposed strategy.

It is suggested that the Strategy is clear on the definition of operational roles. Control employees come under this definition and could therefore be included within this target. Also, roles within the fire service are changing so rapidly that separate

targets for operational and non-operational employees are perhaps less relevant than they were in 1999 and will probably be even less relevant in 2018. The Strategy should not ignore the impact of the introduction of Regional Control Centres, and greater collaborative working as proposed by the national framework consultation. These aspects will affect a Fire and Rescue Service's recruitment rates significantly.

With regards to the target relating to black and minority ethnic employees, NFRS supports Option 1. The Authority should be working towards reflecting the population it serves. We are unsure of the reasons for the 'plus up to 5%' aspect in Option 2 which seems to go beyond the requirement of the law and again would not be an achievable target.

It is also disappointing that nowhere in the Strategy are the issues around working problems and working practices addressed. By establishing targets in these areas, some of the indirect barriers to recruitment and retention may be addressed.

Outcome Measures

NFRS have some concerns about some of the outcomes expected by this draft strategy. For instance, the fourth bullet point stating that we will know we have succeeded when 'gay, lesbian and bisexual staff have no concerns about being open about their sexuality at work' is not achievable. Young people and adults alike still have difficulty in declaring their sexual orientation to their families and friends. Some organisations with less traditionally divided roles and working environments are able to provide safer environments for people to come out at work. But even the most liberal of organisations would find it difficult to state that their staff would have 'no concerns' in being open about their sexual orientation at work.

This outcome would be very difficult to measure and would also have to apply to all members of staff and not just gay, lesbian and bi-sexual employees.

Monitoring

NFRS considers that robust monitoring of all strands of diversity (in most cases) is practical, achievable and provides a useful baseline for action. However, this consultation appears to rely very heavily on the requirements of the local government equality standard and marginalises statutory duties in this area. The local government standard, whilst providing a good outline framework, does not apply effectively to the Fire and Rescue Service. It focuses too heavily on procedures rather than outcomes.

Conclusion

As stated above, a National Strategy for Equality and Diversity is welcomed. However, NFRS feels that a 10 year strategy, during such an intense period of change at Fire and Rescue Authorities, will mean that the strategy and its aims will soon become outdated and targets unachievable. NFRS feels that this strategy should match the timescale of the National Framework which is 3 years.