

MEETING: 13 JULY 2009

SUBJECT: INTRODUCTION OF A SINGLE EQUALITY SCHEME

**JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY,
THE FINANCE OFFICER AND PERSONNEL ADVISOR**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report outlines the first edition of the Authority's Single Equality Scheme (SES) and associated action plans which Members are requested to endorse. By introducing a SES the Authority is providing clear leadership and commitment beyond its legal requirement to address gender, disability and race equality.
- 1.2 The SES encompasses all six strands of equality by including age, sexual orientation and religion or belief and lays out the practical steps the Authority will take to promote equality and Human Rights in all that it does.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Fire and Rescue National Framework 2008 – 2011 sets out the Government's priorities and objectives for the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) by making clear the Government's expectations in:
 - Prevention, Protection and Response
 - Resilience
 - Diversity and the Workplace
 - Governance and Improvement
- 2.2 Focusing on the Diversity objective, The National Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008 – 2018 challenges us to develop and improve our contribution in the following areas:
 - Priority 1 Leadership and promoting Inclusion
 - Priority 2 Effective Service Delivery and Community Engagement
 - Priority 3 Employment and Training
 - Priority 4 Evaluation and Sharing Good Practice
 - Priority 5 Accountability
- 2.3 Furthermore, the suite of Equality Legislation that public authorities have a duty to comply with is both large and complex. Public authorities, including Fire Authorities, have, since 2002 had a duty to "promote race equality". In addition in 2005 the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 was amended and extended to place a duty on public authorities to "promote disability equality", and the Equality Act 2006 requires public bodies to "promote gender equality". Each of these three key pieces of legislation requires the publication of an equality scheme.
- 2.4 The Authority has been meeting the statutory obligations including 'scheme reviews' every three years. Looking to the future, it is vital that a coordinated

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approach to meeting our statutory duties continues, however it is also vitally important to ensure that in developing our Equality and Diversity agenda, that any new scheme is flexible enough to accommodate any future requirements to publish schemes on the remaining equality strands, age, sexual orientation and religion or belief.

- 2.5 In November 2008 the then Fire Minister, Sadiq Khan MP asked Fire and Rescue Authorities to provide Communities and Local Government with details of their Equality Schemes. Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority provided details of our three statutory schemes for Race, Disability and Gender and informed the Minister of our intent to develop a Single Equality Scheme (SES).

3. PROPOSAL

- 3.1 In developing our Equality and Diversity agenda, the introduction of a Single Equality Scheme (SES) places this Authority in a strong position to respond to new legislation, for example, the Equality Bill, which is currently progressing through the parliamentary committee process at present. The intention of the Equality Bill is to simplify, streamline and consolidate current discrimination laws under one statute. It is also likely to introduce new measures intended to strengthen protection against discrimination. It will also make it easier to align equality objectives with the overall strategic plans of the Authority and help to ensure that multiple identities are taken into account.
- 3.2 The SES is attached and is set out as a 'live' document, that it will be regularly reviewed and developed on an annual basis. The scheme contains detailed information and also sets out plans for the six strands of equality, namely:
- Disability
 - Race
 - Gender
 - Religion and Belief
 - Age
 - Sexual Orientation
- 3.3 The introduction and merger of the six equality strands into a SES will also offer an opportunity for the Authority to recognise and celebrate its' achievements whilst giving clear leadership and commitment about the plans for the future in order to promote equality and diversity within the local community and for its employees.

4. EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Authority has control systems in place, including that of Equality Impact Assessments which are undertaken across the six equality strands. This inclusive approach, with the development of a SES is a practical and proactive way forward to assist in areas of service delivery and employment and are considered sufficient to minimise the likelihood of failure, however should the Authority not comply with the duties under the three current legislative schemes, race, gender and disability, the impact could be significant in reputation, legal and financial terms.

5. HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no health and safety implications in respect of this report.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no costs associated with implementing a Single Equality Scheme.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 The Authority is requested to:

- a) Approve the introduction of a single equality scheme;
- b) Endorse the plans identified within each of the six equality strands;
- c) Receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Disability Equality Scheme 2006-2009

Race Equality Scheme 2002 and annual reviews

Gender Equality Scheme 2007-2010

The Fire and Rescue National Framework 2008-2011

The National Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-2018

In depth information can be found at www.equalityhumanrights.com and www.equalities.gov.uk