

PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING**TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY****HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE: 12 JULY 2010**

SUBJECT: EMPLOYEE ADVISORY GROUPS**JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY,
THE FINANCE OFFICER AND PERSONNEL ADVISOR**

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform members of the launch of two Employee Advisory Groups (EAGs) within the Authority. The report includes details of the purpose and focus of the groups and provides a brief summary of the progress to date.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Following the publication of the Single Equality Scheme there was an identified need to establish EAGs within the Authority to further explore specific issues across the six strands of diversity and equality (Disability, Race, Gender, Religion or Belief, Age and Sexual Orientation).
- 2.2 The creation of the EAGs was also driven by the requirement to establish a network for our Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual staff (LGB). This is a specific development area for the Authority identified as part of the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index (WEI) benchmarking exercise. Following consultation, two EAGs were created initially: The Disability EAG and the Sexual Orientation EAG (to consider LGB issues).

3 ESTABLISHING EAGs

- 3.1 An internal article was published explaining the background and purpose of the EAGs and employees were requested to consider volunteering to become members of each group. This generated a good level of interest which resulted in the Authority being able to create two appropriately sized EAGs both consisting of several employees.
- 3.2 The groups themselves are diverse in their own right and include representation from both male and female employees as well as people from operational and corporate roles and from different disciplines across the Service.

3.3 Volunteers for the EAGs are either:

- An LGB employee or an employee with a disability / disabilities;
- Interested in a specific group due to personal experience eg with a family member / friend with a disability / disabilities or who is LGB;
- Someone who feels that can make a valuable contribution to the group in terms of their knowledge / background.

4 PURPOSE OF EAGs

4.1 The main purpose of the EAGs is to help shape internal policy and the services provided to the diverse community of Tyne and Wear. They will do this by:

- Acting as a 'voice' for disabled / LGB employees and provide a support network for disabled / LGB employees;
- Meeting on a regular basis (at least bi-monthly) to explore various issues in relation to their specific area, whilst also considering all six strands of diversity including additional protected characteristics under the Equalities Act 2010;
- Providing advice to help shape policies to ensure they are inclusive to disabled / LGB employees and highlight any areas for improvement;
- Advising on issues to develop our services to people in our diverse communities with a focus on engaging disabled / LGB people; and
- Developing an awareness campaign in relation to their area to expand knowledge and understanding across the workforce.

4.2 The groups are working groups and will assist the Authority in working towards promoting equality of opportunity and diversity in all aspects of its work.

5 STRUCTURE OF EAGs

5.1 Each group has a Group Champion (a senior manager to provide on-going support and encouragement to the group) and a Lead who will be supported by the Diversity and Equality Advisor to consult with group members and set the agenda, chair the group and provide direction as required.

5.2 Each group also consists of several group members and an administrator whose role is to influence and shape the agenda for their group, contribute / input into constructive discussions at meetings / events and generate / develop ideas for improvement as well as share taking accurate minutes to capture valuable details of discussions and actions progressed.

6 REPORTING STRUCTURE

6.1 Both EAGs will report into the Diversity and Equality Committee with regular reporting to this Committee as appropriate.

6.2 Other communication links for the EAGs may include:

- Recruitment & Selection Department
- Human Resources Department
- Diverse Community Relationship Manager / Community Advocates
- Regional Equality and Diversity Policy Advisor
- Strategic partnerships

7 PROGRESS TO DATE

6.1 The Sexual Orientation EAG launched on 22 April, followed by the Disability EAG launching on 7 May 2010. Group Champions, Councillor Nick Forbes, Vice Chair of the Fire Authority and Mr John Hindmarch, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, addressed their respective groups at the initial launch meetings and vocalised their commitment to continue to provide their support on an on-going basis.

6.2 The agenda for each initial meeting included establishing and agreeing the remit of the group and developing the Terms of Reference; outlining, discussing and agreeing roles and responsibilities; group communication methods and themes for communicating / marketing.

6.3 Whilst the Sexual Orientation EAG then went on to focus specifically on the WEI Action Plan, and the organisation / co-ordination of a satellite event within the Service for Northern Pride 2010, the Disability EAG looked at the Single Equality Scheme Disability Action Plan currently due for review.

6.4 The Diversity and Equality Advisor is currently developing the Diversity and Equality pages on the Intranet and Internet and it is envisaged that each group will support this area of work with a view to using the pages to promote their specific group and provide updates / raise awareness regarding their work.

6.5 Following the launch of both EAGs it is extremely encouraging to note that both groups are keen to be working groups with specific objectives and a view to achieving real outcomes for people with a disability / disabilities and LGB people.

8 NEXT STEPS

8.1 The Diversity and Equality Advisor will continue to work with both EAGs and to ensure their work / progress is communicated effectively to the wider workforce. Communications, co-ordinated by the Diversity and Equality Advisor, will be posted on the Intranet News to update the workforce / local communities.

8.2 It is envisaged that these groups will report regularly and provide the Authority with a greater insight into the needs of the highlighted sections of society thereby improving the Authority as an 'employer of choice' whilst widening our knowledge and understanding.

9 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 9.1 Research shows that people work best when they can be themselves at work. Inclusive work environments, which encourage loyalty, teamwork and maximise personal contributions are key to top performing organisations.
- 9.2 Organisations that achieve inclusivity for all become employers of choice in competitive markets, attracting and retaining the best talent.
- 9.3 The organisation may risk its ability to achieve a diverse workforce, which reflects the community it serves if it does not explore opportunities, which ensure inclusivity for all. It is therefore essential that this work continues to enable employees from within the EAGs to assist the organisation in developing policy, practice and processes to support all employees.

10 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There will be financial implications by virtue of this report and some small provision has been made within existing budgetary headings. Further reports will be tabled for consideration by Members as appropriate.

11 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 By supporting and encouraging employees to participate in the EAGs the organisation is showing a clear commitment to listening to and responding to the needs of all employees. It also demonstrates that the Authority is 'living' its core values regarding diversity specifically in relation to valuing the contribution of all employees.
- 11.2 Recommendations from the EAGs may lead to policy development / changes to practices and processes and therefore Equality Impact Assessments will need to be carried out.

12 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

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

13 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 13.1 Members are recommended to:
- a) Note the content of this report;
 - b) Endorse the creation and development of the EAGs;
 - c) Receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The under mentioned Background Papers refer to the subject matter of the above report:

- Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008 – 2018.

Creating the Safest Community