

TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE (TWFRS)	
COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIP BUILDING & ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2011-2014	
COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIP MANAGER	Oct 2011

## **COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIP BUILDING & ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2011-2014**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Community Engagement and relationship building is an intrinsic element of our core vision of '*Creating the Safest Community*' – which drives our need to understand our community better, to improve links and partnerships, and to have meaningful contacts that promote wellbeing, cohesion and inclusion. We strive to make our community and within that - *communities* aware of our commitment to keeping them safe, reducing death and injury and providing a value for money service, in which employees reflect the communities we serve.
- 1.2 At the heart of this strategy is a need for our communities to have a real stake in how we work to support the most vulnerable individuals, to involve communities in our decision making, and to enable them to feel that they can help drive and improve the services that we deliver.
- 1.3 This strategy will outline how we will improve our ability to engage with our community and look at how we build relationships with vulnerable groups. This will include partnerships, internal and external communication, consultation and volunteering.

### **2. OVERARCHING AIM OF THE STRATEGY**

To reach the most at risk in our community through improved community partnerships, relationship building, engagement, effective internal and external communications and a cohesive service wide calendar of events which seek to maximise our impact in line with our resources.

### **3. OBJECTIVES**

- 3.1 To improve our engagement on all levels with the local community, using a 'Ladder of Participation' framework to ensure that we are able to strive for the most effective engagement possible.

- 3.2 To raise awareness of TWFRS as an 'Employer of Choice' for all community groups and ensure that the diversity of our workforce reflects the community we serve.
- 3.3 To enhance community safety by ensuring that TWFRS continues to build sustainable relationships with our local communities.
- 3.4 To use community engagement as a means to enhance and develop our existing and future partnership work at both strategic and local level to ensure we are reaching the most vulnerable and hard to reach in the community.
- 3.5 To improve not only how we communicate and interact with communities, stakeholders and partners - but also how we communicate internally and externally about community engagement activities.
- 3.6 To explore ways of involving the community in how we work, both through consultation and potentially, through volunteering.

## **4. BACKGROUND**

### **4.1 WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

- 4.1.1 At a conceptual level, most Community engagement models spring from 'The Ladder of Participation' (see appendix one) boiled down, the 'ladder' aims to move communities up through a number of developmental levels in terms of the way we, as an authority, interact and engage with them.
- 4.1.2 This hierarchy enables the organisation to see at what level our actions are, and how much we empower our communities. Each level has purpose, and sometimes we will need lower level activities, or at least, begin with lower activities, when engaging with communities – but we should aim to progress so that our work and interactions with communities becomes more engaging.
  - **Level 1 - Informing:** providing communities with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding problems, alternatives, opportunities, solutions. For example our website, leaflets and promotional materials, newsletters and press releases.
  - **Level 2 – Researching –** Trust building and networking, building relationships and scoping the needs of the community.
  - **Level 3 - Consulting:** obtaining community feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions. For example, surveys and focus groups.
  - **Level 4 - Involving:** working directly with communities to ensure that concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered. For example, partnership boards, reference groups and service-users participating in policy groups – Sunderland's Independent advisory groups (IAGs)

- **Level 5 – Devolving:** working in partnership with communities in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution. Working with community based organisations such as Age UK, and carers to deliver HSCs on our behalf. Setting up a volunteering arm of the fire service could also be seen as a level 5 activity.
- **Level 6 - Empowering:** placing decision-making in the hands of the community – communities take full ownership of the decision making process and outcomes.

4.1.3 We can use this as a reference point to see how ‘engaging’ our work is, with the local community, and to see how we might be able to enhance the engagement to further empower the community. The action plan details in the Appendices of this report will aim to develop our engagement activities in line with this model.

## 4.2 Why have an Engagement Strategy?

4.2.1 TWFRS already engage with our community, our Community advocates network and link-in with many vulnerable groups in our districts, our Prevention & Education departments interact with the local community with events and HSCs, our Protection and Technical staff work with diverse businesses and we have numerous partnerships, both strategic and informal at district level which show our need to tap into our community to improve how we work.

4.2.2 It can be said that sometimes we need the level of participation to be quite low, when we simply want to inform; but a modern, community focussed organisation must strive to engage on those higher levels, not just out of a moral imperative to serve the community in the most appropriate way, but because the community itself can be a massive, scarcely tapped resource of knowledge, information and talent.

4.2.3 The development of a Community Engagement strategy is borne out of our ‘Strategic Community Safety plan 2010 - 2013’ and is inextricably linked to that overarching plan. The role of the strategy is to link in to all of our current functions and assist in making our links with communities stronger, our work with community groups more focussed and sustainable.

4.2.4 Our mission, vision and values, we can see clear strategic direction which, through our goals and priorities, clearly lend themselves to a need for engagement –

- § ‘To prevent loss of life and injury from fires and other emergencies and promote community wellbeing’ – Within this, we set the goal of *working with partners to promote community safety, social responsibility and inclusion* – this clearly demonstrates a need to engage with our

community and the Community Engagement Strategy will assist in achieving this goal.

- § 'To deliver a modern effective service, ensuring value for money with staff who reflect the communities we serve' – This goal is enhanced through engagement, value for money comes through harnessing the power of the local communities and making good use of the resources within – as well as this, being seen as an employer of choice, particularly with hard to reach communities, takes a great deal of trust building and engagement – which the Strategy and action plan will hope to enable the service to

4.2.5 Our core values also indicate a need to formalise our engagement strategy:

- *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* – all of these values, demonstrate a need for community engagement.
- *We value improvement at all levels of the service by accepting responsibility for our performance; Being open minded; Considering criticism thoughtfully; Consulting others.* – Again all high level potential actions from the 'ladder of participation'.

4.2.6 Our 'TWFRAs External Communications Strategy' also has a number of agreed actions which dovetail into a potential Community Engagement Strategy, including:

- Ensuring attendance at key partnership meetings; A strategic and planned approach to proactive media relations; identifying and targeting key stakeholders including promoting TWFRAs strategy, plans and performance to stakeholders; Improving communications with 'hard to reach' groups and finally Attending key community shows and events.

It is evident that there is a need for a focussed Community Engagement Strategy which can both acknowledge the factors outlined above, and link in with our other strategies to enable us to enhance our community relationships and target those most at risk.

The significance of having a strategy around Community Engagement is that it identifies our on-going need to understand and relationship build as a fundamental element of our role in the community.

### **4.3 TARGETTING FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

4.3.1 Community engagement goes hand in hand with the targeting of vulnerable groups for Home safety Checks (HSCs) in each district as outlined in our 'HSC targeting strategy 2010 – 2013' the groups will change on an annual basis, depending on risk, and this strategy will be guided by those most at risk on an annual basis.

4.3.2 Other noted groups (outside of the 'very high risk' category) are based primarily around Mixed communities, often diverse BME backgrounds of lower income, and in affordable, possibly cramped housing, as well as individuals living in some form of social housing, dealing with economic and social disadvantage.

4.3.3 Many of our existing partnerships have come through this process via Local strategic partnerships and working with relevant public sector groups.

From this we can ascertain some constants in our targeting:

Age – Older people being more vulnerable, but depending on socio/economic status, young families, singles and couples of varying ages are also at risk.

Social deprivation – Individuals in social housing, in areas of deprivation are more at risk – irrespective of cultural background.

Diverse communities – Various BME communities in our area, more vulnerable because of issues around language, crowded inner city living and cultural disenfranchisement.

4.3.4 From this targeting we have to look at how best we can support all of these communities, through a variety of engagement methods. Some of these we are already doing, but there are a lot of activities that we may be able to engage in that can help to ensure we reach the most vulnerable in all of our communities.

#### **4.4 Hard and Soft Targeting**

4.4.1 When we look at targeting mechanisms currently in use in line with other strategies, we can see a clear distinction of those targets which we can term 'Hard' - with clear routes through existing partnership boards and LSPs and secondly those 'Soft' targets which don't necessarily have a clear path through formal partnership structures, but can yield significant results through improved engagement. Community engagement is relevant to both sides, and we can see below, the distinction between the two.

4.4.2 Hard Targeting – Formal partnership arrangements with public sector agencies and charities to provide information sharing, HSCs, training to have direct access to vulnerable groups. – many of our successful formal partnerships could be put into this bracket.

○ Examples include

- § Local Housing companies i.e. Your Homes Newcastle
- § Police/health service partnerships
- § Social housing providers
- § Age UK
- § Carers

- § Disabled services
- § Environmental Health Services

4.4.3 Soft Targeting – Relationship and trust building with community groups and charities where the link to accessing vulnerable groups may be indirect or the ‘pay off’ might be longer term. Soft targets might be made through issues around age, social deprivation – possibly more based in the voluntary/social enterprise sector. These targets are more long term and we would aim to use the Community engagement framework to enable us to better engage with these organisations.

- Examples might include
  - § Drug and alcohol charities – Although not exclusively, there is an established link between social deprivation and drug/alcohol abuse
  - § Domestic violence – again not exclusively, but a linked factor in social deprivation
  - § Mental health services public/3<sup>rd</sup> sector
  - § Meals on Wheels
  - § RSPCA
  - § RNID/B
  - § Job centres
  - § Balance
  - § Refuge and Women’s Aid
  - § Citizens Advice Bureau
  - § Single mothers support networks
  - § Support groups
  - § Places of worship
  - § Hospices
  - § Macmillan Nurses.
  - § BME groups and services, and businesses.

Both hard and soft targeting can yield great results when the aim is to build a better community profile and enhance community engagement.

## 4.5 Using the Ladder as a partnership and engagement framework

4.5.1 We can apply this model to our partnership work, how we strive to develop sustainable partnerships which achieve engagement on the following developmental levels:

### 4.5.2 Informing and Researching – (Levels 1 and 2)

- Networking
  - § Attend forums and steering groups which address community interests and be proactive in offering appropriate support.
  - § Identify key stakeholders, community leaders and appropriate 3<sup>rd</sup> and public sector support agencies.
- Identify and Inform

- § Identify what services we can provide and ensure that it is within our capabilities and budget to do so, before agreeing on actions.
  - § Educate communities on the importance of fire safety and help them to understand the importance of the home safety check in reducing death and serious harm by fire.
- Trust building
    - § Build upon positive relationships, reasonable sharing of resources, attending events, offering facilities etc
    - § Open up the fire service to the community, host events and build positive associations.
    - § Develop an understanding of the needs of each community, there is no such thing as a 'one size fits all' approach.
    - § Identify gaps and look at a best fit for the service that we offer.
    - § Also acknowledge any barriers that need to be addressed
      - Cultural i.e. need for female TWFRS staff to be present on visits, additional cultural knowledge around specific festivals or customs.
      - Conflict i.e. the acknowledgement that bringing some communities together could lead to difficulties where there are histrionic cultural differences.
      - Technical/logistical i.e. People with disabilities/sensory difficulties may need enhanced equipment, disabled access to facilities.
      - Language needs i.e. if English is not 1<sup>st</sup> language, can we facilitate a way to overcome this, using advocates, translators or in the case of deaf individuals BSL signers. Language specific information sheets might also be appropriate.
    - § To see all events and partnerships as a way of showcasing the service as an employer of choice and ensuring evaluation processes can gather qualitative and quantitative data on how effectively we convey this.

#### 4.5.3 Consulting (Level 3)

- Using EAGs internally and partners and stakeholders externally to enable us to engage and consult with hard to reach groups – ensuring that stakeholders have a say in our aims and objectives and can also help to evaluate the effectiveness of our service and our recruitment.

#### 4.5.4 Involving and Devolving (Level 4 and Level 5)

- Information share with partners to ensure vulnerable individuals are covered by home safety checks and risk evaluation assessments.

- § Educating appropriate partner agencies to carry out risk assessments and HSCs on our behalf – with built in sustainability plans to ensure that work can be maintained and resources are used with the minimum of wastage.
- § Using volunteers from the community to help us achieve our aims and objectives.
- Maximising and standardising formal partnership activity with relevant cross district strategic arrangements.
  - Where multiple partnerships are taking place with one agency, in separate districts – i.e. Age UK – explore working with Districts on replicating good practice and encouraging agreements and partnerships which span all districts with a consistent approach and shared outcomes. This is only relevant when agencies are not confined to a specific district alone.
  - Explore new pan-district partnerships which engage with other 3<sup>rd</sup> sector agencies such as Mind, or Balance.

#### 4.5.5 Empowering (Level 6)

- The most difficult from of engagement and the last step towards self sufficient community actions. This, in terms of our partnership work, would be the most difficult to achieve, as the very nature of our work requires us to work with our partners to quality assure the work they do for us. Level 6 can only be termed as ‘aspirational’ for TWFRS at this juncture. As community engagement enhances our work, new opportunities may come up to generate initiatives that lead to total empowerment.

## 5. ACTION POINTS

The formulation of the aims and objectives of the strategy bring up a number of action points, these will be contained within the report as an appendix to allow for an annual review of progress, evaluation and revision to keep actions as relevant to the needs of the organisation as possible. This action plan will also be tied in to the annual Level 3 plans for community safety. Please see Appendix 2 for action points.

## 6. RESOURCES AND INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

- 6.1 In an organisation such as TWFRS, with such a community focus, the success of this Community Engagement Strategy is reliant upon all staff to view every interaction and contact with our community (and communities) to be a potential chance to engage. With 5 busy districts and a number of SHQ departments which regularly engage with our stakeholders, the implementation of the strategy must be ingrained in our procedures and will need significant buy-in with a wide variety of staff and work streams.



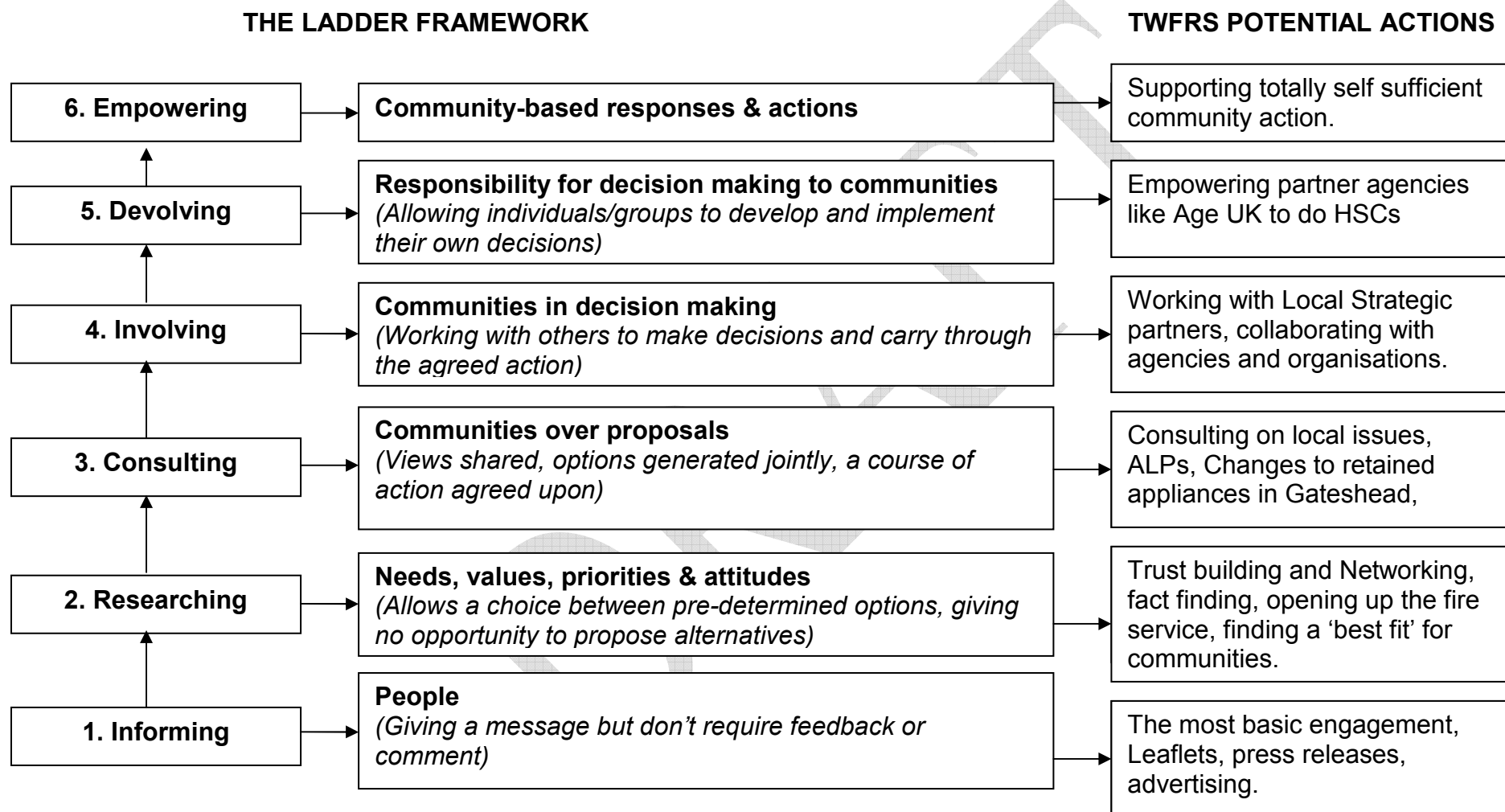
6.2 Outlined below is a general breakdown of where and how the strategy might feed into various work streams, based on activities that the strategy might cultivate through its inception. – The list below is not exhaustive, as the work to achieve community engagement grows, more departments and work streams may need to be involved.

- Community Safety/Service Delivery
  - Prevention & Education
  - Protection & Technical
  - Operational response
  - Advocates
- Corporate Communications
  - Consultation
  - Internal Communications
  - External Communications
  - Web development
  - MRU
- Recruitment and HR
  - Selection and Retention
  - E&D
  - L&D

## 7. **EVALUATION**

Evaluation is an essential element of this process, as we need to gauge the success of the strategy for each of the action points. Each project will be assessed through TWFRS evaluation procedure.

## Appendix 1 The Ladder of Participation



## **Appendix 2 - Community Engagement and Relationship Building Action Points.**

### ***1. Exploration of the use of volunteers for TWFRS through a Volunteering Working party***

What is proposed?

To best explore the resources that the community has to offer, and to improve our engagement with the community as a whole, it is our responsibility to look at the possibility of using volunteers in TWFRS.

The use of volunteers brings out a number of issues to be explored; a suitable working party would need to be set up to look at the issues.

What is the purpose?

Volunteering is used widely within other fire services and can be an effective way to build relationships with hard to reach communities, and is also a good way to empower the community in issues around fire safety. The working party would discuss the implications, functions, cost issues etc around volunteering with a view to preparing a report for our Strategic Management Team to decide the direction that the organisation goes in.

Position on the 'Ladder of Participation' Level 4 – Involving

Volunteering is a fairly high level activity and a move for the service to involve volunteers in our work would be a significant step to increase our community engagement.

Timescales

It is anticipated that a report would be ready for SMT within Q2 2011-12

### ***2. Calendar of engagement events***

What is proposed?

An online events calendar, in which all of our upcoming events which have any kind of engagement element are listed, from Princes trust presentations, Station open days, Business forum events, Pride Breakfast, Ramadan events, BME engagement – mosque visits, Bonfire events, Charity activities etc.

The page would sit on the intranet and the internet sites and would be updated regularly with all new events as and when.

What is the purpose?

Making the service and the public more aware of what we are doing, how we are engaging with our communities, what is happening at district level, with a hope to coordinate activities and plan for higher impact events which span more than one district - i.e. Ramadan – mosques in all districts – can we make more of our effort to support them, rather than piecemeal in each district. This may then lead to more publicity, and more editorial and higher impact.

It would also give us a definitive document on an annual basis as to our work in the community, so that we can build each year to improve what we do.

Prevention & Education and Protection & Technical staff, Station and District Managers can see what is going on in each district and may be inspired to replicate events, partnerships and activities – possible joint working between districts.

Also to encourage more staff to attend events and support our work

Position on the 'Ladder of Participation' Level 1 – Informing

This is a fairly 'low level' of community engagement, but is extremely important in documenting our work and informing internally and externally.

Timescales

It is anticipated that the calendar would be ready for the intranet within Q2/3 2011-12

### **3. Community Engagement section on the Website/Intranet**

What is proposed?

To have a section on our website, dedicated to our community engagement work, 'Meet the Team' - current initiatives, a 'celebrate safely' section so that each festival (Diwali, Christmas, Ramadan, Eid) has its own heading and safety considerations. Also links to other CS functions.

What is the purpose?

To embed Community engagement into our communications and offer the public a conduit to see how we are trying to work with them to improve cohesion and involve our communities in making them safe.

Position on the 'Ladder of Participation' Level 1 – Informing

A low level activity, but again one which would tie in the needs of this strategy and ensure we are informing at the right level.

Timescales

It is anticipated that the section would be ready within Q2/3 2011-12

#### **4. Enhanced partnership focus on 'Hard to reach' communities**

What is proposed?

Exploring partnerships and engagement with agencies that work with a variety of hard to reach groups, specifically those around drug and alcohol (please see 5.11, mental health, sensory impairments, disability and BME groups. (See section 4.4 for more details.)

What is the purpose?

In line with both hard and soft targeting as mentioned in section 4.4, Contact will be made with various groups, to pursue potential partnership working and to improve relationships, understanding and engagement – the ultimate aim is to reach more hard to reach groups and improve community safety.

Position on the 'Ladder of Participation' Level 4/5 – Involving and devolving  
A very high level activity, this would be an ongoing action point throughout the life of the strategy.

Timescales

On-going 2011-2014 – with an annual review to evaluate progress.

#### **5. Scoping the role of Engagement in our diversionary activities**

What is proposed?

A review to see how we might enhance our diversionary activities, such as YFA, Hotshots, Phoenix, Princes trust, and Safetyworks

What is the purpose?

Looking to the future of our diversionary work and acknowledging the tough financial times ahead. As an organisation we need to explore how we can continue to offer a range of diversionary work, whilst dealing with limited resources and capacity issues. Partnership work in this area would be a positive step in community engagement.

Position on the 'Ladder of Participation' Level 4 – Involving  
A high level action, should we enable our communities to get involved more with our diversionary work.

Timescales

It is anticipated that a report on YFA will be ready for review within Q2 2011-12

Other reviews would be dealt with on a case by case basis over the life of the strategy

## **6. Diversity Mapping and targeting**

What is proposed?

To use our current data through Mosaic and Origins to create ethnicity mapping to allow us to identify where our potential BME target groups are in our districts, for both reaching vulnerable people at risk of serious injury and for in targeting recruitment for a more diverse workforce. It is also crucial that we build up databases of BME business holders that can be used to target education initiatives for specific groups – i.e. the Chinese Community.

What is the purpose?

To enable us to use all of our existing information to get a greater understanding of the diversity of our 5 districts, to enable us to create a graphical map which can be overlaid over our current risk maps, to target the most at risk BME groups, find support services in those areas to work with and to be able to identify where we need to enhance and improve our recruitment targeting.

Position on the 'Ladder of Participation' Level 2 – Researching

A Lower level action – but one which should springboard higher level activities over the life of the strategy.

Timescales

It is anticipated that Ethnicity Mapping will be available for districts in Q3/4 2011-12

## **7. Enhanced engagement with BME and community business owners**

What is proposed?

Working with the Protection & Technical department, and local communities to improve fire safety for specific BME and other business groups, through targeted events, talks, improved information in specific languages and consultation with groups to improve how we can support them and keep them safe.

What is the purpose?

To build upon the work we have already attempted in this area to improve or support for BME business owners – targeting specific hard to reach groups and making it easier for us to engage with them. Work in this area has been successful but some groups have still had very little representation at events, so working through community groups to improve how we engage will enable events and work in this area to be more effective.

Position on the 'Ladder of Participation' Level 3 Consulting and Level 4 – Involving.

It is the intention of this action that our communities and groups are directly involved in working with us to improve links for business engagement.

Timescales

An ongoing action for the life of the strategy, which will be reviewed and evaluated annually.

### **8. Review of materials for Deaf and hearing impaired people**

What is proposed?

To ensure that we have appropriate fire safety information, literature and learning tools which can be used by people with sensory impairments and better links with these communities. We would also look at promoting the text alert service for Deaf people in Tyne and Wear. Also ensuring that we offer some online safety information in BSL via our website.

What is the purpose?

A recent Deaf Awareness event has highlighted that there are insufficient resources for people who are deaf or hard of hearing with regards to fire safety including those who use BSL as a first language. Therefore we need a comprehensive review of our materials, and to work with local agencies and charities to address this issue and make necessary improvements.

Position on the 'Ladder of Participation' Level 3 Consulting and Level 4 involving

A good example of working with community groups and individuals to create better resources – this pitches the activity at levels 3/4.

Timescales

Materials produced and available on our website for Deaf Awareness week Q1 2011/2012

Other materials and initiatives developed throughout the life of the strategy – reviewed annually

### **9. General review of language specific fire safety resource, and language support for crews when attending incidents.**

What is proposed?

A review of all of our available Fire Safety information and literature which is offered in other languages, as well as looking at current resources available to

crews when going out to incidents where the people involved do not speak English as a first language.

What is the purpose?

To ensure that all of our materials appropriately reflect the languages of the diverse communities that we serve, ensuring that we make adequate provision for those languages which we do not currently cover, as well as ensuring that our crews have sufficient language support when out at incidents – possibly using MDT technology.

Position on the 'Ladder of Participation' N/A

Hard to quantify on the ladder, but we may be able to use local communities to advise on the best way to take this forward.

Timescales

This will be investigated in Q4 2011-12

***10. Support E&D in existing Employee advisory groups (EAGs) for Disability and LGB issues, and assist in the setting up of groups for the other strands of equality.***

What is proposed?

To promote and support the EAGs currently in existence, as well as encouraging EAGs for the other strands of diversity.

What is the purpose?

EAGs are a very positive tool in enabling us to highlight issues for diverse groups internally, as well as a way for us to explore ways to engage externally, EAGs are as much about Community engagement as they are Equality and Diversity, and as such should be supported through this strategy.

Position on the 'Ladder of Participation' Level 3/4/5 – Consulting, Involving and eventually Devolving

This is (internally) an excellent way to engage with community members and the actions of the groups can attain up to level 5 on the ladder.

Timescales

The development of other groups will be initially investigated in Q4 2011-12



## **11. Review Engagement with Drug and Alcohol agencies/evaluate our ability to assess risk with these groups**

What is proposed?

Review our current procedures and statistical gathering of information around risk of Drug and Alcohol abuse and improve our links with Drug and alcohol agencies as a priority.

What is the purpose?

To ensure that we are able to capture adequate data, to ensure that those at risk are given appropriate support. To consult with stakeholders and partners, and find new ways of working together. This will also enable us to better target services to this vulnerable group and focus media campaigns.

Position on the 'Ladder of Participation' Level 3 and Level 4 – Consulting and Involving

A high level action this will aim to directly involve groups in our work around Drug and Alcohol issues and increase our ability to keep these groups safe.

Timescales

An ongoing Action throughout the life of the strategy with annual review and evaluation.

## **12. LGBT fire risk survey and report**

What is proposed?

The formulation of a survey to address whether the LGBT community is more or less at risk of fire, based on their demographics and lifestyle – and a report and findings based on the survey to enable the service to engage better to address any identified risk.

What is the purpose?

To properly quantify any fire risk with this community, based on many pieces of anecdotal evidence that say this community may be more at risk. The survey will look at drinking habits and from that eating habits late at night, as well as smoke alarm use and testing – to then improve how we engage, and partner up to reduce this risk.

Position on the 'Ladder of Participation' Level 1 to Level 4 – Informing, Researching, Consulting and Involving

A piece of work which relies on moving through the ladder of participation from level 1 – 4 firstly informing and researching, through to consultation and involvement.

Timescales

Survey Ready in Q2 2011/2012 – used at engagement events throughout 2011-2012

Report delivered for review by the end of Q4 2011/2012

DRAFT