

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform members of the Authority's achievement in being selected as a finalist in the 'Outstanding Practice by a Larger Organisation' category as part of the 2010 North East Equality Awards.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The North East Equality Awards, sponsored by ONE NorthEast recognise and reward employers, learning providers and individuals who strive to ensure that good equality and diversity practices are implemented in their workplace, improving recruitment and retention for people from diverse groups.
- 2.1 Previous winners and shortlisted applicants are able to demonstrate, through recognition and positive publicity, that they have good policies and procedures leading to a number of benefits such as better staff retention rates and a greater chance of finding the right people for the right jobs.
- 2.2 Organisations from voluntary and community, private, and public sectors with over 250 employees, who can demonstrate that they have made an outstanding contribution in promoting equality and diversity in the community, are eligible to enter.
- 2.3 The Chief Fire Officer on behalf of the Authority submitted an application within the 'Outstanding Practice by a Larger Organisation' category for the successful implementation of the Positive Action Plan devised in 2009.

3 AWARDS CRITERIA

- 3.1 When evaluating applicants within the 'Outstanding Practice by a Larger Organisation' category the judges will be looking for initiatives, projects or strategies that, by their consideration support the Strategic Equality and Diversity Action Plan by:
- Encouraging participation of under-represented groups in the labour market;
 - Increasing the pace of diversity and equality engagement within public sector organisations;
 - Increasing awareness and engagement of diversity and equality within private sector organisations; and
 - Ensuring that the procurement process effectively takes account of the diversity and equality agenda for clients and suppliers.

4 AWARD APPLICATION

- 4.1 The Authority's only focussed on the successful implementation of the Positive Action (PA) Plan, including a range of actions to promote the Fire and Rescue Service to under-represented groups.
- 4.2 The aim of the 10-month PA programme, specifically tailored and promoted to females and black and ethnic minority individuals, was to address the imbalance of under-represented groups within the Authority workforce.
- 4.3 Open to all under-represented groups, this free programme delivered a variety of fitness sessions and workshops to educate and prepare potential candidates for all elements of the recruitment process and role of a Firefighter.
- 4.4 The Service recruitment team, Community Advocates and BME partners worked together to generate interest and support the programme. A group of 70 candidates attended each monthly event, delegates made up of 60% females and 40% BME's.
- 4.5 A successful Employment Conference specifically tailored to the careers advisors and community leaders within the BME community, informed participants of the variety of career opportunities that exist in the Service, which in turn could be promoted by participants within their respective communities.
- 4.6 A variety of initiatives were also adopted as part of the PA plan including the use of Facebook to promote the PA programme, Bluetooth Technology to promote the firefighter campaign used at different concerts and the Newcastle Mela, the development of a regional website and DVD, along with placing adverts on Real Radio to specifically attract female applicants.
- 4.7 Partnership working with Spice FM, the only Asian North East radio station, also took place to promote all career opportunities and inform people in the Asian community of the recruitment process with an informative question session.
- 4.8 Implementing the PA Plan resulted in a significant increase in the number of females and BME applicants in the 2009 Firefighter recruitment campaign.
- 4.9 Since the 2008 campaign the Authority had seen a 76% increase in the number of females and 122% increase in BMEs applying to the Service. 35% of applicants in 2009 had been part of the PA programme. Furthermore, 44% of candidates who were successful through the whole process had taken part in some or all of the PA events.
- 4.10 The major success of its PA Plan led to the application for an award as part of the 2010 Equality North East Awards.

5 NEXT STEPS

- 5.1 The Chief Fire Officer awaits the results of the winner of the 'Outstanding Practice by a Larger Organisation' category, which will be announced at the Awards event on Friday 22 October held in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.
- 5.2 Regardless of the outcome, the Chief Fire Officer considers that the strength of the positive action programme has actively contributed to improving the diversity of the workforce and that this initiative deserves recognition in that respect alone.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 A risk assessment has been undertaken to ensure that the risk to the Authority has been minimised as far as practicable. The assessment has considered an appropriate balance between risk and control; the realisation of efficiencies; the most appropriate use of limited resources; and a comprehensive evaluation of the benefits. The risk to the authority has been assessed as low utilising the standard risk matrix based on control measures being in place. The complete risk assessment is available on request from the Chief Fire Officer.

7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no financial implications in relation to this report.

8 DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 By participating in the North East Equality Awards the Authority is demonstrating its commitment to driving forward the diversity and equality agenda.
- 8.2 The actions implemented as part of the PA Plan were clearly a success in promoting the role of a Firefighter to females and BME individuals. This is reflected in the trainee course of September 2010 where out of 30 individuals on this course, 5 are females and 2 have classified themselves as from a BME background.
- 8.3 Due to the success of the PA process and the individuals involved, the Service can continue to build on this excellent work in order to continue to increase the diversity of its workforce, which will benefit internal culture and enhance the services provided to the diverse communities of Tyne and Wear.

9 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

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

10 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 Members are recommended to:
 - a) Note the contents of this report;
 - b) Endorse the actions taken by the Chief Fire Officer;

- c) Consider a letter of appreciation to the staff involved in the programme;
- d) Receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

- National Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-18.
- 2010 North East Equality Awards Application Form (available from the Recruitment and Selection Manager).