

SUBJECT: EQUALITY STRATEGY 2012-2016

**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 advise Members with regard to a new Equality Strategy 2012-2016 for the Authority.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At the meeting held on 17th October 2011, Members were advised that a new Equality Strategy was 'in train' to take into account the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and to replace the Authority's Single Equality Scheme and Corporate Equality Plan.
- 2.2 In order to meet the general equality duty which came into force on 5 April 2011, under the Equality Act 2010 (the Public Sector Equality Duty), the Authority must have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 2.3 The specific duties, designed to assist in meeting the general duty, required the Authority to:
- Publish equality information to demonstrate compliance with the general duty by 31 January 2012 and annually thereafter; and
 - Prepare and publish specific and measurable equality objectives by 6 April 2012 and at least every four years thereafter.
- 2.4 An Equality Data Report containing equality information in relation to employees and the communities who we serve was published, following consultation, at the end of January 2012. It was then included as an appendix to the Equality Strategy.
- 2.5 The Chief Fire Officer is pleased to report that in accordance with legislation the Equality Strategy was published both internally and externally on 5 April 2012. It contains a range of data and information which demonstrates how the Authority is meeting the general duty as described in 2.2 above and includes seven key equality objectives as required under the specific duties as per 2.3 above.

3 EQUALITY STRATEGY

- 3.1 The Equality Strategy is a four year overarching document. It is aligned to the Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-2018 and the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework.
- 3.2 The purpose of the Equality Strategy is to inform stakeholders of the Authority's approach to diversity and equality and to demonstrate how it is meeting its legal duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- 3.3 A copy of the Equality Strategy will be available at the meeting. Included as appendices to the strategy are the Equality Data Report 2012 and the Equality Action Plan which contains seven equality objectives.
- 3.4 Analysis of the equality information collated in the Equality Data Report, and feedback from the consultation exercise in relation to the data, enabled the Authority to shape its equality objectives.

4 CONSULTATION

- 4.1 An internal and external consultation exercise took place to gather feedback in relation to the Equality Strategy, specifically in respect of the draft equality objectives.
- 4.2 An on-line survey was created and posted on the intranet and external website. The internal survey was publicised via latest news articles and E-Gazette and the external survey publicised on the internet homepage latest news.
- 4.3 Links to the survey were emailed to a range of stakeholders to encourage participation including Members, Diversity and Equality Committee, Trade Union representatives and partner organisations (Police, Ambulance and Local Authorities).
- 4.4 Feedback was very positive and all respondents felt the Equality Strategy was well presented and easy to follow. 27% of respondents 'strongly agreed' and 73% 'agreed' that the Equality Strategy demonstrates that the Authority is meeting its duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty. 13% of respondents 'strongly agreed' and 87% 'agreed' that the equality objectives set out in the Equality Action Plan are appropriate.
- 4.5 Positive comments were also received from respondents when asked how the Equality Strategy could be improved;
 - "The document clearly sets out the service's commitment to ensure an inclusive service that does not discriminate. This is a very informative document and a well presented piece of work".
 - "The Strategy itself is very clear and measurable. The area that we need to focus on now is ensuring that all are aware of it and understand and support it".

5 REVIEW

- 5.1 The Equality Data Report will be reviewed annually. Progress against the objectives in the Equality Action Plan will be reported on each year. The full strategy document will be reviewed annually in relation to minor updates and amendments. A comprehensive review will take place in 2016.
- 5.2 Equality objectives are set for the period 2012-2016. A full review will take place in four years unless further appropriate objectives are identified during this period.
- 5.3 Members are invited to comment further in either respect.

6 ASSESSMENT

- 6.1 The Equality and Human Rights Commission will carry out an assessment of the equality information published. A report of findings should be available by mid-2012 and will be subject to a further report.

7 LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS

- 7.1 In meeting the equality duty, public authorities are required to comply with their legal duties under:
- Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (the PSED), and
 - The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011.
- 7.2 In order to have due regard to the aims of the general equality duty, public authorities must understand the impact of their policies and practices on people with protected characteristics. It is therefore essential that public authorities collect and analyse equality information to develop this understanding and be able to take appropriate action to address any equality issues.

8 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 Failure to meet the general and specific duties of the Public Sector Equality Duty as described in section 7 could potentially result in legal proceedings. This in turn would have a negative impact on the Authority's reputation.
- 8.2 By consulting on, publishing and monitoring the Equality Strategy and objectives, the Authority is demonstrating compliance.

9 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are financial implications arising from this report which are deemed to be minimal and met from within existing budgetary headings.

10 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

10.1 By collecting and using equality information the Authority will be better placed to understand the impact of its policies, practices and decisions in respect of people with different protected characteristics, and therefore able to plan these more effectively.

11 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

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

12 RECOMMENDATIONS

12.1 The Authority is recommended to:

- a) Note the content of this report;
- b) Endorse the actions of the Chief Fire Officer ;
- c) Comment as appropriate on the Equality Strategy;
- d) Receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

- Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority Equality Strategy 2012-2016.
- Equality information and the equality duty: A guide for Public Authorities, Equality and Human Rights Commission, Revised (second) edition, 19th December 2011.