

**SUBJECT: REVIEW OF AUDIT COMMISSION EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY REPORT**

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

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**1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update regarding progress made against the recommendations of the Audit Commission Equality and Diversity Report 2009.

**2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Audit Commission's 2008 Direction of Travel (DoT) assessments of fire and rescue services, determined that no service could be viewed as an exemplar of best practice in its approach to equality and diversity.
- 2.2 As a result, Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority were subject to a review of its equality and diversity policies and processes. This review was carried out as part of the 2008/09 external audit process.
- 2.3 The audit was undertaken within a regional framework that covered Tyne and Wear, Cleveland, and Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authorities.
- 2.4 The process involved an examination of key documents including the findings from the successful level three review of the Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG), workshops with a range of staff representatives and an observation of a regional positive action activity.
- 2.5 A final report was collated and presented to each Fire and Rescue Authority in May 2009 which encompassed both regional and individual authority findings along with an action plan of recommendations for improvement.
- 2.6 The focus of this report is the Audit Commission's recommendations for improvement contained in the Audit Report. Findings regarding good practice within Tyne and Wear can be found in the Audit Commission Report: Equality and Diversity – Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority; May 2009.

**3 ACTION PLAN – PROGRESS TO DATE**

- 3.1 The Audit Commission report highlighted areas for development which would compliment the commitment and work of the Service. Key recommendations are outlined below along with a summary of progress made to date to address the development areas identified:

- 3.2 **More effective use of regional resources** - to share good practice and develop a more consistent approach to self assessment and to improve learning from further external assessment against the Equality Standard.

**Action taken:**

- Regional GAP analysis against National Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-2018 complete.
- The Authority declared level 4 of ESLG and migrated to the 'Working towards Excellence' level of the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework (FRSEF).
- Regional and local GAP analysis against FRSEF complete.
- FRSEF regional development workshop.
- Development of a regional evidence database.

- 3.3 **Develop corporate website** - to ensure that best practice is adopted, and consistent messages given on recruitment.

**Action taken:**

- Development of a regional recruitment website.
- North East recruitment portal launched and utilised for regional recruitment (subsequently evaluated as a successful recruitment tool).
- Development work undertaken in relation to the Authority's diversity and equality internet and intranet content.
- Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) information now published and EIA register available to the public via the Authority's internet.

- 3.4 **Continue to monitor the quality of applicants attracted by positive action** - activity to assist in evaluating whether the initiative is targeting suitable applicants.

**Action taken:**

- Positive Action (PA) Plan implemented during 2009 which included an interactive 10-month PA programme, targeted development workshops for women and black and minority ethnic (BME) candidates, an employment conference for careers advisors, development of a brand identity to promote the role of Firefighter and various targeted marketing initiatives e.g. the use of Facebook, Bluetooth technology, advertising on Real Radio and Spice FM (Asian North East radio station).
- Implementation of the PA Plan was carefully monitored at each stage and results have shown it has been a great success in terms of attracting and recruiting females and BMEs.

## **PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING**

- The November 2009 regional Firefighter recruitment campaign saw a 76% increase in female applicants and 122% increase in BME applicants since the 2008 campaign. A total of 35% of females and BME individuals applying to the role had been part of the PA programme.
- Following completion of the regional Firefighter recruitment campaign, a Firefighter trainee course commenced in September 2010 comprising 30 individuals. Of those individuals 5 are females and 2 have classified themselves as BME, proving the success of the PA activities carried out.
- The Chief Fire Officer on behalf of the Authority has entered the 2010 North East Equality Awards, 'Outstanding Contribution by a Larger Organisation' category for their work around positive action. Results will be announced late October 2010.

### **3.5 Ensure that the potential role of all front line staff as ambassadors for the service is considered as part of the recruitment process and engaging minority and vulnerable communities in wider community safety initiatives.**

- All staff were invited to be involved in the recruitment process through the delivery of a specific core briefing to all employees. Several members of staff volunteered to support the regional firefighter campaign and participated in positive action activities including the brand campaign and targeted radio advertising.
- Members will be aware that the Authority launched two Employee Advisory Groups (EAG) in early 2010; one to focus on Sexual Orientation and the other on Disability. Both groups have proved to be a great success where employees have been actively engaged in policy development impacting directly upon the community including reviewing the Single Equality Scheme.
- The Sexual Orientation EAG has co-ordinated a number of engagement activities including the 2010 Pride event which involved engaging with our lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community and communicating key fire safety messages. This event was hosted in partnership with Northumbria Police.
- A new Community Relationship Manager has joined the Authority and is currently developing a Community Engagement Strategy for the Authority, which will be subject to a report.

## **4 FURTHER DEVELOPMENT WORK**

### **4.1 The Chief Fire Officer is pleased to report that the Audit Report Action Plan has now been fully implemented however development will continue in the areas as recommended by the Audit Commission in order to ensure continuous improvement, including:**

- Review positive action initiatives;
- Review the current content of the D&E web pages including researching best practice; and

- Amend and republish the EIA register and information.

## **5 RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 5.1 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.

## **6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

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

## **7 DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 Diversity and equality implications are contained within the main body of this report.

## **8 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

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

## **9 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 Members are recommended to:
- a) Note the contents of this report;
  - b) Endorse the progress made in this area;
  - c) Receive further reports as appropriate.

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## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

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

- Strategic Community Safety Plan 2010/13
- National Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-18
- Audit Commission Report: Equality and Diversity – Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority; May 2009.