

SUBJECT: FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE EQUALITY FRAMEWORK (FRSEF)

JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, THE FINANCE OFFICER AND PERSONNEL ADVISOR

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Members of the proposed Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework (FRSEF) and provide an opportunity for comment.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In developing the new FRSEF the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) in partnership with the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA), consulted with representatives from fire and rescue services to create a bespoke equality performance and improvement framework for the service.
- 2.2 As a result of the above the new FRSEF has been drafted (attached as Appendix A) and is currently subject to consultation. It is based on the five themes in the Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-2018:
- Leadership and promoting inclusion
 - Accountability
 - Effective service delivery and community engagement
 - Employment and training
 - Evaluation and sharing good practice
- 2.3 The FRSEF is strongly linked to the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) to ensure application across all the governance arrangements. It will also facilitate equality and diversity partnership arrangements with local authorities and other partnerships.

3 BENCHMARKING LEVELS

- 3.1 The FRSEF includes the same three benchmarking levels as the EFLG, i.e. 'developing', 'achieving' and 'excellent'. It will require significant evidence-based results before individual services can claim to be at the 'excellent' level.
- 3.2 Under each theme within the FRSEF there is a list of descriptors for the three performance levels outlining how fire and rescue authorities can demonstrate their performance at each level.
- 3.3 Separate documents are being prepared to provide guidance on the types of evidence that will be required for each level of performance.

PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

- 3.4 It is proposed that authorities wishing to measure their achievement will also use the Diversity Peer Challenge process developed by the IDeA. The IDeA has recruited specialist fire and rescue service peers who will undertake the peer challenges.

4 FRSEF PILOT

- 4.1 Prior to releasing the completed framework, it was considered appropriate to pilot the process in a cross-section of fire and rescue authorities. Nine authorities representing three different governance arrangements (combined, county and metropolitan) have therefore agreed to pilot the new Framework. These are Hereford and Worcester, Lancashire, Wiltshire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Surrey, London, West Midlands and West Yorkshire.

5 CONSULTATION / LAUNCH OF FRSEF

- 5.1 Following any amendments made as a result of the pilot and consultations, and subject to 'sign off' by the National Equality and Diversity Delivery Partnership, (Communities and Local Government, Local Government Association, Chief Fire Officers' Association, Fire Brigades Union, UNISON, Equality and Diversity Stakeholder Group), it is envisaged that the launch of the new FRSEF will take place at the CFOA Innovations Conference programmed for the 7th and 8th December 2009.
- 5.2 The questions to be considered during this consultation are attached at Appendix B. Members are invited to comment on the Framework and may wish to note that the consultation process will conclude on 21st August 2009, and the outcome will be subject to a further report.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 In developing the new equality framework the IDeA has consulted with representatives of the fire and rescue services to develop a bespoke equality performance and improvement framework. The standard has been drafted by a small joint working group representing the various stakeholders.
- 6.2 Based upon the five themes with the Equality and Diversity Strategy and strongly linked to the Equality Framework for Local Government, the FRSEF is expected to enable application across all the governance arrangements, including county based services as well as facilitating equality and diversity partnership arrangements established with local authorities and other partners. However the success of this framework will only be achieved if all fire and rescue authorities are committed to delivering against it. Any other outcome will potentially present a position whereby the measurement of success in the fire and rescue service will not be achieved in a comparable way. Further, many services have already moved some substantial way down the local government equality framework route and a directional change at this stage may prove to be problematic.
- 6.3 Members are therefore advised that the adoption or otherwise of this framework will be subject to a further report following the outcomes of the consultation and pilot exercises.

7 RISK MANAGEMENT

7.1 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.

8 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no specific financial implications identified at this stage however this may be subject to change depending upon the outcome of the pilot and consultation.

9 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Equality and diversity implications are explicit within this report.

10 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no Health and Safety implications.

11 RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 The Authority is recommended to:

- a) Note and comment upon the contents of this report;
- b) Agree that the Chief Fire Officer in consultation with the Chairman of the HR Committee respond to the consultation;
- c) Receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

- HR Committee Report: Equality Framework for Local Government; 27th October 2008
- The Chief Fire Officers Association Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework 'The Journey to Excellence', Consultation copy May 2009 (attached).