

SUBJECT: EVALUATION OF E-NETWORK

JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report provides Members with a progress update regarding the e-network established primarily for lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) employees of the Authority.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 As Members will be aware the Authority launched its employee network in September 2010. This was in response to feedback from a previous Stonewall audit who advised that establishing a network was a key development area for the Service.
- 2.2 As previous attempts to set up an employee network had not been as successful as hoped, it was appropriate to take a different approach in order to develop a useful, informative, supportive and practical network, which would be used by both LGB and Non-LGB employees, to add value to the work of the Authority.
- 2.3 The main aims of the network are to:
- Provide information and support for all employees on LGB issues;
 - Advertise social and other networking events for LGB staff;
 - Raise awareness for non LGB staff and managers;
 - Provide links to other LGB employee network groups and support mechanisms;
 - Provide contacts for LGB staff with issues at work; and
 - Provide a confidential discussion forum for LGB staff.
- 2.4 Nine months following its launch, an interim evaluation has been undertaken to assess the effectiveness of the e-network to date and the findings are summarised within this report.

3 E-NETWORK FACILITY

- 3.1 The e-network is housed within the Authority intranet, and is accessible to all employees to raise awareness and understanding of LGB issues across the Service, equipping employees with the knowledge needed to be able to effectively serve LGB communities.

**Stonewall is an organisation which works to achieve equality and justice for lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people and runs a national Index each year which showcases Britain's top 100 employers for LGB people in Britain.*

Creating the Safest Community

- 3.2 The e-network incorporates a confidential discussion forum, which is accessible only to LGB staff. LGB staff who wish to use the confidential discussion forum can request membership via the Employee Advisory Group (EAG) for Sexual Orientation.
- 3.3 The confidential discussion forum provides a facility for LGB employees to explore personal or sensitive issues they may be facing. Action can then be taken by EAG group members to support and assist individuals as required.

4 E-NETWORK BENEFITS

- 4.1 Committing to a LGB employee e-network demonstrates that the Authority is proactively supporting LGB employees and awareness of LGB issues can be raised throughout the organisation. Further engagement may also result in opportunities for improved partnership working, training, networking, etc.
- 4.2 An e-network is a more efficient method of communication in comparison to telephone calls, emails, etc. leading to improved communication within the Service and amongst the LGB group.
- 4.3 The e-network could facilitate the sharing of initiatives, ideas and common obstacles to help improve the overall Service.

5 INTERIM EVALUATION

- 5.1 The interim evaluation, carried out by the Diversity and Equality Advisor, followed a relatively informal evaluation using qualitative data.
- 5.2 Discussions took place with the EAG and informal feedback has been received and noted from stations during programmed visits.
- 5.3 A 'hit monitor' was also used to determine how many hits each page was achieving within the LGB e-network. The purpose of this was to identify how many people were actually utilising the e-network.
- 5.4 The main findings were as follows:
- Hits to page are proportionate to 10% of the organisation;
 - All hits are to the information pages;
 - The EAG are using the network; and
 - Employees are not using the discussion boards.
- 5.5 The number of hits is lower than anticipated. This is perhaps due to publicity of the network.
- 5.6 The fact that employees are not using the discussion boards is not a particular surprise and many people do not wish to request specific access to such facilities.
- 5.7 Further consideration needs to be given as to how the network can be publicised and how to start the discussion board usage. It is worth considering

removing the need for individual requests for personal identifications to use the boards however, this will need to be balanced against the possibility of misuse.

5.8 In order to address the issues highlighted by the interim review and ensure the success of the e-network, the Chief Fire Officer proposes to progress the following key recommendations;

- Create a communications action plan to promote the network;
- Trial the removal of the password protection requirement; and
- Weekly monitoring of use to determine whether actions have had the desired impact.

5.9 It is worth noting that the creation of the e-network enabled the Service to claim an additional eight points as part of the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index which contributed to its success in achieving 60th place in 2011.

6 FULL EVALUATION

6.1 The full evaluation will be carried out in December 2011 and will include an on-line survey for all employees. The survey will be designed to assess the success of the six objectives outlined in 2.3 and to consult with LGB employees on improvements. A focus group will also be undertaken with EAG members.

6.2 Quantitative information will be collected to inform the evaluation including the number of hits made to the e-network and discussion forum, as well as closed survey questions as part of the electronic survey.

7 RISK MANAGEMENT

7.1 There is a risk that the discussion forum may be misused however, this will be mitigated by the use of a moderator and managed in the same way as all electronic communications methods (email, internet use etc.) via the acceptable usage policy and code of conduct.

7.2 There is a risk that the purpose of the e-network is not communicated correctly, which may result in employees being overcautious about using it, or not using it at all. This risk will be controlled by clear communication as to the purpose of the e-network. There is also a risk the e-network is not used at all which will be reviewed at the evaluation stage.

7.3 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 The work required to create and set up the e-network was undertaken as part of the existing roles within the Authority and there are no direct costs associated with establishing the new intranet pages and a discussion forum as this is covered within existing budgetary headings.

9 DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Some employees may not have the necessary ICT skills to use the facility and this could include LGB employees. ICT skills should be monitored by line managers and addressed via the personal development plan (PDP) process. Extra training and support can be made available to those staff that are having difficulties in using the discussion forum through the PDP process.
- 9.2 There may be issues arising if any users have visual impairment or learning difficulties. Again, this will be identified via the line management structure and addressed through available support mechanisms.

10 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

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

11 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 The Authority is recommended to:
- a) Endorse the actions of the Chief Fire Officer;
 - b) Receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

- TWFRS Intranet LGB E-Network.
- Network Groups: setting up networks for lesbian, gay and bisexual employees - Stonewall Workplace Guide available via www.stonewall.org.uk
- HR Committee Report, Launch of e-network for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Employees, 18 October 2010.
- Project Evaluation – Highlight / Interim Report – Equality Advisory Group – Employee E-Network Development, 1st June 2011.