

**SUBJECT: FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE EQUALITY FRAMEWORK**

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

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**1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members regarding progress made towards preparing for assessment against the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework (FRSEF).

**2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The FRSEF which, in fire and rescue service terms superseded the Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG) was launched on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2009. In developing the FRSEF the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) worked in partnership with the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) to create a bespoke equality performance and improvement framework for the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS).
- 2.2 This bespoke equality performance and improvement framework for Fire and Rescue Authorities is based upon the same principles of the Equality Framework for Local Government (which superseded the Equality Standard for Local Government) and is cross mapped with the national Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-18.
- 2.3 The FRSEF is focused around outcomes and the five key performance areas of the national Strategy (Leadership and promoting inclusion, Accountability, Effective service delivery and community engagement, Employment and training, and Evaluation and sharing good practice).
- 2.4 The framework has three performance levels - 'Developing', 'Achieving' and 'Excellent'. Prior to the publication of the framework the Authority had self-assessed against Level 4 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. As a result, when the Authority migrated across to the FRSEF, it was regarded as 'Moving towards Excellence' (above 'Achieving' level and potentially working at 'Excellent' level).
- 2.5 The current level was awarded during a transition period and is valid for up to three years before a formal assessment (known as a Diversity Peer Challenge) is required. Therefore, the Authority must be assessed against the 'Excellent' level of the FRSEF before 7<sup>th</sup> December 2012.
- 2.6 A revised FRSEF Self-Assessment Guidance document was produced in the later part of 2011 (attached as Appendix A for the information of Members) to take into account changes to legislation such as the introduction of the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty.

- 2.7 The Chief Fire Officer has therefore established a small project team to prepare the organisation for a Diversity Peer Challenge 'Excellent' level in late November / early December 2012.
- 2.8 Members should note that there are currently negotiations taking place between Local Government Improvement and Development and the Chief Fire Officers Association with regards to ownership of the FRSEF and this may lead to changes to the Diversity Peer Challenge in the future.

### **3 PREPARING FOR ASSESSMENT**

- 3.1 The FRSEF project team referred to above has the directed aim to ensure that the Authority is fully prepared for the Diversity Peer Challenge.
- 3.2 The main objectives are to:
- Self-assess against the 'Excellent' level of the framework, carry out a GAP analysis, address any potential shortfalls and prepare all core / relevant documentation by the end of April 2012.
  - Arrange for a similar Fire and Rescue Service to undertake an independent mock assessment for the Authority in May 2012.
  - Implement any recommended actions following the mock assessment by end August 2012.
  - Ensure that all employees and Members are fully aware of the principles of equality and diversity, the FRSEF and forthcoming Diversity Peer Challenge by the end of November 2012.
  - Ensure that all key employees and Members who will be involved in the Diversity Peer Challenge are fully briefed prior to assessment.

### **4 THE 'EXCELLENT' LEVEL**

- 4.1 The 'Excellent' level focuses on the Fire and Rescue Service's ability to demonstrate that outcomes that are being achieved in relation to diversity and equality.
- 4.2 Assessors will be looking at the degree to which the Fire and Rescue Service has effective self-regulation mechanisms in place, ensuring that its practises and the outcomes being achieved are regularly reviewed.
- 4.3 In order to achieve the 'Excellent' level the Service will need to evidence the following characteristics:
- Fire and Rescue Authority Members and senior service leaders will have a reputation for championing equality issues, ensuring their relevance to communities.

- Successful partnership working with all strategic partners, including the voluntary and community sector, to achieve defined quality outcomes.
- Strong evidence of its equalities profiles both from an internal and external perspective.
- The provision of a good standard of service, delivered by knowledgeable and well-trained employees who understand the needs of their communities.
- Improving satisfaction and perception indicators from all sections of the community and employees.
- Evidence that the Service is integrally involved in community engagement programmes.

### **5 THE PEER CHALLENGE PROCESS**

- 5.1 The Diversity Peer Challenge is based around a review of the Fire and Rescue Authority's self-assessment, supporting documentation and on site activity, including interviews and focus groups with managers, employees, elected Members and other stakeholders.
- 5.2 The Peer Challenge Team will be on site for three days followed by a final report and capture of good practice case studies. They will bring expert knowledge and experience of diversity issues within the Fire and Rescue Service and will consist of one Member and three officer peers, supported by a Peer Challenge Manager.

### **6 ASSOCIATED BENEFITS**

- 6.1 There are significant benefits in terms of preparing for and achieving the 'Excellent' level of the FRSEF.
- 6.2 Working towards and achieving the FRSEF 'Excellent' level will greatly assist the Authority in meeting its legal obligations under the Equality Act of 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- 6.3 Since the launch of the FRSEF two years ago, improvements and achievements in the area of equality and diversity within the organisation have moved on at a rapid pace. This all-encompassing equality assessment will provide challenge at the right time to demonstrate that the Authority is working at 'Excellent' level. Results of the Diversity Peer Challenge will also drive continuous improvement across the organisation in terms of equality and diversity.
- 6.4 There are other benefits in that the Authority would be viewed as a leading organisation in terms of equality.
- 6.5 A positive outcome from the Diversity Peer Challenge is likely to have a positive impact on motivation and morale across the workforce.

## **7 RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 7.1 There is the possibility of reputational risk caused by failure to secure the 'Excellent' level of the FRSEF. However, this risk can be minimised by conducting a mock assessment and taking appropriate action to attempt to ensure that the required evidence is available for assessors.
- 7.2 There is a risk that the current financial climate and announcement of back office review results in early 2012 could significantly de-motivate employees, having a negative impact on morale. As a result, not all employees may fully support the Authority in its goal to achieve the 'Excellent' level which could in turn have a negative impact on the Diversity Peer Challenge. A strong leadership message and commitment, combined with regular and concise communications throughout, is required to minimise this risk.

## **8 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The current cost of the FRSEF Diversity Peer Challenge plus assessors expenses is likely to be in the region of £7,000 and this has been accounted for in 2012/13 delegated budgets.

## **9 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The FRSEF uses a broad definition of equality that goes beyond the formal legal definitions of equality and focuses on what we can do to create a fairer society. This definition is based on the idea of equal life chances.

*"An equal society that protects and promotes equal, real freedom and opportunity to live in the way people value and would choose, so that everyone can flourish. An equal society that recognises people's different needs, situations and goals, and removes the barriers that limit what people can do and be."*

- 9.2 The definition above includes all groups that are protected by law under the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty which incorporates nine protected characteristics including race, disability, age, sex, religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, and marriage and civil partnership (in relation to the elimination of unlawful discrimination only).
- 9.3 The FRSEF therefore focuses on equality for all and complements and supports each of the Authority's core values: Service to the Community, People, Diversity and Improvement.

## **10 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

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

## **11 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 11.1 The Authority is recommended to:

a) Endorse and support the actions taken to date;

***Creating the Safest Community***

- b) Receive further reports as appropriate.

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## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

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

- Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority HR Committee paper: Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework, 1 March 2010.

