

SUBJECT: FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE EQUALITY FRAMEWORK

**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 inform Members of the new Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework (FRSEF) which was launched on 7 December 2009. It outlines the Authority's position in working towards the 'Excellent' level of the standard detailing briefly how this is to be achieved.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG), which superseded the Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG) was introduced in April 2009.
- 2.2 In developing the EFLG 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).
- 2.3 Following consultation with key stakeholders and feedback from the nine FRS's who took part in the pilot exercise covering all three governance arrangements (Combined, County and Metropolitan Fire and Rescue Authorities) the FRSEF was launched.
- 2.4 Detailed guidance documents regarding the FRSEF have been provided by CFOA and IDeA and can be accessed via the links at the end of this report.

3 REQUIREMENTS OF THE FRSEF

- 3.1 The FRSEF is based upon the same principles as the EFLG. It is outcome focused rather than process driven and designed to enable Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRA's) to benchmark their performance against three levels - 'Developing', 'Achieving' and 'Excellent'.
- 3.2 The characteristics of a FRA at each of the above levels are detailed within the five performance areas in the FRSEF and are cross-mapped with the national 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

- 3.3 Communities for Local Government (CLG) and the Audit Commission recognise the FRSEF as an appropriate means to measure and accredit the performance of individual FRA's in relation to equality and diversity. The new framework has a strong correlation with relevant statutory duties and external assessments, including Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAA), Operational Assurance and the Managing Performance element of Organisational Assessment.
- 3.4 The FRSEF also complements and support the Authority's Core Values: Service to the Community, People, Diversity and Improvement.

4 MIGRATING FROM THE ESLG

- 4.1 Prior to the publication of the FRSEF, FRA's that have through Self Assessment reached levels 1 and 2 of the ESLG will be regarded as 'Developing'. Those that have been externally accredited at level 3 of the ESLG will be regarded as 'Achieving' and those who have reached level 4 through Self Assessment will be regarded as 'Moving towards Excellence'. FRA's who have achieved level 5 of the ESLG will be regarded as 'Excellent'.
- 4.2 Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority is one of only a few FRA's that has achieved level 4 of the ESLG and as such will migrate to 'Moving towards Excellence'. Although this is not a specific performance level in the FRSEF, it recognises those Authorities which have progressed beyond level 3 of the ESLG before it was superseded by the new framework.
- 4.3 The 'Moving towards Excellence' level is only to be used to assist with the transition from the ESLG to the FRSEF. It will no longer be applicable once those FRA's currently at this level have been formally assessed and awarded either the 'Excellent' level or reverted to the 'Achieving' level.

5 ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 FRA's will be required to assess themselves against each of the five performance areas outlined in 3.2 above answering a number of questions indicating the range of evidence that will be required to confirm the performance level.
- 5.2 For those FRA's claiming 'Achieving' and 'Excellent' levels there will be a requirement to have their Self Assessments validated by an IDeA Peer Review.
- 5.3 The assessment will consist of a review by IDeA accredited peers of the Authority's own Self Assessment, including appropriate supporting evidence and an on-site visit by three IDeA accredited peers to conduct interviews and focus groups with Members, employees and other stakeholders.
- 5.4 IDeA is currently recruiting and training specialist FRS peers who will undertake the peer challenges.
- 5.5 FRA's with acceptable evidence of current performance at the 'Achieving' and 'Excellent' levels of the FRSEF will be awarded due recognition by IDeA and entitled to use the relevant FRSEF logo.

- 5.6 To ensure that accreditation is up to date and encourage continuous improvement FRA's who are awarded 'Achieving' and 'Excellent' levels will be required to apply to the IDeA for re-evaluation every three years as a minimum.

6 AN 'EXCELLENT' AUTHORITY

- 6.1 The IDeA guidance document 'An Excellent Fire and Rescue Authority – Making a Difference' outlines the expectations of an 'Excellent' Authority. In brief however, an 'Excellent' Authority will be able to demonstrate continuous improvement and that it is making a real difference in terms of equality issues. Members and senior management will have a reputation for championing equality issues and ensuring they are relevant to their communities and that equality issues are clearly embedded in strategic plans.
- 6.2 In order to meet the 'Excellent' level the Authority must also be able to show it is working successfully with all strategic partners to achieve agreed equality outcomes. Clear evidence of the equalities profile including socio-economic differences of the community and robust systems will be in place to successfully measure progress to demonstrate real outcomes in terms of improved equality in service delivery and employment.

7 NEXT STEPS

- 7.1 FRA's are required to use the Framework, Key Principles and Help documents provided by CFOA and IDeA as guidance on the type of outcomes and supportive evidence that will be required in order to achieve specific levels of performance.
- 7.2 It is proposed that the Authority conducts a detailed mapping exercise against the 'Excellent' level of the FRSEF to identify areas for development and produces an interim improvement plan with a view to arranging a formal assessment against the 'Excellent' performance level during 2011.
- 7.3 In line with this work and in preparation for assessment the Authority should carry out a programme of familiarisation sessions for Members, senior management, managers and all employees to ensure the key principles of the FRSEF are understood. It is important that all employees are aware of the Authority's position and are able to make a contribution to any areas for improvement in terms of equality issues.

8 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 Risks associated with equality and diversity issues are incorporated in the Corporate Risk Profile and Integrated Risk Management Plan and risk assessments are carried out against all plans including those with specific equality and diversity actions and targets.
- 8.2 The Authority continues to work towards creating a diverse workforce that reflects our community with appropriately trained personnel to deliver the right services to our diverse communities thus helping us to achieve our vision of 'Creating the Safest Community'.

- 8.3 The FRSEF will assist the Authority in identifying areas for improvement in terms of equalities issues which will in turn help minimise any risks to our diverse communities.

9 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There will be financial implications associated with the IDeA Peer Review. The financial implications will be included as part of the 2011/12 budget setting process but to date IDeA have not given an indication of what the cost of the Peer Review will be.

10 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The definition of equality in the FRSEF is very similar to the way inequality and vulnerability is defined by the Audit Commission for the purposes of the CAA.

- 10.2 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 was originally set out in 'The Equalities Review' and is based on the idea of equal life chances.

"An equal society 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 recognises people's different needs, situations and goals, and removes the barriers that limit what people can do and be."

- 10.3 The definition above includes the groups that are protected by discrimination law. Authorities are therefore required to consider the impact that race, gender and transgender, disability, age, sexual orientation and religion and or belief may have on the life chances of members of their communities.
- 10.4 Authorities must also seek to understand the relationship between these characteristics as well as the socio-economic status and the experience of other vulnerable groups, such as looked-after children and white working class boys with poor educational attainment.
- 10.5 Working towards the 'Excellent' level of the FRSEF will help the Authority to demonstrate its on-going commitment to the Equality and Diversity Agenda.

11 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

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

12 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12.1 The Authority is recommended to:

- a) Note the contents of this report;

- b) Support progress towards achieving the Excellent level of the FRSEF;
- c) Receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

- IDeA (November 2009) 'The Journey to Excellence' available from www.idea.gov.uk
- IDeA (November 2009) 'An Excellent Fire and Rescue Authority – Making a Difference' IDeA (November 2009) available from www.idea.gov.uk
- IDeA (November 2009) 'Key principles – Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework' available from www.idea.gov.uk
- IDeA (November 2009) 'Help – Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework' available from www.idea.gov.uk
- Cabinet Office (February 2007) 'Fairness and Freedom: The Final Report of the Equalities Review' available from www.archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/equalitiesreview
- CLG 'Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008 – 2018' available from www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/equalitydiversitystrategy

