



DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY

REPORT REFERENCE NO.	HRMDC/10/2
MEETING	HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	14 JANUARY 2010
SUBJECT OF REPORT	THE NEW FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE EQUALITY FRAMEWORK: AN OVERVIEW AND THE CURRENT “MIGRATED” ASSESSMENT
LEAD OFFICER	Head of Human Resources Management & Development
RECOMMENDATIONS	To endorse and adopt the Fire & Rescue Service Equality Framework (“ <i>The Journey to Excellence</i> ”) as the framework against which the Authority will measure its equality & diversity outcomes.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<p>The Fire & Rescue Service Equality Framework (FRS EF) was launched on 7 December 2009 entitled “<i>The Journey to Excellence</i>”. This framework supersedes the Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG). It recognises and addresses equality and diversity objectives that are a priority for the fire and rescue service. It is outcome-focused and based upon the same principles as the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG), including the use of three achievement levels: ‘<i>developing</i>’; ‘<i>achieving</i>’ and ‘<i>excellent</i>’.</p> <p>Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service (DSFRS) has reached Level 2 of the Equality Standard, therefore achievement will be migrated across to the ‘<i>developing</i>’ level of the FRS EF</p> <p>The single equality scheme, <i>Making the Connections</i> will go some way towards achieving the desired “<i>excellent status</i>” by 2012. An initial self assessment exercise against the requirements of each level will be carried out within DSFRS early in 2010 to identify further actions required against the criteria set.</p> <p>In early 2010, IDeA plans to launch the ‘<i>Efect</i>’ web based software. It is an assessment tool that will allow upload evidence, links and data against each performance area. DSFRS will be adopting this method of assessment, which will enable auditors to view all the evidence against the framework in one place.</p>

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	There is a significant project to be scoped around the implementation and monitoring of this tool (the “Efect” software), to enable evidence to be collected across the organisation
EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT	
APPENDICES	None
LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS	None

1. **A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR MEASURING FRS EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY PERFORMANCE**

1.1 The Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) has now superseded the Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG). The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), in partnership with the Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA), has produced the new Fire and Rescue Services Equality Framework (FRS EF). The FRS EF recognises and addresses equality and diversity objectives that are a priority for the fire and rescue service. The FRS EF is outcome-focused and based upon the same principles as the EFLG, including the use of three achievement levels:

- 'developing'
- 'achieving'
- 'excellent'.

1.2 It has also been cross-mapped with the national 'Fire and Rescue Service: Equality and diversity strategy 2008 to 2018' to incorporate the same five priority areas stated in that document. This should greatly assist FRSs in preparing their annual report to Communities and Local Government. The priority areas of performance are:

- leadership and promoting inclusion
- accountability
- effective service delivery and community engagement
- employment and training
- evaluation and sharing good practice.

2. **LINKS AND DRIVERS**

2.1 The FRS EF complements and supports the services' national core values of:

- service to the community
- people
- diversity
- improvement.

2.2 The FRS EF also has a strong correlation with relevant statutory duties and external assessment methodologies. Using the 'COUNT' principle – count once and use numerous times – it should be possible to provide evidence that will be relevant to:

- statutory duties
- the 'Fire and Rescue Service: Equality and diversity strategy 2008 to 2018'
- comprehensive area assessment (CAA)
- operational assurance
- the managing performance element of organisational assessments.

- 2.3 Communities and Local Government and the Audit Commission have recognised the FRS EF as an appropriate means to measure and accredit the performance of individual FRSs with respect to equality and diversity. The FRS EF has been cross-mapped against the EFLG to identify common areas. Matters that tend to be led by local authorities – such as commissioned or procured services, equality mapping and sustainable community strategies – have been presented in an FRS context.
- 2.4 Cross-mapping with the ‘Fire and Rescue Service: Equality and diversity strategy 2008 to 2018’ has ensured the inclusion of a number of areas that are particularly important to the FRS. These include integrated risk management planning (IRMP), workplace facilities, recruitment and dealing with bullying and harassment. Importantly, it has also been constructed to provide scope for the different governance arrangements that services operate within, be it metropolitan, combined or county based.

3. **THE FIVE PERFORMANCE AREAS**

3.1 These are:

- leadership and promoting inclusion
- accountability
- effective service delivery and community engagement
- employment and training
- evaluation and sharing good practice

3.2 These five areas are explored further in the paragraphs below.

4. **LEADERSHIP AND PROMOTING INCLUSION.**

- 4.1 Positive political and managerial leadership at all levels is essential to drive change, maintain commitment and create improvement. Senior service leaders and members need to demonstrate their commitment through personal impact and by making resources available to deliver improvements.
- 4.2 Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) Members have a central role in ensuring that equality improvements are integral to the Authority’s strategic aims and performance. They often have a good knowledge and understanding of the needs of their local communities, which should be used to inform service activities. High performing FRAs will be led by Members and officers or managers who have a reputation for championing equality issues, ensuring that objectives and activities are relevant to community needs.
- 4.4 They will have ensured employees are clear about their role in making the service a fair and inclusive organisation. Leaders will also be promoting good community relations and ensuring that the service achieves equality outcomes.
- 4.5 An Equality action plan (DSFRS’s ‘Making the Connections’) is an important mechanism to identify appropriate equality objectives and achieve significant progress. ‘Making the Connections,’ is to be communicated to communities via an overview publication, ‘Considering Needs’ early in 2010.

- 4.6 To attain excellent status, FRSs should be able to demonstrate monitoring and reviewing of their equality action plans and the achievement of significant outcomes. They should be able to demonstrate that procurement is contributing to its equality and diversity objectives, including arrangements for regularly monitoring and reviewing processes. The Efect software will support evidence collection across the organisation.
- 4.7 Partnership between employers and representative bodies will be essential to provide effective support in achieving the desired continuous improvement in performance. Representative bodies should have the opportunity and actively encouraged to contribute. Where that is the case, representative bodies are expected to reciprocate by making a positive and constructive contribution to delivering equality and diversity improvements.

5. **ACCOUNTABILITY**

- 5.1 Driving change and developing confidence among employees and communities requires everyone in the organisation to accept a degree of accountability. The extent of such accountability will vary depending upon an individual's specific role and responsibilities. For instance, the chief fire officer is expected to have a strong strategic influence on the whole service, whereas an individual firefighter's impact will be as a work colleague alongside their peers, delivering a range of services to diverse local communities.
- 5.2 The framework places considerable emphasis upon the demonstrable delivery of improvements across a wide range of equality and diversity matters. Such progress should be regularly reported, reviewed and updated in accordance with a cycle of continuous improvement. Both the FRS EF and the 'Fire and Rescue Service: Equality and diversity strategy 2008 to 2018' place considerable emphasis upon addressing bullying and harassment. Accordingly, everyone in the service is accountable for establishing and maintaining appropriate behaviours.

6. **EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

- 6.1 Effective planning and engagement are key to improving the quality and effectiveness of service delivery to all communities. FRS plans, strategies, policies and procedures should therefore take full account of the needs of local communities. The CAA framework places emphasis upon the importance of involving groups who may experience disadvantage or inequality. In the FRS EF, it states:

"We expect local services to be effective at giving a voice to people who are vulnerable or at greater risk of disadvantage and inequality, identifying their potential and supporting them to achieve the levels of choice, autonomy and improved outcomes that other citizens enjoy. This will vary according to the local context but will include the groups previously identified [see section on understanding equality] and will include groups which local partners have a requirement to consult and engage with under equality legislation."

- 6.2 The FRS EF places emphasis upon the importance of working in partnership with the community and key partners. Narrowing equality gaps and improving the life chances of different groups will require a pooling of evidence, resources and action planning. While, for example, local authorities have the overall responsibility to lead on equality mapping across a wide range of subjects, such as education, health and community safety, FRSs are expected to contribute. They will do this by sharing information on matters such as fires, road traffic collisions and anti-social behaviour.

- 6.3 Similarly, there are a number of examples where notable outcomes have been achieved for vulnerable people where FRSs have worked in partnership with other organisations to share resources and expertise. These include innovative youth engagement programmes and multi-agency home safety referrals.
- 6.4 As an example from within DSFRS, South Hams Community Safety partnership produced a resource pack for people with learning difficulties, making use of service user focus group feedback and a wider spectrum of agencies to enhance the information. DSFRS has been represented on the steering group since 2005 to assist in the development of a fire safety booklet. The project is now delivering 10 x A5 information booklets in an easy to read format as part of the Keeping Safe Scheme. Service users have been involved at all stages of development and production.
- 6.5 The over-riding priority of effective service delivery and community engagement is to achieve outcomes which improve the quality of life for local people and reduce inequalities. This must be evidence based, demonstrable and sustainable.

7. **EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING**

- 7.1 The ability of the FRS to deliver effective services that meet the diverse needs of local people largely depends upon the composition, quality, skills, understanding and commitment of its employees. It is therefore vitally important that FRSs make every effort to employ, develop and support a wide range of high-quality employees.
- 7.2 Actively engaging with an increasingly diverse society helps to enhance an organisation's reputation and enables it to attract and retain employees and to further develop appropriate services.
- 7.3 Having a good reputation as an employer means FRSs will be able to attract talent from a range of communities, choose the best people for jobs, and meet recruitment and retention needs.
- 7.4 Providing a service based on understanding the differing needs of users is a lot easier if the organisation has a workforce trained in good diversity practice that reflects people it serves. An 'employer of choice' recruits from the widest and most diverse pool. These recruits offer knowledge and insights on providing the best service and this should, in turn, contribute to organisational improvement that ultimately saves more lives and property.
- 7.5 The 'Fire and Rescue Service: Equality and diversity strategy 2008 to 2018' has set challenging recruitment targets for women in the operational sector, and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) employees across the whole organisation. DSFRS has set even more demanding locally based stretch targets.
- 7.6 FRSs must ensure that this ambition is supported by effective employment, retention and development processes. They must, for instance, be able to demonstrate open, transparent and fair selection and progression processes. They must promote employee understanding of equality and diversity and take robust action to eradicate bullying, harassment and unacceptable behaviour. Similarly, issues affecting culture, working practices, facilities, equipment and clothing must all be addressed so that employees can work in a safe and supportive environment.

8. **EVALUATION AND SHARING GOOD PRACTICE**

- 8.1 Monitoring, evaluation and recognition of good practice are essential to ensure continuous improvement and to make the best use of resources. FRSs should collect and analyse evidence of improved performance and good practice, share it with others, celebrate success and address areas for improvement.
- 8.2 The FRS EF and the 'Fire and Rescue Service: Equality and diversity strategy 2008 to 2018' both place emphasis upon the importance of monitoring, evaluating and reviewing plans, policies and procedures in order to create a cycle of continuous improvement. This should be supported by both community and employee consultation in order to ensure that improved outcomes are being achieved and recognised.
- 8.3 Through their achievements, FRSs should become exemplars of good practice for other organisations to follow, sharing their experiences and working with others to assist with improved outcomes for local communities. National organisations, such as the Communities and Local Government, CFA, the IDeA, representative bodies and employee stakeholder groups, all have a responsibility to contribute to the development and sharing of good practice. This can be achieved through joint working, sharing knowledge and resources and communicating examples of notable practice.

9. **THE THREE LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE**

- 9.1 The FRS EF is designed to enable FRAs to benchmark their performance against three distinct levels.
- 9.2 The characteristics of an FRS at each of the levels are detailed within the five performance areas, together with a number of accompanying questions indicating the range of evidence that will be required to confirm the performance level.
- 9.3 As the FRS EF is intended to be outcome-focused rather than process-driven, it is purposely designed to avoid a prescriptive list of requirements. FRSs should therefore use the framework, this 'Key principles' document and the 'Help' document as guidance on the type of outcomes and supporting evidence that will be required in order to achieve specific levels of performance.
- Level 1: 'developing'
 - Level 2: 'achieving'
 - Level 3: 'excellent'.

10 **WORKING WITH THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE EQUALITY FRAMEWORK (FRS EF)**

- 10.1 Although there are three different achievement levels, the framework should be regarded as a whole, representing a path of continuous improvement.
- 10.2 In planning to work with the FRS EF, fire and rescue services should initially study the expectations of an 'excellent' service so that they can understand what is required to get there. FRSs should also then study the details of the 'developing' and 'achieving' achievement levels so that they have built up a strong understanding of the overall requirements.

10.3 There will be aspects of work that many fire and rescue services are already at the achieving or excellent levels, although as a whole, they would still be at the developing or achieving levels. This is to be expected as part of the cycle of continuous improvement and the overall journey to excellence.

11. **MIGRATING FROM THE EQUALITY STANDARD FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT TO THE FRS EF**

11.1 As Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue has reached Level 2 of the Equality Standard, our achievement will be migrated across to the 'developing' level of the EF FRSs. It is expected that the key principles and actions within the single equality scheme, Making the Connections, when addressed, will go some way towards achieving the desired excellent status by 2012, however the equality and diversity unit will be carrying out an initial self assessment exercise against the requirements of each level early in 2010. This will identify further actions required against each criteria.

12. **MEASUREMENT**

12.1 Measurement will be undertaken via two key mechanisms, namely:

- Peer challenge
- 'Effect' web based assessment tool

Peer Challenge

12.2 FRSs may claim performance at the 'developing' level based on a thorough self-assessment. At the 'achieving' and 'excellent' levels, however, self-assessments will require validation by an IDeA Diversity Peer Challenge.

12.3 The Diversity Peer Challenge that previously applied to Levels 3 and 5 of the Equality Standard has been revised to provide a means of benchmarking achievements against the FRS EF.

12.4 It will consist of two parts:

- a review by IDeA accredited FRS peers of the service's own self-assessment, including appropriate supporting evidence
- an on-site visit by three peers to conduct interviews and focus groups with employees, councillors and other stakeholders.

12.5 FRSs that have acceptable evidence of current performance at the 'achieving' and 'excellent' levels of the FRS EF will be awarded a certificate by the CFOA or IDeA and will be entitled to use the relevant FRS EF seal.

12.6 In order to ensure that accreditation is current and to encourage continuous improvement, 'achieving' and 'excellent' FRSs will be expected to apply to the IDeA for re-evaluation at least every three years.

12.7 The Equality and Diversity Steering Group to be made of external interest groups and partners will also provide a challenge and scrutiny role which will assist in evidence for how well we are doing against the Equality Framework and demonstrate effective engagement.

'Efect' web based assessment tool

- 12.8 IDeA plans to launch 'Efect' in the New Year. This is a web based assessment tool which will allow fire and rescue services to upload evidence, links and data against each performance area. DSFRS will be adopting this method of assessment, which will enable auditors to view all the evidence against the framework in one place. There is a significant project to be scoped around the implementation and monitoring of this tool, to enable evidence to be collected across the organisation.

13. **RECOMMENDATION**

- 13.1 To endorse and adopt the Fire & Rescue Service Equality Framework ("*The Journey to Excellence*") as the framework against which the Authority will measure its equality & diversity outcomes.

JANE SHERLOCK

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