

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5 NOVEMBER 2012

1. **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY QUARTERLY UPDATE**

Report of the Chief Fire Officer.

RECOMMENDED

THAT the Scrutiny Committee notes the content of this report which provides an overview of current progress against the Equality Objectives.

2. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

The report outlines the Service's progress with regard to the recently developed Equality Objectives for 2012-2015.

3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 On 24 September 2012, The Fire Authority approved the Equality and Diversity Report & Equality Objectives for 2012-2015. This report provides an overview of progress with regard to how the Service intends to move forward in meeting its Equality Objectives (attached as Appendix A).
- 3.2 The Service has commenced work to publicise the Equality Objectives internally and externally so that the public and our employees can access and understand our commitment to Equality & Diversity (E&D). The Equality Objectives are available on the Internet together with additional information.
- 3.3 Internally the Equality Objectives are being communicated to employees through the Intranet News items as well as the E&D Intranet pages. We are also carrying out an E&D awareness campaign focusing on each of the protected characteristics such as Gender for the first one; so that employees and managers have a better understanding of gender issues that impact our Service and how we are

progressing.

ACCOUNTABILITY

- 3.4 The Equality Objectives compliment and align to The Plan and therefore already form part of the way in which the service works.
- 3.5 The Governance arrangements for E&D sit with the Authority's Scrutiny Committee overseeing progress and providing challenge and support.
- 3.6 Corporate Board monitor and direct the work through developing the equality agenda in its quarterly E&D updates.
- 3.7 It is our intention that the management of the organisation will monitor and progress its performance against the Equality Objectives through the Corporate Performance Reporting structures. This will further enable the organisation to embed E&D at all levels of delivering services.

LEADERSHIP & INCLUSION

- 3.8 Corporate Board members continue to provide their personal support and leadership to E&D initiatives to increase the profile of our work internally and externally. For example, The Chief Fire Officer and Director of Operations are speaking at the forthcoming National Asian Fire Service Association Conference which is being hosted by West Midlands Fire Service. Over 150 national FRS and local public and third sector partners are attending. Operations are also holding fringe events in each of the Command Areas focusing on our partnership work which supports the aims of the Conference.
- 3.9 The ACUA Leadership Capability Course in partnership with Coventry University is now in its third year. The course is open to a diverse group of operational and non operational employees and strives to develop leadership skills in emerging talent through inviting them to engage in corporate and strategic issues and in doing so supporting the organisation in delivering better outcomes.

- 3.10 The Academy provides employees with a range of self awareness and team building skills. Managers and supervisors also have access to three levels of Coaching skills to improve people management.
- 3.11 Equality considerations in decision making at all levels within the Service is managed through the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Framework.
- 3.12 E&D as a function is being broadened within the Organisational Development function so that the team can have more influence in embedding and engaging E&D through building organisational understanding and managing change and by increasing capacity and resilience.

PREVENTION, PROTECTION & RESPONSE

- 3.13 West Midlands Fire Service now has approaching 100 active Vulnerable Peoples Officers (VPOs) across the service area. These officers have been trained to a higher level of understanding around the lifestyle, behaviour and health related issues that make certain individuals within our communities at more risk.
- 3.14 VPOs work with partners and service providers to reach these vulnerable individuals, to manage their risk and signpost to other services. VPOs also seek to increase the awareness of fire related issues across partner organisations, making fire safety for their client's part of their core work.
- 3.15 There are a range of examples of projects which aim to keep our most vulnerable people safe; these include the following:
 - *Welcome to the West Midlands*: is an education programme for new migrants to promote safety, well being, community understanding and citizenship. It has been funded by the Big Lottery Fund and developed in consultation with migrants to meet the information gap which can occur when someone arrives in the UK. The mobile education package is delivered by our Community Volunteers and is an interactive experiential learning experience.

- *Special Education Needs (SEN) Educators* who are serving firefighters who have received additional training; deliver fire safety education to people with learning disabilities. The majority of the input is delivered to groups either through special schools, SEN groups within mainstream schools, colleges, residential homes and day care centres as well as activity groups. SEN Educators also provide the SEN programme at Safeside where visiting groups, again of children or adults, are able to learn about keeping safe and keeping others safe tailored to their needs and ability.
- *Safestart programme at Safeside* aims to increase the confidence and skills of parents and carers of babies, pre-school children and Foundation Stage children. The programme covers the key safety issues for this age group including road safety, in car safety, fire safety, general home safety and basic first aid.
- *YOYO (You're on Your Own)* programme at Safeside covers risk in different situations including risk for themselves and others, what to do in an emergency, dealing with peer pressure, key skills in independent living. YOYO is for children leaving care, students, school leavers, young offenders and teenage parents, with a target age range of 14-22. Visits are adapted depending on the age and background of the visit groups.
- West Midlands Fire Service Arson Task force co-coordinator is now working closely with a new crime prevention team established for West Midlands Police. A team of 10 crime prevention officers have been placed at 3 cluster points across the west midlands region each having differing portfolios from arson prevention, cannabis to metal thefts. This is an opportunity to forge stronger links.
- Through the Arson Task Force the *one project* already is taking shape, there is the opportunity for all emergency services to share web space promoting prevention and protection seasonal messages to all schools web sites across the West Midlands. A Pilot scheme will trial this with several other local authority education teams who have expressed an interest.

EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING

- 3.16 An Equality Impact assessment of the Workforce profile related to the Building upon Success outcomes is currently being undertaken, the report for which will be presented to Programme Board.
- 3.17 Working in partnership with a range of internal stakeholders we have undertaken a review of Progression and Selection processes leading to changes in this policy.
- 3.18 The Service is continuing with its range of employee engagement initiatives, particularly targeting under representative groups through:

'We are Women @ West Midlands Fire Service', women's group was launched in March 2012. The aims of the group are:

- Professional development and progression (influence leaders and colleagues)
- Personal development and networking such as building confidence through support
- Achieving tangible outcomes (improve policy and facilities)

The regional Asian Fire Service Association group was launched in December 2011, the aims of the group are:

1. To support professional development & progression and to share learning experiences.
 2. To build a solid network of mutual support for employees that delivers real outcomes.
 3. To support charities and fundraising.
 4. Regional & national AFSA to work together to achieve mutual outcomes.
- 3.19 Working with the two employee groups and engaging with senior managers a positive Action, Personal Effectiveness Course (see Appendix B) is targeting under represented operational and support staff to develop essential skills.

- 3.20 We continue to engage with employees with regards to implementing the actions from the Employee Opinion Survey, such as recently carrying out team activities with Fire safety and Hay Mill's Fire Station.

EVALUATION & GOOD PRACTICE

- 3.21 The Asian Fire Service Conference mentioned above provides a range of learning and development and sharing of Best Practice across the FRS sector as well as our key public and third sector partners. WMFS employees will be speaking and attending the event including sharing our best practice within Employment & Training and Service Delivery.
- 3.22 West Midlands Fire Service held a Serious Incident Review (SIR) where the Head of Safeguarding for the command area contributed, which was vital to embedding learning with several multi agency partners. The learning outcomes and recommendations are now being adopted by Adult Safeguarding Boards across our service area.

4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

This report and Equality Objectives within it respond directly to the General and Specific duties of the Equality Act and considers the Equality and Diversity issues that are pertinent to the needs of the Service. In doing so a range of equality analysis has been considered with regard to all the protected characteristics.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

The report responds to our requirements under the Equality Act 2010; Public Sector Equality Duties 2011. The Equality Objectives 2012 – 2015 further advance our compliance with the General Duty and Specific Duties. The Objectives also support the organisation with better response to employment and service delivery legislative requirements.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Costs associated with the production of the Equality and Diversity report and objectives for 2012-2015 will be met from within existing budget provision.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Quick Start Guide: Public Sector Equality Duty

Quick Start Guide: Specific duties

Meeting the Equality Duty in policy and decision-making

Engagement and the Equality Duty

VIJ RANDENIYA
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

APPENDIX A

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY OBJECTIVES 2012 - 2015

ACCOUNTABILITY

The journey towards achieving excellence requires us to challenge ourselves and continuously improve. We recognise that inclusion strategies will form a key dimension to the Equality and Diversity agenda as we move forward. Some of our key specific and measurable Equality Objectives that promote accountability at all levels of the Service include:

1. Our *Strategic direction and drive* will continue to be given through our Authority and Corporate Board members. They will also monitor progress and provide scrutiny on our Equality and Diversity performance *through equality analysis* such as through quarterly reports and equality impact assessments. We shall continue to have an Equality and Diversity lead member on the Authority who will champion E&D issues at a strategic level.
2. Managers will lead in *identifying and embedding* Equality and Diversity actions into their local directorate/section plans and all employees will identify and promote relevant E&D principals and actions within their work accordingly.

LEADERSHIP & INCLUSION

Attributes of leadership can be displayed at all levels; each and every person within the service is encouraged to promote Equality and Diversity which is reflected in our commitment to our core values in all that we do.

1. Authority and Corporate Board members will continue to demonstrate their commitment to Equality and Diversity through leadership actions and personal impact.
2. The Authority continues to profile and provide the support and resources required to deliver equality and diversity improvements.

SERVICE DELIVERY AND ENGAGEMENT

The service is committed to using the appropriate and varied prevention, protection and response activities to meet the needs of our diverse communities.

Prevention & Protection Activities

1. Our local plans demonstrate the sophisticated way in which we use our intelligence data and risk mapping within the context of understanding the changing nature of who our communities are and the environment that they live in. We use this information to achieve better outcomes in our prevention, protection and response work. We will publish our local plans to communicate with residents and demonstrate our commitment to and understanding of the needs of our communities and set our accountability towards continuous improvement. In particular, by identifying 20% of the most 'at risk groups' with regard to home fires, road safety, personal safety and community safety and target our resources to make these communities safer.
2. We will continue to raise the awareness of our communities towards managing safety through a range of interventions and educational activities that promote community cohesion; such as through publicity, open days, schools visits, youth work, Safeside and local Station level activities.

Response

1. We will be well prepared at all times and respond to all emergency response situations with the highest level of expertise, skills and abilities to reduce the risk of fires, road traffic incidents, injury and death.
2. We will ensure that our enforcement activities do not disproportionately impact any specific communities without reasonable justification. Where possible, where trends are identified we will make efforts to advise and provide guidance so that these communities be more proactive in responding to the requirements of the law.

EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING

1. We will ensure that we tackle any barriers to communication development, inclusion and progression.
2. We will ensure that all of our employees are treated with dignity and respect at all levels regardless of their differences.
3. We will promote positive action initiatives to specifically engage employees from under representative groups to engage with organisational development as well as their own development.

SHARING BEST PRACTICE

Monitoring, evaluation, sharing good practice and ensuring the best use of resources are the key to our aspiration of achieving and sustaining excellence in equality and diversity for our employees and our communities.

1. We will assess the effectiveness of our partnership work in achieving equality outcomes.