FRS Equality and Diversity – Strategy and 2008 Awards; and Firefighters’ Survey

Issued by:
John Dackombe
Fire and Rescue Service Development Division

Addressed to: Please forward to:
The Chair of the Fire and Rescue Authority In Fire and Rescue Services:
The Chief Executive of the County Council Heads of Human Resources
The Clerk to the Fire and Rescue Authority Equality and Diversity Professionals
The Clerk to the Combined Fire and Rescue Station Managers
Authority
The Commissioner of the London Fire and Training and Development Managers
Emergency Planning Authority
The Chief Fire Officer

Summary
This circular informs of the publication of the FRS Equality and Diversity Strategy, and the report and findings of the Survey of Current and Ex-Firefighters, and announces the winners and runners-up in the 2008 Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Award Scheme.

For further information, contact:
John Dackombe
Fire and Rescue Service Development Division
Communities and Local Government
1st Floor, Zone A3 Ashdown House
123 Victoria Street
London SW1E 6DE

Direct line 020 7944 5707
Fax 020 7944 5664
E-mail john.dackombe@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Website www.communities.gov.uk
1.0 The Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-11

1.1 The Equality and Diversity Strategy was published on 20 May and formally launched at the national conference, ‘Making The Difference’, hosted by Communities and Local Government on 28 May.

1.2 Chief Fire Officers will wish to ensure that the Strategy is circulated widely among staff (for example, copies to each fire station). Chairs of Fire and Rescue Authorities will wish to ensure that every Fire Authority Member receives a copy.

1.3 The Strategy document can be found on the Communities and Local Government website at http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/equalitydiversitystrategy, together with the report on the consultation exercise that preceded its finalisation and publication which can be found at http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/equalityanddiversitystrategy (Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-2-18 Consultation: Summary of Responses). Printed copies of the Strategy can be obtained by contacting Clive Botterill on 020 7944 5763 or e-mail: clive.botterill@communities.gsi.gov.uk.

1.4 Communities and Local Government is producing a series of Guidance Notes to assist Fire and Rescue Services and Authorities with meeting their responsibilities in delivering the Strategy’s objectives. The first of these Notes, on Integrated Risk Management Planning, Data Collection and Monitoring, Individual Performance Management, and Establishing an Information Bank, will shortly be published on the Communities and Local Government website.


2.1 Responding to concerns from within the Fire and Rescue Service, and with the full support of the key Fire and Rescue Service stakeholders represented on the Equality and Diversity Project Board and the Equality and Diversity Stakeholder Group, Communities and Local Government commissioned an external research company (ICM Research) to undertake a survey of the workplace experiences of serving firefighters and those who had recently left the Service. 8,900 questionnaires were sent to:

- all women firefighters in every Fire and Rescue Service in England;
- a random sample of male firefighters in every Fire and Rescue Service in England;
- all women firefighters who had left the Service in England in the previous three years, and
- all male firefighters who had left the Service in England in the previous year.

2.2 1,869 completed returns were received, giving a response rate of 21 per cent and a profile of respondents that closely matched the actual profile of the current workforce in England.
The survey examined issues such as individual’s expectations prior to joining the Service and reasons for wanting to join; whether those expectations had been met or how these may have changed over the course of a career; experiences of training and of being a firefighter; experiences of unacceptable behaviour; reasons for leaving or transferring (or thinking of doing so); the provision of separate workplace facilities and appropriate work-wear for women firefighters. A note circulated to all Chief Fire Officers prior to publication of the report, highlighting some of the key findings, is found at Annex A.


The Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Awards

Forty entries were received for this year’s Equality and Diversity Award Scheme. A panel of judges, drawn from the wider equality and diversity community of the public and private sectors, convened to consider the nominations. They looked for evidence of:

- innovation
- ambitious objectives
- sound planning
- successful delivery
- good practice that other Fire and Rescue Services would benefit from
- how the work had had a positive effect on progressing the equality and diversity

The winning nominations and runners-up were announced at the ‘Making the Difference’ Conference, where the winners were presented with certificates by Fire Minister Parmjit Dhanda, the President of the Chief Fire Officers’ Association and the Chair of the Local Government Association Fire Committee. Each runner-up received a letter of commendation from the Fire Minister.

Details of the winners and runners-up in each category, and a brief description of the projects for which they were nominated, are at Annex B to this Circular. A press release can be found on the Communities and Local Government website at: http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/fire/822532.

Photographs of the winners and runners-up, taken at the ‘Making The Difference’ Conference, are available on request from the Communities and Local Government Press Office, by calling 020 7944 4532.

John Dackombe

Fire and Rescue Service Development Division
A SURVEY OF CURRENT AND EX-FIREFIGHTERS IN ENGLAND

Background

Responding to concerns from within the Fire and Rescue Service, Communities and Local Government commissioned research to ascertain the workplace experiences of serving firefighters and those who had recently left the Service. Questionnaires went to all women firefighters (and a sample of men) and all ex-women firefighters who had left in the last three years (and all men who had left the Service in the previous year). The survey was undertaken in June 2007. Nearly 9,000 questionnaires were issued. The survey attracted a high response rate (21%).

The survey examined:

- expectations and reasons for wanting to join the Fire and Rescue Service
- whether expectations had been met and how these may have changed
- experiences of training and of being a firefighter
- experiences of unacceptable behaviour
- reasons for leaving (or thinking of leaving)
- the provision of separate workplace facilities and appropriate work-gear for women firefighters

The report sheds light on the experiences faced by a number of operational staff, both women and men. Whilst the majority of respondents evidently enjoy their work, a significant number reported negatively about Service culture and the behaviour of colleagues. The survey confirms the existence of unacceptable behaviours, with a significant proportion of managers and senior staff either witnessing these behaviours, as well as directly experiencing them, at the same level as firefighters.

The research adds weight to anecdotal evidence about incidents of assault, bullying, harassment and discrimination in the workplace. It clearly scopes the scale of the task in changing culture, attitudes and behaviours in the Fire and Rescue Service.

Among of the findings are:

- **Joining the Service**: 64% of respondents joined because they wanted to do a worthwhile job; 56% wanted a job the community valued. 58% of respondents had either a family member or a friend in the Service when they joined. Most people joined from other employment; few entered straight from school or university.

- **Job Satisfaction**: Generally respondents found their job rewarding and challenging and had good working relationships with colleagues. 70% were “happy” at work. But 14% did not find their work “enjoyable”. 15% did not feel “valued” by work colleagues, with women more likely to state this. Many reported that they did not feel valued by the Service or their managers.

- **Working relationships**: Firefighters generally rated working relationships with immediate or intermediate managers as good to very good, although the relationship with principal officers was, for many, regarded as poorer. 80% of all respondents said their working relationships with others on their watch were “very good” or “good”. 37% of all respondents rated the working relationship with their principal officers as “very good” or “good”.

- **The importance of equality and diversity**: 69% of senior managers and 27% of managers responding to the survey believed that attracting a diverse workforce is important.
• **Witnessing unacceptable behaviours:** respondents saw or heard at work the following behaviours between Fire and Rescue Service staff at least once in the previous 12 months: verbal assault (seen or heard by 58%); bullying and harassment (51%); use and distribution of pornography (39%); physical assault (11%). There was also evidence of discrimination on grounds of age (23%); gender (21%); sexuality (14%); race (13%).

• **Experiencing unacceptable behaviours:** a third of respondents reported that they had been bullied or harassed at work in the previous 12 months. 25% were verbally abused. 19 respondents reported that they had been sexually assaulted in the preceding 12 months.

• **Reporting behaviours:** three-quarters of respondents did not report unacceptable behaviour to their line manager. Of those that did, 45% rated handling as “poor” or “very poor”. 15% who reported the behaviour were bullied and harassed as a result.

• **The effect of the behaviours on individuals:** 56% of those that had experienced these behaviours reported that it “affected” or “bothered” them. Those from minority backgrounds were most affected. Respondents who had experienced the behaviours reported that it had affected their confidence at work (25%) and their enjoyment of their work (29%). More than one-quarter thought about leaving the Service as a result of the behaviours.
Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Award Scheme 2008: Winners and Runners-up

LEADERSHIP (INDIVIDUAL) CATEGORY

Winner: Michael Feather, Equal Opportunities Learning and Development Co-ordinator, East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service

In 2005 Michael initiated a programme to deliver disability equality training to all staff in East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service to raise awareness of changes to the Disability Discrimination Act which affected the Fire and Rescue Service. To promote the fact that existing and new staff who have a disability would be valued, and that reasonable adjustments would be made to ensure that they are not disadvantaged in the workplace, he set up a project to produce a set of posters, in partnership with students of Sussex Downs College, that would help to challenge perceptions about disability and change understanding.

The initiative was very clear in its aims – to promote disability equality, work with other stakeholders and raise awareness through posters displayed at fire stations. There had been excellent engagement with community partners, particularly with the involvement of students in designing the posters. The judges noted that the project had resulted in good practice being rolled out and shared with others: the posters had been bought by 20 Fire and Rescue Services. There was also an element of giving something back– the revenue from the sale of the posters had funded the provision of laptops for an adult learning centre. Michael's personal commitment and drive went beyond his day to day job and the judges were impressed with the tangible outcomes produced by this project, which was innovative and a good example of how individual leadership can have a positive impact on tackling a difficult issue.

Runner-up: Martin Green, Station Manager, Hillingdon Fire Station, London Fire Brigade

This project was aimed at bringing effective engagement between the Traveller community and Hillingdon Fire Station; challenging perceptions; improving understanding of fire safety issues and designing a fire safety leaflet specifically for Travellers. Martin spent time researching the Traveller way of life and learned about the daily challenges they faced. He carried out home fire safety checks on site, checked firefighting and domestic water supplies and set up a liaison between another Fire and Rescue Service (Buckinghamshire) and six local sites, via the Thames Valley Traveller Association. The judges thought that Martin’s initiative, which had brought about a more positive relationship with the Traveller community, was admirable and he had shown strong personal commitment to the task of breaking down barriers between the Service and a hard to reach community.

LEADERSHIP (TEAM) CATEGORY

Winner: The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Support Group of the Fire Brigades Union. The Award Certificate recipients were Stewart Brown (London Fire Brigade), Patrick Carberry (Bedfordshire Fire & Rescue Service), and Yannick Dubois (East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service)

The Group was set up in 1993, primarily as a support network for members of the Fire and Rescue Service who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT), but also to raise awareness of LGBT issues, provide challenge, promote understanding and identify good
practice. The LGBT Group has been instrumental in bringing the issues affecting LGBT members of the Service to the forefront as well as highlighting the needs of the LGBT community.

The judges agreed that dealing with issues of sexuality represented the biggest cultural challenge for the Service – very few members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual community working in the Service felt sufficiently comfortable with the culture of the organisation that they were willing to declare their sexuality. They agreed that this impressive groundbreaking work should be recognised for having paved the way for LGBT issues to be discussed openly and progressed. They were highly impressed that the Group was now involved in encouraging LGBT networks to be established in fire services across Europe.

There were two Runners-up:

i. The Asian Fire Service Association (Akwala Deol, Manjit Singh, Parvinder Singh and Davinder Sodhi, London Fire Brigade)

The Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA) was set up in 2003 as a networking and support group; to provide professional advice and support on matters affecting Asian members of the Service and communities; to promote fire safety in the Asian community, and to raise funds for Asian charitable causes. Leadership, personal commitment, drive and determination led to the creation of AFSA and the judges agreed that this was an excellent example of how an initially small local group had developed an approach to engage with the Service and the wider community to the benefit of both. The initiative demonstrated that AFSA had an effective role in tackling wider issues of religion and belief, developing community links and supporting recruitment and retention. The judges noted that AFSA was now recognised as a key stakeholder and had representation on national bodies.

ii. Lorraine Abrahams, Director of Service Improvement, Avon Fire & Rescue Service

This nomination was for the work to host a national conference in October 2006 on Women as Leaders in the Fire and Rescue Service. The conference, attended by over 170 delegates, explored some of the key issues faced by women in the workplace such as direct/multi-tier entry and incident command. A key objective had been to provide insight into how women become and operate as leaders in a traditionally male dominated and rapidly changing environment. The judges noted that this had been a unique event for the Fire and Rescue Service to stage, and agreed that Avon should be applauded for organising and hosting this important national conference on behalf of the Service, which had helped to raise awareness of the issues. The letter of commendation also acknowledged Avon’s promotion of LGBT issues through its hosting of a national conference in October 2007 and the establishment of a watch managers’ equalities forum, both of which had also been nominated under the Award Scheme.

-------------------------------------------------

SERVICE DELIVERY (INDIVIDUAL) CATEGORY

Winner: Chris Caswell, Watch Manager, Strood Fire Station, Kent Fire and Rescue Service (KFRS)

This project was started in 2006 to promote awareness about dyslexia in the workplace. Using himself as an example, Chris strived to ensure that staff and management were dyslexia-aware. His work helped to develop a more open approach to disability, which had encouraged other staff with dyslexia to come forward. This approach had resulted in significant number of changes in KFRS service delivery and policy both internally and externally.
The judges thought this was an impressive winner that had made an important contribution to raising awareness and understanding of hidden disability. Chris’ work had challenged traditional perceptions about firefighters and encouraged a culture of openness, enabling others with dyslexia to feel they could come forward. It had also prompted an examination of the issues faced by members of staff and the public with disabilities, leading to solutions benefitting both the organisation and the public. The work had changed and improved the way in which Kent Fire and Rescue Service supported people with disabilities in the workplace and in the community. As a result of Chris’ work, Kent had shared the outcomes with others and had provided practical support for staff in other Fire and Rescue Services.

There were two runners up:

i. Michael Skee, Catering Services Manager, Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service

This nomination was for work done by the individual and the organisation to overcome significant disability, to facilitate a comprehensive process of rehabilitation, adjustment and a return to work programme for Mr Skee, post-meningococcal meningitis and bi-lateral lower limb amputation. The judges agreed this was an inspirational approach to raising awareness of the issues and making organisational adjustments to meet the needs of the individual, thereby retaining an effective and talented member of staff. Whilst Mr Skee was central to his own rehabilitation and return to work, the judges also recognised the contribution of the team of professionals both within and outside the Service who had helped and supported him. This case set an example of good practice for others to follow.

ii. Cliff Butterworth, Community Safety Co-ordinator, Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service

The aim of the project was to ensure the protection of the deaf and hard of hearing community through more effective engagement. The judges agreed that this application showed innovation and personal commitment, which included undertaking, of his own volition, training in British Sign Language. Cliff’s work had been recognised by the Royal National Institute for Deaf People, through the receipt of an award. The judges noted that the project, running since 2003, had resulted in over 450 specialist smoke alarms being fitted; Cliff’s work had also encouraged Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service to fund signing courses for other staff. The judges thought this was a good example of using initiative to contact and support a harder to reach group.

---

Category: SERVICE DELIVERY (TEAM) CATEGORY

There were two winners:

i. Pamaljit Kaur Sidhu (Community Safety Co-ordinator), Simone White (Community Safety Officer) and Lynne Grayston (Community Safety Officer), Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service

The Phoenix Project, running since 2006, is a collaboration between Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service, Derby City Partnership and East Midlands Development Agency. The project was set up to deliver sustainable risk reduction strategies to a diverse community in an area of Derby. Its key objectives included increasing fire safety awareness and the completion of targeted programmes of home fire safety checks, community group talks and school visits. The judges agreed that this was an excellent innovative example of engagement across a diverse range of cultures, beliefs, ethnic groups and ages within the community, fostering good relations with the Service whilst increasing awareness through a programme of fire
safety education involving community groups, schools and businesses. The Fire Safety Team had set ambitious targets but managed to exceed all of them. The judges were impressed by the call reduction outcomes over the two year period. The scope of the project and the results achieved demonstrated the Team’s obvious commitment and passion for their work.

ii. Neil Ashworth, Watch Manager, Burnley Fire Station, Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service

This project was about improving engagement with young people from the minority ethnic community. The judges agreed that this was an excellent example of intervention and engagement with local communities following a serious incident where fire crews had been physically and verbally abused by local youths. The watch manager and crew of Burnley Fire Station took the initiative and worked closely with local communities to tackle a specific problem, build up good relations and gain the trust of community leaders. As a consequence, incidents of attacks had ceased and crime and other anti-social behaviour in the area had reduced. The image of the Service in the local area was positive and several young people from the minority ethnic community had expressed an interest in joining the Service. The positive outcomes had led to ongoing work with the police to tackle similar problems elsewhere. Solutions were being shared with others and could be rolled out to a number of Fire and Rescue Services.

Runner up: Rebecca Howard, Monitoring and Performance Officer, London Fire Brigade

This project, running since 2006, was set up to promote positive engagement between the London Fire Brigade and the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) community. The judges agreed that this was an innovative project, signifying a positive attitude towards LGB issues - of particular importance because of high instances of lone males as victims of fire. London Fire Brigade had recognised that it must be a more diverse organisation and accessible to a wider community; this targeted project had succeeded in engaging with the LGB community through the club circuit.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING CATEGORY

Winner: Rex Webb, Relationship Manager, Salisbury Fire Station, Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service

This project, running since 2006, aimed to improve Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service’s engagement with migrant communities. Rex became aware of concerns being raised about migrant workers. A number of fires had taken place in Salisbury in houses of multiple occupancy and firefighters had identified that these premises were occupied by migrant workers who were unable to communicate in English. Rex organised a conference, attended by delegates from across the south west region, to improve understanding of migrant worker issues, challenge stereotypes and identify priorities for the future in Wiltshire. He also set up two multi-agency Migrant Worker Forums.

The result was a highly impressive example of multi-agency activity and engagement with migrant communities, a difficult area for any Fire and Rescue Service to tackle successfully but with very positive outcomes in this case. This was a good example of partnership working in operation which delivered momentum and a sense of permanence. The team leader had identified the nature of the problem facing Wiltshire, set up a project with clear objectives to meet the challenges and personally took the lead to find a way forward, involving other key stakeholders in the area. In delivering this project, Rex worked with the following partners:
There were two runners up:

(i) **Paul Fuller (Chief Fire Officer, Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service) and Tanja Kuveljic (Managing Director, b-live)**

This project was set up in 2006 to develop new ways to engage with young people. Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service ran a marketing campaign in partnership with b-live, using the company website to engage with young people from diverse and ethnic groups. The judges agreed the project’s aim of promoting the issues and raising awareness worked well; this was an impressive, innovative scheme involving new technology to engage with young, diverse groups, especially women and ethnic minorities. The initiative demonstrated good use of business and on-line social networking website to tap into the ‘new generation’.

(ii) **Danny Roberts, Firefighter, Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service**

This project, which ran between October and December 2007, was aimed at encouraging young disabled people to engage with the Fire and Rescue Service. Danny, also a coach with a local football team in Dunstable, started a scheme to encourage young people with disabilities to play football. The project supported Bedfordshire and Luton’s objective to achieve better access with an “at risk” group. It resulted in the Service being closer to and supporting its communities and enabled a programme of home fire safety checks to be completed. The judges felt that this short term project was a good, solid example of how one person working with others can make a difference. There was good use of Government funding to support specific sport based work with young disabled people, with the aim of promulgating the fire safety message to a wider audience. It showed how people from an “at risk” group could be fully engaged by the Fire and Rescue Service, get involved and at the same time have fun.