

# ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY STRATEGY (WITH ACTION PLAN) JULY 2010

## 1 PURPOSE

This Strategy sets out the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service's plans for improving its performance in three areas:

- ensuring that it delivers services that meets the needs of Berkshires diverse communities
- achieving a workforce that reflects those communities
- achieving a working environment in which everybody who works for, or with, RBFRS is treated fairly and with respect.

At **Appendix A** is the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's Equality and Diversity Action Plan for 2010 – 2013 (Working document). At **Appendix B** is the Equality and Diversity Action Plan for 2009-12 showing our achievements to date.

## 2 BACKGROUND

### 2.1 National Context

This strategy seeks to enable the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority and the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) to address their responsibilities within the Fire Service National Framework. From April 2008 the National Framework required Fire and Rescue Authorities to implement the National Equality and Diversity Strategy. This sets out a vision and goals to be met by 2018 looking at staff, local partners and local communities, especially those that are disadvantaged, and provides a framework for action that will enable Fire and Rescue Services to:

- tackle current inequalities
- promote equality between different groups in line with legislative requirements
- establish a culture that enables a supported, diverse workforce to provide a service that meets the needs of diverse communities
- build a more effective relationship with the public.

Delivering this should improve the service that we provide and help to build cohesive and sustainable communities.

The national strategy requires action in five priority areas:

- Leadership and promoting inclusion.
- Accountability
- Effective service delivery and community engagement.
- Employment and training.
- Evaluation and sharing good practice.

The national strategy builds on the Equality Standard for Local Government and the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework, which set out how local authorities can mainstream equality and diversity in policy, planning, service delivery and employment

practice. RBFRS recently achieved Level 3 in the Equality Standard for Local Government, and we will now build on that by working towards Excellent on the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework.

The national strategy also incorporates the Core Values for the Fire and Rescue Service agreed in 2005 by the Local Government Association, the Chief Fire Officers' Association, Communities and Local Government, and the representative bodies. These values set out clear expectations for all staff about attitudes and behaviours, including valuing service to the community by working with all groups to reduce risk, and valuing diversity by treating everyone with fairness and respect

Previously, recruitment targets were set nationally by Communities and Local Government. These were that at least 15% of new firefighting recruits are women and that the number of minority ethnic recruits overall reflects the local working population by 2013. For RBFRS this equates to 18.5% minority ethnic recruits. The new government has indicated that it intends to leave equality and diversity issues to Fire and Rescue Services and will no longer scrutinise progress against these targets, or the Fire Service National Framework. However RBFRS will continue to strive for improvement towards these recruitment targets.

Under the Equality Act 2010, Royal Berkshire Fire Authority and RBFRS will from April 2011 have a statutory duty to promote equality and foster good relations between those who share a 'protected characteristic' and those who do not, a way which goes beyond merely avoiding discrimination. The 'protected characteristics' to which this provision applies are:-

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy & maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

All these strands of equality are already covered by our Single Equality Scheme and by our Equality Policy. We await publication of the statutory guidance, but meanwhile we are embedding the principles of the Equality Act into our policies and practices.

Everyone in RBFRS has a contribution to make to the achievement of diversity and equality. This contribution falls most heavily on the Fire Authority and Leaders of the Service at all levels, but all members of RBFRS have a vital contribution to make to the success of this strategy. Within a context of public service cost reductions, it is more important than ever that equality issues are considered as integral part of our day-to-day work rather than an 'extra' that is the responsibility of specialist staff.

## **2.2 Strategic Commitments**

The RBFA already has strategic commitments in place to deliver its vision of 'A Safer

Berkshire', namely:

1. Minimise loss of life, injury and damage from fire, road traffic collisions and other hazards.
2. Improve public and business safety and reduce risk, through targeted education and enforcement of fire safety legislation.
3. Demonstrate continuous improvement and efficiencies, ensuring consultation and partnership working.
4. Be an employer of choice, offering equality of opportunity and development to all.
5. Provide resilient emergency response through risk management and planning.
6. Conduct activities in an environmentally sustainable way.

This strategy directly supports RBFERS Strategic commitments by supporting;

- Work with communities to deliver safety education thus reducing fire deaths and minimising injuries and damage caused by fire and other hazards.
- Use of consultation and partnership working to develop and enhance services, policies and procedures.
- Work towards achievement of a workforce that is more representative of the communities of Berkshire.
- Efforts to ensure that barriers are removed for disabled employees and applicants.
- Increased employee satisfaction – for which it is essential that employees feel they are treated fairly and with respect.

The success of this strategy will largely be measured by progress against these targets.

### **3 CULTURAL CHANGE**

The Fire Services National Framework has identified the need for 'cultural' change in the Fire Service - the expectations and assumptions people have about what happens at work.

The degree of change being sought is large, to an organisation in which there are significant numbers of women and people from a range of ethnic backgrounds in operational and management roles, and which is inclusive, open, supportive, less formal and able to cope effectively with change.

If this degree of change is to be achieved, we must convince the large majority of the workforce that it is necessary, and that they, RBFERS and the public in Berkshire will benefit from the change.

This strategy will therefore have both an external and internal focus. The external focus will seek to develop the existing links between RBFERS and the communities it serves, especially minority ethnic communities, minority faith communities, disabled people and LGBT people, with whom links have traditionally not been strong. These links will be used to deliver information about what RBFERS does and how it does it, a targeted

community safety message, and information about careers in RBFRS. Increasing the involvement of local communities in our work, will help to raise the cultural and community awareness and understanding of the RBFRS workforce.

The internal focus will be on developing awareness and understanding of the concepts of dignity and respect for all members of the RBFRS. It will seek to counter traditional pressure for conformity and emphasise respect for individuals and their differences.

A particular focus has been in equipping those with responsibility for managing others, from Crew Manager upwards, with the necessary understanding and skills to provide leadership and appropriate responses to issues between colleagues and in service delivery as they arise. This strategy will now look to take this further by working with employees to develop their awareness and understanding of community groups.

Another success criterion is the integration of diversity and equality into all aspects of the work of RBFRS. All policy decisions need to take diversity and equality issues into account, and the contribution of each member of RBFRS to the achievement of this strategy needs to be reviewed as part of their annual performance development interview. All departments participate in self assessment and equality impact assessment of the services they provide through a prioritised timetable of activity built into departmental action plans.

#### **4 POLICY AND LEADERSHIP**

The Fire Authority and RBFRS have produced an Equal Opportunities Policy Statement which is kept under review and amended as required. The Fire Authority will regularly be asked to contribute to and endorse this strategy and the associated Equality Action Plan, and the principles that underpin it. A Member Champion has been appointed to take particular interest in equality and diversity within RBFRS, and ensure that the Fire Authority is engaged with these issues.

RBFRS has a well-developed diversity and equality policy framework, which will be kept under review. The priority will be developing understanding and skills in managing diversity and equality, and monitoring practice, rather than the production of more policies and procedures.

Clear commitment and leadership is required from both the Fire Authority and RBFRS's Principal Officers if this strategy is to succeed. Leaders within the Fire Authority and RBFRS also have a key responsibility to act as role models for this strategy.

Royal Berkshire Fire Authority developed the 'Partnership for Common Sense' initiative, which aims to create common purpose between the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority and RBFRS, and within RBFRS. It is seen as complementary to this strategy, and supportive of the change in organisational culture that is sought. One outcome of the Partnership is the Brigade Charter that which sets out the core values of the organisation, and which incorporates the principles of inclusivity and equal consideration of different needs. The Brigade Charter, in conjunction with the National Values, forms the fundamental basis of RBFRS Dignity and Respect Policy.

## 5 IMPLEMENTATION

All members of the Fire Authority and RBFRS have a role to play in implementing this strategy. It is only through individual input and acceptance that the culture of RBFRS can develop and achieve the organisational objectives and strategic aims.

Some groups have specific responsibility for making things happen.

The Community Engagement and Equality Group (CEEG) is the steering group that supports and assist RBFRS in achieving its equality objectives. To achieve this we require commitment and contribution from all departments, therefore CEEG membership is at Area Manager/departmental manager level, together with delegates from employee representative bodies. CEEG is chaired by the Member Champion.

The Area Manager (Prevention and Protection) takes a lead role on equality and diversity issues within RBFRS, but our aim is that consideration of equality issues becomes embedded as an everyday part of our work. To that end they are the responsibility of every manager. Managers at all levels must act as role models, and be proactive in applying this strategy to their teams and the services they deliver. They are key in impact assessing the services they provide and ensuring their departments/functions/teams are working to progress the equality agenda.

The Senior HR Advisor (Equality & Diversity) provides expertise and a specialist focus on advice for implementation of this strategy, providing direction, training, support and managerial advice, as well as regular review of processes and policies in order to maintain compliance with the legislative framework and best practice.

The Community Liaison Officer seeks contact and develops relationships with community organisations in order to facilitate consultation with communities over how RBFRS delivers its services, and works to develop career awareness among young people.

Members of the Prevention team work with fire station staff to build links with local communities in order to build trust, and facilitate delivery of preventative services and safety messages.

The representative bodies have historically taken a lead on diversity and equality issues in the Fire Service and have much to contribute to this strategy's success

## 7 RECRUITMENT ISSUES

Traditionally the Fire Service has not had problems in attracting applications for firefighter posts, and selection processes were originally designed to reduce applicants to manageable numbers. The modernised National Firefighter Standard selection tests, are now being used and so far seem to have demonstrated that they have removed unnecessary obstacles for female and minority ethnic candidates. The results will continue to be closely monitored through future recruitment campaigns.

We need to maintain a recruitment strategy that specifically seeks out and encourages applications from the currently under-represented groups where career awareness is still low. With many of our applicants having family and friends within the service we

need to ensure that Firefighter career awareness advertising is targeted at under-represented groups. Working in partnership with other fire and rescue services in the South East Region provides us with the opportunity to achieve wider coverage at a lower cost.

## **8 TRAINING AND EDUCATION**

Training has a key role in the achievement of cultural change, and a four-track approach to the provision of training and development in support of the achievement of diversity and equality has been adopted.

a Equality and diversity has been built into all formal training delivered internally or externally on RBFRS's behalf.

b Specific training on equality and diversity issues is delivered both externally and internally. The focus here was firstly on equipping managers to offer leadership and deal positively and confidently with issues as they arise in the workplace. The focus has now moved to frontline operational staff and our expectations of them in terms of their behaviour and understanding the requirements of the Fire and Rescue Service Core Values.

c Training to enhance understanding of specific groups and cultures is part of the modular equality a diversity training programme. This will raise employees' levels of confidence and sensitivity when interacting with people in the community, and help to ensure that their experience of contact with us is a positive one.

d Specialist awareness training has been provided in response to any specific issues, for example, dyslexia awareness training to support individuals in the work place and training to undertake equality impact assessment.

## **9 MONITORING**

It is essential that the progress of this strategy is regularly monitored so that its impact can be measured and appropriate adjustments made if necessary. RBFRS will also review, monitor and evaluate policies and procedures to assess their impact on equality, diversity and fairness. To this end an annual report will be made to the Fire Authority outlining progress in terms of the Equality Standard/Framework, recruitment and promotion and other relevant indicators. This information will also be communicated to the workforce in general on a regular basis.

Some monitoring of equality data of service users now takes place, but we recognise that there are circumstances when it would be impracticable or insensitive to do so.

More work needs to be done on employee monitoring in terms of career progression, but this will only really be meaningful when we have more recruits from under-represented groups.

## **10 CONSULTATION**

Consultation is an essential component of our legal duties as a public body and the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework. RBFRS is committed to consulting with the

community, employee representatives and stakeholders on activities designed to promote equality.

We will also consult on issues that affect service delivery, such as the Integrated Risk Management Plan and the services we provide. Our aim will be to ensure that this consultation seeks as wide an audience as possible, so that members of all communities have the opportunity to comment on issues that affect them. Local Strategic Partnerships and forums such as the Reading Declaration Steering group can play an important role in this.

Consultation must take place at all levels of the organisation and across all functions, in particular those providing service to the public. It should not be seen as the sole responsibility of the Human Resources team or equality and diversity specialists.

## **PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT YEAR**

Having embarked on the impact assessment of our services, the priority will be consultation with service users in order to ensure that any issues that we have identified can be addressed, and plug any gaps in our knowledge that might mean that we have failed to consider what barriers some people may face in accessing our services.

In the expectation that there will be no wholtime firefighter recruitment campaign in 2010, we will focus our attention on longer term positive action by working with schools, colleges and the Connexions service to promote the career to girls and BME pupils. This will compliment the Community and Local Government's 'Extraordinary Career' campaign which is aimed at a similar age group.

Cultural awareness training has not been delivered as planned because of staff absence. We will be seeking to rectify this over the coming year.

In some respects, action in the area of equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people has lagged behind that for other certain other strands, perhaps because of the absence of a public sector duty to promote equality in this area. We intend to address, this as we believe that it is important that our employees should be able to be themselves, and not feel that they need to conceal these aspects of themselves. This confidence is likely to be a key factor in employee satisfaction for our LGBT staff.

Having achieved level 3 of the Equality Standard, RBFRS will now migrate to the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework at Achieving level. We will therefore need to look at what improvements need to be made in order to fully meet the requirements of the Framework this level, and then progress to Excellent.

## **11 ACTION PLAN**

RBFRS has a 3-year plan to deliver the actions arising from this strategy. These actions are taken primarily from our Single Equality Scheme and from the results of impact assessment of our services. This plan is published annually and reviewed regularly as a working document. A copy of the current plan and the proposed plan is attached.

## Initial Equality Impact Assessment

Directorate <b>HR</b>		Department/Section <b>Personnel</b>		Manager <b>Kathie Summers/Jacky Manning</b>		Telephone No. 2254 e-mail: summersk@rbfrs.co.uk	
Name of Policy/Service to be assessed	<b>Equality &amp; Diversity Strategy</b>			Date of Assessment	<b>30/06/2010</b>	Is this a new or existing policy?	<b>Existing</b>
1. Briefly describe the aims, objectives and purpose of the policy/service.			Define a framework for planned activities for the next 3 years				
2. Who is intended to benefit from this policy/service, and in what way?			RBFRS SMT, RBFRS FA, SPA(ED), CLO, employees, potential recruits				
3. What outcomes are wanted from this policy/service?			Clarity of direction, alignment of activities with goals & legal requirements				
4. Who are the main stakeholders in relation to the policy/service?			Fire Service management		5. Who implements the policy/service, and who is responsible?		SPA(ED), RBFRS SMT
6. Are there concerns that the policy/service has/could have a differential impact on the following groups and what existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?			<input type="checkbox"/> Y	<input type="checkbox"/> N	Please explain		
Race			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Y	<input type="checkbox"/> N	Positive impact is the intention of the strategy		
Gender			<input type="checkbox"/> Y	<input type="checkbox"/> N			

	✓		Positive impact is the intention of the strategy
Disability	Y	N	
	✓		Positive impact is the intention of the strategy
Religion or Belief	Y	N	
	✓		Positive impact is the intention of the strategy
Sexuality	Y	N	
	✓		Positive impact is the intention of the strategy
Age	Y	N	
	✓		Positive impact is the intention of the strategy
7. Could the differential impact identified in 6 amount to there being the potential for adverse impact in this policy/service?	Y	N	Please explain
		✓	
8. Can this adverse impact be justified on the grounds of promoting equality of opportunity for one group?  Have you consulted those who are likely to be affected by the policy/service?	Y	N	Please explain for each equality heading (questions 6) on a separate piece of paper.
9. Should the policy/service proceed to a full impact assessment?	Y	N	10. Date on which Full assessment to be completed by.
		✓	Date:

I am satisfied that this policy has been successfully impact assessed.

I understand the Impact assessment of this policy is a statutory obligation and that, as owners of this policy, we take responsibility for the completion and quality of this process.

Completing officer name           K Summers                                Date           30/6/10          

Line Manager name           B JEFFERIES                                Date           30/6/10          

Please note – this impact assessment will be scrutinised by the equality and diversity section who report to the Director of Human Resources and Brigade Management Team.

