



Essex County
Fire & Rescue Service

Corporate Equality and Diversity Strategy 2009-12

Foreword

Chairman Essex Fire Authority Cllr Tony Hedley

Essex Fire Authority are committed to ensuring that Equality and Diversity is at the forefront of all our activities and in order to maintain and underpin this approach the Authority are pleased to present our strategic framework for co-ordinating and mainstreaming equality and diversity within the Fire & Rescue Service. This strategy builds upon the achievements of the Authority over many years and will culminate in achieving Level three of the local Government Standard and an embedded culture within the Authority of Equality Impact Assessments and Single Equalities Scheme enabling us to continue to deliver real benefits for Essex County and the Communities in which we serve.

Our Strategy is set in against the current demographics, employment statistics and current or potential future changes to legislation. In taking this strategic overview we have been able to highlight the key issues for discussion with stakeholder groups during our extensive consultation to develop this strategy.

As chair of the Fire Authority I am pleased to note our progress to date and the commitment to Equality and Diversity from our workforce and the community at large. This work assures that we have the right governance arrangements, structure and resources in place to deliver this strategy.


CFO Forward

It gives me great pleasure to publish Essex County Fire & Rescue Service's Equality and Diversity Strategy. This Strategy is underpinned by our comprehensive Single Equality Scheme and Action Plan, by putting these arrangements in place the Service can be sure of meeting its general and specific duties placed upon us and outlined in the following legislation;

- Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
- Disability Discrimination Act 2005
- Sex Discrimination Act as amended by the Equality Act 2006 for the period 2009 –2012 and;
- Our commitment to other areas of potential discrimination including, gender, marital status, age, sexual orientation and religion or belief.

Throughout this Strategy, we have highlighted a number of key commitments that we will deliver over the next three years, which includes achieving Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG) by end of 2009 and Level 4 within the period of this policy.

I welcome and support the positive duty laid upon the Fire Service by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 and the Sex Discrimination Act as amended by the Equality Act 2006 to, Eliminate discrimination, Promote equal opportunities and to Promote racial harmony and positive attitudes towards people with disabilities




I believe that the new equalities bill will enhance the duties outlined in existing legislation and help us as a public service to do more than ever to eliminate the discrimination that can still exist in society today.

This strategy has been shaped by key stakeholders drawn from the Essex Community and our valued employees. Their positive views comments and concerns have influenced our action plan which we will work toward over the next three years. This consultation has provided us with a better understanding and ability to recognise disparities between different strands of equality and also strands that are not currently covered by legislation. We in Essex's Fire Service are driven not just by the legalisations but also by the moral case and the business case for diversity.

The Policy will be a working document linked to other performance management systems and will be reviewed annually.

I am convinced that this policy will empower our stakeholders and staff to make a real difference.



Introduction

This strategy will build on the progress already achieved and sets out our approach to the equality and diversity agenda over the next three years to achieve social integration and community cohesion and provide equal access and fair employment for all our employees and potential employees.

Ultimately we will ensure we reduce the impact of fire and other risks on all the communities we serve, by effective prevention, protection and emergency response

Our Vision

To provide individualised, responsive, high standard service to the Essex's communities. We will endeavour to provide equality of Access, Experience and Outcome to all communities and staff members.

Our Commitment to Equality and Diversity

ECFRS recognises that we work within a complex society that has some inherent inequalities and disadvantages for people. We are committed to developing a culture and practices which recognise difference both in employment and in the delivery of individualised and responsive service to a high standard and we will work in partnership with our staff and communities to achieve equality of outcomes to all.

Our Core Values

We value:

Openness, Accountability, Respect, Involvement

The make up of Essex


Essex's minority ethnic population is steadily increasing across the County. Recent statistics provided by CLG would suggest Essex has a working ethnic minority population of 12.8%.

The majority of the people living within Essex identify themselves as being Christian, with a small percentage identifying themselves as either Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh.

Essex also has the highest concentration of Travellers in the country.

Women represent slightly above 50% of the population in Essex.

The percentage of people who have stated they have a disability within Essex is 16.4%.



According to research roughly 6% of the population is gay, lesbian or bisexual (LGB); therefore we need to ensure our workplace and services we provide are free from discrimination.


The 2001 Census showed the majority of the population fall between the ages of 20 to 44 years old

Essex FRS Objectives:

We are committed to achieving the following objectives in this strategy:

- Eradicating discrimination and disadvantage through a systematic process of Equality Impact Assessments that cover all seven strands of equality and working in partnership with stakeholders
- Supporting the development of service delivery which is responsive to the individual needs of the diverse communities we serve
- Mainstreaming equality and diversity in decision making and service development
- Creating a fair culture which is free from harassment and victimisation and which celebrates diversity
- Ensuring compliance with the requirements of legislation and Fire and Rescue Service standards
- Training and developing the capability of all staff and managers to understand and deliver the equality and diversity agenda
- Making a difference to local communities by working in partnership and by using influence and resources as an employer to make a difference to employment opportunities and service experiences of the local community

As a start to begin to achieve this goal the Service has established a Single Equality Scheme, a process of Equality Impact Assessments and a clear structure for Equality and Diversity which will ensure that Equality and diversity is mainstreamed into all we do.





Priority Areas

The strategy will look at five priority areas over the next 3 years and will be supported by a more detailed action plan to assist achieving the objectives set out above:

1. Leadership and Promoting Inclusion

The Chief Fire Officer, Chair of the Fire Authority and the Senior Management Board demonstrate their commitment to the equality and diversity agenda by engaging with an Equality and Diversity Board leadership charter which has been designed for each Board member to aspire to ambitious outcomes set out for ECFRS, and to ensure proper governance arrangements are in place to support meeting our diversity objectives. To take this self assessment to the next level the Senior Management Board members are each committed to acting as champions for one of the seven strands.

The EFA will receive annual reports on the progress of both the strategy and the single equality scheme, they will also engage with the verification of 10% of all completed EIAs.

Employee surveys will be used to measure the effectiveness and confidence our employees have in the leadership of Senior Managers and their commitment to equality and diversity.

2. Accountability


ECFRS will report to our Communities and stakeholders annually on the improvements to our service delivery and employment practice. We will also report annually to the EFA, CLG on the implementation of the Equality and Diversity Strategy and on our Single Equality Scheme.

These reports will be posted on our internet for the public to access the data on our progress.

Our appraisal system was introduced in 2008 and is continuing to be rolled out in 2009, it is anticipated all employees in 2009 will have an appraisal with annual objectives including specific objectives on equality and diversity.

We will demonstrate our compliance with employment and equalities legislation and review our progress through our Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP).

We will ensure bullying, harassment, unfair discrimination and unacceptable behaviours are dealt with fairly, quickly and transparently.



3. Effective Service Delivery and Community Engagement

Planning

Through our outreach, community safety and statutory and enforcement strategy we will set out our aim to ensure the equality of service to all sections of the community, we will also identify and take account of the needs of the diverse mix of communities in which we serve.

Within our Single Equality Scheme we have set out a timetable of policies, plans, procedures and functions where they will be reviewed using Equality Impact Assessments

We plan to ensure that the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) takes into account the needs of local communities by Equality Impact Assessing the planning process; this will include the procedures we will implement to ensure progress is reviewed for service delivery.

Engagement

Through the use of our Corporate Strategy and IRMP we will communicate our progress on service delivery to the community, this will include targeted communication.

Through our community liaison officers we will work with partner agencies and community advocates to improve and create new ways of communicating with community groups

Our Complaints Procedure

External Complaints

ECFRS will do its best to meet the duties and actions; however we recognise that we may get things wrong or that people may be dissatisfied with how we carry out our duties. If this is the case we want to be told so we can improve our approach where necessary.

Internal Complaints/Grievances

ECFRS will not tolerate discrimination or harassment on grounds of race, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation or religion & belief. We will monitor our grievance procedure and bullying & harassment policy to ensure we will eliminate inappropriate behaviour.

Training and Awareness

We will provide all employees with appropriate skills, knowledge and training to enhance confidence in delivering a service which is effective in meeting the needs of a diverse community.

We will communicate clearly and consistently with staff to raise awareness and understanding of local community issues and the actions needed to address them.

4. Employment and Training

Recruitment

We believe attracting and employing a diverse workforce will assist the Service in meeting the needs of the community by recruiting the very best staff. We will work hard to ensure We are seen as an attractive employer to talented and appropriately qualified individuals across all the diverse communities that make up the Essex community.

The Community Commands will be the focus for recruitment activity as we seek to recruit from the very best of our local people, this will enable us to reflect the local demographics. We will make full use of our resources at our disposal, particularly fire stations and station based personnel to ensure we communicate opportunities for employment to all sections of our community.

In addition to the work carried out by the station personnel the Equality and Policy Team will also work with diverse communities to improve our brand image and make ECFRS an employer of choice by all.

Diversity Targets

We have set our recruitment targets in the following way:-

- By 2013, 18 percent of new entrants to the operational sector should be women; and
- By 2013, recruitment of minority ethnic* staff across the whole organisation should be 14.8 percent of all applicants.

Training and Development

We will provide all employees with training and development on equality and diversity including those relating to bullying, harassment, unfair discrimination, and unacceptable behaviours

We will provide training for all our managers and where necessary EFA members, on handling grievances and disciplinary cases on tackling bullying, harassment, unfair discrimination and unacceptable behaviours.

The appraisal system will inform our training provision, enabling an early assessment of training needs and capabilities from the point of entry.

5. Performance Management, Evaluation and Sharing Good Practice

Monitoring and Evaluation

We will collect and submit qualitative and quantitative evidence of improvements to service delivery for inclusion in the annual Equality and Diversity Report.

We will also collect and submit evidence of improvements to employment practice in relation to all staff, including progress against the employment targets and in respect of all other roles where monitoring is required, for all diversity strands for inclusion in the annual Equality and Diversity Report.

The Equality Impact Assessment Process will aid to review, monitor, and evaluate policies, practices, plans, and procedures to assess their impact on equality and diversity.


We will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of processes and procedures for dealing with bullying, harassment, unfair discrimination, and unacceptable behaviours.

Through the use of employee surveys and community surveys, in partnership with the representative bodies we will measure perceptions of ECFRS as an employer and service provider and to assess the level of effective engagement with employee and community representatives.

We will ensure that the provisions for collection and storage of personal information are secure and that the organisational culture encourages and supports members of staff to disclose personal diversity data.

We will use the Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG) as one tool to measure our progress towards equality and diversity. The standard currently has five levels:-

- Level 1 Commitment to a Comprehensive Equality Policy
- Level 2 Assessments and Community Engagement
- Level 3 Equality Setting Objectives and Targets
- Level 4 Information Systems and Monitoring Against Targets
- Level 5 Achieving and Reviewing Outcomes



In 2009, we will be assessed and validated against level 3 of the standard. Once level 3 has been achieved we will then use the new Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG).

The EFLG builds on and develops the work carried out within the ESLG and has only three levels we will work hard to achieve level three within the time span of this strategy:-

- Developing
- Achieving and;
- Excellent

Reporting and Recognition

We will work with the Eastern region Equality and Diversity Advisors group to share best practice and to work collaboratively on projects of interest and benefit to all our FRS's.

The Equality and Policy Team will continue to communicate to the workforce on Equality and Diversity.

ECFRS will recognise local achievements by communicating the achievements through our media team using the various communication tools in place and by encouraging departments to complete applications for the CLG Equality and Diversity annual awards

