



**A Report on**  
**Cultural Awareness Sessions**  
**Organised at Fire Stations**

**February 2009 to June 2010**

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# Cultural Awareness Sessions

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# **Cultural Awareness Sessions**

## **1. Communities, Culture, Equality and Diversity**

Equality and diversity is at the heart of every institution. It is not only a legal obligation but also an essential element for the development and enhancement of efficiency in every organisation. The same is true for Essex County Fire and Rescue Service (ECFRS). It may be mentioned here that the principles of equality and diversity cannot be fully appreciated without the understanding and appreciation of the cultures of different communities whom we aim to serve in this county. In other words, it can be argued that cultural awareness is the pre-requisite for the adequate understanding of equality and diversity. For this reason, the Equality and Policy Team believes that there is a need to focus on this issue.

## **2. What are the Cultural Awareness Sessions About?**

In the above context, Equality and Policy Team planned to conduct a series of cultural awareness sessions. It was decided that initially these sessions would be started for our frontline staff, i.e., watches at stations as Fire Fighters at stations are the core segment of the Service. Not only are they directly engaged in saving lives, they are also at the forefront of community engagement. This process commenced in early 2009. It has focused on skill development for our staff particularly with reference to promoting the understanding of diverse racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds of a variety of communities living in this county. During the present year, there are further sessions planned for our HQs, including Control staff.

Cultural Awareness Sessions are carried out over three workshops. Each session is around one and a half hours long. During these sessions, various respective issues related to community fire safety in particular, are discussed.

### **2.1. Session One**

This session is based around a cultural quiz. This two page questionnaire covers several issues related to a number of communities, e.g., their life style, traditions and beliefs, etc. This session is mainly discussion orientated in which participants are exposed to new ways and ideas from different cultures and have an opportunity to discuss various relevant issues. Colleagues are especially made aware of various cultural festivals, respective communities' traditions, rituals and ceremonies, and their links with fire safety aspects.

### **2.2. Session Two**

This session is based around the career and experiences of NYFD's Captain Brenda Berkman. Brenda was the first woman fire fighter in New York who had a diverse and challenging career. After her retirement, she undertook to make a film on her career and experiences in the NYFD. The DVD highlights various challenges faced by female fire fighters at that time and presents as an excellent platform for group discussion around workplace behaviours.

### **2.3. Session Three**

Faith is always considered a sensitive issue and a core element in every culture and civilisation. This last session is partly based on the Hajj pilgrimage in Makkah city as well as various other festivals around the world where on each occasion, a large number of people gather for worship. As

we have several faith based gatherings in Essex, there are two main focuses of this session. Firstly to promote cultural awareness with regards to communities living in Essex and secondly, to discuss issues related to community safety during religious gatherings and festivals.

### **3. Sessions Carried out at Fire Stations**

In early 2009, the Equality and Policy Team sent e-mails to all full-time stations and watches with regard to the initiation of this new activity and watch managers were offered an opportunity to make appointments. We kept these sessions optional so that the watches were free to make appointments or vice versa. It was encouraging to see that during the following months, several watch managers made appointments with us for organising these sessions. The following are a few important points in this regard.

- i) During the reported period, we carried out 86 sessions in total. This indicates that around 42 percent of whole time watches were covered by these sessions.
- ii) The highest number of sessions were carried out at Basildon & Castle Point Community Command (30), followed by Colchester & Tendering (15), Harlow & Epping (14), Southend & Rochford (11), Thurrock & Brentwood (9) and Chelmsford & Maldon (6).
- iii) Similarly, the highest numbers of sessions were conducted at stations: Canvey (13) followed by Basildon (10), Clacton (9), Harlow (8), Hadleigh (7), Chelmsford, Colchester and Southend (6 each), Leigh (5), and Loughton, Waltham Abbey, Grays, Brentwood and Orsett (3 each).
- iv) As the remaining stations and some other watches did not make appointments with us, no sessions were organised there. Presently, we are considering re-contacting these stations and watches to give them another opportunity to make an appointment.
- v) Sessions have also been carried out at two retained stations, Canvey and Braintree.
- vi) On the request of Red Watch, Harlow, two additional sessions were also organised, one about the Jewish community and the other, about the Chinese community. This was mainly due to a sizable existence of these communities in that area.
- vii) Another important point is to look at the comparative situation of the total number of sessions organised for Red, Green, Blue and White watches at all stations. Data given in Table 2 indicates that when considering the whole brigade as one unit, the breakdown of coverage is as follows: Green Watch 49%, followed by Red Watch 39%, White Watch 37% and Blue Watch 35%.
- viii) Most sessions were organised during office hours. However, depending upon the rota of the respective watch, on some occasions these were also organised during weekends and late evenings to fit in with watch calendar.

**Table: 1. Number and Percentage of Cultural Awareness Sessions Organised at various Community Commands and Fire Stations**

Community Command	Sessions at each Command		Station	Sessions at each station	
	Total No.	Coverage (%)		Total No.	Coverage (%)
Basildon & Castle Point	30	83	Hadleigh	7	58
			Basildon	10	83
			Canvey	13	108
Chelmsford & Maldon	6	17	SWF	0	0
			Great Baddow	0	0
			Chelmsford	6	50
Colchester & Tendering	15	42	Colchester	6	50
			Dovercourt	0	0
			Clacton	9	75
Harlow & Epping	14	39	Harlow	8	67
			Loughton	3	25
			Waltham Abbey	3	25
Thurrock & Brentwood	9	25	Grays	3	25
			Brentwood	3	25
			Orsett	3	25
Southend & Rochford	11	46	Southend	6	50
			Leigh	5	42
Braintree	1	33	Braintree	1	33
<b>Total No. of Session Organised = 86</b>					

**Table: 2. Number and Percentage of Cultural Awareness Sessions organised at various Community Commands with respect to their Watches**

Community Command	Total No. of Sessions at each Command	Sessions Organised at each Station	
		Total No.	Coverage (%)
Basildon & Castle Point	30	3	25
		9	75
		6	50
		9	75
		3 (Retained)	-
Chelmsford & Maldon	6	3	25
		3	25
		0	0
		0	0
Colchester & Tendering	15	6	50
		6	50
		3	25
		0	0
Harlow & Epping	14	5	42
		3	25
		0	0
		6	50
Thurrock & Brentwood	9	0	0
		0	0
		6	50
		3	25
Southend & Rochford	11	3	25
		4	33
		3	25
		1	8
Braintree	1	1	33
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>39</b>
		<b>25</b>	<b>49</b>
		<b>18</b>	<b>35</b>
		<b>19</b>	<b>37</b>
		<b>4 (Retained)</b>	<b>-</b>

Note: The percentage coverage in the last column is calculated on the basis of sessions organised for respective watches in that Community Command, rather than the total number of sessions organised for all watches in that Command. It does not cover USAR or Day Crew A and B watches.

#### 4. Cultural Awareness: Positive Outcome and Challenges

Before we say something about the outcome of these sessions, it may also be noted that possibly, our Equality and Policy Team is the only team in the country which has initiated a series of Cultural Awareness Sessions as a foundation to promote and strengthen the objectives of equality and diversity. The validity and uniqueness of this programme can be judged from the fact that various other brigades (e.g., Hereford and Worcestershire FRS and Nottinghamshire FRS, as well as local councils and East of England Environment Agency) have shown a keen interest in this programme as they also wish to initiate similar programmes in their organisations. Here, in our brigade, there were several participants and watches whose responses with regard to this programme were very encouraging. These watches were very hospitable and welcoming. Here, with reference to the context, we would like to quote a few people whose comments reflect the validity of this programme.

- i) 'A very moving & informative presentation showing how cultural misconceptions can have an adverse effect on the lives of so many people.'
- ii) 'The use of [Brenda's] DVD that was fire service related and not produced by the Service, proved to work well in keeping peoples interest.'
- iii) 'Valuable course. I feel it made me realise some difficult situations can be caused by general ignorance towards others.'
- iv) 'I enjoyed the video, it was educational. However, I do feel we need more sessions.'
- v) 'Personally, I quite enjoy the sessions.'
- vi) '[These sessions were] very informative and enlightening.'
- vii) 'Well & worth doing it.'
- viii) 'More information [would be good] regarding Christianity.'
- ix) Lecturer [Muhammad] was very knowledgeable and informative – responded well to questions.'
- x) 'I would like to express my thanks to Muhammad Ahsan for taking the time out to come and talk to us.'
- xi) 'It would be good to have a copy of the “community education handbook” at all stations.'

No doubt, these comments reflect the positive outcome of this programme which is encouraging. Although, one can add that during the reported period, we have only moved *one inch* from point 'A' to point 'B'; our Team believes that this one inch is equal to *one mile* as it was a major ice breaking step. Further to say that this change is 'qualitative' in nature and is not easy to measure it in 'quantitative' terms unless a detailed survey is carried out. However, in this perspective, one may ask that: i) where were we before these sessions, ii) where are we now, iii) where we need to get to, and, iv) how we are going to get there. Without a doubt, these are important questions with regard to this programme and will need to be addressed separately.

#### **4.1. Where Were We Before This Programme?**

It needs to be re-emphasised as is mentioned at the beginning of this report that equality and diversity is at the heart of Essex Fire and Rescue Service. Moreover, the dimensions of equality and diversity cannot be fully appreciated without the understanding and appreciation of cultures of different communities whom we aim to serve in this county. This situation reflects that cultural awareness is the pre-requisite for the adequate understanding of equality and diversity. On the basis of intensive engagement by the Equality and Policy Team with members of staff in general and front line staff in particular, it was realised that there was a need to focus on the area of cultural awareness.

#### **4.2. Where We Are Now?**

As is stated above, it is not a simple and straightforward process to quantify the outcome of this programme, mainly because: i) it deals with human behaviour, and, ii) no survey has been conducted in this regard due mainly to limited human and financial resources. However, the verbal and written feedback received from the participants reflects that during the reported period (i.e., February 2009 to June 2010), there has been considerable improvement in this area. This improvement can also be judged from the following:

- a. The Red Watch at Harlow requested us to arrange two additional sessions, one on the Jewish community and the other one about the Chinese community.
- b. Cultural Awareness Sessions were primarily organised for full-time fire fighters, however, the Retained Watches at Canvey and Braintree also showed a keen interest in this programme and booked sessions with us.
- c. Some Watch Managers also asked the Equality and Policy Team for further engagement in the future and to provide them with community links so that they could approach respective voluntary organisations for promoting community safety.
- d. Several members of our staff were keen to see a copy of the *Community Handbook* which is at the final stage of publishing. They wanted copies at each station and for each Watch.

#### **4.3. Where We Need to Get To**

Within its specified boundaries, the main objective of the Equality and Policy Team is to promote excellence within the Service. We aim at promoting a Fire Service workforce in which each member of the Service is fully aware of: i) the background of communities whom we are serving, and, ii) fully appreciative of all aspects of equality and diversity. These objectives of our Team are completely in line with the present coalition government's policy named 'Building the Big Society' (see: Cabinet Office document: <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/407789/building-big-society.pdf>).

#### **4.4. How We Are Going to Get There**

It is reflected from the above discussion that these sessions played an important role in strengthening the process of equality and diversity. This is merely the beginning, not an end itself. As it is mentioned in the next section, we will not only continue this programme but will also expand it horizontally and vertically. This expansion will be based on lessons learnt during these

sessions. Needless to say, it requires a long time and enormous patience to bring a positive change in human behaviour. The Equality and Policy Team is pleased with this progress and it feels that this small step will provide a solid foundation for further progress in the future.

It should be mentioned here that the positive outcome of this programme was not free from challenges. It was observed during this process that due to the lack of knowledge, some of the members of our staff did not have sufficient understanding with regard to cultural background of various communities and different aspects of equality and diversity. No doubt, due to government policies and the intensive efforts of respective officers, this situation is continuously improving. Our Team is committed and determined to promoting excellence in the Service.

## **5. Lessons Learnt and the Way Forward**

The above discussion presents some important reflections on: i) the overall situation of these sessions, ii) positive outcomes of this programme, and, iii) the future vision. It clearly highlights the need for similar activities in the future with the main focus being to promote the professional expertise of our staff. As mentioned above, these sessions were only the beginning – not the end. In brief, it was learnt during this programme that:

- a) These sessions proved to be a key tool for the promotion of equality and diversity.
- b) Slowly and gradually, it helped our members of staff to better understand local communities.
- c) This programme should not only be continued, but needs to be expanded.

The lessons learnt and professional experience gained during this programme will help us to structure future directions and priorities. With regard to the future programme, we are please to say that:

- a) The sessions at KP and Hutton, including Control Staff are on the way and will be carried out during September this year.
- b) Our Team will re-contact the remaining stations and watches to provide them with the opportunity to book these sessions.
- c) The package of the present Cultural Awareness Sessions can be considered as a first phase of our overall programme in promoting and strengthening equality and diversity activities at ECFRS. Presently, we are also planning to organise a second phase of sessions (which may be considered as the post-cultural awareness phase/stage) for various departments and teams within our Service.

The Equality and Policy Team is committed to achieving the target of an excellent ‘working culture’ and highest level of professionalism in our Service, and we are determined to do this in collaboration with our people.

### Appendix: 1. Sessions' Dates, Watches, Stations and Community Commands

Command	Station	Watch	Session I (Date)	Session II (Date)	Session III (Date)	
Basildon & Castle Point	Hadleigh	Red	24-02-2009	NB	NB	
		Green	14-04-2009	18-05-2009	04-07-2007	
		Blue	NB	NB	NB	
		White	02-04-2009	16-07-2009	24-08-2009	
	Basildon	Red	24-02-2009	NB	NB	
		Green	01-05-2009	01-06-2009	09-11-2009	
		Blue	24-04-2009	26-05-2009	06-07-2009	
		White	09-09-2009	25-09-2009	27-07-2009	
	Canvey	Red	24-02-2009	NB	NB	
		Green	17-11-2009	03-12-2009	27-01-2010	
		Blue	06-07-2009	22-07-2009	30-07-2009	
		White	05-03-2010	12-03-2010	29-04-2010	
		Retained	26-01-2010	25-05-2010	22-06-2010	
Chelmsford & Maldon Community Command	South Woodham Ferrers	Red	NB	NB	NB	
		Green	NB	NB	NB	
		Blue	NB	NB	NB	
		White	NB	NB	NB	
	Great Baddow	Red	NB	NB	NB	
		Green	NB	NB	NB	
		Blue	NB	NB	NB	
		White	NB	NB	NB	
	Chelmsford	Red	29-04-2009	07-05-2009	15-05-2009	
		Green	15-04-2009	10-06-2009	18-05-2009	
		Blue	NB	NB	NB	
		White	NB	NB	NB	
Colchester & Tendering	Colchester	Red	16-06-2009	09-07-2009	11-08-2009	
		Green	14-09-2009	30-09-2009	16-11-2009	
		Blue	NB	NB	NB	
		White	NB	NB	NB	
	Dovercourt	Red	NB	NB	NB	
		Green	NB	NB	NB	
		Blue	NB	NB	NB	
		White	NB	NB	NB	
	Clacton	Red	08-06-2009	15-06-2009	23-06-2009	
		Green	03-07-2009	13-08-2009	22-09-2209	
		Blue	27-11-2009	21-01-2010	23-02-2010	
		White	NB	NB	NB	
Harlow & Epping	Harlow	Red	28-04-2009	14-05-2009	01-07-2009	
		<b>Red Watch: Additional sessions</b>			<b>01-12-2009</b>	<b>17-12-2009</b>
		Green	NB	NB	NB	
		Blue	NB	NB	NB	
		White	01-09-2009	27-10-2009	12-11-2009	
	Loughton	Red	NB	NB	NB	
		Green	27-01-2010	12-02-2010	16-03-2010	
		Blue	NB	NB	NB	
	Waltham Abbey	White	NB	NB	NB	
		Red	NB	NB	NB	
		Green	NB	NB	NB	
		Blue	NB	NB	NB	
Thurrock & Brentwood	Grays	White (73A)	28-07-2009	07-09-2009	23-09-2009	
		Red	NB	NB	NB	
		Green	NB	NB	NB	
		Blue	22-02-2010	02-03-2010	18-03-2010	
	Brentwood	White	NB	NB	NB	
		Red	NB	NB	NB	
		Green	NB	NB	NB	
		Blue	NB	NB	NB	
	Orsett	White	12-03-2010	29-04-2010	07-05-2010	
		Red	NB	NB	NB	
		Green	NB	NB	NB	
		Blue	01-04-2009	16-04-2009	19-05-2009	
		White	NB	NB	NB	
Southend & Rochford	Southend	Red	21-04-2009	15-05-2009	23-06-2009	
		Green	11-05-2009	01-06-2009	NB	
		Blue	NB	NB	NB	
		White	12-05-2009	Cancelled by the Watch		
	Leigh	Red	NB	NB	NB	
		Green	10-06-2009	03-07-2009	Not booked	
		Blue	17-04-2009	19-05-2009	14-07-2009	
		White	NB	NB	NB	
Braintree	Braintree	Retained	24-05-2010	NB	NB	

Note: **NB** indicates that the session was not booked by the respective Watch.

## Appendix: 2. Cultural Quiz

# ***GROSS CULTURAL AWARENESS QUIZ***

**1. The Race Relations Act (1976) and Race Relation Amendment Act (2000) make it unlawful for anyone concerned with providing services to the public to:**

- a) Discriminate on racial grounds by refusing to provide fair treatment;
- b) deliberately omit to provide fair treatment on racial grounds;
- c) offer a lower level of quality on racial grounds;
- d) offer discriminatory terms on racial grounds; or,
- e) all of the above.

**2. What are the major religions in the following two categories?**

- |                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <i>a) Abrahamic Faiths:</i> | <i>b) Major Religions practiced in South Asia:</i> |
| i)                          | i)   |
| ii)                         | ii)  |
| iii)                        | iii)   |
| iv)                         | iv)  |
| v)                          | v)   |

**3. If a Hindu woman is dressed in white - what may this signify?**

- a) She is going to attend a marriage ceremony.
- b) She is going to worship at a temple.
- c) She is going to celebrate Diwali.
- d) She is mourning a bereavement.
- e) A baby has been born into the family.
- f) None of the above.

**4. Festivals of Light are celebrated in:**

- |             |                         |
|-------------|-------------------------|
| a) Hinduism | e) Christianity         |
| b) Sikhism  | f) Buddhism             |
| c) Jainism  | g) <i>All of these</i>  |
| d) Judaism  | h) <i>None of these</i> |

**5. What is Hatzalah in relation to the Jewish community?**

- a) Kosher cooking with olive oil.
- b) A religious gathering for worship.
- c) Taking up arms to defend themselves.
- d) A volunteer ambulance service.
- e) Collection of money for a specific religious purpose.

**6. Match the following religions with their respective places of worship, religious festivals and sacred texts.**

- |                 |           |          |           |
|-----------------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| a) Hinduism     | Mosque    | Easter   | Quran     |
| b) Judaism      | Gurdwara  | Eid      | Talmud    |
| c) Sikhism      | Church    | Baisakhi | Vedas     |
| d) Christianity | Synagogue | Diwali   | Granth    |
| e) Islam        | Mandir    | Hanukkah | Bible     |
| f) Buddhism     | Vihara    | Vesak    | Tripitaka |

**7. In the African Culture what does a name symbolise or signify?**

- |                       |                         |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| a) An ancient god.    | e) An act of dedication |
| b) Ones fore-parents. | f) Your destiny         |
| c) Days of the week.  | g) <i>All of these</i>  |
| d) Month of the year. | h) <i>None of these</i> |

**8. What are the five pillars of Islam?**

- a) { *Hint: Worship & prophet* }
- b) { *Hint: Five times* }
- c) { *Hint: Food* }
- d) { *Hint: Poor people* }
- e) { *Hint: Once in life* }

**9. How many *Christian names* do Sikhs have?**

- a) Several, e.g., .....
- b) Only one, i.e., .....
- c) None at all.

**10. True or False?**

- a) The *Bindi* indicates that the wearer is the follower of Hindu faith [T/F?].
- b) In Islam, men are superior than women [T/F?].
- c) Muslims can eat 'Kosher food' [T/F?].
- d) Hindu babies are given the name *Singh* (for boys) and *Kaur* (for girls) at birth [T/F?].
- e) A Sikh person who has died is required to be buried within 24 hours of death [T/F?].
- f) The Sabbath runs from dawn to dusk on a Saturday [T/F?].
- g) The Indians are the largest and longest established resident minority ethnic community in the United Kingdom [T/F?].
- h) In some cultures it is considered a mark of respect to look at your elders or someone in authority in the eye [T/F?].
- i) Sikh *Gurus*, Muslim *Sufis* and Hindu *Sadhus* have similar beards and wear similar turbans [T/F?].
- j) In Islamic faith, *Jihad* means 'holy war' against non-Muslims [T/F?].
- k) Jesus and Mary are also considered 'holy' dignitaries by Muslims [T/F?].
- l) Tibet is the birthplace of Buddhism [T/F?].
- m) Followers of the Abrahamic faiths have numerous common prophets [T/F?].
- n) Offa, the Anglo-Saxon King of Mercia (757-796) minted *Islamic Dinar* as the currency of his state [T/F?].
- o) In the 4000 years of Jewish history, the time they spent during the medieval Muslim Empire in Spain, is recalled as their *Golden Age* which is also considered an excellent example of *Civilisational Harmony* [T/F?].
- p) In the early 1990s, the theory of *Clash of Civilisation* was presented as a new concept and was the brainchild of *Francis Fukuyama*, a famous American professor [T/F?].

**GOOD LUCK**