

Diversity Consultation Day **4th March 2009**

Venue: Marconi Athletic and Social Club, Chelmsford

Objectives: *Primary:* To acquire first hand community based knowledge with regard to seven strands of Equality and Diversity, with the main aim to incorporate this information in our Single Equality Scheme, Equality and Diversity Strategy & Corporate Strategy which we are working at the moment.

Secondary: To strengthen our partnership with the local communities so that they feel the ownership of services offered by ECFRS.

Number of Participants: 72 (our original target = 60)

Salient Points - Community Views on Equality and Diversity, and Essex Fire Service:

- In general, ECFRS is offering a good service to the residents of Essex - although there is always room for improvement.
- On the part of ECFRS, there is need to further enhance the understanding with regard to prevailing socio-cultural and ethnic diversity in the county.
- Some of the communities still feel isolated and do not know much about ECFRS.
- Delegates from Hindu Colchester community said that they might be reluctant to join the fire service because they feel they may not fit in, they felt there was still a definite divide between cultures.
- The portrayal of the Fire Service within the media – for example, on television, or the home office report from a mere ten years ago which said the fire service was racist. This makes them feel that there would be definitive cultural clashes which could result in bullying.
- With regards to Age, delegates felt it was important to engage with older members of these communities, particularly in BME groups because of the increased language barrier, with regards to fire safety, e.g., electric blankets were mentioned as a particular risk, one example was mentioned where one caught fire as an older lady was sleeping. Possibly, liaise with Age Concern and other groups.
- Delegates always think of fire fighters when they think of Fire Service, they always considered it as a man's job. They are also not fully aware of support staff - it would be a good idea to have open days which focus on support staff recruitment as well as fire fighters - possible graduate schemes.
- Need to liaise and engage with local communities particularly through their representatives and voluntary organisations.
- To promote safety and security, you need to highlight commonalities within various faiths and cultures.
- Issues and challenges vary from community to community, so ECFRS' staff need to be well trained and prepared to address these challenges.
- Language barriers still exist.
- As every community is different from each other, ECFRS needs to recognise its route(s) regarding reaching its target.
- More training of staff with regard to improvement of their communication skills with customers - it will eliminate barriers and create a sense of belonging within the communities.

- The production of a booklet containing common words and phrases of various minority languages will be helpful in promoting communication skills of ECFRS staff.
- More interaction is required to promote inter-faith and inter-cultural harmony.
- More education of communities to promote fire-prevention techniques.
- More effort is required to recruit people from minority communities, women, people with disabilities and LGBT people for ECFRS to reflect a true picture of Essex demography.
- Regular surveys will be helpful to know the level of isolation, or under-representation of various communities.
- ECFRS need to have more knowledge about the problems related to fire and safety issues of disable people.
- Diversity events similar to this one are very helpful to promote not only equality and diversity within the Fire Service but they also enhance public knowledge.
- The awareness programme of smoke alarms is going well, but more awareness should be created within the public with regard to the importance of maintenance of smoke alarms.
- Training of ECFRS staff with regard to cultural awareness is vital.

Outcome of the Diversity Consultation Day

- The feedback we received from the participants, reflect that it was a very successful event.
- People stated that we should conduct such events again so that they could have their say on such occasions.
- The information gathered during this day is very useful for our Single Equality Scheme, Equality and Diversity Strategy & also the Corporate Strategy and thus will be incorporated in these documents.