

Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service



Disability Equality Scheme

2006 - 2009

Reviewed March 2009

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The Disability Equality Scheme, annual Reports and revised schemes along with other relevant documents relating to Equality and Diversity are available on our Website

www.bedsfire.com

If you are unable to access this information electronically or require the Disability Equality Scheme in an alternative format or language, copies can be provided upon reasonable request.

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The duty of the disability discrimination act provides a framework for public Authorities to carry out their functions more effectively and to tackle discrimination and their causes in a proactive way.

This document is a key element of diversity and will facilitate integration of disability equality into the business culture and processes of Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service.

I am confident that the duty fits well with the beliefs and values that Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service promote and that this will assist in delivering a clear message on its importance.

Paul Fuller
Chief Fire Officer

Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service are committed to ensuring equality of opportunity in employment and a high level of service.

The duty to promote disability equality was introduced in the disability discrimination act 2005 and came into force in December 2006. This document details how we intend to specifically promote disability within our over arching aim of ensuring that Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service wholly meets the diverse needs of the communities we serve.

It is essential that this duty leads to real outcomes and practical improvements in the day to day life and experience of disabled people, as one aspect of our continuing commitment to the development of goodwill and a flourishing community.

Whilst many people have positive attitudes towards disabled people, some express pity, fear, lack of respect and sometimes even contempt. These attitudes are hurtful, can lead to discrimination and can also place unnecessary restrictions on disabled people.

As a service we have done much to promote equality and diversity and to build community cohesion. However we remain committed to building on this excellent work to ensure the delivery of our services are designed and delivered in a manner which responds to the individual needs of all groups.

Our Beliefs

Underpinning our Service vision and our aims and objectives is a statement developed by the Service's Functional Command Team in order to guide all members of the Service in performing their work.



We believe in fostering a happy and capable workforce, in which everyone is valued to do what is right and good to protect and save lives, property and the environment from fire and other emergencies.

We are accountable to our community and will sustain our excellent reputation through high quality services of which we are justly proud

Our prudent leadership provides stability in changing times to give clear and consistent direction in the delivery of our services.

Our Commitment to Involve

How we will involved disabled people in developing all Aspects of this scheme:

Bedfordshire & Luton Fire & Rescue Service will distribute this Disability Equality Scheme to disabled people throughout the county including both our community and our staff. We intend to do this by publishing this document our website with an open invitation for comment and through our partnerships including Local Authorities, Local Councils and Disability Groups.

Our aim is to encourage full participation and to engage with people who have disabilities. Therefore we believe it crucial to identify those groups whose voices have traditionally not been heard and work towards sustainable engagement. In this we will consider the full diversity of people with impairment and the barriers that people, community and staff face if we are to fully maintain our commitment to social inclusion.

It is important to acknowledge that our commitment to diversity and equality also includes other equality groups such as ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, religion and belief and gender.

Our Strategic Aims and Objectives

Corporate aims express for all our communities and stakeholders the long term intention to develop in a certain way. We have given a great deal of thought and time to how we can capture our intentions in a concise way that everyone can understand.

These aims are broad in nature and provide everyone with a clear focus on the direction in which the organisation is going. The aims help to gauge how much has been achieved after a given time and are set in a framework within which business strategies can be drawn up.

It is our clear aim to:

- **Maximise the safety of our communities by whatever means possible.**
- **Deliver a modern well managed and effective fire and rescue service of which we can all be proud.**

It is important that aims can be converted into achievable actions, the success of which can be measured. The most effective way to do this is to set specific objectives which are deliverable and which will provide us with a method of monitoring our organisational progress.

For the medium term of five years 2008/09 through 2013/14 we have set ourselves four challenging objectives:

- **To reduce the number of fires, emergency incidents and consequential deaths and injuries in our communities.**
- **To manage risk and respond effectively to emergencies.**
- **To create a safe, fair and caring workplace for our staff and develop the competencies they need to fulfil their roles.**
- **To ensure high standards of corporate governance and continued service improvement**

Introduction to the Disability Equality Scheme

BLFRS is committed to tackling the inequalities, discrimination and harassment faced by disabled people. We believe that strong, clear and consistent leadership is the key to effective and meaningful change. We believe that the development and training of staff at all levels within the organisation, attention to working with others in partnership and procurement, focus on effective change and efficient use of resources is paramount in the continual development to deliver equitable service provision and a fair working environment for those who work for and with BLFRS.

BLFRS Strategy for implementing and delivering equality and diversity is set out in The Service's Corporate Equality Scheme 2007- 2010 (CES) which supports our strategic aims and objectives.

This DES Action Plan is linked to the CES.

Our Disability Equality Scheme

Our DES is a strategy implemented by a time measured plan.

Our approach to disability equality is to identify the most effective ways of involving disabled people in the continual development of this scheme and action plan. This involvement will continue to be taken forward in a planned and efficient way in areas such as identifying the barriers faced by disabled people and unsatisfactory outcomes. We believe that this continued engagement will facilitate our commitment to further develop meaningful priorities and aid us in planning sustainable and effective activity and improvement.

The Disability Discrimination Act (2005) (DDA) places a new General Duty on Public Bodies when carrying out their functions; as such we must have due regard to the need to:

- Promote equality of opportunity between disabled people and non-disabled people.
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination.
- Eliminate harassment of disabled people that is related to their impairment.
- Promote positive attitude toward disabled people.
- Encourage participation by disabled people in public life.

- Take steps to take account of disabled people's impairments, even where that involves treating disabled people more favourably than non-disabled people.

In order to comply with the General Duty, the DDA has placed a number of Specific Duties to assist authorities in planning, delivering and evaluating action and to report on these activities through the production of this Disability Equality Scheme.

This scheme will include how we plan to carry out each part of the specific duty, that is, our arrangements for; publishing a Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan showing how we will fulfil our General and Specific Duties:

- How we intend to involve disabled people in the development of the DES.
- How we have involved disabled people in the development of the DES.
- Our methods for impact assessment.
- Our arrangements for gathering information in relation to employment and function.
- Our arrangements for putting the information gathered to use, in particular in reviewing the effectiveness of our action plan and in preparing subsequent DES.
- Publishing results of our employment and service delivery monitoring, impact assessments, and actions in accessible formats.
- Our arrangements for ensuring our customers have access to all our services.
- How we intend to develop and train our employees our arrangements for reviewing the DES and Action Plan on a three yearly cycle.

Who is Responsible for Implementing the Disability Equality Scheme?

The Combined Fire Authority has overall responsibility for the DES.

The Chief Fire Officer and Principal Officers are responsible for ensuring that the Scheme is put into action.

Members (Councillors), employees, colleagues in partner agencies and those with which we have procurement agreements all have a role to play in helping us to meet our duty to promote equality for disabled people.

The arrangements described below ensure that we co-ordinate the work involved in putting the Scheme into practice.

There is a Combined Fire Authority Member who is responsible for equality and diversity and chairs the HR Scrutiny Group (HRSG).

A Corporate Equalities Group (CEG) of Senior Managers and chaired by the Assistant Chief Fire Office – Human Resource Director (ACO-HRD) ensures effective action is taken to promote equality and eliminate disadvantage.

The three years Action Plan, following the initial consultation with Stakeholders, will be reviewed yearly. The main aim of the initial consultation/ engagement was to develop the action plan in line with identified needs and desired outcomes.

Contained within our three year Action Plan individual or group responsibility has been set out in relation to each of the action points listed.

The yearly review will involve all major stake-holders in identifying unmet targets and further needs. The Corporate Equalities Group will, along with stakeholders, prioritise and where needed amend the action plan.

Engagement with People with Disabilities

Budget Setting

The Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service is committed to embedding equality and diversity into the organisation. In order to establish our commitment and secure success in our Strategic Aims and Objectives we have committed ongoing resources.

Below we have documented our successes and ongoing projects to date. Our Action Plan shows how we further intend to develop and embed this agenda.

Our goal is to encourage a culture where people feel safe to declare their disability so that we can make any reasonable adjustments that are necessary.

Capital Works Project

As an organisation we are committed to supporting access. In relation to our premises we have made a number of building arrangements to facilitate accessibility and to enable greater contact with our communities.

We have provided ramps to several of our buildings and a lift at our Headquarters both to assist people who may find it difficult to climb stairs. We have also provided 'enabled' toilets at our headquarters and other fire service building throughout the county. Our Northern Area Office has been installed with a hearing link to the fire alarm.

In relation to our fire stations we are about to start work on the building of a Community Fire Station. This station will provide easy access for those with mobility impairment, a lift and 'enabled' toilets.

Website Accessibility

We are developing a new website. At this time we have a project team working with the providers. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer chairs this group which will ensure this website will be fully accessible. It will conform to national standards and initially designed to a two star grading.

The organisation will be undertaking essential in-house work to extend

this grading to a 3 star grading. This work will be reflected in local equality action plans where time scales will be developed.

Occupational Health Department

We have an internal Occupation Health Department to provide medical advice and guidance to the Service. Through this department advice is available from a qualified Occupation Physician to assess individual cases and needs.

Development of Training Provision

The Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) has provided an effective framework for developing people employed by the BLFRS. Training development being carried out in relation to equality and diversity will fit into this framework and provide a focus for employees. Currently, our two day induction course for all new members of the Service; has been updated to reflect changes in disability discrimination law. A disability module has been developed internally which seeks to raise awareness and understanding about the barriers facing those with disabilities. The importance of this training, in particular, is to move the focus away from people's disabilities and to focus on society and the barriers it erects which act to disable people with impairment.

BLFRS are currently involved in the development of a trans-national training product. At this time we are designing both a Generic Module for all staff, and a Manager's Module for our middle managers. The ADDRESS Project Leonardo da Vinci is concerned with embedding diversity and lifelong learning. We have developed two members of staff to deliver the Generic Module, which is to be piloted along with the Manager's Module next year.

The purpose of providing disability and equality training and development to all our staff is to ensure that they are more aware of and have the skills to take action in removing barriers placed in the way of disabled people by society.

Recruitment

Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue service has adopted, in line with best practice, the National Fire-fighters Selection Process. As part of this process provision for reasonable adjustments has been utilised

within the Service, for example, reasonable adjustment for those with dyslexia and dyspraxia.

Customer Satisfaction

We actively seek the views of those who receive our services and publish policies to effectively deal with complaints.

Procurement

Our policy on procurement clearly sets out that the Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service expect that all purchases take full account of ethical considerations and embrace equality and fairness requirements appropriate for a diverse workforce and community. To that end the Service supports the National Procurement Strategy for Fire and Rescue Services, the work of the Eastern Regional Management Board and that of the Centre of Excellence.

Cultural Audit – Staff Survey

We strive to measure ourselves and as such have utilised a Cultural Audit Staff Survey to assist in our planning and to benchmark against other Services.

Equality Impact Assessment

As a public body we have a duty to assess the impact of our policies, processes, plan, strategies, procedures and functions (referred to from now on as policy) on our community and staff. We must identify and ensure that the needs of our community and staff are met and that people who need our services have access to them. To help us do that we carry out Equality Impact Assessments (EIA).

An EIA is a way of deciding whether an existing or proposed policy does or may affect people differently, and if so whether that impact affects them in a neutral, positive or adverse way.

All policy is screened and where assessed as 'relevant' required to undergo a partial or full EIA. That means where a policy is shown as having implications for (affecting) the General Duty, that is, it has or could have implications for promoting equality of opportunity it undergoes a partial or full EIA.

Policies are screened in relation to disability as well as race, age, gender, religion or belief and sexual orientation.

The Service uses EIA template developed to record actions for policy improvements, those who were consulted with, and actions and feedback given to those consulted. Screening, partial and full EIA will be quality assured by the Corporate Equalities Group who will ensure that:

- Consultation was with the appropriate groups and individuals.
- The methods used were appropriate to the needs of those groups and individuals.
- Those consulted with were provided with all the necessary information, so that the process was informed.

The Corporate Equalities Group reports to the Human Resources Scrutiny Group.

We have an EIA Statement and Policy, Guidelines and Template to assist those carrying out EIA.

We provide and continue to make provision for training and continued support for staff undertaking EIA.

Information Gathering

This section contains information pertaining to all processes through which we collect, analyse and use equality monitoring and other related data.

Consultation, Involvement and Engagement

Engagement with our community is a priority for BLFRS. We are committed to improving service delivery based on meeting needs and equality in employment. Comments about how we deliver services or how our employees conduct themselves are important to our monitoring process. In response to this commitment, we have established a range of consultation methods to meet the requirements of our EIA:

- Public/ Open meeting
- Use of Media (including the Authority's own staff newsletter)
- Focus groups
- User Surveys (corporate and functional areas)
- Questionnaires and Surveys
- Residents' surveys
- Partnership working
- Consultation with partnership bodies

We will continually seek to improve our consultation through the identification of new and innovative ways to consult. For instance making written information accessible, not only in terms of appropriate ethnic minority languages and large print for the visually impaired, but also by the use of 'plain English'

We also aim to ensure that the consultative process is not discriminatory and does not preclude participation on grounds of, amongst other things disability. We will choose venues for consultative meetings carefully, not only in terms of physical accessibility but also in terms of ensuring a welcoming and on-threatening environment.

In particular initiatives will be pursued to ensure the involvement of people who may be under-represented in consultation exercises, including people with disabilities.

Data Handling

When handling data; matters of data protection, freedom of information and the handling of sensitive or confidential data will be in line with the following service policy.

- Data Handling Policy
- Information Security Policy Statement
- Dealing with Requests for Information - Freedom of Information Act 2000

Monitoring our Workforce

In order to ascertain whether our policies are effective in relation to promoting equality of opportunity it is vital that we collect certain information about our personnel. This information can help us determine whether our anti discrimination measures are effective. In line with the former equality commissions' recommendations and best practice we collect information about ethnicity, age, gender, disability, sexual orientation and religion and belief at point of entry to the organisation. This information is given on a voluntary basis and is kept separate to recruitment processes. This information is used to profile our workforce and develop actions plans for positive action.

The five categories associated with disability are:

- Physical Impairment
- Sensory Impairment (including hearing, speech and sight)
- Mental Health
- Learning
- Long-Term Illness

Monitoring Potential Employees

All potential employees are asked to provide, on a voluntarily basis, the same information as those who are employed by us. By collecting this information we can target sections of the community who may not be applying to us for employment and are currently underrepresented in our workforce. Additionally we can ascertain whether unsuccessful candidates disproportionately identify as coming from particular groups.

Cultural Audit – Staff Surveys

The views, beliefs and perceptions of our staff are important to us and as a result BLFRS undertake to survey their employees' attitudes and views on a wide range of equality issues on a regular basis. The feedback from the staff survey informs equality strategy in areas such as the development of policy, training and development, and service delivery.

The staff survey is carried out in a confidential and anonymous way. All completed scripts are returned to an outside agency for processing. BLFRS believed that by conducting our staff surveys in this way we are better able to encourage our staff to disclose sensitive information. This information is used to set employment targets and to benchmark staff confidence within the organisation.

Customer Care – User Satisfaction Survey Policy

In the event of a fire, you will receive (where possible) an 'After Your Incident' booklet which contains the *User Satisfaction Survey*. All returns are processed in line with the User Satisfaction Survey Policy.

Monitoring Complaints

All complaints will be dealt with fairly, consistently and confidentially. All customer complaints/compliments will be processed in line with service policy and are open to scrutiny and audit.

APPENDIX A

DES – Action Plan 2006 – 2009 (reviewed December 2008)

	Action	Outcome / Performance Measurement	Responsible	Completion/ Review Date	Evaluation
1	Prepare a Draft Disability Equality Scheme (DES)	a. To meet requirements of the DDA 2005	PerM DA	Sept – Dec 2006	Completed Dec 2006
2	Distribute the DES to appropriate groups and individuals and actively encourage feedback and engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. To involve disabled people in the development of the DES b. To encourage disabled people to participate in fire service strategy development. c. To establish and develop meaningful engagement with disability groups and individuals d. To further develop existing working relationships with disability groups so to optimise access to premises and services. 	DA	Dec – Feb 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Consultation with Stakeholders Completed Feb 2007/ comments fed into review of scheme Dec 2008 b) DES published on intranet with advert in BB. c) Disability Staff Survey completed January 2007/ Disability 2 Tick attained Dec 2007 and renewed Dec 2008 d) On- going work carried out resulting from Disability Audit 2003/ and 2004

3	<p>Identify groups we currently work in partnership with to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor Impact • Develop Forums 	<p>a. To establish needs analysis to inform and continually develop accessibility and service delivery.</p>	CEG	Jan 2007	A database of partnership agencies has been formulated.
4	Utilise MIS system to monitor workforce in line with Data Handling	<p>a. To profile Workforce b. To identify areas that may have disproportionate under-representation of disability group(s)</p>	PerM	May 2007	<p>Internal Equality monitoring form for all new entrants includes 6 equality group categories</p> <p>Ongoing profile development of operational workforce to identify race and gender related underrepresentation extended to disability</p> <p>Collection and analysis of equality monitoring data for non operational applications including disability</p>
5	Utilise information from Staff Survey (Cultural Audit) and anonymous questionnaire; personal details optional	<p>a. To build up employee confidence to declare disabilities b. To update Personnel details c. Establish rationale and Terms of Reference for a Disabilities Focus Group</p>	PerM DA	Dec 2007	<p>Information from Cultural Audit presented to MBS and FBU. Disability staff survey completed Jan 2007. Attainment of 2 tick symbol 07 and 08. Update of 2 day EOA Internal monitoring for new entrants against 6 strands</p>

6	Establish a Focus Group	a. Utilise input to establish barriers and concerns and to feed into equality training	PerM DA	Mar 2008	Disability Staff survey inviting interest in taking part in DFG completed January 2008
7	Develop and circulate an anonymous questionnaire for identifying barriers faced by those with disabilities during their employment	a. Report disabilities and long term illness b. Identify barriers to everyday working c. Invite volunteers to sit on a Disabilities Focus Group	DA	June 2007	Disability staff survey completed Jan 2008 with around 28% response rate. Details to be published on website
8	Development and utilization of citizens panels	a. Encourage feedback and engagement	Consultation Officer	Dec-Jan 2007	Full development of Citizens' panel developed and utilised during 2009 CRMP consultation
9	Review employment practices and establish meaningful targets in relation to disability	a. Promote disability equality of opportunity in areas of service delivery and accessibility, employment, retention and promotion of staff with disability(s)	Policy Officer Personnel Officer	Feb 2008	Awarded $\sqrt{\sqrt{}}$ Tick Symbol Dec 2007 and Dec 2008.

10	Continue to complete and utilise information formulated for BVPI (11c)	a. Feed into setting local employment targets		Ongoing	Ongoing collection of data/ information.
11	Develop toolkit to profile national and local communities in relation to disability	a. Feed into setting local employment targets	DA	April 2007	
12	Training and Development of Corporate Equalities Group I line with requirements of the DDA 2005	<p>a. Source training to enable group to make informed judgements and decisions in relation to issues of disability</p> <p>b. To develop action plans, allocate resources and to provide guidance to their relevant sections and departments on matters of disability equality.</p> <p>c. To guide and help in the formulation of their department and section equality targets, plans and outcomes.</p> <p>d. To review the organisations equality scheme and action plans</p>	DA	<p>Feb 2007</p> <p>Feb 2008</p> <p>Feb 2008</p> <p>Feb 2008</p>	<p>Training for CEG (FRS Disability DVD)</p> <p>DVD due to be downloaded onto website.</p> <p>Completed March 09</p>

13	Development of equality objectives in section and department plans of which disability is a consideration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. To provide a fully accessible service to all members of the community who require our services b. To identify neutral or adverse impact in relation to disability from policy, function or procedure and remedy. c. To promote (and embed) equality of disability opportunity throughout the organisation. d. For sections and departments to consider and identify any training needs in relation to diversity of which disability is a consideration. 	CEG	Feb 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Refer to ESLG evidence in functional plans b) All policies screened for relevancy, and all new policies having undergone an EIA c) . d) Working partnership with Training Department and Holme Court School.
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14	Secure continued budget allocation to comply with Statutory Duty	a. Budget bids put forward to budget scrutiny	PerM	Sept 2007	Permanent DA post Appointment of E&D Admin Assistant Oct 08. Continued budget provision: Positive Action 19301
15	Feed into development of new service website to ensure accessibility for all customers	a. To ensure that the website meets national guidelines in relation disability b. To ensure all sections of community have access to services and employment opportunities	ITM DA	Website live 2008	Website meets AA compliancy with work ongoing for maximum standard (AAA) Nov 2009 An on line recruitment questionnaire process is being developed Potential for on line questionnaires for community engagement and analysis tools to be developed
16	Audit provision of equality and diversity training and build in modules currently under development with ADDRESS Project Leonardo da Vinci of which disability is a consideration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure compliancy with statutory obligation To develop workforce skills and confidence and understanding of issues associated with disability 	ACFO	Sept 2008	A T&D matrix which identifies all E&D related training provision developed/ reviewed Oct 2008. Disability module piloted at Dunstable Fire Station. Introduction of disability module into 2 day induction for all new staff (EOA)/ A range of 'disability awareness' raising publications in house (BB). Current discussion with Papworth Trust to introduce disability workbook (March 09)

17	Cultural Audit Staff Survey to benchmark achievements of equality training of which disability is a consideration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second Cultural Audit – Staff Survey 	PerM DA	Oct 2008	Funding request submitted for 2009/2010 financial year. Next CA scheduled for 2009
18	To ensure that buildings accessibility continues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory compliance • Promote Access 	CEG Property M.	Sept 2007	<p>Two Disability Audits 2003 and 2004 with an update presented to FCT 2007 (contents contained within body of Scheme). On going budget commitment secured – although not disability focused.</p> <p>Dunstable Community Fire Station Luton Community Area (TBD) Stopsley Community Fire Station Development (TBD)</p>
19	To ensure procurement activity continues to address equality issues of which disability is a consideration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procurement policy published and achieved 	Head of Finance, Corp. Support	Dec 2006 and ongoing	Following on from correspondence contractor/ service provider E&D database has been developed.
20	FSD1 Monitoring discipline cases to continue and monitor in line with disability issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Returns reported on 	Personnel Officer	Dec 2006 and Annually	Completed and reported on Annually Spreadsheet set up for analysis against 6 strands from March 2009

21	Grievance monitoring form to include disability and be subject to monitoring in line with issues around disability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Returns reported on 	Personnel Officer	Dec 2006 and Annually	Completed Spreadsheet set up for analysis against 6 strands from March 2009
22	Review the Disability Standard Toolkit		DA	Feb 2007	Reviewed 2008
23	As part of the review process; proactively benchmark against recognised standards such as the ESLA, DRC guidance and guidelines and CFOA guidance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> To establish compliancy with DDA 2005 To establish Best Practice in all areas of service delivery, recruitment and employment, and accessibility. 	PerM DA	Level 2 (2007/08) Level 3 (2008/09)	Development of the CES and AP included cross referencing against DES – see evidence collected against ESLG. DES was developed in line with DDA (and amendments) codes of practice.
24	Review and re-issue of Equality and Dignity at Work policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy reviewed and consulted across organisation 	PerM DA	Feb 2007	Under review
25	Review yearly accomplishments and feed into 3 year plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial actions completed and 3 year action plan implemented 	PerM	Dec 2007	Reviewed Dec 08 - Jan 09

