

Equality Scheme Summary 2008/09

A foreword from Chief Fire Officer Graeme Smith:

The outstanding professional reputation of the Fire and Rescue Service makes us well placed to promote our “civic leadership” message.

I believe in the principles of Equality and Diversity and social and community cohesion. I believe the Fire and Rescue Service can have a real impact for the good in these areas as our “brand” is used to support youth engagement and other community activity.

I want ours to be an organisation that treats everyone with dignity and respect and one that provides equality of opportunity. This applies to our service provision and our internal approach to management.

We have been reviewing our approach to Equality and Diversity - in terms of how we deal with the diverse community we serve and how we embrace Equality and Diversity within our own organisation.

The first half of 2008/09 was a challenge. Challenging in the fact that we evaluated what we were *actually* delivering in terms of our service provision, and challenging in how we delivered those services.

This evaluation is work in progress - first evidence shows we are doing some superb work, positively welcomed by the public and partners, and yet in other areas we could do much better.

We are already acting on emerging issues.

Evaluation - this summary looks at the three strands of equality legislation that are relevant to all public bodies like Bedfordshire and Luton Fire Rescue Service. There are principles, general duties and employment duties all of which put the onus on public sector organisations to take steps not just to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment, but to actively promote equality.

I have introduced a very open and transparent way of reporting progress in each of the following documents:

- Race Equality Scheme
- Disability Equality Scheme
- Gender Equality Scheme

The documents outline our plans and you will see they have been updated as a result of comments and feedback so far and we will continue to review these on a regular basis towards developing a single equality scheme.

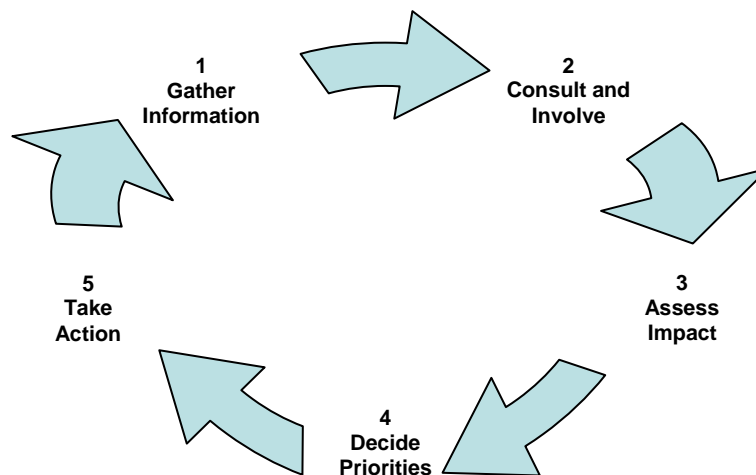
The documents show what we said we were going to do, versus what we actually did. Real activity. Not vague plans about what we will do in the “future” - what we are doing in the here and now.

Learning Points - We recognise we have more work to do both internally in terms of our cultural awareness; professional behaviour, systems and processes, and we still have more work to do in getting the view of the public and citizens we serve.

We have some way to go before we deliver our aspirations on Equality & Diversity. I thought we may have been further on than we really are because we clearly are doing a fantastic job. What we haven't done is been robust in how we measure or collate the positive feedback we receive constantly from the public. So if you said to me; 'Prove how good you are' - it would be difficult.

We have learned to recognise the resource implications that go into evaluation and that we need to be more fluid in our approach. We realised that we hadn't put enough into evaluation and have now addressed that for the future.

A more informed approach is illustrated in this diagram:



We have altered the way we consult our staff – we are not getting enough points of view from our own 600 people. We are looking at the sort of work done in the past and at making sure the information is better collected and co-ordinated in the future.

Where we have reacted to Equality & Diversity problems within the organisation, we have not always then reviewed value of the impact. We are having a systematic review now - but we have a way to go. We have revised the make up and powers of the Corporate Equality Group. Importantly we have also changed the reporting line of our Diversity Section so it now reports directly to a member of our Strategic Management Team. This will make it easier to report on our Race, Gender and Disability Equality Schemes in the future.

Conclusion - I am pleased to say that a series of evaluations which took place in 2008/09 have now been integrated into our Service Strategic Assessment which identifies our priorities as an organisation - Equality & Diversity being given high ranking priority.

There is a genuine will here in BLFRS to improve the service we provide to all our communities and to improve the Equality & Diversity agenda for our own staff.

I hope this summary has been useful - I have tried to be as open as possible about our work in this area.

We are doing some exciting initiatives in 2009/10 and with the changes we have made, the challenges we have set and the scrutiny infrastructure we have established, I am hopeful we will make some real improvements in the service we deliver.

In the community arena we need the help of the public - your comments and participation will be invaluable.

If you would like to get involved and be a member of our consultation database of community members then please do get in touch at:

EqualityandDiversity@bedsfire.com or call on 01234 351081 and ask for Dawn Webb