

Equality and Diversity in the fire and rescue service

Summary

This paper highlights recent developments on progressing equality and diversity in the fire and rescue service by the LGA and CLG, and sets out plans for future work by the LGA.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

1. Consider how the LGA can further demonstrate a strategic lead on equality and diversity in the fire and rescue service
2. Sign up to the equality and diversity charter for FRA members

Action

LGA officers to action as necessary

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Background

1. In March 2008 the FSMC received a report on equality and diversity which focused on the responses to the consultation on the Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy. Members agreed to a series of national actions that are now set out in the strategy, and a top level action plan for the LGA to provide strategic leadership on equality and diversity. The national strategy was launched by the former fire minister, Parmjit Dhanda MP at a high profile conference in May 2008.

LGA role

2. The LGA has on many occasions made a high level commitment to working with government and other stakeholders to ensure that there is a more diverse workforce that better reflects the local working population in each area and providing political leadership on the issue. The Shared Vision Towards 2017, states that the LGA wants to see equality and diversity at the heart of the fire and rescue service culture, with elected members and staff reflecting the communities they serve, and where people from diverse backgrounds can achieve the highest positions within the service.

3. The LGA is progressing the high level action plan to help make this a reality. Local political leadership is key to achieving the national strategy and embedding principles of equality and diversity across the fire and rescue service culture. Members are asked to consider how the LGA can further demonstrate a strategic lead on the issue and how FSMC members can encourage the wider membership to show local political leadership.

Equality and Diversity Charter for FRA members

4. Cllr Duggan is speaking at the CFOA led, and LGA sponsored, Equality and Diversity conference on 25 November. His speech will focus on the importance of local political leadership and the role of the LGA in providing a strategic lead to its membership.

5. Cllr Duggan will announce that the LGA is launching a five-point charter on equality and diversity for FRAs members. The LGA will send the charter to all FRA members who will be asked to demonstrate their commitment to equality and diversity by signing up to the charter individually. Although the National Framework requires FRAs to implement the national strategy, this charter will represent an explicit commitment by each elected member. They will be asked to complete and return a detachable slip to the LGA. This approach is in line with the LGA's corporate priorities to lead the debate and drive change, and the campaigning style of work which is increasingly using innovative methods of reaching the membership.

6. The charter, attached at appendix A, has been designed as a short, punchy document that will be widely understood by all councillors and other stakeholders. It will help translate the LGA's high level commitment into a practical development. It will be accompanied by an article in First, the LGA magazine for councillors, and a press release. The charter will demonstrate to all that the LGA is taking the lead on this issue, and potentially generate positive media coverage.

FSMC members will be invited to be the first to sign up to the charter at the meeting.

LGA annual fire conference

7. The theme of the LGA annual fire conference in 2009 is improving outcomes for communities through partnership working. Part of the challenge for the fire and rescue service in delivering improved outcomes for communities, is creating a more diverse and representative workforce so that the service is better equipped to meet the varying needs of the people it serves. The conference will include a plenary session and a workshop on equality and diversity.

Recruitment Targets

8. The Equality and Diversity Strategy requires that by 2013, FRAs meet recruitment targets of at least 15% for females in operational roles, and that recruitment of minority ethnic staff is the same as the local working age population. FRAs are encouraged to set higher targets, and CLG has provided an incentive in the form of additional capital grant payment of £2 million in total to support those FRAs that commit to the higher targets. The grant payment will provide a minimum of £42,000 to each FRA committing to achievement of the higher targets and will be paid in two instalments - April 2009 and April 2010.

Graduate Entry Scheme

9. The former fire minister announced in April 2008 that a national graduate entry scheme should be developed as part of the wider drive to strengthen the fire and rescue service and increase the diversity of applicants. A graduate scheme would also help with succession planning and ensuring that the most able people are leading the fire and rescue service in the future. CLG established a project board on which the LGA is currently represented by Cllr Richard Hobbs and Clive Harris, to progress the scheme.

10. Following a research study by the University of Manchester earlier this year which proposed alternative models for a graduate entry scheme, little progress has been made by CLG on analysing the options. However, CLG now plans to present an options paper to the project board in February 2009 assessing the alternatives, with a view to progressing the most suitable option and piloting with a representative group of FRAs.

Financial Implications

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11. All proposals for LGA work are to be met from existing LGA budget and resources.

Implications for Wales

12. There are no implications for Wales.

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