

9 March 2009

Equality and Diversity in the fire and rescue service

Summary

1. 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. To consider how the LGA can further demonstrate a strategic lead on equality and diversity in the fire and rescue service

Action

LGA officers to action as necessary

Contact Officer: Emma Varley
Phone No: 020 7664 3237
Email: emma.varley@lga.gov.uk

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Background

1. In November 2008, the FSMC received a report on equality and diversity focusing on the LGA's progress with the high level action plan agreed earlier in the year, and the next steps for the LGA to turn previous high level commitments on equality and diversity into tangible actions.
2. Members were 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. Members agreed that Cllr Joanna Spicer and Cllr Sharon Sullivan would be the FSMC's equality and diversity champions, in addition to Cllr Duggan who would continue to represent the LGA on the National Equality and Diversity Delivery Partnership.

Equality and Diversity Charter for FRA members

3. Cllr Duggan launched the five-point equality and diversity charter for FRA members at the LGA sponsored, CFOA conference on equality and diversity at the end of November. The launch of the charter was accompanied by an article in First, the LGA magazine for all councillors, and a press release. On the whole, feedback from members has been positive, and other stakeholders including CLG have welcomed the initiative.
4. It is particularly pleasing to note that many authorities have highlighted the charter at their full FRA meetings, and in some cases we are working with particular officers in the authority to collect signed charter responses.
5. However, the sign-up rate varies by FRA. Whilst all members of East Sussex and Cheshire FRAs have signed up to the charter, the sign up rate in some FRAs is very limited. All members that have signed the charter have received a letter of thanks from Cllr Duggan. Appendix A provides more information about sign up rates.
6. The LGA has publicly stated that it is aiming for a 75% sign up rate to the charter by the end of March. We will be using the LGA fire conference as an opportunity to promote the charter and increase sign up. In his closing speech to the LGA conference, we expect the Fire Minister Sadiq Khan MP to welcome the introduction of the charter and thank members who have already signed up. The FSMC is asked to consider other ways of promoting the charter to members.

Member Champions network

7. Member Champions for equality and diversity were asked to identify themselves in their Charter responses. These member champions will be invited to meet together as a network in the spring. The aim of the network of member champions is to share ideas and good practice, discuss how their FRA has overcome challenges and to develop a list of practical activities for all FRAs to progress. A first meeting of the network will be held after Easter with the FSMC champions, Joanna Spicer and Sharon Sullivan invited to demonstrate cross party leadership from the LGA.
8. The LGA is planning to produce a report and hold an event for councillors one year on from the launch of the charter focusing on the progress that has been made by elected members and highlighting good practice examples.

National Equality and Diversity Delivery Partnership

9. The National Equality and Diversity Partnership is the CLG chaired stakeholder group that sets the strategic direction for equality and diversity policy at a national level, and is responsible for implementing and embedding the Equality and Diversity Strategy at national level. At the LGA conference, the minister is expected to launch CLG's first Equality and Diversity report containing baseline evidence collected from a survey of FRAs. An action plan setting out what national stakeholders in the National Equality and Diversity Delivery Partnership will do in support of the Equality and Diversity Strategy, will be published as part of the report.

Financial Implications

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

Implications for Wales

11. There are no implications for Wales.

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