



AGENDA ITEM: 13

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

21st September 2015

Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report (Reporting Period 2014-2015)

Report by Ruth Simmons, Assistant Chief Fire Officer

Purpose of Report

- 1 To seek Members' approval for the Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report (reporting period 2014-2015) in response to the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011.

Background

- 2 The Equality Act 2010 came into effect in October 2010. The Act replaced separate equality duties relating to race, gender and disability discrimination contained in the Race Relations Act 1976, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The Equality Act extends coverage of the duty to the other protected characteristics of age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity and gender reassignment.
- 3 The Act places a general duty on listed public bodies which requires them, in the exercise of their functions, to have due regard to:
 - eliminating discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act;
 - advancing equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - fostering good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

- 4 In April 2011 the Welsh Assembly Government exercised its powers to introduce specific duties, designed to aid transparency and enable a public authority in Wales to meet the general duty. These are set out within the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011.
- 5 The specific duty requires public authorities in Wales to produce and publish an annual report detailing progress on the Strategic Equality Plan objectives no later than 31st March each year. The information should cover the complete financial year finishing 12 months prior to the reporting deadline.
- 6 The update must include:
 - engagement and involvement provisions for protected characteristic groups;
 - ensuring published material is accessible;
 - assessing the impact of relevant policies and practices;
 - training and collation of employment information;
 - promoting knowledge and understanding of the Act amongst employees;
 - addressing unfair pay differences;
 - reviewing progress on the Strategic Equality Plan and associated equality objectives;
 - procurement practice provisions.
- 7 Compliance with the legislation is regulated by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). The role of the EHRC under the law is to protect, enforce and promote equality. This role is discharged through the provision of guidance, regulation and enforcement activity.

Information

- 8 This fourth annual report for the reporting year 2014-2015 aims to meet Regulation 16 of the Wales specific duties and has been produced in line with the Welsh Government annual reporting guidance template. To establish consistency the report is laid out according to the Wales specific duties and focuses primarily on data linked to our activity during the set timeframe.

- 9 Specified employment information, including training and pay, is presented along with equality data at recruitment. In order to ensure that our current employee data is accurate and relevant the Service initiated a data validation exercise to which 65% of employees responded. Follow-up work was needed to remind employees who had not refreshed their personal data of the importance of responding and the significance of the Service holding valid data.
- 10 In 2014-2015 the Service concluded a round of equality impact assessment training. The training was directed at senior and middle managers and was designed to include the legal and moral arguments for conducting equality impact assessments.
- 11 Employment monitoring data is used to inform equality impact assessments. The impact assessments ensure that in order to comply with both the general and specific duties in Wales consideration is given to the equality effects of decisions, policies or services on different communities, individuals or groups, particularly in relation to those most vulnerable in society.
- 12 Over the last two years, efforts have been made to collect the relevant service delivery equality information. This focus has resulted in the development of a supplementary post-incident system for the collection of service delivery equality data in addition to the current monitoring data. The Service is proposing to undertake a six month trial which will start in June 2015 where equality monitoring information is collated following specific operational incidents: road traffic collision, special service calls, and dwelling fires.
- 13 This information may assist the Service in ensuring that it is engaging with all people within the community, and also determine whether any of those protected under the Equality Act are more at risk of having a fire, or being involved in an RTC. The trial will utilise various data collection methods, using both written forms face to face and online submission.

- 14 Public engagement and consultation is a key component of the specific duty. In support of this, the Service has recently undertaken an in-depth audit of all its consultation and engagement activities with the help of Participation Cymru Researchers have consulted staff and external representatives and carried out detailed participative workshops to identify and pinpoint the priorities for consultation and engagement for the future.
- 15 Progress towards achieving each of our equality objectives is outlined in the report along, with statements of the effectiveness of the Authority's arrangements for identifying and collecting relevant information.
- 16 The attached annual report is intended for multiple audiences and provides an opportunity for transparency for our partners and the public.

Recommendations

- 17 Members are asked to:
 - (i) note the content of the report;
 - (ii) approve the Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report 2014-2015 for publication on the Service's website.