



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

MAKING YOU SAFER

PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

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SINGLE EQUALITY SCHEME 2009-2012



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Stonewall

DIVERSITY CHAMPION



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

MAKING YOU SAFER
PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

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We are here to serve everyone who lives in, works in or visits Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. We will always work towards greater fairness and equal opportunities for everyone. This is essential to achieving the aims of our policy.

This document sets out our Generic Equality and Diversity Scheme.
Please ask if you would like it in a different format or language.

If you would like more information, please contact
Shahzad Choudhry on 01296 744625

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Foreword

At Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service we are justifiably proud of our role within the community and the achievements we have made in recent years. While our primary objective is to ensure the safety of everyone within Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, and those who visit or travel through the area we serve, we must continue to work with others to maintain and improve our performance.

To do that effectively we must understand the needs of ALL of our residents as well as our staff and strive to meet those needs. Elected members of Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority and officers of Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service are committed to promoting equality, valuing diversity and combating unfair treatment.

While much has been done to embrace our legislative responsibilities, we believe this Equality and Diversity Scheme will bring together all our schemes. It sets out our current position and future intentions to improve our performance on equality and diversity.

We are keen to engage the public and staff in prioritising our services to respond to the needs of all the people in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. Our Equality and Diversity Scheme will continue to evolve over the next three years and ensure that the principles of equality, dignity and respect are integrated into everything we do.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D Smith'.

Damian M Smith
Chief Fire Officer
Buckinghamshire
Fire & Rescue Service

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D Rowlands'.

Councillor David Rowlands
Chairman
Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes
Fire Authority

Introduction

This Single Equality Scheme makes a corporate commitment to taking forward actions that will enable Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service to achieve our aspirations for a truly diverse organisation and society.

As a public authority responsible for delivering services to the people who live, work in and visit the county we are committed to meeting our statutory responsibilities under the various elements of non-discriminatory legislation. As an employer we also have a responsibility for promoting equal opportunities for people within our current and potential staff.

This document is our first Single Equality Scheme and we acknowledge that, even though much work has been undertaken in this area, there is still much to be done to demonstrate our commitment to equalities for all the people of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, visitors and staff. This is a live document, which will be amended following continued involvement of people in the various processes and monitoring of the action plans produced as a result of that consultation process.

Our scheme has been developed as a result of involving people within the authority, and other relevant organisations, so that it reflects and addresses the experiences of our service users and employees. The Action Plan (appendix 1) outlined in our scheme therefore reflects the key priorities (appendix 2) that have been identified through this process.

The overall aim of the scheme is to build equalities and diversity into all our processes and systems to ensure that equality work is embedded into our policies and service delivery procedures. This scheme identifies issues that we will be working on over the next three years. Our programme of impact assessments, involvement and consultations and meeting the requirements of the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) have been identified as areas for improvement.

Included in our Action Plan is the arrangement to continue to involve service users and employees in identifying issues, publicise the results and the steps we will take to remedy our practices and monitor our progress.

We will continue to challenge the way we provide services, develop policies and employ and retain people to ensure that they are treated fairly.

This scheme is a positive sign of our commitment to valuing equality and celebrating diversity.

Vision and Values

Our vision

Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority keeps all of its communities safe from harm through proactive prevention and high quality operational response with ambition and efficiency.

Our values

Underpinning everything we do is a set of values to which we aspire in all our dealings whether they are with the public, partner agencies or our own staff. These values embrace the core values identified by the Communities and Local Government (CLG) 10-year Equality and Diversity Strategy:

Service to the community – we will serve the community by:

- Working with all groups to reduce risk
- Treating everyone fairly and with respect
- Striving for excellence in all we do
- Being answerable to those we serve

People – by everyone practising and promoting:

- Fairness and respect
- Recognising commitment and the achievement of excellent service
- Honesty and trust
- Opportunities to develop and learn
- Co-operation and inclusive working

Diversity – we value diversity in our service and in the community by:

- Treating everyone fairly and with respect
- Challenging prejudice and discrimination
- Creating opportunities to meet the different needs of people and the communities
- Promoting equal opportunities in terms of recruitment, promotion and retention

Improvement – we value improvement at all levels of the service by:

- Accepting responsibility for our performance and actions
- Being open-minded and receptive to alternative approaches
- Learning from our experiences
- Supporting others to enable them to achieve their goals
- Encourage innovation and creativity

Equality and Diversity defined

What is Equality?

Equality is a concept underpinned by legislation. It requires organisations to provide relevant and appropriate access for the participation, development and advancement of all individuals and groups. Equality is about tackling irrelevant discrimination and dealing with inequality. It's about fairness, decency, respect and high standards of behaviour between individuals and groups.

What is Diversity?

Diversity is a given. It is not an option or something to decide to have or not to have. Where there are two or more people, you have diversity. Diversity is difference and we are all different from each other. Our differences include family background, age, ethnic origin, gender, physical abilities, qualities and appearance, nationality, sexual orientation, educational background and marital status.

What is an Equality Scheme?

An equality scheme is a plan that outlines actions aiming to address aspects of the general duty as outlined in equality legislation. The general duty is a positive duty that builds equality into the beginning of the process rather than making adjustments at the end. It represents a change from a legal framework where the onus is on the individual to bring a complaint of discrimination to one where the onus is on the public sector to seek out actual or potential discrimination and address it.



Fire safety leaflets are available in 30 languages other than English – see back page for contact details.

History and evolution of the Fire and Rescue Service

Since earliest history, firefighting has existed in some form or another. The advanced firefighting systems of the Romans did not survive the Dark Ages and it was not until the Middle Ages that some continuous development of the service can be found.

The London City Council issued an 'Assize of Buildings' in the 12th century to encourage the use of stone as the material for partitioning walls between wooden houses. Medieval legislation was for the most part continued to fire prevention measures.

Following the Great Fire of London in 1666, renewed momentum was given to firefighting. Further regulations were issued regarding fire fighting and building materials. Insurance companies began to have their own fire engines and staff from around this time and properties protected by these companies began to display plaques denoting their protection. In this way an insurance company fire appliance could readily identify whether it should offer assistance in a time of fire.

It wasn't until the Metropolitan Fire Brigade Act of 1865 that a public authority, the Metropolitan Board of Works in London, had a duty imposed upon it to extinguish fires. With legislation limited, by and large, to permissive powers during the 19th century it was customary practice for fire brigades to receive, usually from insurance companies, payment for their services in extinguishing fires.

The Royal Commission on Fire Brigades and Fire Prevention investigated fire organisation and legislation, but action did not take place until the mid-1930s.

A departmental committee was appointed to review and revise the Fire Service in 1935. Published in 1936 its report, known as the Riverdale Report, considered it necessary to develop fire brigades both for meeting peacetime requirements and as an additional resource for war risks.

The Fire Brigades Act 1938

This act made it mandatory for council borough and district councils to make adequate arrangements for an efficient fire service. The Home Secretary was also given various powers to provide some central government control. Section 5 of the act ended the close association between fire insurance companies and firefighting by abolishing the right to charge for services.

Reform of the service came too late to meet wartime demands so the National Fire Service was established as a temporary measure under the auspices of the Fire Services (Emergency Provisions) Act 1941. This joined together local brigades and the Auxiliary Fire Service into a single organisation.



Brigade Headquarters and Aylesbury Fire Station seen from the air.

Fire Services Act 1947

Following another review after the war, the fire service was returned to local authority control. The statutory provisions governing the service were contained in this Act as amended by the Fire Services Act 1959, and the Local Government Acts 1979, 1985 and 1999. The Holroyd Report of 1970 made 104 detailed recommendations covering all aspects of fire brigade organisation and work. Some of the main recommendations included:

- That fire brigades should remain under local authority control.
- The Home Office Fire Section should be reinforced to collate information, study basic problems and provide managerial services and guidance to the service. The powers of the Home Secretary should be strengthened.

The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004

The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 received Royal Assent in July 2004 and came in to force on 1 October 2004. The Act replaces the Fire Services Act 1947. It puts the prevention of fires at the heart of legislation by, for example, creating a new duty to promote fire safety and by providing the flexibility for fire and rescue authorities to work with others in the community to carry out this duty.

About Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes

We recognise that one of the main drivers for equalities in Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service is in how we deliver our services to the community. It is vital therefore that we continually develop our knowledge of the people of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes and the different communities it hosts. We also recognise that understanding and meeting service needs requires different approaches.

Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service serves a population of around 720,000 in the South East of England. The area is long and narrow, stretching from the outskirts of London towards the Midlands. It comprises the four districts of Buckinghamshire – Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, South Bucks and Wycombe – and the borough of Milton Keynes which, until local government reorganisation in 1997, was also a district of Buckinghamshire.

Milton Keynes is the northernmost part of the area, bordering the East of England and the East Midlands. It is one of the fastest-growing places in England. Since 1971, its population has more than trebled from 67,000 to around 234,000. During the same period, the population of the rest of Buckinghamshire has risen from 404,000 to around 484,000.

Government plans for housing in the region could see more than 100,000 new homes built in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes over the next 30 years or so, with most of this development taking place in Milton Keynes and neighbouring Aylesbury Vale. The urban infrastructure will have to be expanded to cope with this growth and there will clearly be an increase in demand for fire safety education, community safety partnership working and emergency response.

The major centres of population are the designated New City area of Milton Keynes, which occupies much of the south of the borough (172,033 in the 2001 Census), High Wycombe (77,178), Aylesbury (69,021), Chesham (20,343) and Amersham (17,719).

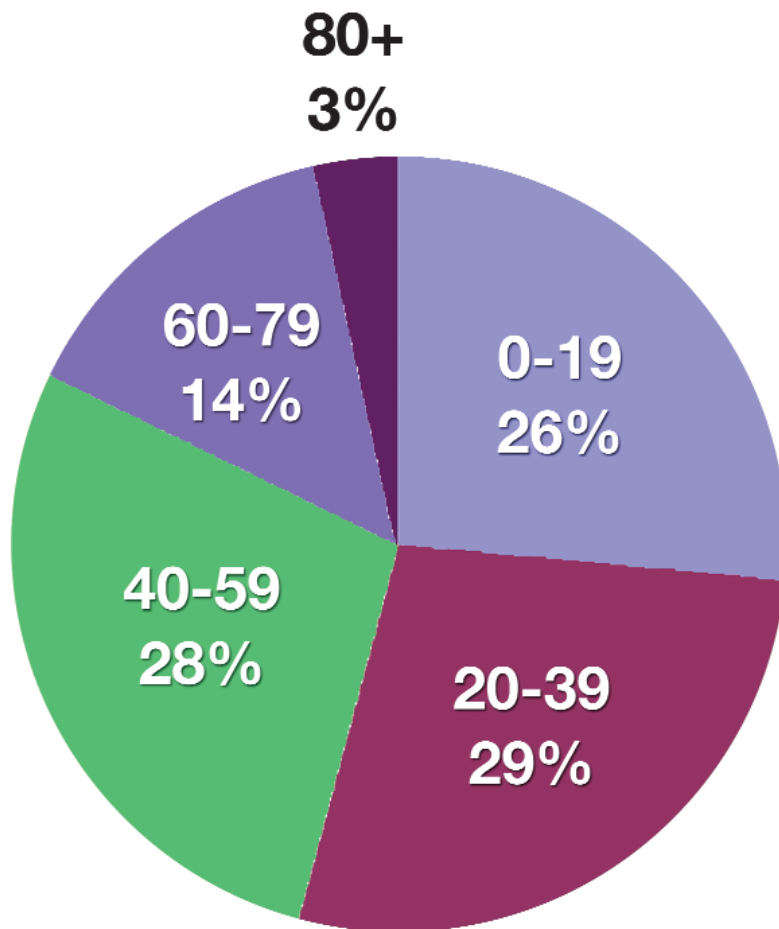
The area served by Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service includes stretches of the M1, M25, M4 and M40 motorways, a section of the West Coast Main Line, several miles of the River Thames, part of the Silverstone motor racing circuit and Chequers, the Prime Minister's country residence. Heathrow, Luton and Cranfield airports lie just outside the area routinely served by us.

A large part of the south of Buckinghamshire falls within the Metropolitan Green Belt and the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Although many parts of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes enjoy the affluence associated with the Home Counties, there are pockets of deprivation in all four districts and the borough of Milton Keynes.

Demographics of the area

These statistics, which look at the age, gender, race and religion of people living in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, are taken from the 2001 Census. At present there is no data available for sexuality or disability, the other two strands of equality.

Proportions of ages for the area served by Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service



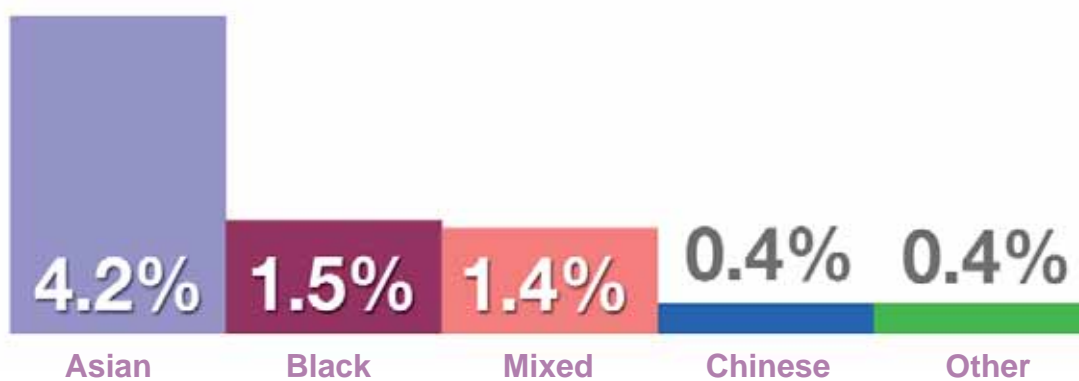
Gender mix of the area served by Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service

Men: 49 per cent

Women: 51 per cent

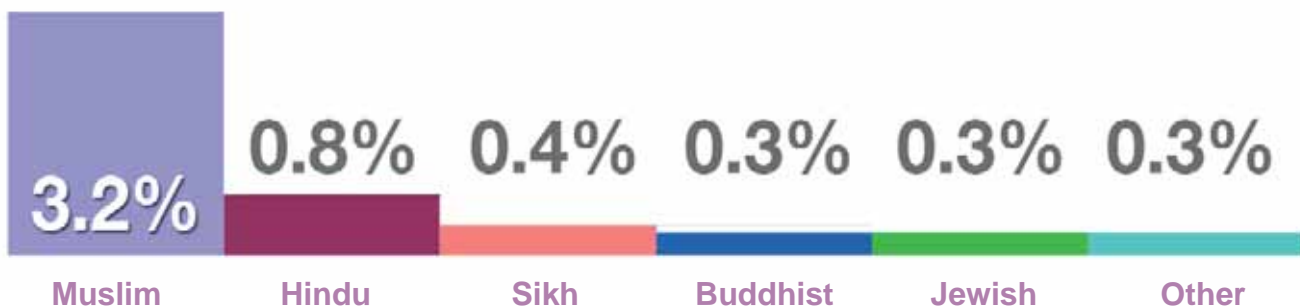
Racial mix of the area served by Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service

92.1 per cent of people in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes were listed as white. Here is the breakdown of the remaining 7.9 per cent:



Religious mix of the area served by Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service

70.5 per cent of people in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes were listed as Christian and 24.2 per cent either stated “none” or did not state a religion. Here is the breakdown of the remaining 5.3 per cent:



Firefighters working from the cage of a turntable ladder at a house fire in Buckinghamshire.



About Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service

Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service receives around 20,000 calls for assistance every year, of which about 10,000 are emergency incidents. It has 42 frontline and specialist fire and rescue vehicles and four specialised Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) vehicles.

Some 550 firefighters operate from Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service's 20 strategically-placed fire stations - six wholetime, four day-crewed and 10 retained. Fire safety offices are strategically located at Broughton (covering Milton Keynes), Aylesbury (covering Aylesbury Vale and Chiltern Districts) and Marlow (covering Wycombe and South Bucks Districts).

A regional Urban Search and Rescue facility is based in Aylesbury, having relocated from Beaconsfield in March 2009. The Urban Search and Rescue capability is part of the Government's New Dimensions programme which is made up of a series of projects that will greatly enhance the resilience and security of our communities.

The community safety team has members at headquarters in Aylesbury, and district-based managers who work in partnership with local statutory and voluntary organisations. Around 90 people work in a variety of support services including teams in arson prevention, risk assessment, workshops, finance, human resources and corporate planning. The emergency control centre employs 23 people who work in shifts. These specialist teams are responsible for the receipt of all emergency calls.

Fighting fires is only part of the work of the present day fire service. Releasing people trapped in vehicles after road accidents and dealing with chemical spills make up an increasing proportion of our work.

Changing political and environmental conditions mean that we need to be ready to tackle major incidents such as terrorist attacks, serious transport accidents and natural disasters.

Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

The service is overseen by Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority, whose membership is drawn from Buckinghamshire County Council (14 members) and Milton Keynes Council (seven members). It has an annual budget of around £28 million.

The Chairman works with the 20 other elected members who are committed to the development and modernisation of the service. Nine members have lead responsibility for specific areas of work including partnership working, community safety, training, information technology, property and equality.

Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service as an employer

It is clear to us that we cannot deliver on our approach to operational diversity unless our employees are equally committed to this agenda. This can only be realised by valuing diversity in our workforce, enhancing relationships between people and tackling negative issues such as unfair treatment and inequality. We are developing a holistic approach to many of the issues rather than tackling each of the diversity strands separately. Training, for instance, will be developed to reflect an approach to all the key issues as a complex whole not as separate blocks of thinking.

We want to help people to develop skills which enhance their relationships with other people and encouraging them to see what the world might be like from perspectives other than their own. The interpersonal skills of assertion, giving feedback, clarifying personal expectations and listening are the bedrock of equality. We want watches and teams to use their skills to self regulate and manage their own behaviour so they include all and ensure the line is clear between bullying and banter.

We want to increase the diversity of our workforce. Not only will this enable us to meet certain Government targets (appendix 3), but also difference is helpful in understanding our community needs, developing new ideas and in supporting individuals in emergency situations.

Managers at all levels are key to the agenda and it is essential that we employ and promote them on the basis of their ability and help them to recognise individual needs and continue the work we have done to improve the range of management styles and skills. We need to help them to continue to focus on systems such as performance, review and performance management to ensure that all employees can contribute to a more creative and more productive work environment.

Workforce objectives

Our history reflects a growing diversity of workforce but we recognise much more is needed to attract women and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) people into our service and to ensure that all individuals are treated with respect. In support of our workforce we have developed clear objectives, in line with the outcomes identified in the national CLG strategy for equal and appropriate treatment in employment. We want to:

- Employ a workforce that is representative of the working-age population in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes.
- Implement recruitment and selection processes which are non-discriminatory and encourage applications from all groups in the community.
- Ensure all employees have fair access to learning and development opportunities.

- Provide a safe and accessible working environment that values and respects the identity and culture of each person.
- Ensure that access to information and data is as open and transparent as possible.
- Create a culture and working environment free from discrimination, harassment and violence.
- Ensure effective communication with, and involvement of, all employees.
- Ensure that pay and benefits are applied consistently and free from any form of discrimination.
- Encourage and support staff to reach their potential.

Monitoring our workforce

We understand that we have a duty under various equalities legislation to monitor our workforce. To do this effectively we plan, during the course of this scheme, to develop monitoring systems for race, gender, disability, age, sexuality and religion or belief.

We have also identified that we need to do more to communicate with all our staff and will carry out ongoing consultation with staff groups and trade union representatives. We will use the views and experiences of staff and respond sensitively to staff needs and add value to inform policy development.

We will actively oppose all forms of discrimination carried out in the workplace and within the services we provide on the grounds of race, gender (including sex, marital status and gender reassignment), age, disability, sexuality and religion or belief. In order to meet our legislative requirements and ensure that no group is disadvantaged in applying and undertaking employment we will monitor:

- Recruitment and selection
- Numbers of staff in post
- Training
- Promotions
- Harassment and discrimination complaints and other grievances
- Disciplinary proceedings
- Starters and leavers
- Performance management

Equality and Diversity training

Our approach will be to mainstream equality and diversity issues into all training programmes including management development activities. For staff undertaking reviews and impact assessments of policies, specific training and support will be offered.

Additional training programmes will include:

- Operational briefings for all staff will incorporate aspects of impact on individuals or groups in the community.
- Training for all staff with management responsibilities which will include the general and specific duties set out in the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the skills necessary to undertake impact assessments. This will be supplemented with discussion and formal training courses and conferences. Training will help people to identify policies and procedures that need to be addressed, carry out impact assessments, report on results and contribute towards achieving various levels of the Equality Framework for Local Government.
- Focused equality skills training for staff undertaking specific tasks which require enhanced understanding of need, for example working with young people, community safety.
- A range of self managed learning resources such as workbook and computer based learning resources and the testing of knowledge following the use of such resources.
- Understanding and Complying with Equalities Legislation – a programme to enhance managers' capabilities and confidence in working across diversity and progressing equalities in the workplace, including anti-discrimination legislation and the Fire Authority's role as a provider of high quality services and being an employer of choice.

It is vital that we encourage all employees to take responsibility for their own learning so they own the discussion of their learning and career needs with their line managers. We want to encourage line managers to ensure that appraisal discussions are meaningful and help each individual identify the learning and support they need. It is important all employees feel they have an equal chance to take the opportunities available for learning and personal and career development.

We will strive to eliminate all forms of discrimination taking place during any development opportunity.

We will:

- Ensure that any alternative access needs are identified before the individual arrives for training.
- Ensure that training material does not contain any biased assumptions.
- Ensure that language used is not racist, sexist, homophobic or offensive to anybody.
- Take responsibility to promote equal opportunities in all situations positively.
- Provide alternative language training materials if appropriate.
- Challenge discriminatory language or behaviour during training events.

Every effort will be made to use venues with facilities for accommodating people's individual needs. We will make training opportunities accessible to all.

All training courses will be evaluated using feedback from attendees and this will be used to inform future training and development programmes.

The start and finish times of courses are selected to enable the fullest amount of training to take place in the time available. We appreciate the course programme times can sometimes cause problems for participants, particularly those with care responsibilities. However, we will provide advance notice of course arrangements to allow staff to make alternative plans for the duration of the course.

It is important that our staff understand the Fire Authority's priority in addressing and promoting equality in the workplace and in service delivery. There is clearly a role for every member of staff in helping to tackle discrimination where it exists, and playing a proactive role in promoting equality and social cohesion in the workplace, and in the way services are delivered.

We have kept and will keep our staff informed through:

- Management and Watch presentations and meetings.
- One to one meetings.
- Our in-house magazine, Direct.
- The I:DRIVE – the brigade's intranet.
- Ad hoc Equality and Diversity bulletins.

We will additionally undertake the following:

- Ensuring there is trade union representation on the Fire Authority's Corporate Equalities Group, which oversees the implementation of the Equality and Diversity Scheme.
- Testing awareness and understanding through staff equalities focus groups and staff survey.
- Sharing our plans through our equality and diversity training courses and intranet pages.
- Communicating our commitment to the Equality and Diversity Scheme through policies, processes, discussion and communication at every level.

Our approach to Equality and Diversity

Our approach has moved from preventing unfair discrimination where it was most obvious – against disadvantaged, and often minority groups – to focussing on active promotion of equality based on better understanding of differences between people and guided by equality legislation.

Over the next three years we plan to continue both approaches, while acknowledging that there is still much to do to promote equality for groups which are disadvantaged or excluded in some circumstances. We accept that equality and diversity is about inclusion and that everyone has an entitlement to equal and human rights. These issues affect everyone and in turn everyone has a role to play to ensure this organisation is an exemplary one in the way it treats its community, staff and partners.

The equality action plans that we develop will be reviewed on an annual basis. This will allow us to reflect upon our progress and monitor how well we are implementing our equality strategy. We will then use this information to make a report to the members. Using the same information will also allow us to demonstrate our progress in equality and diversity to the CLG.

This equality scheme sets out our plans over the next three years for doing this and for making equality and valuing the diversity of our workforce and community a reality.

Values

We are committed to the values identified by the Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy and intend that these will be clearly reflected in the way Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service does business and in the way our staff conduct themselves. These values will underpin our work to achieve our equality and diversity goals. The Fire Authority recognises diversity and actively promotes equality and fairness within all the environments in which it operates. This is achieved by:

- Recognising, respecting and listening to the varied needs of our communities and staff
- Providing different solutions for different needs and requirements
- Valuing and encouraging better understanding of people's differences and things we have in common
- Treating everyone with dignity and respect
- Challenging prejudice and discrimination
- Fostering an inclusive and trusting culture
- Ensuring employment practices are fair and non-discriminatory.

Engagement and consultation

One of the Fire Authority's key priorities is to work in consultation with our employees, representative bodies, partners and local community to develop and provide a service that effectively communicates and delivers fire safety awareness.

In developing earlier equality action plans, we have tried a number of approaches to engagement and consultation and aim to build on those which have appeared most successful. Face to face meetings to discuss and seek the views of those who have experience in a particular area at an early stage has resulted in refreshing and realistic contributions from both staff and community. This approach has shown us how valuable the opinions of our staff and communities are.

Improving our performance cannot be done in isolation from those we seek to serve. Involving our citizens is crucial in order to hear their views about current services and how these can be improved to meet current and emerging needs. The Fire Authority already has strong foundations in place for consulting with the public. These include consultation with Local Strategic Partnerships, Crime and Disorder Partnerships and third sector (voluntary) organisations representing the interest of specific communities. One of the main consultation areas is within our Integrated Risk Management Plan, which establishes plans for service delivery and seeks views on how we deliver our plan.

There are a number of issues we have considered in increasing our understanding of our communities and consulting on specific activities:

- We know that people are increasingly experiencing 'consultation fatigue' as all public sector organisations pursue increased consultation with communities.
- Many people do not easily engage with large theme issues.
- The consultation language itself may not be accessible to some because English is not the first language or written at too high a level.

- People think they will continue to get the same service whether they comment or not.
- Fire and Rescue Services, in particular, have problems because people have a simple view of what we do and we are held, on the whole, in high esteem – this can mean that there is little anger or passion which would drive people to comment on our services.

We therefore need to work harder to reach out to residents and talk to them about how we can improve equality in our services.

Core business

The principal objective of this Equality Scheme and action plan (appendix 1) is to improve the organisation's ability to deliver services to all parts of the community and that ultimately we will reduce the occurrence and risk in the community from fire and other hazards.

This objective can be delivered more effectively if all parts of the organisation understand and grasp responsibility for achieving equality and diversity objectives. It is a fundamental part of this scheme that every part of the organisation understands its equality objectives, targets and how they are to be achieved.

Capacity to deliver

We believe this equality scheme provides a structured approach to planning, communicating and, therefore, achieving our equality objectives. This will allow us quickly to identify the resources needed to implement our plans at an early stage and ensure that the appropriate priority is given to equality and diversity.

The Chief Officers' Forum is responsible for ensuring there is sufficient resource to achieve our equality and diversity objectives as advised by the Equalities and Diversity Advisor. Implementation of the equality plans (appendix 1) will be co-ordinated with corporate programme management processes to ensure impact on other projects are highlighted and resources appropriately prioritised.

Roles and responsibilities

Fire Authority members have the responsibility for setting the direction and policy on equalities and diversity. Officers and their teams are responsible for day to day management of service equality and performance.

The Equality and Diversity Working Group is chaired by a lead member. This group drives progress on the agenda across the Fire Authority and various functions within the organisation and take responsibility for monitoring, analysis, service development and change in relation to the services they manage.

The Diversity Working Group has responsibility to scrutinise progress on equality and diversity issues. The group has representatives from across the Fire Authority. They take evidence from various sources and assist in the development of action plans and initiatives. There are dedicated resources in the Brigade to develop Equality Schemes and action plans (appendix 1).

Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service is also a member of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). LSPs recognise their role in promoting equal opportunity and good relations among groups within the community through their equality and diversity statements and underlying commitment is carried through in the management of their duties.

Performance management and service planning

Performance management is a key element of delivering good outcomes for communities. The Fire Authority's approach to performance management has been designed to take into consideration the principles of the Equality Framework for Local Government, which is used by the Audit Commission as part of the assessment process to evaluate the equity of public sector achievements. The framework requires a systematic approach around monitoring, review and outcomes, including evaluation of achievements and public engagement in order to change the design and delivery of services.

In order to meet our performance objectives under the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), the Fire Authority must focus on engagement with local communities, ensuring that performance is open to public scrutiny and evaluation.

The CAA service assessments have a strong user focus, taking account of the quality of direct service delivery to the customer. The CAA assessment takes into consideration:

- Whether statutory requirements on equalities, diversity and human rights are being addressed.
- Service providers promote and outline their approach to equality, diversity and human rights.
- The access to and impact of services for all sections of the community, including minority and disadvantaged groups.
- Whether the views of users and communities have been considered.
- What processes and models are in place for understanding service users and communities and for gathering service user's views and whether those processes are effective and appropriate.
- Whether the outputs of local consultation and other user feedback, for example, complaints, influence decision making about how services can be improved and whether they result in appropriate changes to service delivery.

We are conducting impact assessments and they are required to comment on the equality aspects of service delivery. The IRMP describes the priorities for each year and takes account of the CAA expectations for equality and, if equality performance improvements are required. Performance issues, including equality performance are monitored throughout the year by the Chief Officers' Forum and by Fire Authority members. The Chief Officers' Forum will hold managers accountable for ensuring there is evidence of improved performance and equality of outcomes.

Equality outcomes

Planning and Providing Services

We want to ensure that everyone in our community can fully access and benefit from our services. We are committed to considering diverse needs and requirements in planning, resourcing and prioritising our services. We want to work effectively with our partners in organisations and as individuals to meet the needs of our communities.

Employment

We want to ensure our staff are able to work in an environment where they are valued, supported and treated with respect and dignity. We want to encourage job applicants from all parts of society and select, develop and retain staff on merit, ensuring all our employment practices and processes are free from potential discrimination.

Procurement

The Fire Authority recognises the positive influence our commitment to equality and diversity can have on external commercial providers, through our procurement processes. BFRS is required to take all reasonable steps to make sure that where goods and services are being delivered through an external provider on our behalf, that they meet the same equality standards that we would expect to be met if we provided that service ourselves.

We want to ensure our contractors, suppliers and partners are aware of our position on equality and are clear about their obligation to provide services that are free from discrimination, harassment and victimisation. We want to ensure that contractors are representative of the local population or of the area from which the businesses are drawn.

Partnership

We work closely with a range of partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors in the delivery of our services. While our public sector partners have similar responsibilities for promoting equality, partners in private and voluntary sectors may take a different approach.

We believe we can achieve better outcomes for our communities by working together and want to ensure all our partners understand our position on equality and that this is reflected in all agreements on collaborative working.



Urban Search and Rescue crews arrive at a multi-agency training exercise.

Our Equality and Diversity objectives

The National 10-year strategy for Equality and Diversity requires action from Fire and Rescue Services in five priority areas. These areas link in with the Core Values and the Equality Framework for Local Government:

- 1 Leadership and promoting inclusion
- 2 Accountability
- 3 Effective service delivery and community engagement
- 4 Employment and training
- 5 Evaluation and sharing good practice

Based upon and consistent with these priorities, Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service has identified its own equality objectives and will work within six equality areas. Some concern the community we serve; others affect our employees and fairness in employment. Our six equality and diversity objectives are:

Leadership: We will provide vision and clear leadership. We will make more positive use of planning, auditing and reviewing to achieve greater equality and diversity and provide a clear demonstration of our leadership and commitment on diversity.

Reaching out to under-represented groups: We will improve our approach to communicating with, and reaching out to, under-represented groups to improve community safety and to raise the profile of the service as an employer of choice.

Supporting compliance: We will use the strength of our remit for partnership working to ensure compliance to legislation on diversity.

Sharing good practice: We will work hard to ensure that examples of good and notable practice are shared with the other services and with external stakeholders.

Measuring outcomes: We will monitor improvements on diversity by utilising current measures such as performance indicators, equality standard for local government, CAA.

Cultural change: We are committed to supporting a culture change. We will provide support and guidance to the Fire Authority and other stakeholders as we believe that successful cultural change will only be achieved by working in partnership and only by achieving on all of the above objectives.

Key Equality and Diversity priorities

Leadership

- We will provide tools for staff and managers that support equality and diversity activity. We will facilitate gathering, publishing and sharing good practice in equality and diversity.
- We will carry out work to optimise opportunities to obtain additional funding sources for equality and diversity and influence funders to boost spending on equality and diversity activities.
- We will ensure that the Fire Authority in the strategies, policies and plans are explicit about how they support the organisation's equality and diversity agenda.
- We will ensure that our planning and funding systems are managed effectively in support of the equality and diversity agenda.
- We will have diversity at the heart of all job descriptions, person specifications, the National Firefighter Selection process and Assessment Development Centres.
- We will establish a clear understanding with members, managers and officers regarding individual and organisational responsibilities for diversity.

Reaching out to under-represented groups

- To communicate the benefits of employment in the fire and rescue service to all currently under represented groups across the county.
- To work in partnership to identify and plan the engagement of all groups that support the objectives of creating a safer society and achieving targets on representation in the service of all groups.
- We will develop and support interventions that will support us in meeting this strand.
- We will develop ways of communicating that appeal to all sections and groups in our community.
- We will use strategic audit and review methodologies to ensure that Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service is meeting the needs of specific groups in local areas, particularly those that are disengaged.
- Building on existing links we will encourage inter-community working and partnership building with relevant organisations for the purpose of meeting our objectives.
- We will work with our equalities partners to understand the barriers faced by groups to accessing and succeeding in the service.

- We will aim to improve year on year the representation of the workforce of under-represented groups.
- We will work towards the enhanced targets for 2013 set out by CLG, in the areas of gender and race; both groups to each represent 18 per cent of the workforce.
- We will also aim to improve their links in their respective communities to support service delivery, community safety and workforce profile.

Supporting compliance

- We will work in partnership with stakeholders to review and support the assessment framework for the Equality Framework.
- We will use planning to enable Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service to prioritise and mainstream equality and diversity.
- We will be fully compliant in current equalities legislation and employment law.
- We will have plans in place for any programmed changes in legislation.

Sharing good practice

- We will support the development of toolkits for diversity professionals and other practitioners across the region.
- We will ensure that future research is focused on clear objectives and outcomes that support our strategy.
- We will monitor the results of our work.
- We will take note and account of good practice that has been published or promoted.

Measuring outcomes

- We will work in partnership to identify and publish evidence of the social and economic benefits of equality and diversity.
- We will use our communication with central government to maximise the impact of this work.
- We will seek out additional funding sources to support diversity.
- We will work with stakeholders to devise measures that can overcome any barriers for the collection and publication of data.

- We will use current tools to measure targets to monitor and measure change and if necessary we will develop further methods and tools that support us to measure outcomes and not just process.

- We will gather information that will support the legislative requirements and support the service in general to improve equality and diversity.

Cultural change

- We are committed to changing the culture of the service which the Improvement and Development Agency review and other reports have highlighted as an area of concern.

- We will provide support and guidance to the Fire Authority and other stakeholders with regard to improving the culture of the service.

- We will work in partnership with all stakeholders to improve the culture of the service.

Legal framework

Our plans for achieving equality and improving the management of diversity will take account of existing equality legislation, future amendments, corresponding codes of practice and case law. The Fire Authority recognises its responsibilities in complying with equality legislation and is committed to ensuring that our local plans, priorities and the resources assigned to achieving them take due account of relevant legislation including:

Equal Pay Act 1970: Gives an individual right to the same contractual pay and benefits as a person of the opposite sex in the same employment, where they are doing like work.

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974: Makes employers responsible for the health, safety and welfare at work of all their employees. Organisations are liable for the behaviour of their employees at work.

Sex Discrimination Act (SDA) 1975: Applies to both women and men. It makes discrimination unlawful in employment, vocational training, education and the provision of facilities, services and housing.

Race Relations Act (RRA) 1976: This takes the same form as the SDA. It legislates against direct and indirect discrimination within certain areas. Under the Act, the Fire Authority must not discriminate on the basis of “race”.

Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995: Aims to protect disabled people from discrimination in employment and access to goods, facilities and services. The Act bars “less favourable treatment” of disabled people in employment and in the provision of services. A duty to make “reasonable adjustments” in order to ensure access to goods and services came into force in October 2004.

Protection from Harassment Act 1997: This Act relates specifically to activities including stalking, harassment and fear of violence. Offences also include breach of an injunction or restraining order placed on a person who has been engaging in harassing behaviour. Harassment is defined as being deemed to occur when unwanted conduct related to racial or ethnic origin takes place with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

The Human Rights Act 1998: This came into force in 2000. This incorporates the 18 articles of the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law. Seven articles have implications for the provision of public services and function:

- **Article 2:** Everyone has the right to life.
- **Article 3:** No-one shall be subjected to . . . degrading treatment.
- **Article 5:** Everyone has the right to . . . security of person.
- **Article 8:** Everyone has the right to respect for their private and family life, home and correspondence.
- **Article 9:** Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion . . . subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, public order, health, morals or the freedoms of others.
- **Article 14:** Prohibition on Discrimination. The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in the convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority.

Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999: Aims to protect transsexual people from discrimination in pay and treatment in employment and vocational training.

Disability Rights Commission Act 1999: Set up the DRC and established its remit and responsibilities.

Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000: Places a positive duty on public bodies to promote race equality. Previous legislation on gender, race and disability had focused only on preventing discrimination. The Fire Authority is now required by law to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination
- Promote equal opportunities
- Promote harmonious relations between people of different cultural groups

Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) 2001: Establishes legal rights for disabled students in pre- and post-16 education.

Employment Equality Regulations 2003 (Sexual Orientation): Makes it unlawful for employers to discriminate on the grounds of (perceived) sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is defined as orientation towards the same sex, both sexes or the opposite sex.

Employment Equality Regulations 2003 (Religion/Belief): Makes it unlawful for the employer to discriminate on the grounds of (perceived) religion or belief. This covers discrimination on the basis of any religion, religious belief or similar philosophical belief.

Gender Recognition Act 2004: The Act introduces a mechanism whereby transgender people can apply for legal recognition in their acquired gender.

Civil Partnership Act 2004: Allows for a new form of legal relationship which may be formed by two people of the same sex. Civil partnership is of similar seriousness and commitment as civil marriage and has been created in order to provide same-sex couples with a means of having their relationship legally recognised if they wish.

Disability Discrimination Act 2005: This is the Government's final step towards fulfilling its pledge to extend rights and opportunities for disabled people. It builds on other legislative steps already in place, including the setting up of the Disability Rights Commission, and includes measures to amend the DDA 1995 in areas such as the definition of disability, premises and private clubs. It places a duty on public authorities to actively promote disability equality. The Fire Authority is now required by law to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination
- Promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and others
- Eliminate disability related harassment
- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people
- Encourage participation by disabled people in public life

Employment Equality Regulations (Age): Became law in December 2006, and outlawed discrimination on the grounds of age. This is likely to herald substantial change, for example compulsory retirement at 65 may be abolished. This coincides with the apparent need in the national economy to address the problem of providing adequate pensions.

Equality Bill: This established the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights from October 2007, incorporating the Equal Opportunities and Disability Rights Commissions from the start and the Commission for Racial Equality by April 2009. The Bill also banned discrimination on the grounds of religion/belief and sexual orientation, in the provision of goods, facilities, services, premises and education, and creates a new duty on public authorities to promote gender equality.



A potential recruit is shown around a fire appliance at an open day at Brill Fire Station.

People Impact Assessment

An impact assessment is a systematic way of finding out whether a policy or a proposed policy affects different groups of people in different ways. The term 'policy' refers to any of the Fire Authority's activities – this might be:

- Any service we provide
- Any policy we implement
- Any strategy we write
- Any procedure we follow

The assessment must cover both service delivery and workforce matters. An impact assessment aims to ensure that any negative consequences for a particular group or sector of the community are identified and eliminated, minimised or counterbalanced by other measures. Impact assessments can also be used to establish good practices as a result of positive consequences. A people impact assessment can be the starting point for establishing equality objectives and measures.

Assessing existing policies, plans, procedures and practices

All policies, plans, procedures and practices identified as having relevance for one or more of the equality groups will be initially assessed to ensure there is no adverse impact on any particular group. This should include an assessment of the evidence and consultation with relevant stakeholders on the options for change.

A review of the relevance of our functions and policies for each equality group will be carried out every three years.

Assessing proposed policies, plans, procedures and practices

All new policies, plans and procedures will be assessed during their development to ensure there is no potential for them to adversely impact on any particular equality. Groups affected by the policies (for example the public, partners and staff) will be consulted over the impact of policies relevant to them. Impact assessment reports will form part of policy proposals to the Senior Management Team and the Fire Authority.

Where there is insufficient data to assess whether there is likely to be any adverse impact, a monitoring system must be established to provide relevant data in the future.

Benefits of undertaking an assessment

By undertaking an impact assessment we are able to:

- Take into account the needs, experiences and circumstances of those groups of people who are affected by our policies, procedures, services and strategies.
- Identify any existing and potential inequalities that people may experience.
- Think about other ways in which we can achieve the aims of our policies, procedures, services and strategies that will not lead to inequalities.
- Ensure that we are open in the things that we do and improve the public's confidence that we treat everybody fairly.
- Generally develop better policy-making, procedures and services.
- Become more accountable to the people we serve.

Equality Framework for Local Government

What is it?

The Equality Framework for Local Government sets out a generic framework for local authorities like Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority to mainstream and effectively audit equality across service areas and through which legal obligations to anti-discrimination laws can be met. This requirement also contributes towards assisting the Fire Authority in developing a quality service to its diverse citizens.

What does it involve?

Through its three-level framework, the Equality Framework for Local Government acts as a guide seeking to encourage a local response to local circumstances while securing continuous improvement. Targets applicable to each level need to be achieved before an authority can move on to the next level.

- Level One of the Equality Framework is termed as emerging.
- Level Two of the Equality Framework is termed as achieving and is subject to peer review.
- Level Three of the Equality Framework is termed as excellent and is subject to peer review.

The peer review for the achieving and excellent levels consists of two parts:

- A review by peers of the Fire Authority's self-assessment document, including supporting documentary evidence.

- A two-day on-site visit by peers to conduct interviews and focus groups with employees, members and other stakeholders.

The commitments made in each level of the Equality Framework translate into action in five substantive areas:

- Knowing your community – equality mapping
- Place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment
- Community engagement and satisfaction
- Responsive services and customer care
- A modern, diverse and reflective workforce

Implementing the Equality Framework

The framework builds on the principles of quality, leadership and community engagement. These are seen as central features of modern local government. Successful implementation of the framework will depend on a partnership between the Fire Authority and the community and should involve:

Fire Authority:

- Provide leadership and support
- Ensure resources are available
- Engage with the local community
- Provide a scrutiny role

Managers/Unions/Staff:

- Work towards speedy implementation
- Organise and participate in training
- Challenge existing cultures and traditions
- Engage with the community

Community/Stakeholders:

- Work with the equality planning process
- Participate in scrutiny
- Extend knowledge of the equality framework within the community

Working with the community requires more than consultation after significant decisions have been taken. Participation in service design and delivery is crucial if services are to meet the needs of all parts of the community, and authorities should devise a participation strategy that describes how it will involve others in its activities.

The Equality Framework will:

- Provide a systematic framework for mainstreaming equality leading to the continuous improvement of outcomes.
- Help local authorities to meet their legal obligations under the law.
- Develop and integrate equality policies and objectives that can be driven through performance management.
- Encourage engagement with stakeholders, inviting challenge and involvement in all management and decision making processes associated with service improvement and accessibility.
- Encourage the development of anti-discrimination practice and community outcomes appropriate to local circumstances.
- Provide a basis for tackling all forms of institutionalised discrimination.
- Integrates the six strands of diversity.

An Equality Framework for people and places

The starting point for the framework is the recognition that local government is legally obliged to provide a fair and equally accessible services to all citizens. This principle is central to the government's agenda to bring local government closer to communities. As well as adapting to the changes in which local services are required to integrate equality considerations, the Equality Framework also takes account of the changing local, national and international legislative and policy environment.

The framework can be used as a basis for working with partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors; for supporting the work of community forums and promoting citizen engagement.

Equality strands

There are specific groups within society who experience acute discrimination and inequality and who have been protected in law. We set out below our understanding of the nature of the inequality experienced by these different equality groups and our commitment to addressing this in our policies and practices.

The law regarding age, sexuality and religious or belief discrimination is less comprehensive than for race, gender or disability. However, we believe it is right for us to aim to eliminate discrimination and harassment on grounds of religion or belief, sexuality or age and to promote equality between people of religion or belief, age groups and sexual orientation, as well as to comply with the employment regulations.

Age equality

Age discrimination can be just as damaging as, for example, race discrimination. We are all at risk of being disadvantaged and held back due to our age whether we are young, middle-aged or old. Age is often used as a weapon to define a person's capability and role in society. To be told you're 'too old' is as disheartening as to be told you're 'too young'. This form of stereotyping not only prevents people of all ages from reaching their full potential but also denies, and undervalues, them as individuals.

Older people are all too often marginalised, ignored or disadvantaged in our society simply because of their age. They face overt discrimination in employment, in the health service and as consumers. The assumption is that older people are less capable in the modern world.

Many employers still mistakenly assume that older people will be unwilling or unable to retrain for new posts. Age discrimination limits staff performance and affects the quality of service. Pensioner poverty affects more women than men, not only because women form the majority of pensioners, but also because women pensioners are more likely to have lower incomes than men.

In October 2006, legislation came into force outlawing age discrimination in employment and vocational training for all employees and those applying for work.

Children and young people are often perceived as one homogenous group and are regularly blamed for crime and social problems. This negative perception ignores the fact that children and young people are individuals from diverse backgrounds with different experiences, who have their own needs, views and aspirations. In common with older people, assumptions are made regarding their abilities and motivations because of their age.

Children and young people can suffer the same concerns and discrimination as adults through direct experience or indirectly through a parent or carer. This can limit their potential and lead to isolation, harassment and bullying.

Disability Equality

Disability covers a variety of impairments such as:

- Learning disabilities
- Mental health conditions
- Mobility impairments
- Blindness and partial sight
- Deafness and hearing impairment
- Progressive long-term health conditions such as multiple sclerosis and HIV

It also covers people who may not recognise themselves as having a disability, such as those with long-term conditions (for example, diabetes or cancer) or older people. Disabled people are not a homogeneous group and may also be discriminated against because of other aspects of their identity such as ethnicity, age, gender, sexuality, economic status and religion or belief.

Using the widest definition, there are more than 11 million disabled people in the UK, more than one in five of the adult population and one in 20 children.

Disabled people do not always have the same opportunities or choices as non-disabled people and this can be particularly acute because the majority of disabled people have impairments that are not easily visible. They can experience discrimination, lack of respect, and unreasonable barriers to participation in society on an equal basis. Such barriers can be attitudinal, environmental and institutional. Although these barriers may sometimes be unintentional this does not lessen the negative impact upon disabled people.

The concept of the social model of disability is the most effective starting point for our approach to promoting disability equality and tackling discrimination and harassment. The social model identifies that the poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion that disabled people can experience is not the inevitable result of their impairments or conditions. It results from the barriers constructed by society.

Gender Equality

Stereotyping of gender roles has led to a society where both men and women are often perceived in unfair ways. This kind of stereotyping is a form of prejudice, making broad assumptions about people based on their gender.

As a result, people can find themselves facing inequality when it comes to pay, access to services, responsibilities, levels of safety and other areas. It can directly affect the choices men and women make in their lives.

Society places a heavy burden on men and women to conform to a set image – what is seen as ‘the norm’. These images are defined in terms of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’. The pressure to conform to these can be damaging, and place great pressure on people. It also denies the expression of one’s identity as an individual.

The Just Pay Task Force Report identified that three-quarters of working women work in nursing, caring, admin/secretarial work, sales/customer service and non-skilled manual work. 73 per cent of women with children work, but spend three times as much time caring for children as men. In industry, including the fire and rescue service, women hold less than one in 10 of the top positions. In politics, only 18 per cent of MPs are women, as are only 28 per cent of local councillors in England and Wales.

However, it is important to acknowledge that attitudes towards women are slowly changing. Some women are now better represented in previously male-dominated environments, and can operate on a more equal basis.

Gender stereotyping also affects men. Certain groups of men can experience discrimination and harassment in terms of their ethnicity, class and sexuality. In addition, the strict gendering of roles at home and at work can discriminate against men too.

In addition, gender can no longer be neatly defined, and transgender/transsexual issues also play a role. In any discussion of gender issues, it is important to take a multiple-identity approach.

In April 2007, the Government introduced a Gender Equality Duty, which forms part of the existing Sex Discrimination Act 1975. Public authorities are legally bound to eliminate unlawful sex discrimination and harassment, and promote equality of opportunity for men and women by tackling equal pay, publishing a gender equality scheme and assessing the impact of new policies. The new law places the onus on public bodies to demonstrate fair treatment of women and men instead of depending on individuals to make a complaint. The duty will be in the same spirit and intention as the existing duties to promote race equality and disability equality.

Race Equality

People from black and minority ethnic communities experience multiple inequalities – 70 per cent live in the 88 most deprived neighbourhoods of the UK and they are more likely to be poor, with lower incomes spread across larger household sizes. They also continue to experience discrimination, stereotyping and racism. Gipsies and travellers face particularly acute discrimination as many local public services have low awareness of the needs of these particular communities.

These overall patterns also vary between and within different ethnic groups. The fact that race inequalities still exist is partly explained by the slow and sporadic progress being made by public services.

We see a strong connection between successful community cohesion and integration and the effectiveness of local public service approaches to promoting equality and diversity and tackling discrimination and inequality.

Religion or Belief Equality

According to the 2001 Census, 76 per cent of the UK population identified themselves as having a religious faith. The diversity of faith groups makes the UK one of the most religiously diverse countries in Europe.

After Christianity, the next most common religion in terms of number of believers is Islam with eight per cent of the resident population.

Recent events around the world and in this country have emphasised the importance of faith issues. The Local Government Association's Guidance on Community Cohesion highlights the importance for local authorities, as part of their leadership role, to "build cross-cultural networks and inter faith structures". Local authorities must also help facilitate an agreed vision, which will have as one outcome a reduction in racial and inter-religious tension and conflict.

The Guidance states that: "At community level it's important to foster understanding and respect between different faith traditions as well as between different cultural and ethnic groups."

Some faith communities suffer discrimination and prejudice due to their beliefs and appearance. Following major world events, including the attack on the World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001 and the London bombings 7 July 2005, there was a reported increase in cases of physical attacks against members of the Muslim communities. Women adhering to religious dress code were attacked in shopping centres, and children were bullied by fellow pupils in schools because of their faith. Certain areas around the country witnessed increased tension between young people from different faith backgrounds.

Legislation outlawing discrimination on grounds of religion and belief in the areas of employment and training was enacted in 2003.

Sexuality Equality

Attitudes towards LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) people in many parts of British society have changed dramatically for the better in recent years, something that has been reflected in the law. There are however still significant pockets of ignorance, hostility and prejudice. Estimates drawn from sociological and commercial surveys show that between five and 10 per cent of the UK population define themselves as gay and lesbian.

LGBT people have faced significant discrimination and exclusion historically, and still do in many areas today. This occurs at school, at work and in many other everyday situations. It can range from verbal abuse, bullying and harassment, to physical violence and murder. It is estimated that almost one third of suicides in the young are lesbians and gays.

As with other minorities, LGBT people are often stereotyped. Whether the stereotyping relates to HIV/AIDS or other negative phenomena, it rarely corresponds to facts. Ignorance often leaves a void too easily filled by myth, misinformation and lies.

Parliament passed a law that came into force in 2003, equalising the age of consent between gay men and heterosexuals. It also saw the introduction of an age of consent for lesbians for the first time, finally ending society's historical failure to acknowledge the existence of gay women. Other recent legal developments include the Civil Partnership Act and the Gender Recognition Act for transgender people, who now will have the opportunity to apply for legal recognition in their acquired gender.

Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service is committed to working with all sections of the community to create an environment of respect, fairness and acceptance, where all people are seen as positive role models for young people, and we can all live and achieve our full potential free from hostility and prejudice.

Firefighters engage with the public at a variety of events, including sponsored car washes.



Appendix 1: Equality and Diversity Scheme Action Plan

Action	Objectives	Responsibility	Target dates
Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service to have specific responsibility for progressing equality so that valuing equality and diversity becomes embedded throughout the organisation.	Develop, consult on and communicate a comprehensive policy that commits all parts of the service to achieving equality and diversity.	Equality and Diversity	April 2009
	Develop, consult on and communicate a Single Equality Scheme and progress associated action plans to implement equality and diversity policy and comply with legislation.	Equality and Diversity	April 2009
	Source and co-ordinate relevant training and development for managers to enable them to achieve equality and diversity objectives.	Equality and Diversity	Ongoing
	Support all parts of Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service to implement the requirements of the Equality Framework for Local Government.	Equality and Diversity	Ongoing
	Identify and provide relevant training and development to Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority Members to enable them to monitor and audit equality and diversity and set future targets.	Equality and Diversity	August 2009
	Ensure sufficient resources are allocated to meet equality and diversity objectives.	Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority	Ongoing

Action	Objectives	Responsibility	Target dates
Incorporate Equality and Diversity objectives and targets into service plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with all managers to ensure they have carried out PIAs and put any relevant actions into neighbourhood plans. Ensure actions are taken into individual appraisals. 	Equality and Diversity	Ongoing
		Area Managers	Ongoing
Identify and remove any potential discrimination in planning and providing services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop monitoring processes to measure access to, and impact of, our services on different groups in community. Assess existing policies, procedures and practices for adverse impact. Establish quality assurance systems to ensure impact assessments are realistic and robust. 	Equality and Diversity/ Performance and Planning	Ongoing
		Area Managers	Ongoing
		Equality and Diversity	April 2009
Enhance understanding of localised issues, be clear about how all our frontline staff liaise with communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Line managers should ensure all impact assessment information and other community information is sent to the Equality and Diversity Team to be collected for the intranet and website. 	Departments	Ongoing
Plan and deliver services to accommodate all local communities; assess the impact of proposed plans, policies and practices on different groups to ensure no-one is excluded or disadvantaged.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure proposed policies/ plans are impact assessed, and consultation and monitoring outcomes appropriately recorded and reported. Make sure impact assessments are available for public scrutiny. Continue to establish systems for collecting and analysing the take-up, effectiveness and value of services to identify any differential impact to previously disadvantaged, excluded or vulnerable groups in the community. 	Area Managers	Ongoing
		Equality and Diversity	Upon request
		Equality and Diversity/ Community Safety	Ongoing

Action	Objectives	Responsibility	Target dates
<p>Incorporate corporate equality policy and objectives into the Fire Authority's partnerships and contractual arrangements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Work with Procurement team to incorporate equalities into contracts. 	<p>Property, Procurement and Transport</p>	<p>March 2010</p>
<p>Develop an open and trusting culture where all staff feel valued and able to offer and give their best.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identify and meet training needs of workgroups on understanding prejudice, bullying and harassment. 	<p>Equality and Diversity</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Source and co-ordinate role specific training, where needed, for staff and managers on conduct at work, bullying and harassment, handling discipline and grievance cases. 	<p>Equality and Diversity</p>	<p>March 2010</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Source and co-ordinate awareness training, based on needs analysis, on specific diversity issues (race, gender, disability, age, sexuality and religion or belief). 	<p>Equality and Diversity</p>	<p>March 2010</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide effective informal and formal procedures for dealing with bullying and harassment incidents and monitor incidence. 	<p>Human Resources</p>	<p>March 2010</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Continue to monitor incidence of grievance and discipline issues that address complaints of unfair treatment. 	<p>Human Resources</p>	<p>March 2010</p>

Action	Objectives	Responsibility	Target dates
Achieve a workforce that is representative of the communities in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Review recruitment advertising processes to ensure job opportunities are communicated to all groups within the community, taking account of different methods of getting and understanding information. 	Human Resources	March 2010
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Maximise the use of positive action by measuring and evaluating outcomes of positive action initiatives. 	Equality and Diversity/Human Resources	Ongoing
Help staff and managers understand how impact assessment information will change how they work with different individuals and groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Intranet site focused on community information will be regularly updated. 	Equality and Diversity/Communications	Ongoing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ All managers responsible for ensuring staff are using the information to change working practices. 	Departments	Ongoing

Action	Objectives	Responsibility	Target dates
<p>Develop good practice employment policies and procedures, ensuring no adverse equality impact for any employee.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Review terms and conditions of employment to ensure, as far as possible, that these do not unjustifiably disadvantage specific groups of staff. 	Human Resources	March 2010
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Review access to training and development opportunities and arrangement of training courses to ensure there is no unjustifiable disadvantage to specific groups of staff. 	Response Support	March 2010
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensure disciplinary, grievance, capability procedures reflect good practice and are free from unfair discrimination. 	Human Resources	March 2010
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensure performance management process is transparent, fair, competence based and evidenced. 	Departments/ Performance and Planning	March 2011
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensure consultation with trade unions is conducted with due regard to organisational values and a joint approach to improving diversity. 	Equality and Diversity	Ongoing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensure effective systems for monitoring employee and recruitment diversity profile, including where possible the six strands of diversity. 	Human Resources	Ongoing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Continue to develop flexible working practices to support staff in achieving a work/life balance. 	Human Resources	Ongoing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Achieve “Positive about Disability”, “Stonewall” and “Equality Kite Mark”. 	Equality and Diversity	March 2010

Action	Objectives	Responsibility	Target dates
<p>Improve systems for monitoring, reporting and audit to enable progress to be measured and continuous improvement made.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensure diversity initiatives and training interventions are evaluated and results of evaluation used to inform next steps. ■ Demonstrate level of achievement against this plan using the Equality Framework for Local Government. ■ Develop, publish and make available annual report on achievement of equality objectives. 	<p>Response Support</p> <p>Equality and Diversity</p> <p>Equality and Diversity</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>March 2010</p> <p>March 2010</p>
<p>Explore new ways of consulting and engaging with members of the public and representative organisations to respond more effectively to their needs and so they can gain a better understanding of BFRS.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Establish effective strategy for public consultation and engagement. ■ Identify ways of working with partners and/or relevant stakeholders to enable joint approaches to engagement and consultation. 	<p>Equality and Diversity/ Communications</p> <p>Equality and Diversity/Safety</p>	<p>March 2010</p> <p>March 2010</p>
<p>Network across all agencies and community groups to spread messages about services and risk management.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Create an area on our Intranet Site for particular service users. ■ Liaise with all relevant community groups to get our information about risk and coping with emergencies on their websites and out to their specific groups. 	<p>Equality and Diversity/ Communications</p> <p>Equality and Diversity/Safety/ Response</p>	<p>May 2009</p> <p>Ongoing</p>

Action	Objectives	Responsibility	Target dates
Review all procurement practice and all contracted services and partnership arrangements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Measure impact, develop and implement systems for monitoring contractors who deliver services on behalf of BFRS. 	Property, Procurement and Transport	March 2010
Develop a consistent approach to our involvement and support to events across Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Develop a programme of events in different communities. Identify those we will support and create a theme from consultation in the events. ■ Work with partners and key stakeholders to hold events. 	Equality and Diversity/Safety/Response	March 2010
Regularly update members of the Fire Authority on new legislation and issues on equality and diversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide information and appropriate training to Authority members on action plans to support the scrutiny process. ■ Use full Fire Authority meetings to update on key issues when all Members are present. 	Equality and Diversity	Ongoing
Help firefighters and support staff to develop their skills and understanding of operational diversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Develop support materials in plain English for the Intranet. 	Equality and Diversity/Communications	Ongoing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Deliver regular training and briefings to firefighters and support staff. 	Equality and Diversity	Dec 2009
Identify why staff are leaving the organisation to ensure its not due to unfair treatment or discrimination.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Implement a formal system of exit interviews. 	Human Resources	Sep 2009

Action	Objectives	Responsibility	Target dates
Assess the attitude of staff to equalities and diversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Undertake a cultural audit of staff. 	Equality and Diversity	January 2010
Communicate community safety and recruitment information to a range of BME communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Community safety team and equalities team to attend BME community events and collate information. 	Equality and Diversity/Safety	Ongoing
Portray a cross section of society in our publications to ensure community recognition.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The image that we include in our publications are representative of people with a range of different backgrounds/abilities. 	Equality and Diversity/ Communications	Ongoing
Provide community fire safety support to a wide variety of organisations which support our diverse communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provision of community fire safety advice to a greater number and wider range of people who may be at increased risk of injury. 	Safety	Ongoing
Develop a working relationship with a wide range of organisations which represent the interests of diverse groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A network of organisations which can advise us on issues relevant to people from diverse backgrounds. 	Equality and Diversity/Safety/ Response	Ongoing

Appendix 2: People Impact Assessment Prioritisation

Year 1: High Priorities

Operational Response

Stations

- Home Fire Safety Risk Checks
- School visits – Key Stage 3
- Control (taking calls)

Response Department (BHQ)

- Responding to incidents
- Station Planning
- OCs
- Incident monitoring/debriefs
- Station audits (Retained Duty System and wholetime)

Human Resources

- Grievance policy
- Disciplinary policy
- Secondary employment
- Health and sickness absence
- Recruitment
- Absence policy
- Duty systems
- Employment engagement and retention
- Job evaluation scheme/equal pay audit
- Re-employment
- Performance management

Performance and Planning

Corporate Planning Unit

- Corporate Planning
- Corporate Risk Management
- Integrated Risk Management Plan development
- Policy Management

Central Intelligence Unit

- Incident data collection and analysis

Safety

- Single Home Safety Check process for vulnerable households
- Risk reduction strategy for HMO (houses in multiple occupation)
- Arson audits for business
- Gang Masters Protocol
- Develop road safety work

Finance

- Budget Settings (including precepting)
- Payroll
- Statement of Accounts
- Council Tax leaflet

Financial Governance Framework

- Financial Regulations (draft revision in hand)
- Financial Instructions (draft revision in hand)
- Debt Management Policy
- Contracts Standing Orders
- Invest to Save
- White Fleet Policy (draft in hand)

Operational Support

Equipment

- Legislative compliance
- PPE and its management

Health and Safety

- Legislative compliance and advice
- Audit, review, monitoring and reporting

Operational Support (continued)

Policy and Projects

- Vision FX - upgrade to mobilising system
- Leave policy
- Effective manager including IPR introduction
- Industrial and Commercial Training Unit

Operational Training

- BA training
- Water awareness and water rescue training
- Driver training

Staff development

- NVQ Level 3 Operations in the Community
- IT training

FiReControl

- Staff/HR procedures for staff retention, reasonableness, relocation

Firelink

- C-soft installation and testing
- Phase B vehicle installations
- Statement of brigade requirements for Firelink

Property, Procurement and Transport

- Procurement

Year 2: Medium Priorities

Operational Response

Stations

- Site Specific Risk Assessment

Response

- Control (call processing and turning out)
- Crewing levels (predictive and cover moves)
- Emergency/contingency planning
- Finds messages
- USAR strategy
- Business continuity
- Brigade exercises

Human Resources

- Flexi-working
- Managing under-performance
- Promotion process
- Ride to Work scheme
- Management development effective manager

Human Resources (continued)

- HRIS project
- Employee well-being
- Occupational Health
- Workforce planning
- Bullying and harassment
- Staff consultation
- Stress management
- Leave policy
- Dress code
- Car policy

Performance and Planning

Corporate Planning Unit

- Data Protection
- Freedom of Information
- Information Governance

Central Intelligence Unit

- Incident Data Reporting
- Information and Communication Technology Unit
- Radio Communication

Performance and Planning (continued)

Safety

- Home Safety Check process for vulnerable rural areas
- Thatched properties campaign
- Risk database integration
- Develop LAA partnerships
- Youth diversion work
- Improve engagement with BME groups
- Improve engagement with gipsies and travellers
- Review partnerships
- Develop adult Firesetters programme

Finance

- Creditors (Accounts Payable)
- Debtors (Accounts Receivable)
- Treasury Management
- Use of Resources

Financial Governance Framework

- Payment of invoices
- Imprest accounts
- Business cards

Operational Support

Equipment

- R&D, selection and management of operational equipment
- Asset management of equipment
- Working at height equipment
- Water rescue equipment
- Aids to vision equipment
- Budget control

Health and Safety

- Policy and procedures
- Accident Investigation
- Fire Investigation
- Health, Safety and Welfare initiatives
- Budget control

Policy and Projects

- SSRA Regional/National standardisation
- Water Officer's role
- Technical Assessment of operational competence
- Introduction of Mobile Data Terminals

Operational Training

- Phase 1 Recruit training
- Working at Height training
- Staff Development
- Wholtime staff development programme
- Support staff development programme

FiReControl

- Identify changes required to existing systems

Firelink

- First Line Maintenance of Firelink
- Phase C vehicle installations

Property, Procurement and Transport

- Property

Year 3: Low Priorities

Operational Response

Stations

- Budgets

Response Department (BHQ)

- Response Bulletins
- Briefing Sheets
- FOSI returns

Human Resources

- Alcohol and substance abuse
- Medical expenses
- Smoking policy
- Security of employees

Performance and Planning

Corporate Planning Unit

- Inspection liaison
- Project management

Central Intelligence Unit

- Incident data modelling
- Incident data quality

ICT Unit

- Helpdesk service
- Out of hours support

Safety

- Promote sprinklers
- Real Fire data research
- Improve evaluation of Community Safety
- Develop arson audits

Finance

- Budget monitoring
- Internal Audit
- Comprehensive Area Assessment
- Pensions (Local Government Pension Scheme and Firefighters)

Financial Governance Framework

- Claim forms (including mileage and business expense)

Operational Support

Equipment

- BA and associated equipment
- Technical notes

Health and Safety

- Staff training
- Risk Assessments, operational and equipment

Staff Development

- RDS development programme – Firefighter to Watch Manager

FiReControl

- FRS/RCC Operational Procedures
- FRS equipment to support RCC operations
- FRS Data interfaces
- FRS training to support RCC

Property, Procurement and Transport

- Transport

Appendix 3: Recruitment Targets for Gender and Ethnicity

Working age population estimates				
Area	Ethnic minority (i)	Other white (ii)	Total (i) & (ii)	All population 18-54
Aylesbury Vale	8.5	2.2	10.7	85,550
Chiltern	3.5	9.6	13.1	37,040
South Bucks	4.2	3.3	7.6	30,380
Wycombe	14.3	6.4	20.8	78,620
Milton Keynes	14.4	3.8	18.2	122,050
Total	11.1	4.9	16.0	353,630

Based upon the working age population estimates, above, of each of the areas of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service is aiming for the higher targets set by Communities and Local Government for recruitment.

The figures identified are:

■ **Female recruitment: 18 per cent**

■ **Ethnic minority recruitment: 18 per cent (minimum), 21 per cent (maximum)**

We will aim to recruit staff that will better reflect the composition of the community we serve. The figures above reflect our aims.

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