



AGENDA ITEM: 9

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

16 September 2013

Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report (Reporting Period 2012-2013)

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 2012-2013) 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 In March 2013 the Service published the first Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report for the reporting period 1st April 2011 to 31st March 2012. In accordance with Welsh Local Government Association Guidance the option was taken to include progress toward fulfilling the Authorities Equality Objectives during the first six months of the Strategic Equality Plan (i.e. April – October 2012).
- 7 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.
- 8 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

- 9 Following the production of the first report the Service's Strategic Equality Group concluded that the Service would benefit if the report was produced in the autumn of the reporting year. This would afford departments with Equality Objectives the opportunity to implement changes and incorporate those changes into the business planning process for the coming financial year.
- 10 This second Annual Report for the reporting year 2012-2013 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.
- 11 In considering engagement and involvement provisions for groups within the protected characteristic groups the report notes the 2007 work of the Chief Fire Officer's Task Group (further reviewed in 2009). This remains the principal driver for North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's community safety strategy in relation to targeting home fire safety.
- 12 The Chief Fire Officer's Task Group Report was intelligence led and highlighted the need for vulnerable individuals in our communities to be identified in order to provide them with education, equipment and assistance in staying safe in their home. This work continues to guide the steps the authority has taken to identify and engage with protected characteristic groups along with the collection of relevant information.
- 13 During 2012 - 2013 this information has been used in meeting the three aims of the general duty, that is, in the delivery of Home Fire Safety Checks, the work of the Voluntary Sector Coordinator and the Arson Reduction Team.

- 14 Included in the 2013-14 business plans is the proposal to conduct a full equality risk assessment on each of the four key service delivery areas i.e. dwelling fires, road traffic collisions, arson and home fire safety checks, to establish if the remainder of the protected characteristics render an individual/group any more vulnerable to fire by virtue of those protected characteristics. This information will provide the Service with the opportunity to put in place protective measures.
- 15 The attainment of the Corporate Health Standard at Platinum Level provides further evidence against the general duty. The Platinum Standard is awarded to exemplar employers that demonstrate sustainable development as an integral part of their business practice and culture, simultaneously meeting environmental and social goals.
- 16 Specified employment information including training and pay is presented along with equality data at recruitment. The requirement to include other relevant information incorporates voluntary work such as the Colleague Support Scheme and extends to the arrangements for work experience including Skill Build Placements.
- 17 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.
- 18 The attached Annual Report is intended for multiple audiences and provides an opportunity for transparency for our partners and the public.

Recommendations

- 19 Members are asked to:
 - (i) note the content of the report;
 - (ii) approve the Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report 2012-2013 for publication on the Service's website.