

## **Equality and Diversity Objectives 2016-20, Public Sector Equality Duty and Review of 2012-15 Objectives**

### **1.0 Introduction**

Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority (BMKFA) is fully committed to Equality and Diversity. The Authority recognises that we must make fairness and inclusion fundamental to everything we do in order to achieve our aim of making Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes one of the safest areas in England in which to live, work and travel.

The Authority believes that a workforce who better reflect the diversity of the local working population will create a stronger, more enriched and well informed organisation, able to meet the expectations for a modern Fire and Rescue Service.

Under the Equality Act 2010, Public Sector organisations are expected to use this understanding to demonstrate 'due regard' to the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by, or under, the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
- Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it.

The aim of the PSED is to embed equality considerations into the day to day work of public authorities so that they tackle discrimination and inequality and contribute to making society fairer.

The Equality duty covers the following protected characteristics:

- Age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

It also applies to marriage and civil partnership, but only in respect of the requirement to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination.

### **2.0 Executive Summary**

Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority (BMKFA) is subject to the specific duties as laid out in the Equality Act (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011. This is in addition to the general equality duty as laid out in the Equality Act 2010. These duties together are commonly known as the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), the aim of which is to ensure that fairness is at the heart of public bodies' work and that public services meet the needs of different groups.

The PSED requires public bodies to publish, at least annually, data on equality in the workforce and to set objectives to further one or more of the aims set out in the general equality duty, but is not prescriptive in what data may be published. Each organisation is free to publish such data as is relevant and meaningful to them.

This purpose of this paper is to set the Authority's future four yearly objectives under the PSED (Appendix 1) and to update on progress since 2012 (Appendix 2).

This report sets out how the Authority will comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and uses the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) as a guide.

This report contains an update on the key internal performance areas as follows: Workforce Strategy, Workforce Monitoring, Equality Analysis/Impact assessment, Employee Engagement, Promoting an Inclusive Working Environment, Equal Pay, Harassment and Bullying, Appraisal and Training Learning and Development. The report also contains an update on the key external performance areas Working with our Communities as follows: Knowing Communities, Involving Communities and Responsive Services and Customer Care.

**Appendix 1** of the report sets out the Objective for 2016 to 2020.

**Appendix 2** of the report provides a review of 2012-15 Equality and Diversity work plan set at the Authority's Executive Committee on 16 May 2012.

**Appendix 3** displays the workforce diversity in the form of charts and tables and provides commentary where it can be identified that people who share protected characteristics are under-represented in the Authority's workforce in comparison to the census data for the population of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes.

**Appendix 4** of the report provides the Equality and Diversity Measures to be set for year 1-2 and years 3-4 between 2016–2020 in order to meet our objectives.

### **3.0 Workforce Diversity**

In order to comply with the PSED the Authority will publish the information contained in **Appendix 3** and include information relating to people who share a relevant protected characteristic who are:

- Employees
- People affected by policy and practice e.g. service users

The latest public data available is from the census conducted in 2011. The charts provide a comparison of the diversity within BMKFA in February 2016 to the

census data of the communities it serves within Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes.

The Authority employ 538 people. Operational employees make up 78 per-cent of the entire workforce. It is important to note there is low turnover of Whole-time fire fighters mainly as a result of pension arrangements. There has been a Whole-time Firefighter recruitment freeze and a decline in the overall numbers of operational staff employed. As a result of this there has been limited opportunity to recruit; therefore it has been historically difficult to change the composition of the workforce in terms of diversity in order to better reflect the communities served. The last recruitment for Whole-time Operational Firefighters was in 2009.

### **3.1 Ethnicity census data compared to BMKFA employees**

Proportionally Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) employees are under-represented within BMKFA compared to the population ethnicity of both Milton Keynes and Buckinghamshire.

Black and ethnic minority community employees are under-represented within Support employees, On Call and Whole-time employees.

### **3.2 Gender census data compared to BMKFA employees**

15 per cent of the entire BMKFA workforce is female compared with 49 and 51 per cent of Milton Keynes and Buckinghamshire respectively.

Females account for 56 per cent of Support employees.

Females are under-represented within On Call employees (2.8 per cent) and Whole-time employees (3.1 percent).

### **3.3 Age census data compared to BMKFA employees**

86 per cent of BMKFA employees are between 30 and 59 years of age in comparison to 43 per cent of the Milton Keynes population and less for Buckinghamshire.

Under 30 year olds are under-represented within Support employees, On Call and Whole-time employees.

### **3.4 Sexual orientation and gender reassignment**

Data around sexual orientation (heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual) and gender reassignment was not collected as part of the Census 2011. However, there are a number of national pieces of research which can help understand potential population statistics:

The Integrated Household Survey data collected from January 2012 – December 2012 indicated that 1.1% of those that were surveyed identified themselves as Gay or Lesbian with 0.4 per cent as Bisexual.

GIRES (the Gender Identity Research and Education Society) puts the number of people living with some form of 'gender variance' in the UK as approximately 13 per cent.

Many employees at BMKFA have not provided equality information which has resulted in a high percentage of unknowns.

### **3.5 Religion and belief**

The predominant religion in both Buckinghamshire (60 per cent) and Milton Keynes (52 per cent) is Christian.

'Other religions' Muslim: Milton Keynes (4.8 per cent) and Buckinghamshire (5.1 per cent). Hindu: Milton Keynes (2.8 per cent) and Buckinghamshire (1.2 per cent).

The number of unknowns and no religion (58%) within the workforce data makes objective setting a challenge.

### **4.0 People Strategy**

Our aim is to maintain a skilled and committed workforce and to have a variety of employees to reflect the diverse communities we serve.

We recognise more work is needed to attract Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and female employees into our service.

Our overall strategic objective is to employ the best people. We will do this by:

- Recruiting, engaging and retaining the most high-performing, highly motivated people regardless of race, age, sex, gender, disability, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity and marriage/civil partnership.
- Aiming, over time, to employ a workforce that is more representative of the County's working-age population.

In support of our workforce diversity aims we have developed clear objectives over the next 4 years to:

- Promote and increase the number of females employed with a focus on operational employees by promoting the employment of females and providing fair access to opportunities where there is one i.e On Call recruitment and the intention to create more opportunities for flexible working as a retention tool.

- We will encourage and actively promote employment applications from all groups in the community. Our aim is to increase the number of BME's employed to better reflect the proportion of the community we serve.
- We will aim to better reflect the age profiles of the community we serve. We will do this through our three year apprenticeship programme and by focusing on the aging workforce aspects of our people strategy.
- Ensuring that our recruitment and selection processes 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 bias.
- Encourage and support employees to reach their potential.
- Make E&D training compulsory for new employees at their induction and review at two-yearly intervals.
- Ensure that 100 per cent of employees evidence delivery of their specific E&D improvements via the appraisal process within 2 years. Audit a minimum of 10 per cent to ensure consistency and benchmarking.
- Ensure all line managers complete performance management training in appropriate procedures and best practice in; Discipline, Anti Bullying and Harassment, Grievance and Capability.
- We will review processes and update the People Impact Assessment (PIA) Procedure and provide training to those responsible for improve workforce profile statistics by improving existing rates of reporting completing PIAs.
- We will improve workforce profile statistics by improving existing rates of reporting.
- Further the engagement of employees, identify and train Diversity Champions to form an E&D Advisory Group containing members who either have a protected characteristic or an active interest in E&D.

## **5.0 Workforce Monitoring**

The monitoring information set out in this report has mainly been collected from the Authority's management information system (currently SAP) and from monitoring information collected by employees in HR.

The data recorded in SAP is based on information provided by employees during recruitment and throughout their employment. Employees are also encouraged to update their personal information by notifying HR.

It is recognised that there are still some employees that do not have access to SAP and a self-service facility is not yet available. Data collection for these employees is an area for review. Some employees have not provided equality information which has resulted in a high percentage of unknowns in the report. We continue to look for ways to build confidence about declaring and decreasing these numbers.

A data cleanse exercise is planned as part of the introduction of a new HR System in 2016/2017 and this will happen in conjunction with an employee census. It is expected to result in a number of changes to equality self-declarations.

We understand that we have a duty under the Equality Act and PSED to monitor our workforce. To do this effectively we plan to develop and improve monitoring systems for 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 employees in post
- Training
- Promotions
- Harassment and discrimination complaints and other grievances
- Disciplinary proceedings
- Starters and leavers
- Performance management

It is acknowledged that there may be gaps in our internal data. We will therefore take steps to update our information as part of our objectives.

## **6.0 Equality Analysis/Impact assessments**

We will ensure that equality and diversity is at the heart of all we do by conducting a People Impact Assessment (PIA) at the inception and prior to implementation of any change project. PIAs are an essential criteria (i.e. added to meeting paper template) for all papers submitted to management board meetings.

A PIA is a systemic way of finding out whether any of the Fire Authority's policy, procedure or activities, or proposed policy, procedure or activities affects different groups of people in different ways.

PIAs look at both service delivery and workforce matters and will be undertaken for:

- Service we provide
- Policy we implement
- Strategy we write
- Procedure we follow

The aim of the PIA process is 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 and can be the starting point for establishing equality objectives and measures.

PIAs will be followed up by the lead officer responsible for the policy, service, strategy or project, and monitored at six months and twelve months from implementation to verify that there have been no negative impacts on E&D and the evaluation will be recorded.

Our target is to achieve 100 per cent PIA compliance for change programmes, management board papers and procedural implementation or amendment. We will update the PIA procedure as required to reflect up to date best practice.

## **7.0 Employee Engagement**

We will carry out on-going communication and consultation with employee groups and Trade Union representatives. We will use the views and experiences of employees and respond sensitively to employees needs and 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.

Trade unions – on-going engagement with the trade unions occurs on a regular basis via informal meetings and discussions and more formal meetings including the Joint Consultation Forum. Trade unions are regularly consulted on new and updated policies and projects and engaged in equality analysis.

The service involves representative bodies on equality issues in order to develop a constructive and collaborative working relationship. For this purpose E&D is a standing item at the Joint Consultation Forum.

Representative bodies are encouraged to fulfil a positive role in delivering a wide range of corporate service and workforce objectives.

## **8.0 Promoting an Inclusive Working Environment**

The recent publication of our Code of Conduct clearly sets out Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority's required standards as a publicly accountable body which manages Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire and Rescue Service on behalf of the communities it serves.

The Authority aims to:

- Ensure that all employees are aware of the vision, values and behaviours expected within the workplace;
- Improve the Authority's performance through building the skills of a diverse workforce that reflect the community;
- Ensure employees have an understanding of how the Service operates, in order to be as effective as possible within their role.  
We will do this by:
  - Promoting E&D by recognising exceptional contribution to promoting positive values as a category award for employees in the annual Safe Awards process.

Diversity is important from a legal and moral standpoint. Diversity makes business sense – the commercial aspect – effective partnerships and community working is good business practice.

- We will promote and facilitate each department having an Equality and Diversity Champion to promote E&D both internally and externally, and recognise those who excel in this field.
- Identify and train Champions to form an E&D Advisory Group who have a wide diversity representation and an active interest in E&D. The group's terms of reference will include challenging the Authority to strive for future improvements in E&D.
- Challenging behaviours that are not consistent with the Authority's values and taking appropriate action in line with internal procedures, such as the Anti-Bullying and Harassment Procedure when inappropriate behaviours are identified.
- Identify and implement improvement action plans for any learnings taken from cases where we have not met the high standards expected.

### **8.1 CFOA ageing workforce research participation**



Our Head of Human Resources is a member of the CFOA working group, tasked to research the future of an ageing workforce. The research sets out to face the issues and will include, but is not limited to:

- Support to maintain fitness in older workers.
- Support for psychological wellbeing for older workers.
- Support through the menopause, particularly for operational employees.
- Support for employees with responsibilities for both children and elderly parents.
- Intergenerational working.
- Planning for retirement.
- Impact of shift work on older workers.
- Management and motivation of older workers.

We will consider the outcomes of this research which will shape the content of future policies and procedures.

## **9.0 Recruitment**

We can only get the fully diverse skills, competencies and experiences that the fire and rescue service needs by employing a variety of employees from all the communities we serve. We will do this by ensuring that our recruitment practices align to the following principles:

- Advertising of vacancies – target areas which will reach under-represented groups including BME's, females and young people.
- Provide alternative language promotional material, if appropriate.
- Blind-sifting of applicants to remove any unconscious bias.
- Ensure that any alternative access needs are identified before individuals arrive for role-related testing and interview.
- Implementing any reasonable adjustments required through the identification and assessment of disability.

### **9.1 Developing and engaging younger employees**

Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority (BMKFA) have approved the introduction of an Authority-wide Apprenticeship scheme. Our equality objectives are included in the recruitment strategy for this scheme.

Having an ageing operational workforce is an emerging concept for us, as traditionally Firefighters and Officers have been financially tied to leave the

Service after 30 years. The changes to the Fire Fighter Pension Regulations 2015 means that firefighters will need to work until they are older if they want to avail themselves of a full pension. We therefore need to adapt, ensuring we can harness the skills of an older generation of operational employees.

We are committed to the Government's pledge to reduce numbers of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and will look to engage with young people wherever we can.

### **10.0 Equal Pay**

An Equal pay Audit of Support employees was completed in 2013. The outcome was not a risk to the Authority. We will publish the gender pay gap reporting requirements within BMKFA in line with the outcome of the Government Equality Office, Consultation on Mandatory Gender Pay Gap Reporting.

### **11.0 Harassment and Bullying**

New Anti-Bullying and Harassment, Whistleblowing and Code of Conduct procedures have recently been published along with procedures on how to deal with grievances and discipline cases that may arise from time to time.

We monitor advisor cases relating to the Discipline, Dignity at Work and Grievance procedures to ensure that the full abilities and attributes of all employees are recognised based on their competence, not who they are and to ensure that we tackle discrimination and inequality. The Authority's policies and procedures make it clear that discrimination is totally unacceptable and must be eliminated.

### **12.0 Appraisal**

To develop and support employees, recognise achievement and as part of the process, encourage them to become role models across the organisation, all employees are required to undergo an annual appraisal where their commitment to E&D is an essential element. The appraisal process contains an evaluation to ensure employees are delivering an improvement on equality and diversity, based on individual annual performance reviews.

### **13.0 Training Learning and Development**

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

Additional training programmes will include:

- Operational briefings for all employees which will incorporate aspects of impact on individuals or groups in the community.

- 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 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 manager. 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 that 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 positively promote equal opportunities in all situations.
- Provide alternative language training materials if appropriate.
- Challenge discriminatory language or behaviour during training events.
- Implement any reasonable adjustments required through the identification and assessment of disability.

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. We will however provide advance notice of

course arrangements to allow employees to make alternative plans for the duration of the course.

## **14.0 Working with our Communities**

We will ensure we understand the needs of our communities and we will base our decision-making, policies and procedures upon the analysis of relevant information.

### **14.1 Knowing communities**

We will identify where we can best provide services to improve inequalities which lead to increased risk from fire. Every opportunity will be used to share data with partners to improve general and specific gaps across the communities. Our structure will support local delivery of appropriate services to the most vulnerable people. Appreciating the need to deliver relevant support and knowing that 'one size does not fit all' will be key to our success.

We will ensure we work with businesses and understand their needs. We will support businesses though giving appropriate advice and guidance and work with other regulators to decrease unnecessary bureaucracy on effective managers. We will ensure less able managers are supported or compelled to comply with legislation to maintain the safety of their employees and the public.

'Knowing your communities' includes three elements within the framework. These are:

- **Collecting information**  
We have been collecting data from Home Fire Risk Checks, operational incidents and other initiatives which helps understand our communities and their needs.
- **Analysing and using information**  
We appreciate that having the information is only as useful as the analysis applied to it.
- **Sharing information between partners**  
We know that vulnerability to fire comprises a number of complex and inter-connected factors e.g. social isolation, smoking, use of alcohol and drugs, mobility, etc. and whilst we hold a great deal of information, we need to share information with partners to gain as full a picture as possible. This is a reciprocal process where the information we share with others helps ameliorate wider inequalities.

## **15.0 Involving communities**

We work to ensure that we listen to our communities and involve them in shaping our service delivery. Whether that is in creating focus groups in schools to help create fire safety talks to children, or inviting members of the public to participate in establishing healthy living programmes delivered from fire stations. It was only through talking to children at Key Stage 1 that we understood how important pets were when families consider their escape plans. Discussing with the public healthy living messages made us realise that people often found this communication to be patronising and alienated some people.

Working with partners to involve the public will help us understand community needs and the best methods for service delivery. The Fire Service is a trusted 'brand' and this allows us access to the public in ways which other organisations cannot even consider.

'Community engagement and satisfaction' comprises three main elements within the framework:

- **Engagement structures**  
We will ensure we have appropriate methods in place to capture the views of the public.
- **Effective engagement**  
We will ensure communities from across the protected groups are actively participating in and influencing decision-making.
- **Participation in public life**  
We will ensure people feel they have been listened to. We will deliver programmes with people and not merely deliver them to people.

## **16.0 Responsive services and customer care**

We will meet the diverse needs of our local communities and individuals. We appreciate that communities and their needs are dynamic and we know that we need to have a flexible approach mixing short, medium and long-term objectives.

We will always treat our communities with dignity and respect. Our station-based employees will build positive and pro-active relationships with our communities and our partners and feed lessons learned back into the organisation.

'Responsive services and customer care' within the framework comprises the following main elements:

- **Equality analysis/impact assessment**  
We will demonstrate improvements in equality outcomes are being delivered as a result of effective equality analysis/impact assessment, and can demonstrate how negative impacts have been mitigated.
- **Integration into business planning and delivery**  
We will demonstrate that improvements and equality outcomes are being delivered across the business.
- **Accessible services**  
There is increased satisfaction with services amongst all users, including those with protected characteristic.
- **Human rights**  
We will take steps to safeguard the human rights of individuals where these have been threatened.