

**FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES  
EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY STRATEGY 2008 – 2018**

**The Strategy**

**Do you consider that the Strategy sets out the actions which will together drive change? If not, why not? And what would you wish to change?**

West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority broadly supports the production of this strategy. It should act as a means of setting national targets and standards and also of giving a renewed impetus and focus to the Equality and Diversity agenda.

The revision to the employment targets is a sensible move, changing the focus of these targets towards future recruitment will make them more achievable and lead to a greater level of commitment. It is however vital that the actual targets set are at the bottom end of the ranges quoted in the strategy document in order to make them realistic and achievable.

It is pleasing to see the Equality Standard for Local Government is to be a central strand to this strategy, the ESLG should act as an important means of achieving equality and diversity into the everyday work of FRAs. However, it is important that BVPI 2a is mandatory and not optional for FRAs. It is therefore a little surprising that the strategy does not mirror the headings in the ESLG as this would simplify the use of the strategy for practitioners within the FRS. It is accepted that the extra heading of 'accountability' is necessary.

This Fire and Rescue Authority welcomes the proposed role of the Audit Commission within the Comprehensive Performance Assessment process and sees this accountability as a key means of ensuring that real progress is made within this agenda.

**Targets and Monitoring**

**Do you support the principle of recruitment, retention and progression targets and consider they will drive improvement on workforce diversity? If not, why not? And what would you propose should be put in place?**

The principle of these targets is fully supported. These targets act as one of the main drivers for change within the Fire and Rescue Service and as such they are essential.

It is however important that these targets are not seen as the sole focus of the E & D agenda. The Equality Standard for Local Government acts as a vehicle to mainstream equality into our organisation and it is important that these other and wider measures of equality are also fully utilised.

**What are your views on the level at which recruitment targets for women in operational roles and ethnic minority staff should be set (within the ranges proposed), in order to be challenging but achievable, and likely to motivate action?**

The revised targets measure the percentage of the target groups who will become operational staff in future, this is a great improvement on the existing targets which only measure the composition of the workforce. The concept of being given until 2013 to reach the target levels is also welcome and will make it more likely that success can be achieved.

It is vital that the actual targets set are both realistic and achievable. It is the view of WYFRA that the targets should be set at the bottom of the suggested ranges. This does not in anyway imply a lack of commitment to the objective of achieving a more diverse workforce. It is however based on our own experience of trying to do so for a considerable period of time and the difficulties of achieving success.

For black and minority ethnic staff the target should be based on the percentage in the local working population. This is seen as a sensible and realistic target to aim for. Option 2 is seen as being unrealistic and unachievable.

It is important that the definition of 'operational staff' is clearly understood by all FRAs so as to avoid any ambiguity or miscounting.

The target for achieving parity in rates of retention and progression is appropriate.

One of the main ways in which WYFRA seeks to recruit a more diverse workforce is by utilising a comprehensive outreach programme. This has led to a significant increase in the percentage of target groups at the application stage. WYFRA considers that there should be a measurement of attraction rates as part of the overall strategy.

**Do you consider robust monitoring of all strands of diversity achievable, and likely to motivate action?**

WYFRA is pleased that targets have not been set across all 6 diversity strands. This would cause us unnecessary work and increase levels of bureaucracy and also it would be impossible to gain accurate data for some of the equality strands.

Some strands are difficult to monitor and once gathered the data would be of little use to us. For example it is difficult to see the benefit in knowing the religious make up of our workforce in a secular society. It is surely more important that we have comprehensive and appropriate policies in place to ensure that all our employees are treated with dignity and respect regardless of any irrelevant differences.

### **Guidance**

**Are there areas covered by the strategy for which you consider specific guidance for the Fire and Rescue Service is required (in addition to existing guidance developed for the Service or for the public sector in general)?**

Specific guidance for the FRS is not required. It would however be helpful if the strategy document contained 'signposting' so that relevant information can be easily accessed from other organisations e.g. Stonewall and CEHR etc.

**We would also welcome any comments that you may have on the accompanying Impact Assessment (ie, is there anything specific you want Communities and Local Government to collect additional information on ie, costs/benefits?)**

No comments.

### **General Comments**

The remainder of this response makes comments and observations about specific areas of the strategy.

#### **Page 7 – Para 1**

This refers to women, it is difficult to see why BME is not also included.

#### **Page 23 – Para 2**

The review needs to be time bound and should be in line with the provisions of the relevant 'duties'

#### **Page 18 - Vision**

The strategic vision is purely aspirational. Whilst it is appreciated that a high level vision needs to be strategic and broadly based, many of the points covered within the vision are not SMART.

#### **Page 19 – Success Criteria**

Some of the criteria chosen to measure the success of failure of the strategy cannot be directly linked to the strategy. For example, the causes of attacks on firefighters are multi-factorial.

#### **Page 26 (iv) Outcomes**

Not all stress related sickness is due to E & D related issues.

It is difficult to see a link between this strategy and the numbers of women returning to work after maternity leave.

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