



Looking “Inside and Out” - We make
our communities safer

East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service
Inclusion, Equality and Diversity
Strategy

2017-2021



Foreword

East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service (ESFRS) is committed to making our communities safer. We will achieve this by proactively approaching everything we do with fairness and impartiality, engaging and supporting all aspects of diversity in our communities.

ESFRS will continue to improve on past achievements. We will ensure our purpose and commitments are underpinned by values, policy and processes that are inclusive and reflect our current work.

We recognise that the diversity of our staff, volunteers and partners benefits the way we plan and deliver our services to the community. We will strive to be an employer of choice and we will continue to develop the diversity of our workforce at all levels of the organisation, to reflect the diversity of the community we work within.

East Sussex Fire Authority and East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service are proud to comprise of leaders with a reputation for championing equality issues. We are committed to ensuring an equitable approach to “everything we do” and will demonstrate this by delivering high performing services that not only consider the needs of those at greatest risk but also ensure their needs are fully considered in how we shape our services.

Dawn Whittaker

Interim Chief Fire Officer



Safer Communities “Inside and Out”

We know that understanding inclusion, equality and diversity are an integral part of keeping our communities safer, stronger and healthier. One of the main tools for considering the risk to our communities from fire and for securing our population’s general health and wellbeing is our Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP).

There are two key commitments this strategy will support in delivering the IRMP:-

- Delivering high performing services
- Developing a multi-skilled, safe and valued workforce

Making sure we are inclusive

At ESFRS we actively support equality and diversity as everyone’s responsibility and we do this not only in terms of thinking, language, behaviour and values but also through ensuring that our policies and processes are fair, impartial and compliant with legislation.

The decisions we make about our business must consider the needs of everyone. We strive to achieve equality of access, equality of impact and equality of outcome for the services we provide. Our staff use People Impact Assessments which are also known as Equality Impact Assessment (EIA’s), these ensure that the decisions consider the needs of all people. This risk based approach ensures that our projects and plans meet the needs of all the impacts on people.

We have a Fire Authority member with portfolio for Inclusion and our Equality Advisor meets regularly with them. Our Corporate Management Team supports the future direction of the Service and that the strategy is embedded within the organisation. We need to ensure that responsibility for our equality decisions and policies supporting this strategy in practice is taken by all levels within the organisation.

The monitoring of equality, diversity and inclusion activity is supported through a number of formalised mechanisms that ensure compliance and supports the strategy. A HR Strategic Group will be created and this will inform policy and practice, share good practice and facilitate continuous improvement. Other mechanisms include: quarterly updates from the Equalities Advisor and an annual publication of workforce data will be available on our website.

Compliance

ESFRS must comply with The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). This duty requires public bodies to give due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation

- Advance equality of opportunity between different groups
- Foster good relations between different groups

The Public Sector Equality Duty aims involve:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to protected characteristics
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low

This strategy supports our compliance with our legal responsibilities. We will ensure the Service is meeting these requirements, and ensure our information about equalities is transparent and publicly available on our Service website.

Monitoring and review

The Inclusion, Equality and Diversity Strategy will be reviewed annually. The Corporate Management Team and Fire Authority member with portfolio for Inclusion will be briefed on how the Service is meeting the commitments outlined in this strategy. Indications that the Service is not meeting expectations will be addressed and action taken to fulfil obligations.

Structure of this Strategy



It is our aim to weave inclusion, equality and diversity into everything we do.

The recognised framework enabling us to take this approach is the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework. The Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework is based on the Local Government Association's Framework and is designed to help Fire and Rescue Services integrate their commitments to promote equality and diversity into their day-to-day work.

We have therefore developed our strategy with this framework in mind. The framework has five performance areas;

- Knowing your communities
- Leadership, partnership and service commitment
- Community engagement and satisfaction
- Responsive services
- A skilled and committed workforce

Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion themes

1. [Knowing our communities](#)

The public will generally need the Service when an emergency arises. To understand the causes of potential fire and rescue situations so that prevention messages and initiatives are made relevant to the needs of the community, we need to acquire and use information as effectively as possible. We understand that every contact with our communities counts and are essential to our success.

We get much of our information through our work in partnership with other public sector organisations locally and nationally. We know we can improve our response to our community's needs if we are able to effectively hear what they need - Inclusion is about hearing everyone's voice.

We use equality information to inform our decision making in respect of community engagement and internal organisational policy. Our staff Equality Networks volunteer their time and energy to provide advisory support to the organisation alongside professional and personal support to colleagues. Their contribution to our work is of enormous value and we will continue to consult with our staff through the Equality Network and Trade Union representatives.

We will:

1. Encourage staff to participate in Equality Monitoring by demonstrating how data can inform policies and procedures to support the needs of all staff.
2. Ensure information that is disclosed through Equality Monitoring is kept confidentially and is compliant with data protection.
3. Increase staff equality monitoring disclosure by reassuring confidentiality and anonymity whilst effectively using data to improve organisational practice.
4. Provide regular information to support the scrutiny of our performance across the business. Promoting a culture of transparency through openness.
5. Allow time to be given to the chairs of the Staff Equality networks to be used to support effective consultation and understanding of staff needs and impacts.
6. Provide regular forums for People Advocates*, Equality Networks, Representative Bodies and External Reference Groups to speak directly to our Corporate Management Team.
7. Support diverse thinking through cross organisational working; fire stations to be used by all staff groups, and as co-location opportunities with other public services.
8. Use data about the communities of Brighton & Hove and East Sussex from other sources to improve our understanding of the needs and assets in diverse communities.

*People Advocates are employees who volunteer to champion an area of Inclusion and Diversity

2. Leadership, Partnership and Service Commitment

Positive political and managerial leadership at all levels is essential to drive change, maintain commitment and create improvement. At a senior level this will be demonstrated by their commitment through personal impact and by making resources available to deliver improvements.

We see leadership as a skill to be developed across our organisation at all levels as demonstrating and promoting fairness and inclusion is the role of all our employees.

We will:

1. Take every opportunity available for our Fire Authority, Principal Officers and Corporate Management Team, to endorse activity that is inclusive and which promotes the Service as an equal opportunities employer.
2. Record and publish equality data in accordance with the Public Sector Equality Duty so that we can actively use this data to inform our decision making processes.
3. Ensure our senior managers and political leaders visit the workforce and engage with staff about the culture and environment they create and work in.
4. Provide inclusive leadership training to our senior managers.
5. Look to further develop our framework of external reference groups; to help support us with our understanding of under-represented groups and optimise partnership opportunities.
6. Foster professionalism and accountability, support and encourage inclusive behaviour, recognise and share good practice and support managers to manage their teams.
7. Recognise our political leaders have a good understanding of the needs of our community and use this knowledge to ensure equality remains central to the organisational strategic aims and performance.

3. Community Engagement and Satisfaction

We believe that practising inclusion and equality in all that we do and having a workforce that is reflective of the community it serves will help build trust, (as does having a high regard for our stakeholders and transparency in our decision making).

To deliver a diverse workforce and engage with our communities, we must have an inclusive culture - at stations, in offices and in the community. Our culture must celebrate and support diversity, promote trusting and accountable relationships, and celebrate progression.

We know teams and relationships are stronger, safer and more effective when everyone has the opportunity to contribute. We are committed to building partnerships between representative bodies and other public sector services to provide effective support in achieving continuing improvement in performance.

We will:

1. Further develop partnership working with local and national organisations and corporately endorsed inclusion activities with partner organisations, such as Two Ticks, White Ribbon, Stonewall and Mind (Blue Light Initiative).

2. Listen to the community: understanding the many and diverse needs will enable the shaping of an appropriate service.
3. Foster good relations across the workforce and within the communities of East Sussex and Brighton & Hove, in particular, developing our relationships with representatives of minority groups.
4. Develop an inclusive approach to policy making through facilitating engagement with community groups, public sector organisations and stakeholders to ensure meaningful consultation on significant proposals for change.
5. Further develop the mechanisms by which we capitalise on the collaborative work currently undertaken by our City Engagement and Partnership Manager, Community and Business Safety Teams, other blue light agencies, partners, voluntary organisations and minority groups.
6. Create regular engagement forums with under-represented communities to seek their views on any proposals for change.
7. Explore opportunities to put fire stations at the heart of their community by encouraging an 'open' culture that builds on the public's trust of firefighters and develops fire station resources for community groups.
8. Celebrate our equality, diversity and inclusion activity across our communities.

4. [Responsive Services](#)

The monitoring, reviewing and evaluating of our equality, diversity and inclusion activity forms a key part of our ability to advance opportunity as it informs and influences how we behave and serve our community in the future.

We will ensure that equality and fairness are embedded in the delivery of our services to local communities. We will also ensure our services are accessible to all and that they meet the needs of the people we serve.

We will:

1. Ensure that inclusion, equality and diversity are appropriately considered as essential social values across the organisation in areas such as Procurement, HR and Communications where there is known impact on equality outcomes.
2. Embed Equality Impact Assessments (also known as People Impact Assessments) in all of our activities, not only at the start but also during and the end, so that we fully consider the risk to, and needs of those less represented and support an inclusive culture that welcomes diversity.

3. Recognise our bias, by providing targeted training and development to all colleagues, with enhanced training for assessors and hiring managers.
4. Use our local knowledge about hazards, risks and needs in the community and learning from community engagement to inform the measures we put in place and actions we take to improve safety.
5. Develop a mechanism utilising equality data in relation to promoting and enhancing community satisfaction in conjunction with service provision.

5. Skilled and committed workforce

We know that diversity of thought and language can improve our efficiency and effectiveness. The cost and time it takes to recruit and train a new firefighter is considerable.

To deliver an inclusive and diverse workforce, we must have an inclusive culture - at stations, in offices and in the community. Ensuring that all our staff are properly inducted and developed must be a core requirement of our workforce plans.

We will:

1. Increase our workforce diversity, working towards reflecting the community we serve within East Sussex and Brighton & Hove, the development of local and representative recruitment-related targets for Borough Commanders, who will be accountable for engaging their local communities.
2. Use induction and training to ensure all our staff understand what behaviours are expected and what they should expect from others.
3. Establish induction and development pathways for staff which are flexible and support opportunities to work in different teams, projects and places, enabling a range of career progression options.
4. We will ensure that our workforce ambitions are supported by effective employment, retention and development processes, which are fair, open and transparent.
5. We will support and improve employees' understanding of equality and diversity and take robust action to eradicate inappropriate behaviour such as bullying or harassment.
6. We will address issues affecting culture, working practices, facilities, equipment and clothing so that employees can work in a safe and supportive environment.
7. Create strong, inclusive teams through the development of management skills and coaching and mentoring opportunities.

8. Develop our support mechanisms for staff returning after a period of absence to ensure retention.
9. Encourage more staff that are leaving us to use exit interviews, to understand reasons for leaving and identify areas for improvement or change.
10. Invest in apprentice schemes and market our recruitment campaigns in diverse communities proactively to encourage applications from under-represented groups.
11. Provide “taster session” and “have a go” opportunities and support networks for candidates or potential promotion applicants from under-represented groups.
12. Support all staff when taking formal or informal action against bullying and harassment internally and externally when “hate crime and incidents” are reported.
13. Establish a network of People Advocates from across the Service. Supported by the organisation, individuals will act as role models, celebrants and promoters of our activities and key enablers of inclusion, able to offer advice, guidance and support.
14. Develop powerful internal and external communications promoting diversity by showcasing personal stories, highlighting positive contributions by role models and celebrating the progression of staff.
15. Engage with staff to provide an inclusive workplace culture, encouraging early action against intolerance, bullying, victimisation and harassment enabling happy environments in which everyone can thrive and reach their full potential.

A Journey

Our approach to inclusion, equality and diversity work is not one of reaching a destination, but rather one of experiencing a journey, evolving within changing communities and risk. Achieving our purpose and commitments will be part of our continuous development, awareness and review of inclusion within our communities, both “inside and out”, for a safer, more effective and efficient public emergency service.

This strategy is available in other formats and languages upon request.