



AGENDA ITEM: 9

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

19th March 2012

Strategic Equality Plan The Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011

Report by Ruth Simmons, Assistant Chief Fire Officer

Purpose of Report

- 1 To seek Members' approval for the Strategic Equality Plan 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 Compliance with the legislation will be regulated by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). The role of the EHRC under the new law is to protect, enforce and promote equality. This role will be discharged through the provision of guidance, regulation and enforcement activity.

Information

- 6 Our Strategic Equalities Plan sets out our ongoing commitment to ensuring respect and fairness for the residents, elected members, staff members and all visitors to the North Wales area.
- 7 The Specific Duty requires public authorities in Wales to produce a Strategic Equality Plan detailing equality objectives aligned to the regulations, published no later than 1st April 2012.
- 8 The regulations 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.
- 9 The Service's draft plan outlines the key equality objectives identified by our stakeholders and has been designed to build on the achievements of our previous Equality and Diversity Schemes as well as to meet the new legal duties.

- 10 The content of the equality objectives has also been aligned to the:
- requirements of the General Public Sector Equality Duty, and the Specific Regulations 2011 (Wales)
 - North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's Combined Improvement and Risk Reduction Objectives
 - Welsh Local Government Associations Equality Improvement Framework.
- 11 It is envisaged that in the future the Welsh Local Government Associations Equality Improvement Framework will be used as an assessment tool. To aid that assessment the equality objectives are related to the main headings used in the Equality Improvement Framework.
- 12 The plan will be publicised and promoted both internally and externally to raise awareness of the work we are doing. In accordance with the legislative requirements, once published the plan will be reviewed no later than every four years although the Authority may review, revise or remake any objective at any time. Our activity will be monitored to assess the impact on the public and on our employees of the progress we make and reported annually to the Authority.

Recommendations

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