

Report title

Staff Support Groups - Progress Report

Agenda item

6

Meeting

Human Resources, Health & Safety and Equalities Panel

Date

20 January 2009

Report by

Head of Equality Services

Document Number

HRE 303

Summary

This report provides an update on the progress of staff support groups recognised by the Authority.

Recommendation

That the report be noted.

BACKGROUND

1. A deliverable of the Authority Equality Action Plan is to 'continue to provide support to groups of staff who are currently under-represented in the workforce and who have set up network and mutual support arrangements'. Groups recognised by the Authority are consulted on issues relevant to their membership and provide support and guidance to the Authority on policy development and implementation. Support Groups also make a significant contribution to the Authority's community development and involvement agenda.
2. One member from each Support Group is invited to attend Human Resources, Health and Safety and Equalities Panel meetings to enhance the aims and work of the Panel and to ensure that the particular issues of such groups are considered. However, although attendance at the Panel is offered to Support Groups it is not compulsory they attend. Support Groups are given the opportunity to provide a written response to any issues.
3. Support Group members also meet with the Deputy Commissioner and other officers to raise issues of concern and progress initiatives. These meetings take place every 3 months and help to identify any issues that could be clarified at this level.

4. The Support Groups Network Forum is a Training and Development Department initiative to allow for both input into and feedback about training and development across the organisation and specifically to allow Support Groups to offer their own particular perspectives. It also aims to co-ordinate any training and development that the Support Groups feel necessary and to address these both in terms of organisational needs and the support group members aspirations. The Forum also plays a part in co-ordinating targeted training and maximising the use of resources.
5. Over the years the Support Groups have become more pro-active at working together, for example the Networking Women in the Fire Service (NWFS) and Fairness successfully organise a yearly event celebrating International Women's Week and the Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA) has arranged training for all the Support Groups on arranging Events.
6. Support Groups currently recognised by the Authority are:-
 - a. Staff with Disabilities Group
 - b. Fairness
 - c. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Support Group (LGBT)
 - d. Networking women in the Fire Service (NWFS)
 - e. Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA)
 - f. The Irish Society.
7. Support groups have undertaken a range of activities throughout the year that support the aims and values of the Authority. The following information has been provided by the Support Groups on the activities they have undertaken since the last report.

Staff with Disabilities Group

8. The group is open to both operational and non operational disabled staff members, it is also open to staff who have a legitimate interest in disability issues. The group meet every quarter.
9. The Group's regular meetings are attended by a diverse cross section of the LFEPA's disabled staff – both FRS and operational personnel. These meetings, although sometimes frustrated by the lack of progress made since the last one, always provide an excellent networking opportunity and the chance for attendees to have a better understanding of the issues affecting their peers around the service.
10. **Firesign** – The *Firesign* group, a sub group of the Staff with Disabilities Group, meets once a month to network and enhance the British Sign Language (BSL) skills of individual members. Not only does this add to the network of skilled signers within the Authority, but it also facilitates a greater understanding of the issues affecting Deaf and hearing impaired staff.

Fairness

11. Since its formation in 2004, Fairness (a Support Group for BME staff in LFEPA), has continued to support staff and work closely with senior figures in other organisations and with other LFEPA support groups to successfully raise awareness of issues relating to BME staff.

Fairness and Health Living

12. Women members of Fairness have continued to work with the Healthy Living team and have been offered the chance to join the Shape-up-Sister research project which is being run by the University College of London. This is a new on-line healthy living programme designed for African Caribbean women.

International Women's Day

13. In conjunction with Networking Women in the Fire Service, Fairness hosted a workshop to celebrate International Women's Day in March 2008. The theme of the event was 'Inspirational Women'. The format of the day was designed for guests to have the opportunity to network and communicate with fellow colleagues, representatives from the Authority's support groups and external attendees. The event was open to all staff.
14. The event was opened by Rita Dexter, Director of Corporate Services and the programme consisted of speakers from Brigade Control, National Black Women's Network and Station cooks. The keynote speaker was Lucy Philips Deputy Chief Fire Officer Hereford and Worcester. The workshops included 'A New Road to Success', 'Digital Photography' and 'Career Coaching for Cooks'.

African Caribbean Leukaemia Trust (ACLT)

15. Fairness and the FBU's Black and Ethnic Minority Members (B&EMM) worked in partnership with the ACLT to encourage people from ethnic minority and mixed race communities to register as bone marrow donors.
16. Since 2002, Fairness and B&EMM have worked in conjunction with the ACLT by hosting a range of events to encourage registration. This year's event at Lewisham Fire Station was supported by the Green watch who did some impressive drills. In total, 58 new potential bone marrow donors registered on behalf of the Anthony Nolan Trust and 33 on the National Blood Service register. Members of Fairness also took part in the Adidas 5k Women's Challenge – Hyde Park – 7th September 2008 donating sponsorship money to ACLT
17. Sadly, after a brave fight with an illness not related to his cancer Daniel de Gale died on 8 October 2008. It was Daniel's inspiring story that spearheaded the drive to encourage more people from ethnic minority communities to register as donors. Daniel's funeral in South London was attended by the Duchess of York and fire service personnel formed a guard of honour.

Notting Hill Carnival

18. Members of Fairness continue to work with the Positive Action team to attend community events. The most recent event was the Notting Hill Carnival on the August Bank Holiday weekend where members of Fairness assisted with stewarding of the float.

Black History Month

19. The aim of this season's Black History Month (BHM) was to actively encourage older Caribbean people to sign up for home fire safety visits. On Saturday 14 June 2008, Fairness members in conjunction with B&EMM attended Lewisham Shopping Centre and Lewisham Fire Station to reach their target groups. Additionally on Sunday 22 June 2008, staff participated in the 60th Anniversary of the arrival of the HMS

Windrush. Members also attended celebrations at Clapham Common where large numbers of that target groups were present. Members also played an active role in the BHM celebrations on Tuesday 7 October 2008 held at Brigade Headquarters.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Support Group (LGBT)

20. The LGBT group is open to all LGBT staff across the brigade. The group supports LFEPA's commitment to LGBT equality and acts as an advisor on these issues.
21. The LGBT continues to work with the GLA groups, the City of London Police and the Ambulance Service in order to raise LGBT awareness in the organisation as a whole.
22. The LGBT have also had a presence at 6 Pride events this year – London Pride, Stockholm Pride, Brighton Pride, 2 Black Prides and Soho Pride (3 in conjunction with the Metropolitan Police). LGBT is also involved in the Equality and Diversity Seminars for Service Delivery alongside other members of the other Support Groups.
23. The LGBT Support Group is also continuing to develop appropriate mechanisms for supporting LGBT members in the workplace, particularly those who have just joined the organisation and/or those not 'out' at work. LGBT also continues to work with our straight allies who have become mentors to some of the members.

Networking Women in the Fire Service (NWFS)

24. In December 2007 – NWFS circulated details of Assessment Workshops available to assist in promotional prospects.
25. In January 2008 – NWFS were consulted over the CLG Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-2018.
26. On 12 March NWFS held an International Women's Day event at Southwark Training Centre which was organised by Fairness and the NWFS support groups. They had a number of speakers in the morning session which included Lucy Phillips, the Deputy Chief Officer of Hereford and Worcester FRS. The afternoon consisted of workshops and the feedback was very favourable. The event was publicised in the NWFS Newsletter and also the London Regional Newsletter. 128 staff attended and delegates were from London staff, together with staff from Suffolk and Hampshire.
27. NWFS promoted an event called Living Library in May and a London Female Firefighter attended for our group.
28. In April – the first NWFS Gala Awards Evening took place at De Vere Belton Woods Hotel in Belton Lincolnshire. Over 20 very deserving Award recipients (both female and male) from across the spectrum of Fire Service staff received awards in recognition of their achievements and contributions in support of women in the Fire Service family. 100 people attended to celebrate with the recipients. The Awards given covered a period of 14 years.
29. In June – NWFS launched our own London Regional NWFS Newsletter. We are planning for this to be a regular Newsletter to keep its members updated.

30. On 8 October - the National NWFS AGM and Women's Development Day took place. This was kindly hosted by Hereford and Worcester FRS in Worcester, and 9 staff from London were sponsored to attend. 97 staff attended from Brigades across the Country. The workshops included USAR, Incident Command, The Very Real Personal Safety Course, Achieving Success in Equalities and Stress Management.
31. NWFS meet regularly with Senior Management and Equality Services to discuss the work of the Support Group. We also meet with other Project Managers where the Support Group are consulted on changes being implemented.
32. NWFS has developed a presentation which its committee members use in briefing staff groups and new staff about the work of NWFS.

Future events

- 20 March 2009 – Celebration of International Women's Day event planned to be held at Southwark Training Centre and hosted jointly by NWFS and Fairness Support Groups.
- NWFS – National Conference planned for Moreton in the Marsh 12 – 14 June 2009.
- NWFS Awards Gala evening 11 September 2009.

The Irish Society

33. The Irish Society membership is continuing to grow with approximately 270 London Fire Brigade staff expressing an interest in membership.
34. With the support of the London Fire Brigade, the Irish Society has established a constitution and has become a recognised support group within our organisation.
35. The Society has now taken an active role in working with and supporting other Support Groups with their activities, partaking in the Support Group forums as well as providing support, information and advice on issues affecting our staff and our communities.

Charity Work

36. This year the Society has undertaken some fund raising for two fire-fighters in Bray County Wicklow who tragically died whilst fire fighting in their home town.
37. A benefit dance was held in the Irish Centre, Camden, London, this function was a well supported event attended by the Irish Ambassador, David Cooney. The event raised £5,000 and members of the Irish Society travelled to Bray County to present the cheque to the families.
38. The Irish Society has also made a contribution to the Warwickshire Fire fighters Fund to support the families of the four firefighters who tragically lost their lives fighting a factory fire in Warwickshire.

Events

39. The executive committee has established a draft for a calendar of forthcoming events which include:
- Social Event Dance 30th January 2009. Venue TBC
 - Irish Society Launch 7th March 2009. GAA Ruislip TBC
 - St Patrick's Day Parade 15th March 2009 Marble Arch to Whitehall
 - Cultural trip to Ireland May 2009.
40. Other events are being proposed to support Irish National teams sporting events and GAA sporting events. A number of social events are being proposed that will be held at short notice enabling members to enjoy live Irish music and entertainment.

Community work

41. Permanent links have now been established with the traveller communities in West London including the Irish Traveller Association to improve relationships between LFB staff and traveller communities and to also deliver organisational Community Fire Safety messages to a previously hard to reach section of the community.
42. Exploratory work is being undertaken to look at youth engagement with the traveller community via LFB cadet schemes.
43. Members of the Irish Society are developing contacts to support work within Brent to support Community Fire Safety initiatives with Brent Irish volunteer groups.

Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA)

44. AFSA has been continuing with its work of providing support to its members and has been engaged in several projects. The Executive Committee, consisting of FRS and operational representatives meets regularly to discuss the progress of the Support Group and shares updates on Brigade and external issues.
45. Members of AFSA were awarded the runner up position at the Equality and Diversity Fire Service awards in May for their work in founding the Association and representatives from AFSA have attended several different support group and UK FRS functions. These included the International Aid conference in Manchester and the Diversity week organised by Essex Fire and Rescue Service. AFSA has also been involved in the delivery and attendance of Support Group sessions, including helping at a project and event management training session, which was extremely well attended and is hoped will be a stepping stone to other training sessions.
46. Youth and community engagement have been a key theme for much of AFSA's recent work. AFSA members have also attended "Diwali and Eid in the Square" celebrations delivering fire safety and recruitment advice. Presentations regarding engagement with the Asian community and the work of AFSA have been delivered at Borough Equality Meetings, Stations and Diversity Cultural Awareness training sessions. The Association has also been in consultation with Hazel Blears regarding this important issue. Further notable partnerships include BERR and CLG to show support of the diversity month, consultations with CFOA and EDSC regarding national strategy and agreement with Operation Florian and the Fire Service College to support Uganda Fire Service Aid. This agreement has followed international aid to Tanzania where equipment and training was delivered to Dar as Salaam in March

2008. AFSA have also advised South Wales FRS on recruitment matters and continues with its mentoring work with Southwark Training Centre trainees.

47. Inspirational role models and Youth Engagement formed the theme of AFSA's recent conference and dinner in celebration of diversity. The Conference was extremely well attended, and speakers included Sadiq Khan, the Fire Service Minister, Roy Bishop, Deputy Commissioner for the LFB and Narinder Dail, a Watch Manager from the LFB. During the afternoon delegates attended a series of workshops. AFSA has received positive feedback as well as requests from individuals and services wishing to join AFSA locally and nationally. It was at this conference that AFSA launched itself as a national association with the aim of sharing good practice and developing partnership working with other Fire and Rescue Services. This is a new challenge and one that AFSA is looking forward to meeting. AFSA have produced a Multi Faith Calendar 2009, and Enlighten – an AFSA Newsletter.

Finance

48. Training and Development hold a budget of £25,000 to provide training and development for support group members and to promote initiatives organised by Support Groups.

Conclusion

49. It is envisaged that the groups will continue to carry out the following and also include new initiatives:-
- Have regular meetings with the Deputy Commissioner and Head of Equality Services;
 - Encourage group members to participate at events and programmes;
 - Have clear aims and objectives;
 - Form links with Support Groups in the GLA functional bodies; and
 - Work with Training and Development Department to provide innovative training and support options for their members to enhance staff progression.

Authority's Strategic Objectives

50. Support group activities meet strategic aim 6 – Principles - operating in accordance with our values, and ensuring that safety, sustainability, partnership and diversity run through all our activities.

Head of Legal and Democratic Services comments

51. Support to groups of staff who are currently under-represented in the workforce is consistent with:

- (1) The Authority's duty under section 404 of the GLA Act 1999 "to have regard to the need –
 - (a) to promote equality of opportunity for all persons irrespective of their race, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation or religion;
 - (b) to eliminate unlawful discrimination; and
 - (c) to promote good relations between persons of different racial groups, religious beliefs and sexual orientation." and
- (2) The Authority's general equality duties under section 76A(1) of the sex Discrimination Act 1975, section 71(1) of the race relations Act 1976 and section 49A(1) of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Head of Finance Comments

52. It was agreed at Directors' budget review earlier this year that the budget of £25,000 should be moved to Equality Services. This will be actioned for the 2009-10 Budget.

Environmental Implications

53. There are no environmental implications associated with the contents of this report.

Equalities Implications

54. The establishment of a range of Support Groups enables the Authority to meet its duty to positively promote good community relations and not to discriminate. Support Groups provide an informed consultation forum and assist the Authority to improve the service offered to members of minority communities. All Support groups have as an aim to assist in the progression and retention of their members.

List of Appendices to this report:

None

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985	
List of background documents Equalities Action Plan Report	
Proper officer	Patricia Oakley - Head of Equality Services
Contact officer	Patricia Oakley
Telephone	0208 555 1200 x 30651
Email	patricia.oakley@london-fire.gov.uk