

MEETING

**Human Resources Equalities and  
Health and Safety Panel**

AGENDA ITEM

**8**

MEETING DATE

13 September 2007

DOCUMENT NUMBER

**HRE 256**

SUBJECT

**Staff Support Groups Progress Report**

REPORT

(5.09.07) by the Head of Equalities

**Summary**

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

**RECOMMENDATION**

That the report be noted.

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**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, Equalities and Health and Safety Panel meetings to enhance the aims and work of the Panel and to ensure that the particular issues of such groups are considered. Panel members also meet with the Deputy Commissioner and other officers to raise issues of concern and progress initiatives.
3. Support groups currently recognised by the Authority are:-
  - Staff with Disabilities Group
  - Fairness
  - Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender support group (LGBT)
  - Networking Women in the Fire Service (NWFS)
  - Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA)
  - The Irish Society.

**CURRENT POSITION**

4. Support groups have undertaken a range of activities throughout the year that support the aims and values of the Authority to serve and protect the people of London by minimising risk and to develop our staff and reflect the community. The following information has been provided by the Support Groups

on the activities they have undertaken since the last report.

### **Staff with Disabilities Group**

5. 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 meets quarterly. Group members have:-
- participated in training forums organised by the Employers Forum on Disability to help develop group members and to help them inform the Brigade's disability policies;
  - assisted in the delivery of Disability Awareness training for Brigade staff;
  - assisted in the development of a disability awareness training and enforcement package for Fire Safety Inspecting Officers;
  - supported individual disabled staff in the workplace regarding management and development issues and appeals in promotion processes;
  - continued to support Fire Sign – (a British Sign Language study group). The group has provided a forum for staff members to influence the Brigade's policies affecting the Deaf community and to provide sign language and deaf awareness training throughout the organisation;
  - continued supported the new GLA disabled staff group;
  - helped to initiate and support the accessible IT strategy and pilot project for the Brigade;
  - provided information and advice on best practice for achieving accessibility at the new Brigade HQ building in Union Street; and
  - participated in the Equality Management Board.

### **Fairness**

6. In the last year the 'Fairness' Support Group (for BME staff) have been engaged in the following events and activities, working both with other organisations and with other Fire Brigade support groups.

#### **Fairness and Healthy Living**

7. Fairness was approached by the University College of London, who are developing a weight management and healthy living programme for black women in the UK, to participate in a group discussion.
8. The session took place in October 2006 and 8 members of Fairness attended to give their views and ideas on the topic.

#### **International Women's Day**

9. In conjunction with Networking Women in the Fire Service, we hosted a half day workshop to celebrate International Women's Day on in March 2007.

10. The event was open to all staff and included opportunities to network and communicate with fellow colleagues and representatives from the Authority's various support groups.
11. The event was opened by Barbara Riddell, Director of Resources, and the programme of the day included speakers from the Suzy Lamplugh Trust on 'Personal Safety'; a nutritionist from the University College of London on 'Healthy Living'; 'Learning Sign Language'; and 'How Strong Is Your Brand' which was a demonstration by the National Black Women's Network of various brands of make up.

#### **African Caribbean Leukaemia Trust (ACLT)**

12. In June, for the second year running, Fairness worked in partnership with B&EMM (BME section of the FBU) and the UK based charity African Caribbean Leukaemia Trust (ACLT) to raise awareness of people from BME communities, as well as to add to the numbers of potential donors on the Anthony Nolan Trust and the National Blood Service registers.
13. The Bone Marrow Registration took place at Lewisham Fire Station and was supported by members of both Fairness and B&EMM.
14. In total, 75 new potential bone marrow donors registered on behalf of the Anthony Nolan Trust, and 35 people registered on the National Blood Service register.

#### **Notting Hill Carnival**

15. Members of Fairness continue to work with the Outreach Team to attend career/community and lifestyle events, the most recent being the GLA Capital Woman event.
16. The most recent event was the Notting Hill Carnival, on August Bank Holiday weekend, where members of Fairness assisted with stewarding of the float.

#### **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Group**

17. The LFEPA LGBT group is open to all staff across the brigade. The group supports LFEPA's commitment to LGBT equality and acts as an advisor on these issues.
18. It has been quite successful and very busy for the group in the last year as again we hosted on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2007 a Pan-London networking event in conjunction with Equalities, with attendees from each of the GLA groups, the City of London Police and the ambulance service. A panel of speakers at this event included representatives from Stonewall, the GLA, the GPA and the National FBU, together with the Deputy Commissioner Roy Bishop. We continue to work with all these groups in order to raise LGBT awareness in the organisation as a whole.
19. We have also had a presence at 5 prides this year – Pride Scotia (Edinburgh), London Pride, Brighton Pride, Black Pride and Soho Pride (2 in conjunction with the Metropolitan Police). We are proud that the Deputy Commissioner, other members of LFEPA and other brigades marched alongside us at London and Brighton. We are also involved in the Equality and Diversity Seminars for Service Delivery alongside other members of the other support groups.
20. In October members of the LGBT Support Group will be attending the Avon Fire & Rescue LGBT Conference in Bristol to share best practice with other Fire & Rescue Services.

21. The group is also in contact with the IT and Equalities departments to update Hotwire so more information is available about our group, for example upcoming events, contacts of the committee members and outside organisations (such as the Lesbian & Gay Switchboard).
22. The LGBT support group seeks to improve the working environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) staff within the brigade.
23. These aims shall be achieved by:-
  - Providing a support network for members;
  - Developing a forum for LGBT staff to share experiences, problems and solutions;
  - Working closely with other networks and associations;
  - Being a voice for LGBT staff;
  - Fostering better relations between LGBT staff and other staff;
  - Fostering a better partnership between management and staff; and
  - Supporting staff interested in career progression including access to training.

These services shall be offered through:-

- a brochure which will advertise and explain the services,
  - a variety of regular social gatherings which all members and their guests can attend, and
  - business meetings which will run the group and represent the group in any discussions with the Authority.
24. The 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.

### **Networking Women in the Fire Service (NWFS)**

25. London sent a delegation of 70 staff (23 firefighters, 6 cooks, 4 control, 37 support staff) to the National NWFS Conference in July 2006. The event attracted a total of 310 delegates and trainers. 29 different workshops on offer over the weekend ranged from Operational, Practical and Seminar style sessions. The conference catered for staff with dependant children and this enabled staff to attend with a total of 18 children.
26. On 10th October 2006 the National AGM took place at the Brigade HQ of East Sussex in Eastbourne. Workshops were included in the event on Conflict Management, Leadership and Personal Finance Planning. 14 staff attended from London.
27. Staff from London Fire Brigade were elected on to the National NWFS Network Committee at the AGM in October 2006.

28. In November 2006 a German National Conference took place. An NWFS member Sue Douglas from Community Fire Safety put herself forward to attend. She attended representing the London Fire Brigade and the NWFS.
29. In December 2006:
  - we attended a meeting with the Deputy Commissioner and the other support group representatives and agreed upon the forthcoming events for the following year;
  - we sent committee members to pilot the 2 day Equality and Diversity Course; and
  - our Committee organised and completed a Myers Briggs exercise to identify our different styles of working in order to improve how our committee can work effectively together as a group.
30. The Committee decided upon a list of courses to give us the skills required to run a successful committee. These courses have been sent to the Training Service Desk to facilitate our requirements.
31. The Committee agreed that it would be beneficial for the membership to set up some social events. The following three events were organised by four of our members of staff. The Committee gave support by publicising and attending the events.
  - At the end of January 2007 a quiz in Aveley, which attracted a number of NWFS Members.
  - Social event for the NWFS membership on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2007.
  - On 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2007 a further quiz held at Lambeth this again attracted a number of NWFS members and the sum of £484 was raised, which was donated to the Burns Family Group at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital.
32. On the 29th March we jointly organised an event with Fairness Support Group to celebrate International Women's Day. The event attracted approximately 80 staff which also included staff from other fire and rescue services.
33. Committee members also gave support to other support groups by attending events organised by those groups e.g. AFSA Conference and Dinner Dance and the Pride Breakfast.
34. In July 2007 the National NWFS Conference was held at the Fire Service College at Moreton in the Marsh. London Fire Brigade sponsored 69 staff to attend. Amongst these were 25 staff who had not attended one of these events previously. The delegation incorporated 20 firefighters, 5 cooks, 3 control and 40 admin staff. The total attendance at the Conference this year was 359 – this was 241 delegates and 118 trainers/staff/others. Amongst the London delegation were 2 Deaf staff and there were facilities in place to support the 19 children attending.
35. Two Committee members currently represent NWFS on the Control Project Sounding Board to give support on the forthcoming National Control Project, the most recent meeting having taken place at a completed site of the Long Eaton, East Midlands Regional Control Centre on 13<sup>th</sup> August.
36. The Committee have assisted with the start of setting up a Pilot Mentoring scheme for Career Development for Admin staff. 17 staff have registered an interest at this stage and a programme is starting to be rolled out in September 2007.

37. Also for 2008 there are plans to run a further International Women's Day in partnership with the Fairness Group in March 2008.
38. The London Regional Committee attend the following meetings to give input:
  - The Support Groups Training and Development Forum facilitated by Peter Watkins.
  - Representative Bodies Meetings for Union Street facilitated by Ben Cameron
  - HR and Equalities & Health and Safety Panel Meetings

### **Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA)**

39. AFSA is an inclusive support group that currently has over 80 members; operational and non-operational staff, Asians and non-Asians. Currently the Executive Committee meet approximately every 2 months and wider members meetings are planned to take place 4 times a year.
40. Over the last 12 months AFSA have organised and been involved in a number of activities which demonstrate its commitment to raising the profile of Asian staff and associated issues within the fire service and with local community groups. This has included:

#### **London based events and work**

41. We supported Diwali community engagement events In Southall November 2006.
42. We organised planned and delivered a conference and dinner dance. Over 100 delegates attended the conference and approximately 350 people attended the dinner dance. The conference provides a good example of the work of AFSA. This event met many of the core aims of the group. During this event AFSA was able to:
  - improve understanding of issues facing Asian members of staff and the Asian community;
  - improve the cultural competencies of all delegates and guests at the dinner dance by exploring cultural differences of our different communities;
  - support community fire Safety education;
  - support recruitment of under-represented groups from the Asian community; and
  - raise funds for Asian Linked charities. (This event raised over £2,500)
43. We worked with the Communications Department to deliver the Vaisakhi event at Southall. This is the largest and most influential Sikh Gurdwara (temple) in the UK and it holds an annual procession to mark Vaisakhi. People from a variety of backgrounds, faiths and cultures attend this event. A fire appliance took part in the parade and fire service staff actively participated in the event. Southall fire station was open during the day for community members to visit and receive fire safety and recruitment advice.
44. We worked with the LFEP Community Safety Department to secure a relationship and working arrangement whereby AFSA can advise on the implementation of the community safety strategy to target and access ethnic minorities in the delivery of community safety initiatives.
45. We have worked with Station Managers to advise on a number of initiatives and local events to get across recruitment and community safety messages.

## **External engagements events**

46. AFSA is a standing member of the national equality and diversity stakeholder group (EDSG) and has been invited to be full partners on CLG and CFOA equality and diversity reports and strategies.
47. AFSA attended meetings in 2006 & 2007 at the CLG for -
  - the development of the Business Case for Diversity;
  - the new Equality and Diversity Strategy; and
  - the launch of the Women's Awareness Campaign
48. AFSA is working with the Communities and Local Government and CFOA on breathing apparatus to lead on developing a technical solution to the issue of breathing apparatus and facial hair. AFSA has also held meeting with officers in London to discuss how the issue can be overcome and feedback on national developments. AFSA will continue to actively pursue this issue and ensure that it remains on the fire service agenda.
49. We have worked with the National Community Safety centre within the CLG to advise on the implementation of the national community multi faith safety strategy which targets and access ethnic minorities in the delivery of community safety initiatives.

## **The Irish Society**

50. No report provided.

## **Finance**

51. Training and Development have allocated £25,000 from existing budgets to provide training and development for support group members and to promote initiatives organised by Support Groups.

## **Environmental Impact**

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

## **Equality Impact**

53. There is positive impact with regard to race, gender, disability, faith and religion, and sexual orientation. The impact on age diversity is neutral, although all groups are open to staff in all age groups.

## **Conclusion**

52. It is envisaged that the groups will continue to:
  - have regular meetings with the Deputy Commissioner and Head of Equalities;
  - 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 to provide innovative training and support options for their members to enhance staff progression.

<b>LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985</b>	
<b>List of background documents</b>	
Equality Action Plan (incorporating the Race equality Scheme) 2002-03/05 – progress report – FEP 499	
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<b>FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 – LFEPA Publication Scheme</b>	
This document appears in the publication scheme under:	<b>Category:</b> Management arrangements and decision making
	<b>Topic:</b> Authority, committee and panel meetings
	<b>Class:</b> Panel agendas, minutes and reports
It also appears in the publication scheme under:	<b>Category:</b> Working for LFEPA
	<b>Topic:</b> Equality and Fairness
	<b>Class:</b> Equality Action Plan and Race Equality Scheme
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