

Equality support groups policy

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Owner: **Assistant Director, People Services**
Responsible work team: **Inclusion**

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This policy sets out the Brigade's arrangements for Equality Support Groups (ESGs) and applies to all employees.
- 1.2 The Brigade is committed to promoting equality, embracing equality, diversity and inclusion as well as promoting the importance of togetherness in building strong teams, where you are treated with respect and their contribution is valued.
- 1.3 The Brigade recognises that difference comes in many forms, including, but not limited to those defined in the Equality Act 2010 as protected characteristics. The Brigade believes that when you can work in an environment that is truly inclusive, you will feel a sense of belonging that will lead to being happier and feel able to contribute more and deliver better outcomes for Brigade and the communities we serve.
- 1.4 ESGs are essential to the delivery of these and are an integral part of the Togetherness Strategy as well as the delivery of the Brigade's commitments, plans and strategies.
- 1.5 This policy should be applied in line with the Brigade's values:
 - Service – We put the public first.
 - Courage – We step up to the challenge.
 - Learning – We listen so that we can improve.
 - Teamwork – We work together and include everyone.
 - Equity – We treat everyone fairly according to their needs.
 - Integrity – We act with honesty.

2 Definitions

- 2.1 Protected characteristics: the term defined by the Equality Act (2010) given to groups that are protected under the Act from unlawful discrimination in employment or provision of goods, services or facilities to the public. The protected characteristics are: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex and sexual orientation.
- 2.2 ESG is the term the Brigade use for a group of people with a shared interest or characteristic (sometimes protected) which has been approved in line with this policy.
- 2.3 Equality support group network is the term for the network comprising the chairs of the equality support groups (which includes the equality support group network chair and vice-chair). It has a quarterly forum to which all equality support groups chairs are invited.
- 2.4 A member is an employee of the Brigade who joins an ESG.
- 2.5 Chair: the person elected by the members to chair the work of the ESG. Each group may vary the title of their chair, and election process as defined within their constitution.
- 2.6 Vice-chair: the person elected by the members to act as vice-chair of the ESG and provide crucial support to the chair.
- 2.7 A charter is the document which an ESG will draft every year outlining the officers of the group, main goals and activities to meet these goals, which will help to set out how they will add value and influence the Brigade, and enable the Belonging, Inclusion and Wellbeing team to evaluate the group's success. A template charter can be found here on Hotwire.

- 2.8 Ordinary members are any members of an ESG who are not in leadership positions of the group.
- 2.9 Allies are people who may not share the characteristic that connects members of an ESG, but who advocate for, sponsor and drive change for that group. They may educate others, openly use their voices to challenge prejudice and raise awareness as well as sponsor and mentor where appropriate. Allies can be of all ranks and grades; however, each ESG should have a senior member of staff who volunteers to become an official ally for each group. That ally is responsible for supporting the committee and providing continuity, giving support to the chair and ensuring they have access to guidance and giving platform to equality support issues. They should attend events (ideally across groups, particularly in relation to intersectional issues), find ways to resolve issues structurally and have oversight of group activity. A list of senior allies of each ESG can be found on Hotwire here.

3 Equality support groups

3.1 A list of approved ESGs and their leads can be found on Hotwire here. The approved ESGs, as of 28 November 2023 comprises of the following:

- Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA)
- Black & Ethnic Minority Members (BEMM) – FBU Group
- Disability Working Group (DWG)
- Dyslexia and Neuro Diverse Support Group
- Emerald Society – Irish Group
- Fairness – Black and Ethnic Minority Group
- LGBT+ – Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity / Expression
- Menopause Action Group (MAG)
- Mental Health Support
- Military Veterans Support Group
- Parents and Carers
- Phoenix – Domestic Abuse Group
- Women in the Fire Service (WFS)
- Women's Advisory Committee (WAC) – FBU Group

4 Purpose of an equality support group

4.1 Each ESG will have a clear purpose, set out in its constitution. Broadly, ESGs exist to:

- (a) Provide independent and confidential support, advice and guidance to their members, signposting where relevant including to a trade union;
- (b) provide a social network for their members and to promote opportunities for social networking internally and externally;
- (c) provide feedback to the organisation on behalf of their members relating to policies, processes, procedures and strategies;
- (d) provide peer to peer networking to members;
- (e) offer mentoring and coaching to members;
- (f) coordinate training, professional development and learning opportunities for their members;
- (g) offer support services to support personal and employment issues of their members;

- (h) assist in the identification of training needs and sign posting in relation to training provision with equality, diversity and inclusion implications. This may include advising the Brigade's training provider(s);
- (i) exploring internal and external development opportunities for their members;
- (j) collaborating with other equality support networks on shared issues;
- (k) devising campaigns and activities to benefit its members and Brigade; and run events to facilitate the above; and
- (l) review Equality Impact Assessments.

5 Establishing an equality support group

- 5.1 In order for an ESG to be formally recognised by the Brigade, and to be able to access the full support of the Brigade, it must:
- (a) Adopt the standard ESG constitution which clearly demonstrates how its work benefits the Brigade, supports its members and London's diverse communities.
 - (b) Provide a charter which outlines the main goals, activities and officers of the group, which will be updated as and when required.
 - (c) Demonstrate that it has at least five (5) members, this is to ensure the group is sustainable and that there are enough members to create a committee and provide support for each other.
- 5.2 The Belonging, Inclusion and Wellbeing Team will review the ESG charters on an annual basis, or as and when the document is edited, to ensure they have continued approval.
- 5.3 The Belonging, Inclusion and Wellbeing Team will be responsible for assessing an ESG application against the criteria set out at point 5.1 above and will ordinarily respond to applicants within 20 working days of submitting their application to create an equality support group.
- 5.4 An approved ESG will be expected to work towards the aims, actions and objectives in the organisational strategy whilst also challenging the Brigade and holding it to account for delivering that strategy.
- 5.5 Where an ESG application is denied, a written statement will be given to the group outlining the reasons for rejection. The person drafting the application will be offered feedback and support if an application is rejected by the Belonging, Inclusion and Wellbeing Team. If an application is rejected for any reason, the applicant will be able to go through an appeals process:
- An appeal may be made to the Director for People Services, outlining the reason for the appeal and attaching evidence to support the appeal. The Director for People Services will respond directly to the applicant and either reverse the decision or uphold the appeal. No further process of appeal is possible after this has been concluded.

6 Equality support group governance

- 6.1 Each ESG constitution will set out:
- (a) The name of the group;
 - (b) the purpose of the group;
 - (c) the aims and objectives of the group aligning to the organisation's strategies and plans;

- (d) the criteria for membership and application process;
 - (e) the composition of the executive committee (the group leaders) including number and description of roles and their decision-making powers;
 - (f) how other decisions are made including how the committee vote;
 - (g) how amendments are made to the constitution, including how the group is dissolved by its members;
 - (h) the structure of meetings including general meetings and referendums;
 - (i) how meetings and decisions are recorded and reported;
 - (j) how progress against aims and objectives will be measured and reported;
 - (k) how annual membership numbers will be measured and reported; and
 - (l) responsibilities of executive committee members, including respecting confidentiality.
- 6.2 As a minimum, each ESG will have an elected chair and vice-chair forming their executive committee. Each group will have a maximum of five leadership roles available, but they may ask for permission for expansion from the Belonging, Inclusion and Wellbeing Team if more are needed. These leadership roles will be recorded as a stand-alone objective by line managers, and their work in this space will be recognised.
- 6.3 Each equality support group will be required to keep a list of its members securely and in accordance with Policy number 351 - Data protection and privacy policy and completed data protection impact assessment. ESGs will be required to share the number of active members it has at the end of each year and upon request to the Belonging, Inclusion and Wellbeing Team.
- 6.4 List of members can be defined as those who sign up to join the group and are on their mailing lists. Each group is required to update this list on a bi-annual basis by requesting members to renew their membership. ESG members should be encouraged to play an active role in the organisation and delivery of the activities for their groups. As part of the evaluation of their activities, ESGs will report annually to the Belonging, Inclusion and Wellbeing Team the number of staff that have attended their events.
- 6.5 Each ESG is expected to actively contribute to meetings and perform in line with their charter and constitution, and the Belonging, Inclusion and Wellbeing teams will work with groups who may need extra support to do so. Failure to do so may result in the Brigade suspending support and resources to that group. A group will be disbanded by emailing the members and removing references online.

7 Supporting equality support group executive committee members

- 7.1 The Brigade believes that ESGs provide valuable insight and feedback to improve how we operate. As a result, the Brigade will support committee members to fulfil their roles.
- 7.2 The Brigade also believes that running an ESG provides a platform for you to develop your skills and experience. Leadership roles are eligible for additional support from the Brigade including training and development and as a result the total number on each ESG are limited. It is recommended that your wish to apply for leadership roles are supported by their line managers, who will recognise and support this as a stretch opportunity.
- 7.3 The Brigade will organise specific training for the chair and vice-chairs of all ESGs at least once every two years and specific training for the advisory role.

- 7.4 Committee members with specific roles as outlined in their approved constitution are entitled to:
- (a) Attend committee meetings in work time or as detached duty, by giving at least five working days' notice to line managers. Where attendance at executive committee meetings take place outside of working hours, staff can claim for the duration of the meeting plus travel time from home that can be taken as compensatory leave or LILO per meeting.
 - (b) Up to four days release from work or detached duty per year to attend meetings or run ESG activities, to be approved by both the chair of the ESG (or in their absence, the vice chair) and their line manager.
 - (c) Claim (in addition to the above) compensatory leave or Leave in Lieu of Overtime (LILO), equivalent of up to two day shifts (e.g. if operational 10.5 hours x 2) per calendar month for the completion of committee-related tasks undertaken outside of working hours.
- 7.5 Examples of committee-related activities that may accrue compensatory leave or LILO include, but are not limited to, attending and preparing for committee meetings, organising events for the committee in line with the ESG's approved objectives, influencing and creating policies, designing, delivering and attending training events and researching and responding to requests for information such as through the preparation of Equality Impact Assessments. Social and sporting events will not accrue compensatory leave or LILO.
- 7.6 Applications for LILO and compensatory leave must be approved by the ESG Network Chair or Deputy, who will inform the Belonging, Inclusion and Wellbeing Team who will record absences for monitoring purposes.
- 7.7 Requests for release from duty, claims for LILO or compensatory leave in excess of the provision laid out in section 8.4, will require prior written approval from line managers. All claims for LILO will be subject to the exigencies of the service and Establishment and Performance Team (EPT) agreement and recorded on STARS.
- 7.8 The claiming of expenses, and compensatory leave or LILO if appropriate, will be done in accordance with the terms of the relevant Brigade policies as set out in section 8.6.

8 Supporting equality support group activity

- 8.1 Senior management should, where possible, support staff to attend ESGs conferences and events. A more inclusive and supportive work environment where staff are knowledgeable and able to connect with other staff around inclusion issues have many benefits including better retention, staff development, better productivity, and improved sickness absence. Promoting these events at team meetings will ensure all staff have access and opportunity to attend.
- 8.2 Ordinary members may apply for facilities to attend official support group meetings (to include general and annual general meetings) through their committee representatives, subject to the exigencies of the service and Establishment and Performance Team (EPT) agreement. ESGs will attempt to schedule these quarterly meetings across different working patterns to provide fair opportunities for staff to attend. Meetings that occur outside of working hours will not accrue compensatory leave or LILO. Claiming of expenses will be done as per section 8.6.
- 8.3 Attendance at conferences or events for ordinary members will be at the discretion of their line manager (at station officer rank and equivalent or above) and should be taken from the local department budget. Where requests are declined, the Belonging, Inclusion and Wellbeing Team should be informed to ensure there is parity across staff groups and to provide visibility of access.
- 8.4 Specific workshops, seminars, team-building or networking events may be classed as 'training events' for the purposes of personal development. Ordinary members who secure places at these

events will refer to the policies stated in section 8.6. The Belonging, Inclusion and Wellbeing Team will retain control of the ability to determine an event a 'training event' as outlined above at point 9.4, to allow the Brigade to have oversight of the number of attendees at an event based on the needs of the service.

- 8.5 The Brigade encourages the use of digital communications platforms such as Microsoft Teams to support meetings across various sites and reduce costs.
- 8.6 Where stated in section 7 or 8 of this policy, compensatory leave, LILO, and reimbursement of expenses will be claimed in accordance with the terms of the relevant Brigade policy:
- Policy number 515 – Compensatory leave taking arrangements policy – attendance at training courses and other planned events – operational staff
 - Policy number 924 – Overtime and compensatory leave policy – FRS staff
 - Policy number 573 – Control staff overtime and LILO policy
 - Policy number 514 – Expenses - Subsistence, public transport and professional body memberships policy

For the purposes of this definition, fares and subsistence incurred by ordinary members will be payable by the local department.

9 Funding equality support group activities

- 9.1 ESGs can run campaigns within the Brigade. All campaign and communications activity must be pre-approved by the Belonging, Inclusion and Wellbeing and Communications teams according to their guidelines to receive funding and support from the Brigade centrally and must therefore comply with the Brigade branding guidelines. Funding will not be allocated to groups where branding guidelines have been breached.
- 9.2 At the start of each calendar year, the Belonging, Inclusion and Wellbeing team will request and collate funding submissions from each group which should cover all activities across the upcoming financial year. To be approved, requests for funding for events, training, development and campaign activity must be proportionate to stated objectives and desired outcomes.
- 9.3 All approved activities will be added to a corporate equality support group calendar. Only activities recorded in this calendar will be approved for funding.
- 9.4 Other day-to-day costs, such as expenses and catering will be made on an ongoing basis, usually from authorised suppliers that are already recorded on SAP, with the pre-approval of the Belonging, Inclusion and Wellbeing team.
- 9.5 The Belonging, Inclusion and Wellbeing team may, at their discretion, open submissions for further rounds of funding to support additional activity and will:
- (a) Set out a clear process for funds to be allocated, including a clear timetable for the application of funds.
 - (b) Complete an annual review of all funding to both the Equality Support Group Network.
 - (c) Lead a monthly cross-departmental group to plan and support the delivery of approved ESG activities. The membership of this group will consist of staff from the following teams:
 - (i) Belonging, inclusion and Wellbeing.
 - (ii) Community Engagement.
 - (iii) Outreach.

(iv) Learning and Development.

(v) Internal Communications.

10 Equality support group network

- 10.1 Each ESG will be invited to join the Equality Support Group Network which meets at least bi-monthly, or as often as required.
- 10.2 The Equality Support Group Network will be for:
- (a) Sharing best practice among ESGs;
 - (b) sharing updates on their work and lessons learned;
 - (c) receiving updates from various teams around the organisation on work that impacts or is of interest to ESGs;
 - (d) raising issues which ESGs are facing, individually or collectively;
 - (e) proposing solutions to problems ESGs face; and,
 - (f) shaping the Brigade's approach to equality, diversity and inclusion.
- 10.3 The Equality Support Group Network will be chaired by a person elected by the members of the Network.
- 10.4 The ESGs will also elect a vice-chair.
- 10.5 Departments will be expected to support the Equality Support Group Network by attending meetings, providing information, sharing resources and allowing their staff time to participate fully in meetings, as outlined in this policy above.
- 10.6 The Belonging, Inclusion and Wellbeing Team will be responsible for providing support to the Network including recording minutes, actions and providing general support to the Network. Publication of minutes will be made routinely with redactions if necessary on the ESG Hotwire pages.

11 Help and support

- 11.1 Please contact the Equality Support Groups by email to ESGplanning@london-fire.gov.uk or the HR Helpdesk on extension 89100 or by email to IT.HR@london-fire.gov.uk.
- 11.2 This policy may also be available on request in other alternative accessible formats as set out in Policy number 290 – Guidance note on translation and interpretation. Please contact Communications on extension 30753 and by email to communications.team@london-fire.gov.uk to discuss your needs and options.
- 11.3 The Brigade invites your engagement so that it can learn so if you have a suggestion that can improve this policy then please submit your idea via the Staff Suggestion Scheme on Hotwire as set out in Policy number 887 – Staff suggestion scheme. Any changes do need to go through the agreed engagement, consultation, negotiation or governance requirements.

Document history

Assessments

An equality, sustainability or health, safety and welfare impact assessment and/or a risk assessment was last completed on:

EIA	02/04/2024	SDIA	L – 30/04/2026	HSWIA	01/05/2026	RA	NA
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Audit trail

Listed below is a brief audit trail, detailing amendments made to this policy/procedure.

Page/para nos.	Brief description of change	Date
Page 9	EIA date updated.	29/04/2024
Page 8 para 11.3	Staff Suggestion scheme access details added.	17/05/2024
Page 7, para 8.6	Hyperlink and title for PN514 updated.	28/04/2026
Page 9	SDIA and HSWIA updated.	05/05/2026

Subject list

You can find this policy under the following subjects.

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Freedom of Information Act exemptions

This policy/procedure has been securely marked due to:

Considered by: (responsible work team)	FOIA exemption	Security marking classification