

THE HIGHLAND AND ISLANDS FIRE BOARD

23 January 2009

Agenda Item	
Report No	

Disability Equality Scheme Annual Report

Report by Chief Fire Officer

Summary

The Highlands and Islands Fire & Rescue Service published its Disability Equality Scheme on 4 December 2006, to fulfil its obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act. This report sets out progress against the actions in the scheme, two years on.

1. Background

The scheme states that we will publish an annual report setting out how we have fulfilled our action plan. The attached information is designed to publicly demonstrate the progress we have made and we will therefore publish it on our website and make it available in other formats if requested.

Recommendation

The Service asks that the Fire Board:

- (i) notes the content of the annual report

**BRIAN A MURRAY
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**

15th January 2009



Highlands & Islands Fire & Rescue Service

Disability Equality Scheme

Annual Report 2007/2008

This report is in 12 point font to improve accessibility under the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)

Summary

1.1 Introduction

Highlands and Islands Fire & Rescue Service is committed to ensuring equality for all who use our services and we will endeavour to do this through implementing our Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan, along with other documents, which work towards our equality objectives.

In order to do this the Service will ensure that the organisation understands its responsibilities and that there is clear communication throughout so that our intentions are transparent. We will continue to consult with our communities on this Scheme and any other relevant functions in the future.

The Highlands & Islands Fire & Rescue Service (HIFRS) introduced its Disability Equality Scheme on 4th December 2006 in line with legislative requirement and identifies key actions to be taken by HIFRS to meet our commitment to promote equality of opportunity for people in the Highlands & Islands. It should be read alongside our Diversity Strategy, Equal Opportunities Policy, Fairness at Work Policy, Race Equality Scheme (2008-2011), Gender Equality Scheme (2007-2010) and Service action plans.

The full Disability Equality Scheme is available on our webpage www.hifrs.org.

Priorities for action were:

- To eliminate unlawful discrimination
- To eliminate unlawful harassment
- To improve accessibility of the service
- To promote equality of opportunity

1.1.1 How We Are Meeting our Duties

The service has already introduced many good practices to overcome race inequalities and to encourage under-represented groups to apply for positions within the Service.

We have been monitoring our employees and potential employees for many years and will continue to do so. As an organisation we will ensure that this information is utilised effectively to review our policies and identify patterns of concern.

The initiatives that the Service introduces along with a change in culture will help to meet the target.

The Service aims to be recognised as an equal opportunities employer and has policies to help achieve its goal. These policies cover all aspects of employment, including selection, recruitment and training, positive action and flexible conditions of service. We are positive about disabled people and therefore user of the disability symbol.

The Service's equality and diversity policies and the measures to implement them have been devised on the basis of advice from relevant bodies as well as through consultation with the appropriate representative bodies.

The Service encompasses a range of roles, including Administrative Staff, Control Operators, Community Fire Safety, Finance, Firefighters, Human Resources, IT, Mechanics, Performance Team, Procurement and Training. These jobs require a range of skills and provide opportunity of employment for a wide range of people.

1.1.2 Profile of the Area We Serve

Highlands & Islands Fire & Rescue Service serves the Authorities of the Highland Council, Orkney Islands Council, Shetland Islands Council and the Western Isles

	Highlands & Islands	Highlands & Islands Percentage	Scotland
Total population	279,649	100.00%	5,062,011
Limiting Long term Illnesses	50,727	18.14%	20.31%
Percentage of economically inactive people who are permanently sick/disabled	47,507	16.99%	21.25%
Percentage of households with one or more carers resident	43,840	15.68%	16.84%

1.2 Progress

Equality and diversity has now been mainstreamed into our Service Plan through our annual business planning process. This ensures that all actions identified through the Disability Equality Scheme Action Plan are not the responsibility of one or two individuals, but rather are owned by staff across all levels and departments.

Equality is a standing agenda item on key HIFRS committee meetings and an impact assessment process and policy document, covering all areas of equality has been produced and reviewed by an external organisation.

All new policies and key changes to practise or procedure require a completed EIA as part of the sign off procedure and all existing polices have been identified and EIA's will be completed by end of March 2009.

The Service has already delivered training to personnel on equality and diversity. This training is ongoing and frameworks are now being considered to ensure all new employees to the Service receive this training during the early stages of their career with us, as well as refreshing training for existing employees to ensure that the training has a permanent and positive impact.

The training given to staff will be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure its relevance and effectiveness.

The development of Control procedures to deal with requirements of the deaf is in progress.

HIFRS is working closely with various organisations to ensure we meet the requirements of the community.

Resources in the capital plan have been identified and a rolling program has started with DDA improvements to HQ in 2008.

To ensure staff are aware of their responsibilities, staff also have access to HIFRS Disability Equality Scheme and Action plan as well as access to the Equality and Diversity forum.

Further reports on progress made against the Scheme's Action Plan will be incorporated within our Public Performance Report.

1.3 Information Gathering

An Equality and Diversity Forum has been set up and monitors ongoing Equality plans on behalf of the Service. This group is chaired by the Assistant Chief Fire Officer, and has representatives from each recognised Union, as well as from a broad selection of work areas from within the Service. Two members of the Highland and Islands Fire Board also sit on this committee to act as equality champions.

HIFRS is an active member of the Highland Community Planning Partnership Equality & Diversity Group, and it is this forum that provides essential links to the various disability groups.

It has grown from a group formed in 1996 of five public organisations in order to express their commitment to improve the wellbeing of the people of the Highlands and to develop collaborative ways of working.

Legislation in 2003 required the setting up of Community Planning Partnerships across Scotland to take forward the process of community planning.

Community planning is the process through which the connections between national priorities decided by the Scottish Executive and those at Highland, local and neighbourhood levels are improved.

- It is about making sure that people and communities in the Highlands are genuinely engaged in making decisions on public services which affect them.
- It requires a commitment from organisations in the Highlands to work together, not apart, in providing better public services.
- It provides the over-arching partnership framework within which other initiatives and partnerships can be co-ordinated and, where necessary, acting to rationalise and simplify public sector working arrangements. In Highland community planning involves representatives of the voluntary and business sectors as well as public sector agencies.

Not only do public sector organisations need to strengthen a joint-working culture and practice between each other but also with and between communities. The Highland Community Planning Partnership recognises that these relationships require considerable levels of support and action in order to enable full community participation in the community planning process to take place.

The Disability Equality Scheme is published in paper format and is available on request; it is also placed on our website: www.hifrs.org. The results of the monitoring are published annually and are also available on the website within the annual Public Performance Report.

1.4 Future Plans

The HIFRS is committed to promoting disability equality and will support the further implementation of the Action Plan 2006-2009.

The tables on the following pages represent our targets and the achieved results up to date.

**HIGHLANDS & ISLANDS FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE
DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME ACTION PLAN - DECEMBER 2006-DECEMBER 2009**

1: TO ELIMINATE UNLAWFUL DISCRIMINATION					
Objective	Accountable	Timescale	Outcome	Progress to Date	Completed
1.1 Prioritised plan for Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) of existing functions/policies	Departmental Heads	April 07	1. Screen functions and policies for relevance to disability equality. Set priorities for equality impact assessments (EIA)	<p>T&D – Currently undertaking a review of T&D policy documents, updating as required including impact assessments.</p> <p>Area Command north – The Command Area has one policy which is currently part of 2008 service plan. The MIRG National Agreement has been developed into a specific HIFRS operational procedure and policy which has been impact assessed for disability</p> <p>Ops Support – Included as departmental action for 2007 / 2008. Policies are being assessed as they are produced or revised. Action plan in place.</p>	<p>January 2008</p> <p>January 2008</p>

	HR Manager in association with HWBA	April 07	2. Complete report of multi-agency involvement of people with disabilities. With partners, report feedback to organisations and individuals involved in the preparation of the Schemes. Identify priority areas for action, including opportunities for partnership action.	CRM – All policies have now been assessed. Human Resources – new policies are impact assessed and existing policies will be impact assessed by end of July 2008 ongoing	November 2008 June 2008
1.2 All new and revised policies, where relevant to disability equality, include outcome of	HR Manager	April 07	1. Agree EIA template through Service decision making process.	An EIA template has been agreed and is in use.	November 2007

EIA.	HR Manager Commander Development	Apr 07	2. Ensure staff undertaking EIA are informed and understand the requirements a) staff guidance completed b) training for relevant staff c) EIA undertaken according to priority timescale	All relevant staff has been trained by Angela Webb of HMI	November 2006
1.3 Personnel required to undertake EIA have the appropriate support, contacts and sources of information.	HR Manager through the HWBA Commander CRM Departmental Heads	Dec 07 Dec 07	1. In association with partner agencies, develop a central register of information on disability. 2. Extend this central register to incorporate information gathered in cross-department working eg. Community Fire Safety Activities	Ongoing with HWBA T&D – Providing HR department on a monthly basis a report of the numbers and names of personnel attending courses.	April 2008

	Area Commanders	Dec 07	3. District managers to set up contact links with local disability groups and individuals, and feedback any issues through the appropriate Service channels.	<p>South - District managers attend Ward meetings where the format is now completely different and they don't have the opportunity to form these links.</p> <p>North – District staff attend various local forums including ones which are directly linked to Fire Safety and provide guidance appropriate to the individual groups needs.</p>	<p>January 2008</p> <p>January 2008</p>
	Commander CRM	Dec 07	4. Develop a process to record details of local engagement	Departmental Plan reflects all partners in addition to Service Partnership Register. A further review of the Partnership Register has commenced and will be completed by March 2009.	
	Commander CRM/ HR Manager	Dec 07	5. Implement ongoing involvement with people with disabilities, as part of the review of the Scheme.		
	HR Manager	Dec 07	6. On receipt of DRC impairment criteria, ensure employment monitoring includes desegregated data.	<p>ongoing with HWBA</p> <p>Disability is monitored as part of the wider monitoring in the recruitment,</p>	April 2008

				promotion, transfer, disciplinary, grievance and dismissal process	
1.4 Diversity Awareness Training	Commander Development	Apr 07	1. Continue to deliver staff training on diversity awareness. Plan a roll-out programme to deliver diversity awareness training to remainder of the Service.	T&D – Majority of full time staff and selected retained staff completed training during 06/07. All mainland retained stations and outstanding fulltime staff programmed for 07/08 currently on target. Island status to be programmed for 08/09. New retained staff, section of recruit course to include E&D training via appropriate instructor. A refresher programme will be in place by e.learning modules by 09/10.	January 2008
	Commander Development	Dec 08	2. Identify and plan a refresher training programme, and how training will be delivered to new starts post the current round of training.		

2: TO ELIMINATE UNLAWFUL HARASSMENT

Objective	Accountable	Timescale	Outcome	Progress to Date	Completed
2.1 Record and Monitor incidents of harassment and discrimination of people with disabilities.	HR Manager	Jun 07	1. Ensure related policies are updated and revised and communicated across the Service	Related policies are updated and revised.	June 2008
	Commander Development	Jun 07	2. Identify any further training requirements that are required, and timetable accordingly.	ongoing	
	HR Manager in association with HWBA	Nov 07	3. Further widen the scope of the Racist Incident Multi-Agency Strategy with our partners to include all hate incidents/crime.	Ongoing, external Agency to support.	

3: TO IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY OF THE SERVICE

Objective	Accountable	Timescale	Outcome	Progress to Date	Completed
3.1 Identify barriers to access and plan rectification program, where appropriate.	Head of Corporate Services	In line with Capital plan	1. Review progress of DDA compliance plan of built environment through performance management processes.	Identified resources in capital plan (£50k) Rolling program starting with DDA improvements to HQ 2007/08. Resources identified for next 2 financial years.	April 2008
	Head of Corporate Services	Nov 07	2. Develop access compliance audit through relevant access panels.	Access panel now @ main entrance of HQ	February 2008
	Head of Corporate Services	In line with IT project	3. Ensure that the review of the Service website considers accessibility requirements for people with disabilities.	Researching Text enhancement and speaking software	April 2008
	Commander Operations Support	Dec 07	4. In partnership with other Public Agencies Continue to develop our Interpreting and Translation Service	Service plan action 08/09 Translation and Interpreting Service access provided for operational crews,	April 2008

			ensuring that the needs of people with disabilities are met.	Control, HQ and District Offices. Developing Control procedures to deal with requirements of deaf.	
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4: TO PROMOTE EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY					
Objective	Accountable	Timescale	Outcome	Progress to Date	Completed
4.1 Ensure staff are aware of their responsibilities in line with the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act.	HR Manager through the Service's DDA Review Group	March 08	1. In association with Occupational Health Advisor ensure reasonable adjustments are appropriately identified and implemented and develop guidance for line managers about making reasonable adjustments.		
	HR Manager/ Departmental Heads	Dec 07	2. Incorporate the provisions of the Disability Equality Duty in the Service's Diversity Strategy and related documents.	All documents include the Disability Equality Duty	January 2008

5: ANNUAL REPORTING					
Objective	Accountable	Timescale	Outcome	Progress to Date	Completed
5.1 Open and transparent publication of outcomes.	Head of Corporate Services	Jan 08	1. Publish Action Plan Results in Public Performance Report.	For 08/09 – Action plan results will be referred to.	April 2008
	Head of Corporate Services	Dec 07	2. Research and consider other ways of publishing results/outcomes from Action Plan through the Media and Service website	Departmental plan action 08/09	April 2008