Aiming for Excellence

Self assessment report
This is Cheshire Fire Authority’s self assessment report against the Excellent criteria of the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework. All supporting evidence can be found on the flash drive provided with this document.
1. Foreword 5
2. Executive summary 7
3. Introduction and context 9
4. The Service’s journey towards Excellence 17
5. Evidence categories 19
   Leadership and promoting inclusion 19
   Accountability 22
   Effective service delivery and community engagement 24
   Employment and training 30
   Evaluation and good practice 34
As a front-line emergency service and a major local employer, we have a dual responsibility to promote equality and diversity both in the way we work to protect our communities and in how we exercise our responsibilities to our staff.

Our wider responsibilities in fire prevention and community safety education mean it is critical that our services are accessible to all sections of the community and that we fully consider the impact on all residents when we develop our policies and our service priorities. And as we continue our commitment to provide a modern and flexible service, we need to take all practical steps to remove potential barriers to employment in our organisation.

For a number of years the Service has fully embraced the moral and business case for equality and diversity. The current financial pressures in the public sector mean that it is more important than ever that we ensure we are operating openly, with transparency and without discrimination.

The Service’s commitment to equality and diversity is explicit in its four year strategy, ‘Planning for a Safer Cheshire’ 2011-15, its annual action plans, its core and local values and its Corporate Equalities Strategy and Action Plan. The Fire Authority originally signed up to the Equality Standard for Local Government in 2005 and continued its support when the Equality Framework for Fire and Rescue Services was launched in 2009.

This self assessment highlights the action and progress that the Service has made since the introduction of the Standard and the Framework in the following key areas:

- leadership and promoting inclusion
- accountability
- effective service delivery and community engagement
- employment and training
- evaluation and good practice.

Our action plans for the future have identified areas and issues where more work may be needed to ensure we meet all our customers’ needs and focus on our mission ‘to help create safer communities, to rescue people and protect economic, environmental and community interests’.

Paul Hancock
Chief Fire Officer

Cllr. David Topping
Fire Authority Chair
Equality and Diversity has been a key corporate priority for Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service since 2005, with strong personal leadership from the Chief Fire Officer and senior Members.

Objectives to attain recognised national equality standards have featured in every one of the organisation’s recent annual Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs), while specific objectives feature in all departmental and local area performance plans.

The Service has won national acclaim for its innovative and ground-breaking work with key strategic partners, including the development of data sharing agreements and joint initiatives which have improved the lives of specific vulnerable groups such as older people and victims of domestic abuse. The organisation’s effectiveness at protecting local communities was highlighted by judges when Cheshire was named as “Fire Service of the Year” at the inaugural Emergency Services Awards in April.

A full range of demographic data is monitored and analysed centrally with sophisticated analysis allowing profiles and breakdowns to be carried out by geographic area, socio-economic group and risk categories. In addition to specific reports, a full annual strategic intelligence analysis document is produced and used by the organisation as the first step in its annual planning process.

The Service’s major Home Safety Assessment programme has seen over 300,000 homes visited and provided with free smoke alarms and key safety advice. Analysis has been able to ensure these are increasingly targeted at the most vulnerable and at risk groups in the community, with major reductions in the numbers of fire-related injuries in recent years.
• Central and local intelligence is used to monitor changes in local community risks, with projects and activities set out in both corporate and unitary area plans. Extensive and innovative consultation is used to involve and outline activities to local residents, while both partner and Service communication channels are used to inform local communities.

• There are service standards covering both emergency response and community safety, while a comprehensive ‘Listening to our Customers’ project shows exceptionally high levels of satisfaction. Within the organisation staff attitude surveys have shown improving satisfaction levels in every area.

• The Service has its own consultation panel, makes regular use of a black and minority ethnic consultation panel and a recent community roadshow programme has increased resident involvement on the development of its IRMP. In addition, specific representative groups are used to give insight into the development of key policies and proposals.

• An equal pay audit has been carried out and the Service’s flexible working and training and development policies are well advanced. Diversity is greater within community safety and support areas of the organisation but progress on improving under-representation in operational areas has been limited by recruitment restrictions.

• Cheshire’s own set of core values and behaviours have been developed following extensive engagement with staff at all levels.

• The Service’s equality strategy is actively monitored by both a staff working group and the Fire Authority, with recent updates to take into account changes in the Equality Act 2010.

• Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service plays a leading role in national and sub-national equality working groups and gives regular support to other key partners in developing equalities best practice, such as its risk matrix approach to Equality Impact Assessments.

• While more still needs to be done in areas such as workforce representation, the organisation believes it demonstrates the key characteristics of an excellent Authority.
Cheshire Fire Authority

Cheshire Fire Authority is the publicly accountable body which manages the local fire and rescue service on behalf of the community. Established in 1998, the Authority is legally separate from its constituent local unitary authorities of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington Borough Councils. It comprises 23 councillors from these councils – eight each from Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester Councils, four from Warrington and three from Halton.

The Authority manages a 24 hour service to just over 1 million people and at the start of 2011-12 employed some:

- 716 operational staff
- 27 control room operators
- 259 community safety and other support staff.

Staff operate out of:

- 24 Fire Stations
- 4 Community Safety Centres
- 3 Community Fire Protection Offices
- A Headquarters and training facility.

Key responsibilities of the Fire Authority include setting the annual budget and Council Tax precept, agreeing the levels of personnel and vehicles, approving the Service’s plans, policies and strategies and appointing Members to committees and advisory groups. The Fire Authority also appoints ‘Member Champions’ for key areas of the organisation’s business including Equality, Environment and Health and Safety. The current Equality champion is Cllr. Stef Nelson, who also sits on the Equality Task Group which comprises staff from across the Service, chaired by the Chief Fire Officer member links of further supported through a ‘buddy system’ involving all of the Service Management Team.

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service

The Service is managed by a Chief Fire Officer (CFO), a Deputy Chief Fire Officer with responsibility for Service Delivery and an Assistant Chief Fire Officer with responsibility for Service Support. They are supported by the Director of Finance and Corporate Planning, the Director of People and Organisational Development and six Heads of Departments covering Community
Aiming for Excellence – Self assessment report

Introduction and context

Senior Management

Chief Fire Officer
Paul Hancock

Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Mark Cashin

Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Richard Ost

Director of Finance and Corporate Planning (treasurer)
Darren Griffiths

Director of People and Organisational Development (temporary)
Steve Mason

Head of Legal and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer)
Andrew Leadbetter

Head of Communications
Tim Bevington

Head of Community Fire Protection
Keith Brooks

Head of Community Safety
Evan Morris

Head of Unitary Performance
Terry McDermott

Director of People and Organisational Development
Steve Mason

(Temporary)

Health, Safety and Welfare Manager
Neil Wilson

Director of Finance and Corporate Planning
Darren Griffiths

(Treasurer)

Director of People and Organisational Development
Steve Mason

(Temporary)
Safety; Community Fire Protection; Unitary Performance Management; Corporate Communication; Policy Planning and Resilience and Legal and Democratic Services. The Service currently has firefighters working on four different duty systems so they can respond more flexibly to the risk and activity levels in different areas. These also provide an arrangement of working options for staff.

- **Wholetime** - in the main urban areas such as Chester and Warrington where there are more emergencies and greater risks, crews work 9 hour day and 15 hour night shifts to provide round the clock cover.

- **Day shifts** - this system involves wholetime firefighters working 12 hour day shifts, with cover in the evening provided by “on-call” staff who live within five minutes of the station. It currently operates at Wilmslow and Birchwood stations.

- **Day crewing** is a system which operates in smaller urban areas such as Northwich and Winsford, with firefighters living in Authority-owned houses alongside the stations. They are on duty in the day but respond from home through a pager in the evening.

- **On-call** - in rural areas “on-call” firefighters – formerly known as retained firefighters - live or work within five minutes of the station and are alerted via a pager day or night.

A fifth system – day crewing plus – is being developed which can operate in urban areas of lower activity and risk. Under this firefighters are on duty in the day but respond from specialist accommodation alongside the station at night. The initial location for this system is at Macclesfield.

**Vision, aims and objectives**

To help it develop its services in line with local risks and needs during the current difficult financial climate, the organisation has recently adopted a four year strategy – ‘Planning for a Safer Cheshire’. This has been timed to coincide with the Government’s four year Comprehensive Spending Review and was subject to detailed consultation with both key partners and staff.

The strategy sets out the Service’s vision of “A Cheshire where there are no deaths, injuries, or damages from fires and other emergencies” and its mission to “help create safer communities, to rescue people and protect economic, environmental and community interests”.

To help staff and partners understand how this vision and mission can be delivered, the Service has developed three key aims, each supported by specific objectives:

- Protecting our communities and reducing local risks
- Responding promptly and effectively to emergencies
- Developing an excellent organisation accountable to our communities.

While these objectives provide a clear sense of what we need to do, it is our behaviour and values which influence how the Service actually does things. The organisation is a supporter of the national core values for the fire and rescue service but with the involvement of everyone in the organisation, a more detailed set of Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service values have been developed:

- Putting customers first
- Promoting equality and diversity
- Working together
- Aiming for excellence
- Developing and respecting our people
- Delivering our promises.

While the four year strategy sets a clear sense of direction for the Service in the medium term, it is supported by annual action plans which set out in more detail the key projects scheduled over the next financial year. Known as Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs), these are developed through the use of sophisticated risk analysis techniques, with proposals then subject to extensive public consultation and engagement.

A more detailed outline of the Service’s approach to risk methodology is contained within the evidence folder.
Local context

A picture of Cheshire
The Fire Authority covers an area of approximately 896 square miles, which includes rural communities in the south and east and more industrial and densely populated areas to the north and west. Cheshire is a county of contrasts, with areas of comparative affluence and pockets of notable deprivation.

The majority of the population is concentrated in the major towns of Chester, Ellesmere Port, Runcorn, Widnes, Warrington, Macclesfield, Northwich, Congleton and Crewe. There are also a number of prosperous rural market towns and communities such as Nantwich, Malpas, Tarporley, Frodsham, Neston, Sandbach and Knutsford.

A significant, and rising, proportion of the population in the Fire Authority area are over 65. The current figure of 17.8% will rise to 20.1% by 2015 and in the Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester areas the increases are even more significant. Around 5% percent of the population come from minority ethnic groups.

The heritage city of Chester has a large number of unique sites dating back to the Roman and Medieval periods and there are large centres of the petrochemical industry along the River Mersey. In fact, Cheshire has the second highest number of COMAH (Control of Major Accident Hazard) sites in the country.

Four major motorways traverse the area, along with an extensive road network and the West Coast Mainline railway, linking the main urban areas of Merseyside and Greater Manchester with the South East. Cheshire is also covered by a number of key flight paths for the major regional airports in Liverpool and Manchester.

More people are killed and injured in road traffic collisions than in fires in Cheshire. In the calendar year 2009 there were 42 deaths on the road and 4,743 injuries, this compares to just one fire death and 37 injuries.

Cheshire East
Cheshire East covers an area of 450 square miles, making it the third largest unitary council in the North West. Approximately 40% of the population live in rural areas and the remainder in the two major towns of Crewe and Macclesfield and smaller towns of Wilmslow, Congleton, Sandbach, Poynton, Nantwich, Middlewich, Knutsford and Alsager.

While the northern part of Cheshire East is one of the most prosperous parts of the country with low unemployment, a thriving economy and well-educated workforce, it does have a few small pockets of deprivation in the south. Ten of the most deprived areas are within Crewe.

**Key facts:**
- The area has an older population with 17.5% of the population over 65 compared to 16.1% nationally – specific areas include Nantwich and Knutsford
- Crewe and Middlewich have a higher proportion of children and young people than the average
- Macclesfield and Crewe and Nantwich are the wards with the largest Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities - Polish and Slovakian people make up the largest migrant communities
- A 2007 survey estimated there were over 440 on Gypsy and Traveller families in houses and the 15 sites in Cheshire East
- 17% of Cheshire East’s population have a long term illness, health problem or disability that affects their daily lives. 11,500 people of working age claim Incapacity Benefit and 12.1% claim Severe Disability Allowance.

The Service has 12 stations within Cheshire East in the following areas: Audlem, Nantwich, Crewe, Sandbach, Middlewich, Holmes Chapel, Congleton, Macclesfield, Bollington, Poynton, Wilmslow and Knutsford. Seven of the stations are On Call, two are Day Crewing, one has a unique shift system, and two are currently Wholetime.

Cheshire West and Chester (CW&C) covers an area of 350 square miles and holds a complex mixture of risks, with a significant transport network comprising motorway, mainline railway and the shipping canal all over flown by the approach to three airports.

There are major chemical, oil and nuclear risks as well as international manufacturing companies servicing the car industry. Chester has become the banking capital for the north of England and the City is a significant national heritage site. Flooding is a major risk with the Sealand Estuary, Dee Valley, Elton, Ince marshes, Weaver Valley and areas around Northwich all built on flood plains.

**Key facts:**
- The area has an older population than that of England as a whole with around 17.7% of the population over 65 years of age compared to 16.1% nationally - this older population is set to grow by 9% over the next 10 years
- There are markedly fewer people in the 20 to 35 year age bracket compared to the rest of England
- The highest proportion of younger people (aged 0 – 19 years) are in the Lache, Blacon,
Ellesmere Port, and parts of Winsford and Northwich. Over 40% of the population in parts of the Grange and Rossmore Ward and the Winsford South and West Ward are comprised of young people under 19

- The BME community is 5.12% with White Other being the main group, followed by Asian or Asian British and then White Irish
- The majority of the 1,840 registered migrant population (48%) were from Poland followed by the Slovak Republic (6%) and India (6%)
- 14% of Cheshire West and Chester population have a long term illness, health problem or disability that affects their daily lives.

The Service has seven stations within Cheshire West and Chester in the following areas: Ellesmere Port, Frodsham, Chester, Malpas, Tarporley, Winsford, and Northwich. Two of the stations are Wholetime, two are Day Crewing and three are operating the On Call duty system.

Halton

Halton is a largely urban area of 28 square miles with two large towns, Runcorn and Widnes on either side of the River Mersey, 10 miles upstream from Liverpool.

Widnes is regarded as the birthplace of the chemical industry and its development spread to Runcorn in the 19th century. At the end of the 1960s Runcorn was designated as a ‘new town’ with new road networks and shopping centres built to serve the influx of residents from the centre of Liverpool, many of whom were housed in new social housing. Halton has inherited a number of physical, environmental and social problems as a result of its past.

Key facts:

- The Index of Multiple Deprivation for 2007 ranked the area as the 30th most deprived nationally - 48% of the population live in ‘Super Output Areas’ ranked within the most deprived 20% of areas in England
- The population of Halton was in decline for over a decade, but has recently started to increase, with more young people than the national and regional averages
- The BME community estimate is 3.1% with White Other and Mixed being the main groups, followed by White Irish and Asian or Asian British
- Workers registration figures show 1,270 from Polish applicants, with 110 from Lithuania and 82 from the Slovak Republic
- There are three Gypsy and Traveller sites within the Halton Area
- 16.7% of Halton’s population consider themselves to be disabled and just under half of Halton’s 65 plus population live with limiting long term illness
- Halton has the 8th highest hospital admissions for alcohol related conditions in England.

The Service has two stations in Halton at Runcorn and Widnes - both are wholetime.

Warrington

The borough of Warrington covers 68 square miles and lies at the centre of the North West of England’s communications network, with the M6, M56 and M62 motorways all intersecting within the borough.

Two significant waterways serve the main urban area, the River Mersey and the Manchester Ship Canal. This role as a crossing point of both river and canal is an essential part of the town’s character.
Warrington has historically enjoyed high levels of employment, growth and prosperity driven principally by a strong manufacturing base and its key strategic location in the region. Recently a shift from manufacturing to a service-based economy has resulted in financial services being the largest sector providing employment in Warrington (27%) followed by distribution (23%).

**Key facts:**

- Residents are less likely to be unemployed than the national average - and if they are out of work they are more likely to find a job within 6 months
- Warrington has a slightly younger population than the national and regional averages, with a smaller proportion of over 65s
- 35.4% of the population are in the 20 – 44 year old age group
- The BME community is 5.07% with White Other being the biggest group, closely followed by Asian or Asian British and then Mixed (1800)
- Most migrant worker registrations are from people from Poland followed by Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic and Lithuania
- 22.8% of Warrington’s total population consider themselves to be disabled. - of those 31.4% said they were DDA disabled and work limiting disabled
- Using 2007 figures, 1 in 7 of the working age population of Bewsey and Whitecross could not work due to their disability
- The five wards with the highest number of income support claimants and incapacity benefit claims are Poplars and Hulme, Orford, Fairfield and Howley, Latchford East and Bewsey and Whitecross.

There are three stations - Warrington, Stockton Heath and Birchwood. All three have different duty systems with Warrington Wholetime, Stockton Heath Day Crewing and Birchwood operating the same system as Wilmslow.

*More detailed demographic information about Cheshire and each of the unitary areas is in the evidence folder.*
Background

Equality and Diversity (E and D) has been a key corporate objective for Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS) for a number of years and as such, considerable time and resources have been put into mainstreaming E and D considerations into day to day activities.

In 2005 CFRS took the radical step of downgrading itself against the then Standard of Equality for Local Government from a Level 2 to Level 1 following a review within the Service. This was the catalyst for a journey to truly embed Equality and Diversity into the organisation’s policies, functions and processes.

Its initial challenging target of reaching Level 3 of the Standard within an 18-month timetable was achieved in December 2007 following a comprehensive external assessment. The Service then maintained the momentum by setting itself the further target of achieving Level 4 by July 2009 – a target which it also achieved.

While attainment of Level 4 only required an organisational self assessment to be carried out, the Service decided to mirror the approach for Level 3 as far as practical. A self assessment document was produced which was then reviewed by the Equality and Diversity Manager from a neighbouring fire and rescue service who also talked to staff before a report was presented to the Fire Authority’s Performance and Overview Committee.

Approach to self assessment

Achieving both Levels 3 and 4 of the former Standard required the Service to carry out detailed self assessments of the organisation’s position against the relevant criteria. Both involved an honest and pragmatic review of strengths and achievements as well as an acknowledgement of areas for improvement.

The final assessment report which awarded the Service Level 3 status said that the organisation was ‘performing strongly’, adding:

“"The three elements of the assessment: the self assessment document, the supporting evidence and the interviews provided a consistent view of CFRS’ achievements and where it still needs to supplement its equality improvement effort.”

“"In particular, it should be noted that during interviews staff were both enthusiastic and well-informed about improving the way in they deliver services and employ staff.”

“"There is a sound management structure in place, which can drive, guide and scrutinise equality improvement work.”

Following attainment that Level 3 an action plan was produced to ensure the areas identified for improvement were addressed. This proved key in working towards the Level 4 assessment which focused in particular on the performance management systems in place to monitor equality improvements.
Aiming for Excellence

After attaining Level 4, the Service recognised changes were imminent to national Equality and Diversity legislation and decided to adapt its strategic approach accordingly. A new Corporate Equalities Strategy was produced, bringing together the Service’s existing Race, Disability and Gender Equality Schemes into one and also picking up other equality strands such as age, religion and belief and sexual orientation.

The Strategy was developed so that it closely linked to the National Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008 – 2018 and the FRS Equality Framework. At the same time the Service also produced a combined Equalities Action Plan to ensure progress on areas of improvement was maintained.

The Fire Authority was keen to maintain both its commitment and its progress on embedding E and D within the organisation and agreed a strategic objective of aiming for Excellence in the new FRS framework. An initial target of March 2011 was subsequently extended by three months to allow the organisation sufficient time to fully consider the implications from the pilot assessments which were reported in January 2011.

The Authority’s last formal external assessment was published in December 2009 through the Audit Commission which concluded that the organisation was “performing well”. Relevant points taken from the report’s summary include:

- The Authority takes equality and diversity seriously and continues to improve the diversity of its workforce
- The Authority engages well and understands its communities and their needs
- It has clearly identified key groups who are most vulnerable to fire and targets prevention work on those in most risk.

The report, however, also said that despite a range of projects and initiatives, more still needed to be done to make the workforce more representative of the community.

The purpose of this self assessment is to highlight and evidence the progress that has been made by CFRS since it successfully achieved Levels 3 and 4. The Service is self aware and as well as identifying its strengths and achievements, the report also recognises areas for improvement. The assessment has been carried out following a detailed and thorough review and therefore represents an honest and fair statement of the Service’s position against the Excellent criteria of the Equality Framework for the Fire and Rescue Service.
Background

Cheshire Fire Authority’s commitment to mainstreaming equality and diversity is evidenced by its inclusion as a headline objective in all of its annual Integrated Risk Management Plans. The setting and achievement of challenging targets has been closely monitored and scrutinised by Members of the Authority.

Within the Service a key factor in moving the equality agenda forward has been consistent and strong leadership from senior management. Initially this was done via the Deputy Chief Fire Officer – Corporate Services, who agreed to the creation of a dedicated post and chaired the Service’s Equality Task Group, which was established in 2005.

Since its introduction, the Equality Task Group has also had consistent Member involvement and support. This has been key in enabling the Group to be the corporate driving force for developing and establishing Equality and Diversity throughout the organisation as well as championing equality priorities in Authority forums/committees.

Operating originally on a task and finish basis to produce the statutory schemes via cross functional working groups, the Group has evolved to match the knowledge and understanding of the equality agenda within the Service.

Following a senior management restructure in 2009, the Chief Fire Officer took over responsibility as Chair of the Group. At the same time the lead Member left the Fire Authority and a new elected member was appointed – Councillor Stef Nelson.

The Chief Fire Officer wanted the group to take on a more strategic role and took the decision to revise membership to Heads of Departments, interest groups, Trade Union representatives, the Service’s Solicitor and the Equality Team. This has meant that key tasks identified were owned by departments and incorporated into departmental plans. The group also monitors compliance with the Corporate Equalities Strategy and Action Plan.

The Group has continued to commission work and identify barriers to progress against the action plans and equality impact assessments. Another key role of the Group is to scrutinise the Service’s equality monitoring reports and identify potential issues or trends.

Following the introduction of a dedicated Equality Officer, the Service recognised that support was needed and a position was transferred into the Corporate Team from the Community Safety department. In addition, a dedicated budget was...
created to fund key corporate subscriptions and training initiatives. More recently, despite the difficult economic climate, a further part-time post has been created within the Human Resources department to co-ordinate and analyse key workforce statistics and trends.

All Elected Members and the Service’s Management Team have received Equality and Diversity training. The most recent was in relation to the Equality Act 2010 and the practical implications for the Fire Authority. This joint session was also used as an opportunity to review and challenge the equality impact assessment process and the roles of Members and senior managers. All Fire Authority Members have also signed up to the Local Government Association Equality Charter.

Staff satisfaction surveys

The Service carries out biannual surveys to engage with staff and gain quantitative and qualitative feedback on a range of key organisational workforce issues. The first was carried out in 2007 and the 2011 survey is due to start shortly.

The overriding impression from the staff survey results is that staff employee satisfaction had improved significantly when compared to the benchmark set in 2007. Overall satisfaction with working for the Service had increased by 13% over the period 2007 – 2009. The main issues identified within the 2009 staff survey focused on

- A feeling among many staff, particularly those in operational roles, that they were not valued by the organisation
- Major differences in satisfaction between operational and non-operational staff
- Poor relationships between senior management and staff
- Levels of bullying and harassment associated with a ‘blame culture’

It was identified during focus group meetings that individuals were comfortable with their direct line managers but were mistrusting of what they classed as middle managers. This is where they felt that most of the bullying was taking place. Following the survey an action plan was produced to try to improve the issues identified across the whole service. Actions that have been completed to date include

- Senior Management meetings being held on stations and regular visits by the SMT team to discuss issues arising on stations.
- Relaunch of the Service’s Safecall independent bullying and harassment line
- Review of the Dignity at Work Policy.
- Introduction of local values to supplement the national Core Values, the local values take things one step further in identifying appropriate behaviours. All Service managers from station manager / equivalent and above were involved in the formation of these local values.
- Breakfast with the Chief – the Chief has monthly briefing sessions with individuals randomly selected (birthdays within that monthly period). Invites are sent to individuals asking them to come in for an informal breakfast session. The session involves a brief overview of key corporate issues such as finances, key proposals and then he opens the session for questions and discussions. These sessions have been really well received from all who have attended.
- Introduction of Chief’s Briefings which are run quarterly and open to everyone. The 2 hour session is set up to allow individuals to hear key corporate issues and give them an opportunity to ask any relevant questions.

One of the major contributing facts to the improvement in morale within CFRS over the past couple of years has been the change in the Service’s Senior Management Team with a new Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Assistant Chief Fire Officer and new Head of Human Resources.

The new Chief Fire Officer following his appointment introduced the ethos of Team Cheshire and this has been emphasised through the Management Conference, Watch and Crew Manager insight training days (where all crew and watch managers receive training into the different
facets of the organisation), and in the Service’s key documents. The Service is about to launching its 2011 Staff Survey and are hopeful that the results will verify the comments that are being made about the disappearance of the blame culture, and that CFRS is now an environment where individuals feel able to express opinions without fear of retribution.

To indicate the impact that this has had I have summarised the 08/09 and 2010/11 statistics

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On top of this, in 2010 /11 there were only 2 Dignity at Work cases. Reasons for the disciplinary and grievances were related to attendance, conduct, and performance / capability. A full breakdown by age, gender, disability etc can be found in the supplementary evidence. Action that has been taken as a result of the above includes informal and formal mediation sessions and additional training.

The Service has also seen a reduction is the number of days absence lost per employee which is often an indication of moral and satisfaction within the Service with 5.1 for 2010/11 down from 6.46 days the previous year.

**Working with partners**

The strong sense of leadership provided by Members, the Service Management Team and the work of the Equality Task Group has driven the organisation to target our most vulnerable and excluded residents/communities. To achieve this there was a recognition that CFRS would have to work with partners within the local area. In the early stages considerable work had to be done to demonstrate to partners exactly what CFRS could bring to the table, i.e. selling our brand and raising awareness of the wider services the organisation was already providing.

This has resulted in the Service delivering on not only its own key outcomes and objectives but those of partners and most importantly bringing

**CASE STUDY**

**SPRINGBOARD**

In 2008 Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service entered into the ‘Supporting You’ Service originally set up by Age UK and the former Cheshire County Council. The initiative was established to help people aged 55+ to maintain their independence by accessing information and local services therefore reducing their dependency on social and health care services. A contact assessment form was developed for firefighters/ advocates to complete in any household where over 65s live.

The form identified whether the occupier needed support or more information in relation to potential services available to them i.e. benefit entitlements, socialising, cooking etc. The contact assessment is sent back to Age UK who assess the needs of the individual and arrange a follow up meeting.

The Service and its health and social care partners also established protocols to enable the partner organisations to share information which may be sensitive. This unique data sharing enabled CFRS to take a more systematic approach to targeting older people and prioritising Home Safety Assessments/contact assessments.

This partnership has proved extremely successful with almost 50% of referrals to ‘Supporting You’ coming from CFRS each year. As a result of the partnership a staggering additional £7.4 million pounds has been accessed by those most in need. It has also given people access to vital services such as support with cleaning, shopping, transport, meal delivery, mobility equipment and pendant alarms/telecoms.
additional benefits to the residents of Cheshire. Through work with a range of partners, particularly Age UK, key outcomes achieved to date have included:

- Delivery of over 304,000 Home Safety Assessments, 106,500 of which have been delivered to the over 65s
- Working with Age UK ‘Supporting You’ (see case study for more details) the offer of a contact assessment has gone to 38,380 people over the age of 65 with 28,709 being accepted
- Launch of the first ‘Cheshire Safety Day’ which saw staff from across the whole Service work with partners to complete over 1,600 HSAs in a single day
- £7.4 million pounds in benefits has been accessed by Cheshire residents as a result of the referrals from the Contact Assessments
- Almost 50% of the referrals to the ‘Supporting You’ project are from CFRS
- Data Sharing Protocols between the local Primary Care Trusts and the Service have enabled the sharing of GPs registrations of the over 65s – a first for any FRS
- Delivery of 635 HSAs since April 2009 by the Service’s joint D/deaf persons advocate
- Introduction of an advocate part-funded by CFRS and Age UK
- Co-ordination of a successful partnership bid to the Migrant Impact Fund which has resulted in the creation of eight advocate posts on temporary contracts with 838 HSAs delivered to date
- An 88% success rate among graduates from the Service’s Princes Trust Programme on going into jobs, further education or training
- The delivery of an average of 35 ‘Think Drive to Survive’ courses per year since 2000 with around 50 young people on each one.

All this partnership working has resulted in CFRS receiving numerous awards for its work nationally. The ‘Think Drive Survive’ Course has twice won the Prince Michael of Kent award. In 2009 the Service won the partnership working category of the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Awards. In January 2010 the Service won the Innovation in Strategy award in the E-Government Excellence Awards. Most recently the Service won ‘Fire Service of the Year’ at the inaugural Emergency Services Awards.

**Procurement**

CFRS continues to use its procurement process to help improve the equality agenda. The Procurement Strategy outlines its commitment to ethical purchasing and our legal responsibilities in relation to Equality and Diversity.

Equality and diversity issues are considered at the earliest possible stage of a product / project delivery as all business cases presented must have an equality impact assessment form completed. This is then fed into the tendering exercise.

The Procurement Team ensures that equality and diversity is a consideration when devising contracts. All contracts contain equality clauses in line with the Equality Act 2010 and the Service uses information regarding whether one potential supplier has an Equality Strategy or has had any legal action against them into consideration when deciding on who to appoint.

When appointing suppliers, we also ask if training has been provided in relation to E&G and for a breakdown of their staff. It is explained within contracts that behaviour which is not in keeping with the Service’s values will not be permitted and may result in determination of the contract. Challenges have been made to contractors about the language used by their employees while at CFRS properties.
The Service has procured a number of specific products following equality impact assessments such as:

- non leather boots and gloves for individuals who for religious reasons cannot come into contact with this material.
- ensuring that extra small boots can be sourced
- non alcoholic hand wash has been sourced for the Service’s welfare facilities
- where buildings have been reviewed, the Procurement Team have ensured that disability issues / dignity issues are considered i.e. separate toilet/showering for women and accessible toilets where space permits. In the near future, CFRS will be looking at the feasibility of PODS (all encompassing showering, changing and toilet facilities that are gender neutral.) This will of course go through the full equality impact assessment process.

The team use discretion to ensure that the process is not so bureaucratic that it disadvantages smaller local businesses. Recently the Procurement team worked with the Communications team to develop a targeted campaign to encourage local trades personnel to bid for work within the Service. This resulted in 331 expressions of interest.

In addition, improved transparency and access to procurement processes has been developed through the Service’s website. The Service and its partners recognise, however, that there is scope to make more proactive use of procurement in furthering E and D issues, provided processes do not result in the potential exclusion of some smaller suppliers.
Accountability

The work of the Service’s Equality Task Group in monitoring and scrutinising performance against the Corporate Equalities Action Plan has been briefly referred to previously. This ensures cross-departmental scrutiny and also identifies tasks that have impacts on more than one department - awareness days for recruitment, for example.

If slippage has occurred, the relevant Head of Department is required to provide an explanation and outline what action is being taken to get the issue back on track.

The Task Group also receive quarterly equality monitoring reports containing the disaggregated data from all departments within the Service. This provides an opportunity to discuss any statistics that they feel need further investigation or explanation.

A recent example of this has been the numbers of female firefighters on On Call Stations, historically an area with a higher proportion of females than wholetime. This has changed over the last couple of recruitment drives and action to address the issue in future drives is underway.

The Performance and Overview Committee of the Fire Authority also receive E and D progress reports twice yearly. This documents progress against the action plan and also key areas of work undertaken.

The Corporate Intelligence Unit (CIU) has responsibility for the co-ordination of performance planning databases and the annual departmental and unitary area plans. The unit also collates quarterly progress reports produced by each department which are scrutinised by Members of the Performance and Overview Committee.

In previous years such as 2009-10, the departmental plan templates contained compulsory Equality and Diversity sections. As the organisation has progressed, the need for a compulsory E and D section has been removed with action now mainstreamed within the body of the documents. Monitoring of departmental progress on E and D issues, however, continues to be a fundamental feature of the quarterly scrutiny by the Performance and Overview Committee.

To support the mainstreaming of all corporate priorities such as Equality and Diversity, Health and Safety and Environment issues, the Service has used an internal scrutiny panel to quality assure all departmental plans in each of the last three years. This has helped to ensure all Service plans contain equality objectives which are measurable and in keeping with the profiling of the area / key strategic issues for the Service.

This process has been refined year on year to enable the panel to scrutinise plans in greater detail and act as a ‘critical friend’. Comments are co-ordinated by CIU and then the Unit manager liaises with Heads of Department and unitary performance managers to provide the feedback.

Engagement with Representative Bodies

CFRS Representative Bodies are actively encouraged to contribute in a positive and constructive manner in delivery of the equality work within the Service. The Service has a full time FBU representative who is seconded to HQ to fulfil union duties. There is a fairness representative and women representative [who is also the regional rep] and a BME representative. Both the full time
FBU rep and the women`s rep attend all equality task group meetings. The BME rep was recently appointed and will attend meetings when available, however, all minutes and actions are being sent to the individual.

In accordance with the trade union protocol, which has recently been revised, employees who are officials of a recognised trade union will be granted responsible time off during working hours to carry out certain trade union duties.

The Service also has agreed mechanisms that allow meaningful consultation to take place between the Service and its representative bodies. Joint Consultation Panel (JCP) meetings are scheduled throughout the year and policies are taken to this meeting to allow Representative Bodies to comment. E&D policies and policies such as Maternity etc will be consulted on via this route.

On top of this the Service also has Joint Consultation and Negotiation Panel (JCNP) meetings which allows formal negotiation and consultation to take place. The types of issues that would be taken to such meetings would be relating to duty systems where formal negotiation is needed.

Where there are specific issues or a major project, additional meetings will be organised on a more regular basis to ensure that Representative bodies are informed of progress to ensure two way communication continues.

Representative bodies have encouraged their members to get involved with the Positive Action in recruitment that has taken place on our stations.

**Equality Impact Assessments**

In 2007 the Service provided Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) training to all managers with responsibility for developing and delivering projects and policies. This ensured that those responsible for the Service’s recognised project activities had the skills to carry out the assessments when developing their work.

**CASE STUDY**

**SPECIALIST KEY STAGE 2 VISITS**

It became apparent during an Equality Task Group meeting that the schools visited as part our Key Stage 2 delivery programme were all mainstream educational schools. Checks showed that the education authorities had not included schools for pupils with additional support needs in the lists they supplied to the Service.

An advocate visited all identified additional support need schools to ascertain the needs of the pupils and the amendments needed to make sure the information was presented in the most relevant format. It was agreed that greater animation with lots of props and hands on examples were needed. All identified schools have now had the visit by advocates or firefighters and have secured future visits. Progress was monitored at every ETG meeting until the scheme was fully operational.

This has led to the teams working with Petty Pool Trust which provides schooling for people with learning difficulties aged 16-24 from within the Cheshire area. Advocates and firefighters set up practical identification scenarios of fire hazards in the home; such as over loaded sockets, drying clothes in front of the fire, unattended cookers, safe use of washing machines, toasters, microwaves etc and at the end of the session all students were able to identify and remove risks and create a safe bedtime routine, to plan and secure a safe exit from their property.

Ten sessions were delivered from September to November engaging with all 86 students, staff and carers. Students were presented with a certificate of achievement on completion of the course.
At the end of 2009 the Service revised its EIA process and changed its format making the template more in line with the risk assessment forms. This has helped CFRS managers and staff to think about equality impact assessments as people risk assessments. It was then decided that a champion from every department would complete the EIA training. There were two training sessions in total, one delivered by an external trainer and one delivered by the Equality and Diversity Officer, to familiarise the champions with the revised form. These champions are now working within departments to support the completion of EIAs and also to scrutinise completed EIAs. All policies and procedures are subject to an initial Equality Impact Assessment, and where any possibility of differential impact is identified, a full equality impact will be undertaken. The Service’s Equality and Consultation Officers will co-ordinate the consultation dependent on the size of the impact.

As a result of equality impact assessments:

- The Service’s Maternity Policy explicitly states the provision available to same sex couples and those who are undergoing IVF.
- The Appearance and Bearing Policy states that where an individual [operationally] may have a facial disfigurement or birthmark, the issue of make up will be looked at on a case by case basis. The Policy also takes account of cultural issues with uniform.
- The Service noticed that very few cadets were from BME backgrounds while reviewing our EIA. Following consultation it was identified there was a perception of a cost associated to the scheme. Many stating they thought they had to pay for their child to attend and also to purchase the Firekit. Work was undertaken to remove this misconception and raise awareness of the cadet scheme and to educate individuals that there are no financial costs to the individual. This resulted in a slight increase in uptake amongst the BME community [although still not representative of the community we serve]. The continual monitoring of the gender breakdown of our cadets has identified a decrease in the number of females enrolled. This has been identified by the task group as an area for positive action.
- When the Service completed its initial EIA of the Driving Policy, it identified the potential for a disproportionate impact on those with a disability who may need a car with specific adaptations. The Service does possess automatic cars but the EIA states that any person who has such needs will be classed as an essential car user and therefore, be able to claim mileage/petrol. This was felt the most proportionate and reasonable action to take.
- The Service identified that its Death in Service Policy may impact on certain religious groups as there is no guarantee that the body could be released within the first 24 hours. Small scale consultation took place with local Muslim groups to identify the impact that this might have on the grounds of their religion. The Service was informed that in these circumstances, the family would class the 24 hour period from the release of the body. As a result of the consultation the Service made sure that those involved in the policy had the details of local Imams who could be called upon should the need arise.
- Following the initial EIA of our deployment of the Welfare Unit, the policy was amended in terms of the mobilisation of the vehicle. Originally it stated that if the incident was likely to last a long time [more than two hours], or have a five pump attendance, the vehicle can be deployed. Now it states that it is an automatic deployment at five pumps or protracted incidents, but the Officer in Charge can use his/her discretion to call it out. This was following discussions with staff members who had IBS. The Welfare Unit also has sanitary packs supplied on it. Through the EIA it was also noted that the vehicle could also be used at training incidents which was not its original purpose but improves dignity facilities.
Effective service delivery and community engagement

The Service has made great strides in targeting those who have been recognised as most vulnerable to injuries from fires, road traffic collisions, and anti-social behaviour.

It does, however, also recognise that in order to comply with the general duties of the Equality Act it has to ensure that all sections of the community have access to our services. Over the years, therefore, not only has the Service looked at who is featuring disproportionately in its statistics as having been involved in incidents, it has also worked to identify those who have not accessed its services. In addition, innovative ways of getting information across to as diverse an audience as possible have been implemented.

The Service has put considerable resources into the development of a central Corporate Intelligence Unit (CIU), which has had a major impact on the Service’s ability to target its activities and resources as mentioned above. The range of information and analysis has continued to increase and become more robust year on year.

Annually the team have produced planning packs to support unitary performance areas highlighting days, times, months of increased activities, red routes, persons involved, and increased anti-social behaviour statistics etc to target resources and prevention techniques in the appropriate areas. Increasingly use of social profiling techniques and programmes such as Mosaic are being used to identify and target preventative work and campaigns.

A Strategic Intelligence Analysis document is produced at the start of the planning cycle which, coupled with a corporate horizon scanning publication, is used by senior managers and Members to develop both the annual Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) and individual departmental and unitary performance plans for the year ahead.

This corporately-driven and performance managed approach has ensured that the Service has consistently met and exceeded its targets for Home Safety Assessments both in terms of quantity and risk profiles – 60,000 with at least 60% to vulnerable groups.

Equality objectives

The Service has its Corporate Equalities Action Plan that identifies corporate equality objectives that need to be completed. Along side this are the equality objectives that are embedded into all our departmental plans where appropriate.

The Service has made considerable progress against its equality objectives the details of which are below.

Corporate Equalities Action:
- Provide training to Senior Management Team and Fire Authority on the Equality Act – a half day joint session was completed by members and senior management team facilitated by the Equality and Diversity Officer and Solicitor.
- Provide EIA training to the Equalities Champions. Two EIA training days were held and all champions trained. One session was provided by an external supplier and the other was completed by the equality officer.
- Improve internal and external awareness of the equality work within the Service. The Service’s Alert magazine [issued to all staff members and sent to external public places], now contains stories of our engagement with our diverse communities in almost every addition.
- Joint training day with Partners – In 2010 the Service and its Partners ran a collective training day that focused on the importance of disaggregating data to ensure clarity of understanding. 15 employees from Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service attended.
Equality objectives contained within departmental plans include:

- Improve our Stonewall index rating – this year the Service improved by 23 points.
- Visit Gypsy and Traveller sites to give driver safety and home safety information, once per quarter – completed.
- Target 16-24 yr olds as they are disproportionately affected by RTCs. A number of Think Drive Survive courses were run throughout 2010/11.
- Work with Partners to reduce antisocial behaviour through Youth Engagement.
- To work with Age UK to introduce a part-funded advocate to support the delivery contact assessments. The part-funding advocate post has been introduced and the contact assessments are being completed. Case studies are available.
- Actively engage with businesses that are owned, occupied or employ members of the BME community to ensure they receive business advice and support in relation to fire protection, arson and UwFS’s. Business Seminar held for BME businesses and engagement work has taken place with a number of employers.
- Following an evaluation of Equality and Diversity knowledge in CFP, further training is to be delivered to all CFP staff. All CFP staff received additional equality and diversity training.
- Launch of the high potential development scheme. Established staff on the scheme and leadership schemes.
- Collate quarterly equality monitoring reports. Quarterly reports produced and continually analysed to identify any adverse impacts and information gaps present.
- Equality Mapping to identify most vulnerable sections of our communities. Corporate Intelligence Unit have produced comprehensive risk profiling packages for each of the unitary performance areas along with the Strategic Analysis Document.
- Introduce Migrant Impact Fund Advocates – five posts introduced.

A summary of the impact that this has had on our overall statistics for the service has been summarised on opposite page. Full details can be found in the evidence files.
## GMSF Evidence categories

### Cheshire East

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Community engagement

The majority of community engagement work is done at a local level by firefighters and community safety advocates. We feel this gives a true indication of the understanding within the Service of the importance of engaging with all sections of our communities. Below is a summary of some of the engagement work undertaken by the resident focused Community Safety Department (CS) and the Community Fire Protection Department (CFP) which concentrates on business and commercial premises.

Community Safety

The Service noticed early on in the HSA delivery programme that those from the Black and Ethnic Minority Community were under represented in our HSA delivery. This coupled with the national information regarding the knowledge of the working smoke alarm being lower within this section of the community prompted the Service to take action. Much work was done to identify where the BME communities were living. The Service's largest ethnic minority community is Gypsies and Travellers and there are a number of sites throughout the unitary council areas. There are higher Eastern European populations in the Crewe area and members of the Chinese, Pakistani and Bangladeshi community in Warrington, Ellesmere Port and Chester. The Service then started an engagement campaign that has resulted in:

- Gypsy and Traveller sites visited by operational crews and advocates
- A competition run within the Gypsy and Traveller Times for a caravan safety competition for children. The winning entrant spent the afternoon with the crew and had the poster put on our safety information
- Crews visiting local places of religious observance such as the mosques in Chester and Crewe and the Sikh Gudwara in Warrington
- Crews visiting the Polish Sunday School
- Gypsy and Traveller well women initiative specifically focusing on welfare issues such as cancer screening, stress relief, domestic

WORKING WITH GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS

Following a narrow boat fire (2007) and an anti-social behaviour incident targeted at a Gypsy and Traveller site, the Service identified that interaction with these sections of the community both in terms of home fire safety and general community safety activity had been minimal. The Service recognised that our HSA delivery needed to focus on more than bricks and mortar and developed its HSA forms to take account of the differing risks facing the Travelling Community.

A firefighter at Ellesmere Port also took up the champion role for engaging with the Gypsy and Traveller communities on the 41 official sites across Cheshire. He contacted Gypsy and Traveller liaison officers at the local authorities and built a relationship with the Travelling community in his station area. To support his colleagues with future engagement he produced a Gypsy and Traveller toolkit that contained some useful tips on initial engagement, a generic risk assessment for engagement activities, a leaflet that he had sourced (which was easy read) and a DVD that was produced by another FRS who agreed CFRS could use it.

It also displayed the winning entry of a national competition that the Firefighter had set up within the ‘Traveller Times’ newsletter. This has resulted in firefighters and advocates visiting all sites within the Service area to ensure that they have access to key fire and road safety advice. This work will be ongoing due to the transient nature of the Gypsy and Traveller Community.
Evidence categories

abuse information and fire and road safety information
• Advocates attendance at the Black History Month organised by Race and Equalities Centre and other events targeted at the BME communities
• As mentioned earlier the migrant impact fund advocates have undertaken considerable engagement work to identify BME communities to ensure ownership of working smoke alarms.

All of this work has contributed to the fact that of all the HSAs we have delivered, 7.6% have been to people who classify themselves as being from a BME background. It has also led to ongoing communication specifically around religious festivals to ensure that all those celebrating are aware of the increased risks. For the Polish and Gypsy and Traveller community it has broken down barriers originally faced by firefighters and advocates who were trying to engage, however due to the transient nature of the Gypsy and Traveller community this work is ongoing.

In relation to people with disabilities, local stations and community safety centres have targeted local support groups and schools to ensure vital fire safety information is given in appropriate formats. Recent initiatives include:

• Attendance at Warrington Disability Awareness Day for the past four years
• Multi-agency (emergency services) day organised for Children of Deaf Adults (CODA) explaining what happens when you dial 999
• Crews have undertaken fire safety talks in residential accommodation for people with varying degrees of autism
• The Service’s D/deaf persons advocate has attended 22 events over the last financial year, raising awareness of the specialist alarm and equipment available from CFRS and Deafness Support Network
• Crews have worked with 11-16 year olds from all over the county with a variety of learning difficulties including Attention Deficit Hyper Disorder and Behavioural Emotional Social difficulties and Autistic tendencies raising awareness of fire safety in the home
• Children from Special Education Needs schools regularly visit local stations and enjoy squirting water and getting key home safety messages
• Using practical scenarios to display fire hazards in the home, work has been undertaken with young people 16-24 who have learning disabilities and/or live in a variety of independent or provided accommodation
• Production of Emergency Sign Language Cards
• Personal invites for a Home Safety Assessment sent to all disabled people registered with Vale Royal Disability Services.

Again this work has raised awareness of fire safety issues to potentially vulnerable groups within the community. It has also given firefighters greater understanding of individuals’ needs and the appropriateness of information.

Fire Crews and advocates have also spent considerable time in schools delivering Key Stage 2 fire safety talks and taking part in reading role models days. Fire safety education has been given to nursery children who have visited stations to find out what firefighters do, while also fulfilling the nursery’s project about people who help others. It is also hoped that by talking to young children, they take the message back to their family about escape routes.

The Service actively targets young (16-24) year old drivers to identify dangers associated with drug/drink driving, not wearing seatbelts and
using mobile phones to mention just a few. This has resulted in thousands of young people being given this vital road safety information and formal evaluation has taken place which can be found in the evidence folder.

The Service also undertakes numerous motorway / driver / biker engagement days with partners, namely the Police to work to educate drivers who are committing offences. People stopped during the days are offered a choice of points on their license or a talk / video from operational crews.

The Youth Engagement Team operate a number of prevention initiatives, such as Cadets, RESPECT, Princes Trust, and On The Streets. All of these are for young people and the aim is to build confidence, team building, and respect. Initiatives like the Prince’s Trust Programme and RESPECT also involve some form of community work for example, a PT group helped to decorate a local café designed for disabled clients. On the Streets is targeted at young people to prevent anti social behaviour and sees youth workers going into areas with high incidents of small arson fires or anti social behaviour.

All this work, coupled with the HSA delivery programme, has been responsible for the following reductions:

- injuries from fires down from 133 in 2004-05 to 37 in 2009-10
- accidental dwelling fires from 675 to 470
- RTCs attended down from 760 to 386
- those who were killed on Cheshire roads down from 97 in 2005 to 42 in 2009
- the number of people seriously injured down from 709 to 547.

It has also helped with the growth and support of the Service’s extensive volunteers and cadet programmes.

**Community Fire Protection**

The Community Fire Protection department has also undertaken work specifically targeting BME business owners or those who employ large numbers of migrant employees.

For example, it was identified that within the Crewe and Nantwich area there was a number of ‘houses of multiple occupation’ which resulted in a number of contraventions of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 that needed to be addressed, as well as community safety issues. The CFP officers worked with estate agents to ensure that both the landlords/ladies knew their responsibilities under the Fire Safety Order as well as providing home fire safety information to the occupiers.

The team also wanted to ensure compliance to the above Act in terms of evacuation and training given to employees by employers who had large numbers of migrant workers where English may be their second language. CFP Officers worked with local recruitment agencies to identify appropriate employers and completed Fire Safety Audits. It was found that many of the employees’ English was advanced enough to understand the written and verbal communications given by the organisation, however, where language barriers existed, fire marshals within the organisation were able to translate the relevant information.

During these sessions Home Fire Safety information was given to the employees in line with community safety priorities, with one employer agreeing to put home fire safety information in pay slips.

In 2010, following a revised definition of what comprises a ‘premise’ under fire safety legislation, CFP and CS staff worked together in engaging with the Gypsy and Traveller community. Joint visits were made to sites and Home Safety Information was distributed, while the CFP teams identified issues such as appropriate distance between caravans. This approach helped the Service improve its engagement with the
Targeted activity was also undertaken in relation to takeaway premises (predominantly BME owned) with sleeping accommodation above. This followed random audits which highlighted the potential life risk. Occupiers were given 4-6 weeks notice prior to the Service’s arrival. A number of prohibition notices were issued due to the serious nature of the risks found. From 1/04/09 to 31/03/2010 there were 20 prohibition notices served in total, 11 of which were in Indian or Chinese food premises which equates to 55% of all prohibitions.

The Community Fire Protection Department have carried out Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 seminars for BME business to try to overcome some of these issues. This was organised in conjunction with the Asian Business Association. Following this close working they are also in the early stages of recruiting a Chinese volunteer to support CFRS by improving compliance with the Fire Safety Order in Chinese fast food outlets.

This work has again contributed to the Service successfully reducing the number of fires in businesses from 668 to 243.

**Online services**

The Service recognises that it is not only face to face communication that is important in keeping residents informed and involved in the Service and key safety messages. A key focus in recent years has been to continually develop and improve its website, with a particular emphasis on accessibility and usability. This has resulted in the Service’s website being repeatedly highlighted in the annual ‘Better Connected’ survey run by the Society of Information and Technology Management (SOCITM) as the best fire and rescue service website in the country.

The latest report described Cheshire’s site as ‘informative and attractive with masses of information … an excellent site’. In addition the website has the Plain English crystal mark and accreditation from the Shaw Trust – the most challenging of accessibility awards which involves detailed assessment by a team of testers with a range of disabilities. This accreditation is
particularly relevant for the Service given the potential vulnerability of some of its key at risk groups.

The Service is making increasing use of social media to improve online engagement with communities. It has established channels on Facebook with 783 followers, Twitter with 1,245 followers, Flicker with 15,093 page views and YouTube with 18,412 channel views.

The Service has also developed dedicated text messaging services for deaf residents and a registered email and text alert service to keep registered users informed about emergencies and key safety messages.

More recently the Service also introduced Home Safety Direct - an online tool that allows individuals to complete their own safety checks. Designed for residents considered at low risk, it automatically generates a visit by the Service should the assessment trigger key safety issues.

Consultation

The Service’s external consultation process has also evolved over the years from purely paper based exercises to the formation and use of Response – a dedicated resident consultation panel, the only such panel within the fire and rescue service. This has been enhanced by the use of focus groups both with general residents and specific representative groups such as the Macclesfield Disability Information Bureau and the Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Racial Equality Council (CHAWREC).

The organisation’s approach to consultation and engagement is set out in it’s Community Empowerment Strategy which has been formally approved by the Fire Authority. A comprehensive corporate database of partner consultees is used to ensure all key stakeholders have the opportunity to comment and shape the development of the Service’s key proposals.

Recent developments have focused on a pro-active approach which has involved taking consultation out to the community and combining it with community safety activities. For consultation on the Integrated Risk Management Plan for 2011-12, 14 community road show events were held in town centres and busy areas at different times and days and made use of mobile outreach vehicles. This resulted in a major increase in public attendance and involvement and ensured a comprehensive final consultation report could be considered by the Fire Authority before making decisions on the IRMP.

Major events such as the Cheshire Show are also used to engage and involve local residents, while the Service also ensures it is accessible to specific groups through repeated attendance at events such as the Warrington Disability Awareness Day and Manchester Pride. At the latter the Service uses its high profile presence – the organisation won best public sector entrant in 2010 – to distribute safety messages as well as promoting itself as a positive employer.
Employment and training

Recruitment

For some years the Service has been taking forward proposals to encourage a more diverse workforce, recognising that it was under-represented within the Black and Ethnic Minority community and also in female firefighters.

Historically the work undertaken to address this issue was through attendance at BME recruitment fairs predominantly organised by the then Race Equality Council. Following the formation of the Equality Task Group, this was one of the first issues to be addressed and a small working group was formed.

The first round of ‘Positive Action’ days were held in town centres across Cheshire, Halton and Warrington with media campaigns highlighting where the Service would be. This proved successful in terms of attendance but feedback from visitors highlighted that individuals wanted to know more about the FRS from basic salary, working hours, to holiday entitlement (this was noted specifically within the BME community). They also wanted further information on the application form (Personal Qualities and Attributes), written tests and physical standards. It was further identified during consultation with younger females that they still had a very stereotypical view of a firefighter and their role.

As a result, the approach was revised and it was decided to hold awareness days using stations and at Headquarters. The workshop-style sessions focused on the application form, interview skills and ‘have a go’ sessions with the entry tests.

Operational crews ran the entry test section whilst staff from Human Resources provided the application/interview skills sessions. The fourth session was the Service’s corporate DVD which gave potential applicants a clear overview of the role of a firefighter and the diverse nature of the FRS and Cheshire specifically.

Numerical and literacy tests are also given out and put onto our website to support individuals, while BME Recruitment fairs have been attended by the BME Equality Task Group rep.

In terms of advertising, CFRS targeted gyms, including female only, hairdressers, beauty salons, schools, local shops e.g. Polish delicatessens, halal meat shops etc.

The feedback from those sessions was highly successful with most individuals finding the whole day informative. This was supplemented with an information pack containing contractual and factual information regarding station activity and terms and conditions, while practice written papers and numerical tests were also provided.

On top of this the Service engaged with numerous schools and colleges who were holding career events to ensure that there was a representative with information relating to a career in the FRS, covering the range of opportunities available to them.

Articles have been placed in a number of publications specifically targeting under-represented groups. They featured ‘A Day In The Life Of...’ articles of both a BME and a female firefighter. The publications were sent to colleges and universities in the North West Area. Along with this, the Service is a Stonewall Diversity Champion and has a profile in their ‘Starting Out’ recruitment guide which is sent out to colleges and schools throughout the country.

All vacancies are sent to support groups within the area for further circulation. Groups contained on the circulation list include Halton and Warrington Race and Equalities Centre, Disability Partnerships,
The Service has seen an increase in its applicants and successful candidates into the Service over the years, although operationally we have not yet hit all our targets.

In 08-09 and 09-10 fig 7.89% of firefighters were female, this increased to 11.1% in 10-11. This was -3.89% under our 15% target.

4.5% of our support staff workforce are from a BME background (this does include White Irish and White Other) and this is representative of the community within Cheshire, Halton and Warrington. In 2008/09, 0.9% of our operational crews were from BME background and at 2010/11, 1.3% of our operational workforce would classify themselves as BME, however, if White Irish and White Other are included in this figure the percentage increases to 4.2. Full analysis of the recruitment process can be found in the additional evidence.

The Service has also attended Manchester Pride for a number of years. This has been to change the perception of individuals of the FRS not only amongst the Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community but the thousands of visitors and spectators.

This work over the years has resulted in an increase in the diversity of people applying for posts. However, as recruitment has been frozen for Wholetime/Day Crewing duty systems, the Service is reviewing how it can expand this work to continue to increase the diversity of applicants amongst the On-Call and support staff within the Service.

The Service currently supports national organisations such as Networking Women, the Women’s Institute, National Disabled Firefighters Associations, Stonewall, Asian Fire Service Association and advertises all events throughout the Service, specifically to our representatives on the task group. A number of support and operational personnel have attended conferences/days to network and build confidence.

The Chief Fire Officer is actively encouraging a culture of ‘Team Cheshire’ in all corporate presentations and ‘Breakfast with the Chief’ sessions. In recent years the Service has also introduced the STAR Awards which aim to recognise the hard work of individuals within the Service. There are 10 categories which people can...
be recognised under and all nominations are considered by a senior management panel. All those shortlisted are invited to an evening to celebrate their success and to receive a certificate, with an award for the winner from the Chief Fire Officer.

The Service has a number of policies that help and support employees’ progress within the Service and also support a work/life balance. For example, it has had an appraisal process for several years and this has been refined and improved considerably for 2011-12 as a result of staff feedback.

The Service has an appraisal policy covering all employees and this is monitored by the Learning and Development Department. The process highlights and addresses a range of training needs and in 2009-10 for example, 416 training needs were identified and 224 were met. There were a variety of practical issues why the remainder were not met - a full breakdown is in the evidence pack.

The Service’s coaching and mentoring policy also gives individuals an opportunity to further advance their personal development through transfer of knowledge and experience of the mentor/coach. The Service offers flexible working and this is used by both support and operational personnel. On analysis of our returners from maternity it was established that in 2008-09 five people reduced to part time following maternity leave, with three in 2009-10 and just one in 2010-11. Four employees are currently on maternity leave, two of which are already part time.

The Service has made a number of reasonable adjustments to keep people within their posts. These have included hearing aids, dyslexia tests and scribing tests during interviews and applications.

Innovative ways to help career progression within the Service have included the launch of a High Potential Development Scheme and the production of a comprehensive Cheshire-specific Assessment, Development and Competence framework.

**CORE VALUES**

The Service when looking to produce its local values used the annual Management Conference to engage all middle managers. The Service’s Management Team wanted to ensure that individuals from across the Service had an opportunity to input and therefore maximise ownership and buy in. A session was run where groups were asked to consider high performing organisations and what they considered the values of these organisations to be.

All groups identified key traits and these were compared with the Service’s Management Team suggestions. Areas identified by both groups were;

- equality and diversity,
- customer services,
- respecting individuals, and
- continual improvement.

Agreement was sought on the other two potential values identified by the SMT and managers were asked to take the proposed values back to their teams to seek feedback and to clarify understanding of what each value meant.

The Head of Corporate Communications made sure it was part of the Service’s Core Brief, a communication tool to be used by managers when undertaking team briefings. Managers were then asked to feed back comments on the values and the Service’s 6 local values were established and incorporated into all of the Service’s key policies.
Training

Over the years a number of Equality and Diversity training packages and awareness sessions have been introduced and undertaken. These have included e-learning packages, awareness sessions run by the Service’s E and D officer, Equality Impact assessment training, slots on the Service’s Annual Management Conference and ‘Insight’ days – special training days arranged by the organisation for Watch and Crew Managers. In 2008-09 the Service also reviewed its corporate induction process and as a result increased the Equality and Diversity session from 30 minutes to a half-day session.

Operational training days, known locally as Cluster Exercises, are used to test staff knowledge of E and D issues in an operational capacity. The first training day involved a scenario with a non-English speaking lorry driver and the Service was testing knowledge of the services of Language Line. This resulted in the Service re-launching Language Line and asking for receipt from Officers that the number had been stored within all Officers and appliance mobile phones. The second training day involved a disabled (non-mobile) casualty.

All of this work has resulted in our workforce having a clear understanding of the expectations on them as individuals and the Service as an employer and service deliverer. This, we feel, can be seen in the community engagement section of the document and also in the fact that in the last financial year the Service has only had two Dignity at Work cases, and four Grievances.

Facilities

The Service has made adaptations to stations over the years to ensure that not only are they complying with statutory disability requirements, but they also have appropriate female facilities. Because of practical considerations this has resulted in joint accessible toilets and female showering on some stations.

This piece of work is ongoing, particularly in light of the Equality Act 2010 and the removal of the need to be under medical supervision when undertaking the gender transition process. The Fire Authority has given £100,000 in the current year’s budget to enhance facilities in this area and audits have started along with the refurbishment plans.
Equal Pay

The Service initially undertook a pay review in 2005, carried out by the North West Employers, as part of the harmonisation agenda. This concluded that the Service had no non-operational posts on firefighter terms and conditions and that where operational staff were undertaking predominantly policy roles, they still had to remain operationally competent. The Service has recently taken the decision to review this and has appointed a legal consultancy firm to carry this out. Initially, seven points were identified, however, this has been reduced to just one following further investigation. The Service is now identifying how frequently pay reviews need to be undertaken going forward.

Staff survey

In the 2009 Staff Survey the organisation was keen to identify how employees felt the Service were performing in relation to equality and diversity. It was extremely pleasing to see that three quarters of the sample (74%) recognised the organisation’s work in promoting equality and diversity, this was an increase from 65% in 2007. Employees also stated that there was also an improvement in how diversity issues were viewed, with around 60% agreeing that senior management and other staff recognised diversity as an asset. In comparison to bullying and harassment there were far fewer respondents who said that they had suffered from discrimination in the last two years. The most common form of discrimination mentioned was by gender (5%), with 11 females and 14 male staff claiming to have experienced this. The next most common was age-related discrimination (3% of the sample), which seemed to be distributed across the different age groups. A full breakdown can be found in the evidence. As a result of this, the Service re-launched Safecall to ensure that there was a confidential independent help line for those who felt that they couldn’t report it internally.
Evaluation and good practice

This self assessment document has previously highlighted some of the arenas where performance is scrutinised and information about those affected by our services and employment policies and practices are discussed. These include:

- Performance Management Group
- Resources Development Group
- Attendance Management Group
- Equality Task Group
- Performance and Overview Committee.

The Service is also represented on a number of external board meetings which enable partnership working and ensure each partners’ objectives are considered and reviewed. These include:

- Sub-national Leaders’ Board and Management Committee
- CFOA On Call and Operational Training Group
- Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC – domestic abuse)
- Migrant Impact Fund Governance Board
- Cheshire Warrington Equality Leads Group.

The equality information discussed is then used to feed the Service’s Strategic Intelligence Analysis and then incorporated into departmental plans.

For example, the Service’s attendance at the MARAC meetings where individual domestic abuse cases are discussed highlighted a high incidence of arson threats against victims. A referral process has now been established which ensures the Service can promptly fit arson-proof letterbox covers to any at risk premises.

Along with a wide range of national and regional awards which the Service has received in recent years, individuals and teams have also spoken at a number of conferences, sharing best practice and discussing candidly the obstacles and barriers as well as the benefits and outcomes. Highlighted below are some of the conferences that the Service has presented at:

**Data sharing and working with older people**
- Fire Service College Annual Research conference
- Fire Angel conference (Smoke alarm manufacturer)
- Capita Data Sharing conference
- North West Fire and Rescue Service Health Network conference
- North West Diversity in the Community Event
- EdgeHill University Summer School
- Presentation to Directors of Department for Work and Pensions.

**Youth Engagement**
- Fire Service RE10 Conference – RESPECT the importance of evaluation
- Respect Youth Conference.

**Driver Engagement**
- CFOA North West Road Safety Lead Officers
- CFOA National Executive Board
- Parliamentary Advisory Committee Transport Safety.

One of the outcomes of this information sharing has been other organisations developing their own variations on the Service’s ‘Think Drive Survive’ course – its main programme to promote road safety among young people. Similarly, the Service
has paved the way for others through the strides it has made with the data sharing protocol established between itself and key partners.

Other national recognition involved a recent visit from Neil O’Connor, Director of Fire, Resilience and Emergencies, to find out more about the Service’s SPRINGBOARD partnership project to support older people.

In addition, Chief Medical Officer for England, Sir Liam Donaldson, used Cheshire’s work with local primary care trusts as an example of best practice in one of his recent annual reports. He highlighted the ‘Fire and Flu’ initiative which saw both nurses and community safety advocates operating out of a ‘mobile fire station’. Older people who visited to get their annual flu jab were sat down immediately afterwards and signed up for a free Home Safety Assessment while they recovered.

**Conclusion**

The Service believes the evidence and outcomes highlighted in this self assessment document demonstrates that it displays the key characteristics of the excellence framework.

Its strong leadership, detailed awareness of its communities and its sophisticated risk profiling mean it is well placed to deliver positive outcomes and improvements in the safety of all residents of Cheshire.

While more still needs to be done in areas such as workforce representation, the organisation believes its staff have the commitment and dedication to make the necessary improvements.