



7 Longdon Drive, Four Oaks, Sutton Coldfield. B74 4RF

Date: 17th March 2016

Dear Surjit

Thank-you for giving the AFSA Executive the opportunity to comments on the London Fire Brigades proposed 10 year inclusion Strategy.

On behalf of AFSA we would like to congratulate London FRS for recognising the need for a long term sustained commitment towards diversity and inclusion.

Having reviewed the draft strategy we would like to put forward the following suggestions for your consideration:

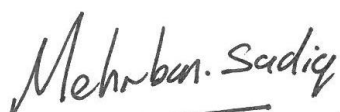
1. It cannot be stressed enough that the work proposed to foster an inclusive culture within the London Fire brigade should be sustained by its core values fairness, integrity, respect, service and trust (FIRST). Given the diversity of the London, these values have particular resonance. We would therefore recommend that the proposed inclusion strategy has the values of London FRS at the centre.
2. Consistent analysis of progress at London FRS demonstrates not enough progress has been made in the past 20 years to address the representation of black and minority ethnic (BME) staff in the London Fire Brigade any all levels. We would also in particular like to highlight the number of BME staff who have retired or will be retiring within the next five years. Therefore we would therefore recommend the adaptation of a standard that addresses the recruitment, representation of BME Staff at all levels and their subsequent employment experience one example of such a standard has been introduced within the NHS (workforce race equality standard).
3. The nature of the workings of the fire service highlights the important of teams. Research indicates that most discrimination occurs and where the opportunities to bring about change are most likely to be effective. The approaches likely to have the greatest benefit are those that encourage inclusion and value different perspectives.
4. The proposed strategy emphasises a commitment to undertaking 'unconscious bias training'. We welcome the use of such as approach but with a caveat. We would like to advice that our experience and subsequent research indicates that messages communicated through diversity training interventions can have negative consequences. For example, asserting that most people exhibit unconscious race bias can legitimise that bias, making people feeling less motivated to discover their own prejudice and change their attitudes and behaviours.
5. We would like to highlight and recommend that training programmes in which participants agree a number of specific goals for their behaviour and attitudes (and

review their progress) are more successful than interventions that focus on simply educating participants or encouraging discussion.

6. Within your proposed strategy you rightly so emphasised the legal drivers for addressing diversity and inclusion. Our experience indicates that it is also important to educate people and leaders about the subtler aspects of discrimination. Although in society more generally there has been a move away from overt forms of discrimination (racist or sexist comments; consciously rejecting candidates because they have a mental health problem), more covert, subtle forms of discrimination continue – e.g., negative humour, harassment and ridicule without overt discriminatory content – and these are harder to identify, assess and eradicate.
7. AFSA has long emphasised the importance of Fire services having visible and sustained top management support for positive diversity and inclusion policies and practices. But it is equally important that these are seen to be implemented effectively are consistently reinforced by middle management.
8. Within your strategy you list a number of actions you intend to undertake. We feel that these enablers will be useful but alone are not enough, however; we would therefore recommend that London Fire Brigade take a strategic approach to creating a culture of inclusion. The key elements necessary for cultures of inclusion are also associated with high-quality service provision care. These elements include the following (a) common values and a sense of common purpose (b) clear individual and team objectives and feedback to ensure a sense of injustice does not spread (c) Promoting contact and advancing a sense of positivity between staff and the diverse communities London Fire Brigade serves. Our experience and research indicates that positivity reduces stereotyping and also the psychological distance that people perceive between themselves and others who are dissimilar.
9. We would also encourage your organisation to use suitable performance indicators such as staff and community satisfaction, staff engagement and absenteeism and engagement and health well-being to demonstrate that your approach is working.
10. We welcome the investment of internal staff networks but would also encourage London Fire brigade to continue to work with external staff organisations such as our selves -AFSA.

Finally as the founders of AFSA we are very pleased that London Fire Brigade will be hosting the AFSA National Conference 2016 and we remain committed to working with London Fire Brigade to implement its 10 year inclusion strategy.

Yours sincerely



Mehrban Sadiq
AFSA Chair

Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA)

The Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA) is an independent inclusive employee led support group with the desire to raise the profile of Asian staff and associated issues.

AFSA works with Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) to mainstream issues around equality and diversity in two priority areas:

• **Service provision • Employment policy and practice**

AFSA's main source of income is the £800 per annum received from each of its Corporate Members. We have traditionally done further work to potentially generate income through the development of various products i.e. community handbooks/conferences etc.

AFSA's direction and behaviour are governed by:

- Our existing Vision
- Our existing Core Values
- Our proposed four Strategic cornerstones & accompanying objectives
 - **Our Vision** remains (*what we are seeking to become*): AFSA will work with the National Fire and Rescue Service and supporting agencies to enhance equality and diversity and associated values.
 - **Our Core Values** reflect the values of the Fire and Rescue Service and remain (*determining the way we operate and enabling us to achieve our vision*):
 - **Service to the community** – and our united purpose – to improve the quality of service.
 - **Our People** – we look to harness the collective strength of staff from the FRS.
 - **Diverse communities** – we are prepared to stand up and be counted; we continually seek to develop new and better ways of working with and for the diverse communities.
 - **Continuous improvement** – we understand the FRS, the many challenges it has overcome and the transition it is now undertaking.

Membership

AFS has 32 corporate members. Membership is open to all Fire and Rescue Service in the form of Corporate Membership, Individual Membership and Associate Membership for non-Fire and Rescue Service employees. The Association is inclusive to **All**.