



#blacklivesmatter - Response

5th June 2020

Systemic Racism damages the fabric of our society

AFSA Chair, Dalvinder Rai calls on the fire and rescue services to reflect on and take the lead in challenging structural racism within their organisations

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Recent tragic events have highlighted the deep-rooted problem of race discrimination within our society. We need to all undertake some honest critical introspection and accept that racism exists in various forms in our own organisations.

This calls us to work together and make change happen. Now is not the time for silence, we strongly believe black lives matter, we stand in solidarity with our members and partners and are committed to helping build a world where everyone can live with dignity and be free from fear. We therefore echo and support the statement from the National Fire Chiefs Council that:

'Black Lives DO Matter; our thoughts are with everyone grieving and hurting following the death in the USA of George Floyd. We embrace inclusion and reject racism. It is a tragedy we should all be talking about. We are proud to champion the struggle'. Similarly, we support actions taken by staff who #taketheknee to express their solidarity.

The need to act now should not come a surprise to any one of us. We know there is a significant under-representation of ethnic minorities at the top of UK boards, as shown by the Government's recent [Parker review](#). Closer to home and the fire service the 1999 – Thematic Review - [Equality and Fairness in The Fire Service Report](#) and subsequent reports – [AFSA Smoke and Mirrors Report \(2018\)](#) and the [Independent Cultural Review of Essex County Fire and Rescue Service](#) all consistently point to the need to review a range of leadership and cultural issues as well as taking specific steps in a wide range of areas to improve practices attaching to equality and fairness. This is an issue that has not disappeared within our organisations and the fire service needs to commit to making real and substantial change now.

Responding to recent events, Dalvinder Rai, Chair of the AFSA, says:

'Whether it is racism, discrimination or prejudice – all have no place in society let alone the fire service. The fire service as a community provider and employer must work with staff and diverse communities to challenge and work towards eliminating prejudice and commit to a culture of inclusion. I encourage chief fire officers and other leaders to dedicate time and effort in discussing current events with staff and community stakeholders.

'On behalf of the AFSA I encourage all fire and rescue services to take the following key actions:

- Publicly share your organisation's position on #blacklivesmatter
- Engage with black and minority staff and staff in general
- Demonstrate public leadership from the centre and at a local community station level
- Share and reiterate the organisation's commitment towards equality, diversity and inclusion.

'I encourage you to visit our revamped [AFSA Website](#) and book on to the series of [webinars](#) we have organised. We will also continue to share weekly [updates](#) with you.

'The AFSA will continue to listen and work with staff and leaders within the fire service on race equality through dialogue and support.

'Finally, it is crucial we all continue to work together to ensure equality, diversity and inclusion remain a top priority of fire service reform, policy and practice as well as experience. Therefore, using themes we are all very much familiar with – let us challenge “*systemic racism within fire and rescue services through prevention, protection and responding*”.