FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE EQUALITY FRAMEWORK
AND
PEER CHALLENGE TOOLKIT

Contents

Introduction

This guidance has been produced to assist fire and rescue services prepare for a peer challenge at both the 'achieving' and the 'excellent' levels of the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework (FRSEF). The aim of the FRSEF is to help fire and rescue services integrate their commitments to promote equality and diversity into their day to day work.

The FRSEF is one of three self-assessment equality frameworks that have been developed by Local Government Association (LGA) for public sector organisations to assess their work on equality. The others are the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) and the Social Housing Equality Framework (SHEF).

The FRSEF has been revised to:
- Reflect the new national policy and legal context, including the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty
- Bring the headings and structure more into line with EFLG and SHEF to enable benchmarking, information sharing and liaison with partners on local equality priorities and objectives
- Reflect the removal of the national 'Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-2018' (CLG)

FRSEF in summary

The FRSEF covers five performance areas:
- Knowing your communities
- Leadership, partnership and service commitment
- Community engagement and satisfaction
- Responsive services
- A skilled and committed workforce.

There are three levels of achievement:

- Developing
- Achieving
- Excellent

Each of the five performance areas has a number of linked elements which encourage fire and rescue services to progress through the three levels.

Knowing your communities

The fire and rescue sector is unlike the rest of the public sector in that it does not have specific service users. The public will generally need the service when an emergency arises. To understand the causes of potential fire and rescue situations so that prevention messages and initiatives are made relevant to the needs of the community, a fire and rescue service (FRS) needs

to acquire and use information. Services get much of this through their work in partnership with other public sector organisations locally and nationally.

Leadership, partnership and service commitment

Positive political and managerial leadership at all levels is essential to drive change, maintain commitment and create improvement. Senior service leaders and members need to demonstrate their commitment through personal impact and by making resources available to deliver improvements.

Fire and rescue authority members have a central role in ensuring that equality improvements are integral to the authority's strategic aims and performance. They will often have a good knowledge and understanding of the needs of their local communities, which should be used to inform service activities. High performing fire and rescue authorities will be led by members and officers or managers who have a reputation for championing equality issues, ensuring that objectives and activities are relevant to community needs. They will have ensured that employees are clear about their role in making the service a fair and inclusive service. Fire authority chairs will also be promoting good community relations and ensuring that the service achieves equality outcomes.

Identifying and setting appropriate equality objectives are important to achieving significant progress. Fire and rescue services should be able to demonstrate monitoring and reviewing of their equality objectives and achievement of significant outcomes. They should be able to demonstrate that procurement is contributing to its equality objectives, including arrangements for regularly monitoring and reviewing processes.

Partnership between employers, representative bodies and other public sector services is essential to provide effective support in achieving the desired continuous improvement in performance.

Community engagement and satisfaction

The FRSEF places emphasis upon the importance of working in partnership with its community and key partners who represent their needs. Listening to the community and understanding the many and diverse needs will enable the shaping of an appropriate service.

Responsive Services

Using the knowledge from community engagement and the service's skilled and committed workforce, the work that the service does meets the needs of its diverse local communities.

A skilled and committed workforce

The ability of a fire and rescue service to deliver effective services that meet the diverse needs of local people largely depends upon the skills,

understanding and commitment of its employees. It is therefore vitally important that fire and rescue services make every effort to employ, develop and support a wide range of high quality employees.

Fire and rescue services need to ensure that their workforce ambitions are supported by effective employment, retention and development processes. They must, for instance, be able to demonstrate open, transparent and fair selection and progression processes. They should support and improve employees' understanding of equality and diversity and take robust action to eradicate inappropriate behaviour such as bullying or harassment. Similarly issues affecting culture, working practices, facilities, equipment and clothing must all be addressed so that employees can work in a safe and supportive environment.

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Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework

Knowing your communities					
Developing Understanding the importance of equality		Achieving Developing better outcomes		Excellent Making a difference	
1.Collecting Information					
1.1		2.1		3.1	
The service has in place plans to gather information on the profile of its communities and the extent of inequality and disadvantage within the local area, and to identify priorities across its area.		Relevant and appropriate information is gathered efficiently using a range of methods, across the service's local area, to identify key equality gaps and inform the service's Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) and other strategic documents.		The service has good quality information of the equality profile of its communities and their changing needs, which is regularly updated and used to inform planning and monitor outcomes.	
How was this done and what is the evidence? Questions / issues authorities might consider:					
Is the service clear about what sources of local information might be relevant and useful?		Are different methods being deployed to gather data? How is information disaggregated and analysed on the basis of different communities?		How are changing needs identified, prioritised and met? How often is data gathered?	
2.Analysis and using information					

2.1		2.2		3.2	
Systems are being developed corporately to collect and analyse soft and hard data/information about its communities.		Systems are in place for the disaggregation and analysis of data/information to identify at risk communities and inform service planning.		Service planning and outcomes are reviewed and evaluated regularly at a corporate level	
How was this done and what is the evidence? Questions / issues authorities might consider:					
Does the service have systems for collating and analysing the different sets of data being collected? How frequently is data gathered and analysed? Have staff been briefed on why the FRS needs to collect this data? Are safeguards in place to ensure that data is stored securely?		What information is collected? Is the service able to gauge how its communities might be changing? Is information disaggregated and analysed on a regular basis? What changes have been made as a result? How is it used to inform the objective setting?		What analysis has taken place? How has it contributed to service improvement? Is continuous improvement being achieved? What evidence is there of gaps being narrowed? Have relevant targets been set to reduce risk to communities? Are these regularly monitored?	

3.Sharing information between partners					
1.3		2.3		3.3	
Plans are in place to collect, share and use equality information with partners.		Information and data is mapped, disaggregated and used with partners, to identify at risk communities and inform service planning.		The service and partners are able to identify how communities are changing and the impact this may have on at risk communities and service planning. Service planning and outcomes are reviewed and evaluated regularly.	
How was this done and what is the evidence? Questions/issues authorities might consider:					

| Are there protocols in place for sharing information? Is the service working with its partners to ensure information is shared effectively? | | How is the information being used to inform and reduce risk and achieve service plan outcomes? How does the service demonstrate working with partners to obtain data and information on local community needs? | | How is the service working with partners to manage the diverse needs of their communities? How are changing needs identified, prioritised and met? How often is data gathered? | |

Leadership, partnership and service commitment					
Developing Understanding the importance of equality		Achieving Developing better outcomes		Excellent Making a difference	
4.Leadership, vision and commitment					
1.4		2.4		3.4	
The Chief Fire Officer and Members commit publicly to the service's core values to develop an organisation which values and supports equality and any human rights considerations.		Clear organisation equality and human rights priorities have been set and are owned and understood by all key stakeholders.		The service can demonstrate success in achieving a range of outcomes for at risk communities, which are reviewed on a regular basis.	
How was this done and what is the evidence? Questions/issues authorities might consider:					
What documentation details the commitment of the service to equality, diversity and human rights? How is the 'equality story' integrated into corporate documents? Who is responsible for delivering the agenda at fire authority and service leader level? Is there a corporate equality group?		Are equality/human rights objectives integral to the corporate service plan and corporate performance management systems? How are the views and expertise of stakeholders used to inform service delivery?		What evidence is there of improved outcomes? Can employees or the local community give any good examples of improved service outcomes? What review mechanisms are in place?	

5.Integrated Risk Management Planning					
1.5		2.5		3.5	
The service is committed to developing an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) that takes full account of the needs of its local communities.		Arrangements are in place to review implementation of the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP).		The service has a sophisticated and segmented understanding of its local communities, which informs and influences its Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP).	
How was this done and what is the evidence? Questions/issues authorities might consider:					
What information has been used in the development of the IRMP? How does the service ensure that it is able to identify service needs based on a constantly changing population? Who has been consulted?		What arrangements are in place to review the IRMP? How does the service scrutinise equality issues that have been embedded in the IRMP? Who is involved in the scrutiny process? How are local communities involved in this process? How challenging is the scrutiny?		How well does the service know its local communities? Is there regular engagement with local communities? What methods are used to engage with them? How does knowing the community inform and influence the IRMP?	

6.Local partnership working					
1.6		2.6		3.6	
Partnerships and working arrangements, such as those for the local strategic partnership are in place with the voluntary and community sector and the wider community to		Outcomes for at risk communities are monitored regularly by key partners and the Members and senior leadership and appropriate resources are allocated to achieving them.		The service can demonstrate success in working with a range of partners to deliver outcomes for at risk communities, which are reviewed on a regular basis.	

deliver outcomes for at risk communities.					
How was this done and what is the evidence? Questions/issues authorities might consider:					
What partnership arrangements are in place? Which partners does the service work with? What evidence is there of which at risk communities have been identified? What evidence is there of involvement by key stakeholders to deliver outcomes for at risk communities?		How are outcomes for at risk communities monitored, reviewed and evaluated? Are outcomes monitored through the corporate performance management framework?		What evidence is there of improved outcomes as a result of partnership working? Can employees, and/or the community or voluntary sector give examples of improved service outcomes? What review mechanisms are in place?	
7.Working with representative bodies					
1.7		2.7		3.7	
The service involves representative bodies on equality issues in order to develop a constructive and collaborative working relationship.		The service enables representative bodies to be involved in the delivery of corporate service and workforce objectives.		Representative bodies are actively encouraged to fulfil a positive role in delivering a wide range of corporate service and workforce objectives.	
How was this done and what is the evidence? Questions/issues authorities might consider:					
What arrangements are in place to involve representative bodies on equality issues?		What arrangements are in place to involve representative bodies? What contribution have representative bodies made?		What evidence is there of representative bodies being actively encouraged to fulfil a positive role? What examples of positive contribution are there by representative bodies to deliver	

				corporate service and workforce objectives?	

8.Equality analysis

1.8		2.8		3.8	
A corporate system is in place for conducting equality analysis of the potential effects of planned changes to financial plans, policy and/or service delivery on different communities and employees.		The service can demonstrate it mitigates risks as a result of equality analysis and monitors outcomes from its decision-making.		The service can demonstrate that actions taken to mitigate risks are achieving the desired outcomes.	
How was this done and what is the evidence? Questions/issues authorities might consider:					
Is there a corporate system for equality analysis? Is guidance, training and support on equality analysis offered on a systematic basis? What potential effects have been identified?		What evidence is there of equality analysis being undertaken? What is the quality of the analysis? Are mitigating actions identified where appropriate?		What evidence is there of desired outcomes being achieved?	

9.Legal duties

1.9		2.9		3.9	
The service complies with the Public Sector Equality Duty.		Action is taken to implement the commitments within the Public Sector Equality Duty, which is regularly monitored by senior leadership.		The service can demonstrate significant, year-on-year improvements in outcomes for employees and at risk communities as a result of the Public Sector Equality Duty.	

How was this done and what is the evidence? Questions/issues authorities might consider:					
Has the organisation published evidence of how it complies with the Public Sector Equality Duty? Has it published equality objectives. Are plans in place to report at least annually?		What actions have been taken? How is progress monitored, reviewed and reported publicly?		What evidence is there of outcomes for at risk communities? Are outcomes reviewed regularly?	

10. Communication and promoting commitments

1.10		2.10		3.10	
The service's internal and external communication strategies are designed to foster good relations across all local communities.		The service communicates effectively regarding its equality priorities, how it responds to local communities' needs and fosters good relations.		The service has gained a reputation within the community and among key partners for championing and achieving equality outcomes and fostering good relations.	
How was this done and what is the evidence? Questions/issues authorities might consider:					
Is the service's communication strategy designed to ensure a wide range of communities are communicated with effectively? Do the service's publications and press releases reflect a diverse community and workforce in terms of both content and images? Is the service's website accessible and informative? What is done to foster good relations across communities?		How is 'equality' success defined and communicated? What methods are used? How does the service foster good relations across the community?		Is the service approached to share information about its achievements? Can employees, the community or the voluntary and community sector give examples of how good relations is fostered?	

11.Procurement					
1.11		2.11		3.11	
Equality matters are fully considered during the procurement of goods and services.		The service ensures that the procurement process is regularly monitored and reviewed.		The service can demonstrate that procurement processes are contributing to its equality-related priorities.	
How was this done and what is the evidence? Questions/issues authorities might consider:					
Is there corporate guidance on the equality requirements for the procurement function? Are there standard equality clauses for contracts? How do specifications take account of the different needs? Is equality analysis part of the process when procuring services? Are the outcomes reflected in the specifications for the service and in the procurement process? Does the specification set measurable criteria for contractors or suppliers?		How are equality issues addressed in the stages of the tendering process, for example when preparing the specification, pre-qualification and tender assessment? Are monitoring requirements built into contracts to ensure equality issues are addressed? How do managers ensure that suppliers have an understanding and commitment to the principles and practice of equality in what they do?		What evidence is there that procurement processes contribute to the achievement of equality priorities? How does the service ensure that contractors/suppliers continue meet changing needs? How is the contract managed over time to support good practice and continuing service improvement? Is there evidence that contracts are being monitored using quantitative and qualitative analysis, and the results considered and analysed?	
12.Fostering good relations					
1.12		2.12		3.12	
Structures are in place with partners to foster good relations, enable different		The quality of relationships between different communities/groups of people		There is evidence to support improved relationships and	

communities/groups of people to get on well together.		are monitored and analysed.		understanding of different communities/groups of people.	
How was that done and what is the evidence? Questions/issues authorities might consider:					
What structures are in place to support fostering good relations within the community?		What evidence is there of partnership work to improve relations with communities/groups? How is this monitored? What does the analysis tell you?		What evidence is there to demonstrate mutual understanding and joint working of different communities/groups of people?	

Community engagement and satisfaction					
Developing Understanding the importance of equality		Achieving Developing better outcomes		Excellent Making a difference	
13.Effective community engagement					
1.13		2.13		3.13	
The service engages with at risk communities to identify and reduce risk.		Improved outcomes are being delivered for at risk communities as a result of efficient and effective community engagement.		At risk communities are involved in the design and delivery of interventions that deliver improved outcomes.	
How was this done and what is the evidence? Questions/issues authorities might consider:					
What engagement structures are in place? How are at risk groups involved?		Does community engagement take place on an on-going basis? How is its effectiveness monitored? Are there targeted interventions specifically for at risk groups? What feedback has been received from stakeholders of at risk groups?		How are people from at risk communities encouraged and enabled to participate? Are a range of methodologies used? How has involving the community enabled a difference to be made to the delivery of the service?	

Responsive services					
Developing Understanding the importance of equality		Achieving Developing better outcomes		Excellent Making a difference	

14.Community Satisfaction					
1.14		2.14		3.14	
The service consistently communicates progress on service delivery to all communities.		The service monitors and takes action on community perceptions and satisfaction.		The service has achieved measurable improvements arising from community feedback.	
How was this done and what is the evidence? Questions/issues authorities might consider:					
How does the service communicate progress on service delivery? Is it widely accessible to local communities? Does it include targeted communication where appropriate?		How does the service gather information on the perceptions and satisfaction of the community? How are complaints dealt with?		What views and needs have been taken into account? What improvements have been delivered? Are they being measured and recorded?	

15.Human Rights					
1.15		2.15		3.15	
Appropriate mechanisms are in place to ensure that human rights considerations are identified when		Human rights issues are considered and addressed when delivering services to all citizens.		More people believe that they have been treated fairly and that their human rights have been respected	

planning services and that citizens are treated with dignity and respect.					
How was this done and what is the evidence? Questions/issues authorities might consider:					
Do service provision policies highlight human rights considerations? Do staff have the competence to identify potential human rights issues? What training has been provided to service planners?		How are human rights issues taken into account? What guidance is available for staff? Are manuals updated regularly with regard to changing case law?		Is there any evidence of improvement over time? Are there any examples of the different experiences of communities and are these being analysed and acted upon?	
16.Evaluation and Sharing Good Practice					
1.16		2.16		3.16	
The service is aware of good practice and learns from others.		The service is informed by good practice and has made changes to its practices as a result of learning from others.		The service creates and develops good practice. Other organisations look to it for information and advice.	
How does the service become aware of good practice? What best practice has been considered?		What examples of good practice are used? How has it learnt from others?		Is the service approached on a regular basis to provide examples of or showcase good practice? Has it been asked to improve performance on equality in another organisation?	

A skilled and committed workforce					
Developing Understanding the importance of equality		Achieving Developing better outcomes		Excellent Making a difference	
17.Workforce strategy					
1.17		2.17		3.17	
The service's workforce strategy identifies key equality issues to be addressed.		The equality objectives of the workforce strategy are implemented and monitored.		A range of innovative processes are in place which deliver equality outcomes for the whole workforce.	
How was this done and what is the evidence? Questions/issues authorities might consider:					
Are there a range of workforce strategies and policies?		How are the equality aspects of the workforce strategy being implemented and monitored? Are specific actions being taken? How are processes changing?		What strategic, innovative and crosscutting approaches have been considered to improve outcomes? Is there good use of opportunities for employees that deliver improved outcomes, for example flexible working? Are there career opportunities for part-time employees?	
18.Workforce diversity					
1.18		2.18		3.18	

The service uses effective processes for the employment, development and promotion of a diverse workforce, including understanding its local labour market.		Employment objectives have been set based on the assessment of the local labour market and barriers to employment.		The service can demonstrate significant progress in improving the diversity of its workforce.	
How was this done and what is the evidence? Questions/issues authorities might consider:					
What processes are in place? What progress has been made in employment, development and promotion?		What objectives have been set? Where workforce data indicates that targets or objectives are not being met, are there appropriate examples of positive action? Where there is evidence of disproportionally, what action is being taken to reverse the trends?		What evidence is there of the service improving the diversity of applicants for employment, development and promotion?	

19.Workforce monitoring

1.19		2.19		3.19	
The service ensures that all employment procedures comply with equality legislation and employment codes of practice.		The service regularly monitors, analyses and publishes employment data in accordance with its statutory duties.		The service acts promptly upon adverse trends identified from monitoring and analysis of employment data.	
How was this done and what is the evidence? Questions/issues authorities might consider:					
Are all employment policies regularly reviewed to ensure they are compliant with the latest developments?		Is there evidence that workforce data is analysed and published to help establish targets and objectives? What information is published and where? Are trends identified? What action has been taken as a result of the monitoring?		Is the workforce profile updated regularly? Does monitoring and analysis encompass a wide range of equality matters? What action has been taken to address adverse trends?	

20.HR policies and procedures					
1.20		2.20		3.20	
The service has undertaken or is undertaking analysis of the potential effects of employment policies and procedures. This analysis is made public.		The effects of all employment policies and procedures have been assessed, and action has been taken to mitigate any adverse impact identified and to promote equality of opportunity.		A range of examples is readily available of positive outcomes from action to promote equality of opportunity.	
How was this done and what is the evidence? Questions/issues authorities might consider:					
Are equality analyses being undertaken when employment policies and procedures are reviewed or developed?		Have equality analyses been carried out for all people management processes? What action has been taken to ensure equality outcomes?		Have positive and tangible outcomes been delivered? Is the service maximising the potential of employees? Is there a cycle of continuous improvement?	
21.Employee engagement					
		2.21		3.21	
The service communicates regularly with employees to raise awareness and understanding of workplace equality and the actions needed to address them.		Employees are engaged positively in service transformation and in developing new roles and ways of working.		The service has high satisfaction levels across all employee groups.	
How was this done and what is the evidence? Questions/issues authorities might consider:					
What employee engagement structures are there? Are there any employee support networks?		What evidence is there that employees have been proactively engaged? Are there any improvements arising from employee engagement?		Do employees feel engaged? Are staff surveys/communication carried out regularly? Is there any evidence of how levels of satisfaction have improved over time? Are there any examples of different	

				staff experiences being analysed?

22. Promoting a positive working environment					
1.22		2.22		3.22	
The service has assessed all aspects of the working environment.		The service can demonstrate a range of improvements to the working environment.		The service has achieved significant improvements across a wide range of the elements of the working environment.	
How was this done and what is the evidence? Questions/issues authorities might consider:					
Has the service carried out an assessment of its working environment for all employees? What issues have been given consideration in relation to equipment, travel, training, clothing, facilities, food?		What improvements have been made?		What significant improvements have been achieved with equipment, travel, training, clothing, facilities, food etc?	

23. Equal pay review					
1.23		2.23		3.23	
The service has undertaken an equal pay audit as required by the Equal Pay Act 1970.		The service has an action plan in place on equal pay and consulted with recognised trade unions.		Action has been taken to ensure equal pay is fully implemented.	
How was this done and what is the evidence? Questions/issues authorities might consider:					
Has the service developed an equal pay policy, set out a timetable for carrying out its pay review?		Does the service have an action plan in place for equal pay? Have the new proposals been analysed to ensure there are no detrimental effects? Has the service consulted with recognised trade		Overall, is there evidence that men and women are receiving equal pay? Is the situation being monitored / audited regularly?	

		unions? Have managers and employees received information about equal pay?		

24.Inappropriate Behaviour

1.24		2.24		3.24	
The service has policies and systems in place to identify, prevent and deal effectively with inappropriate behaviour in the workplace.		Incidents are regularly monitored, analysed and acted upon.		Action is taken to address the issues identified in relation to inappropriate behaviour	
How was this done and what is the evidence? Questions/issues authorities might consider:					
Is there a dignity at work or harassment and bullying policy? Are there any support structures for staff?		Are harassment and bullying incidents monitored? What action is being taken to address problems? What information and support is available to employees? What training provision has been made for managers (and members) on handling cases?		What issues have been identified? What actions have been taken? What evidence is there to show that managers (and members) understand the importance of equality when managing inappropriate behaviour in the workplace?	

25.Appraisals/Performance Development Reviews

1.25		2.25		3.25	
Annual individual performance reviews, based on the relevant role for all employees include equality objectives.		All employees are delivering improvements on equality objectives based on individual annual performance reviews.		There is strong evidence of outcomes arising from individual personal reviews.	
How was this done and what is the evidence? Questions/issues authorities might consider:					
How do personal performance review		What improvements are being delivered?		What outcomes are being delivered?	

processes ensure employees are aware of their responsibilities and accountabilities? Has the appraisal system been reviewed to take account of equality issues?		Is good performance being recognised?		Is good performance being recognised?	

Learning and development					
1.26		2.26		3.26	
The service has completed individual training needs assessments of the development required by employees to deliver equality outcomes.		The service provides all employees with training and development on equality issues.		The service can demonstrate it has knowledgeable and well trained employees who are better equipped to meet the diverse needs of local communities.	
How was this done and what is the evidence? Questions/issues authorities might consider:					
Have the appropriate competencies been identified? Has an assessment been made as to what equality-related training, learning or development will be required? Does the learning and development plan take account of equality issues?		Is equality an integral part of all employee training and development? Are different methods used to promote learning?		Can the service demonstrate that its employees are knowledgeable and well trained? What evidence is there of employees meeting the diverse needs of local communities?	

Self-assessment and external validation

The FRSEF is a self-assessment for fire and rescue services (FRS). This will lead to judgements about overall performance level, areas of strength and specific areas for improvement. For many services, there will be aspects of their work which may be at both the 'achieving' and 'excellent' levels, even though they would still self-assess their performance as a whole at the 'developing' level. Fire and rescue services rating themselves at the 'excellent' level will still be able to identify areas for improvement. These will help services to set appropriate equality objectives, as required as a specific duty under the Equality Act 2010.

Once an FRS believes it is meeting in full the elements that make up the 'achieving' or the 'excellent' level it can apply for an Equality Peer Challenge (EPC) to validate this self-assessment. A service applying for the 'achieving' level can only be assessed and validated at that level. A service applying for a challenge at the 'excellent' level will be assessed at that level. However should it not meet the criteria for 'excellent' it may be awarded the 'achieving' level.

The peer team will consider the case for either the 'achieving' or 'excellent' level put forward by the fire and rescue service in its written submission (see below) and during an on-site visit. The on-site challenge is two days for the 'achieving' level and three days for the 'excellent' level. Whilst on site, the peer team will speak to a range of internal and external stakeholders including partners, community and voluntary sector organisations, individuals from the community, Fire Authority members, senior officers, fire fighters and support staff. At the 'excellent' level, the team will also visit stations and projects or work initiatives that illustrate the self-assessment. The peers will seek to triangulate evidence that is submitted in order to be confident about the conclusions that it makes.

The team's role is one of a critical friend. The challenge therefore provides an opportunity for fire and rescue services to work with the peer team about the way they do things, what works and what doesn't.

Based on the balance of all it has learned, the team will decide whether it agrees with the service's self-assessment and feedback is given at the end of the challenge. A report is sent to the FRS within eight weeks of the challenge.

Successful services receive a certificate and an accreditation logo which they can use for publicity (for example on their website or other publications).

IDeA Diversity Peer Challenge

The Peer Team

Peer teams consist of an LGA Challenge Manager, two fire officer peers and one member peer. At the 'excellent' level, the team will have an additional external peer from another part of the public sector (for example, local government).

All the peers will have knowledge and experience of equality. Officer peers may be equality practitioners or senior managers with strategic responsibility for equality or diversity within their own service. The lead peer is usually a senior uniformed officer and they will play a key role in facilitating discussions and giving feedback to the service. The member peer is usually a fire authority member with the lead for equality, or equality scrutiny. Services booking an equality peer challenge will be able to approve the proposed peer team.

The LGA is a learning organisation and likes to encourage its staff and peers to shadow and participate in peer challenges. The LGA will meet all costs of any shadow, and will only include them with the consent of the client FRS. The decision on whether to validate the self-assessment will still be made by the appointed peer team.

Roles and responsibilities of the peer team.

Challenge manager:
- first point of contact for the fire and rescue service in preparation and on site.
- liaise with the Service's co-ordinator on a regular basis
- support the FRS preparing for the equality peer challenge, including conducting any meetings with the service and working with it over the timetable and documents
- manage the peer team through the peer challenge process
- produce a written report with the support of the peers, process it through LGA quality assurance processes and agree it with the fire and rescue service.

Lead peer:
- lead spokesperson for the peers
- leads the presentation feedback
- final arbiter on contentious or difficult decisions.

All peers:
- read and review the submission documents before coming on site
- integral part of the team during work on site and maintain good relations with the FRS and the rest of the team
- input specialist advice during the challenge process
- use relevant skills and experience to provide insights into how the service is performing across the FRSEF

- actively contribute to the team's decision on whether or not to validate the self-assessment
- contribute to and deliver the final presentation as appropriate
- contribute to the final report.

The Challenge Process

This guidance outlines the practical elements of a peer challenge. Before addressing these it is important to reflect on the right time to undertake a peer challenge. The fire and rescue service's own self-assessment will be the most important determinant of this. It is crucial that the fire and rescue service sees the exercise as a driver for improvement and it is helpful to consider therefore how its diversity and equality practice has already helped it to: deliver local targets, create strong partnerships with public, private and voluntary and community sectors and demonstrate good customer satisfaction across all its work.

Booking a Peer Challenge

When a fire and rescue service contacts the LGA to arrange an equality peer challenge, they should say when they would like it. There will normally need to be a minimum of 16 weeks lead in time to ensure that documentary evidence is submitted on time and peers appointed. Once a challenge manager is assigned they will agree the dates with the FRS.

The challenge manager sends an email outlining the process which forms the contract between the LGA and the client service. This should be returned as soon as possible, and in any case, before the peer team comes on site.

The fire and rescue service should nominate a co-ordinator to liaise with the challenge manager and to organise the logistics locally. This is usually the officer responsible for equality.

The challenge manager will guide the co-ordinator through the preparation of the submission documents and the practical arrangements for the challenge.

Costs and expenses

The 'achieving' challenge is £4,300 plus expenses. The 'excellent' challenge is £5,400 plus expenses.

Expenses will be charged at cost and include hotel accommodation, meals and travel for the team members.

The challenge submission

The submission should consist of:
- Self-assessment – based on the framework. This is best kept to bullet points answering the questions provided and succinctly demonstrating

what you do and what impact it makes. A template is available on the LGA website.

- Narrative – the service's equality journey, who local communities or customers are, and how the service understands and meets their needs. It should highlight key achievements and challenges under each of the five areas of the framework. This should be no more than 20 sides of A4.
- Case studies - brief but clear illustrations of the outcomes the service has achieved, either individually as a service or in partnership with others
- Other supporting evidence – this includes key strategic documents like the Corporate Plan, Equality Action Plan, Workforce Strategy, Communications Strategy, Engagement strategy and Procurement & Commissioning Strategy.
- a draft timetable for the on site challenge (more details in Appendices 5 and 6).

Evidence should be submitted at least six weeks before the on site peer challenge at the 'achieving' level, and eight weeks for the 'excellent' level. As far as possible hyper links to documentation should be provided, as some of the evidence will be available via the service's website.

The submission can be presented in a number of formats:
- secure temporary group on the Knowledge Hub, the LGA's online support for the public sector
- USB stick
- CD-Rom

The challenge manager will discuss the options with the service. More details about he submission documents are provided in Appendices 2 and 3.

Before the on site challenge

The initial discussion about the challenge with the fire and rescue service's challenge co-ordinator will cover:
- sharing an understanding of the key issues facing the fire and rescue service, including any sensitive issues the peer team need to be aware of. These might include: outstanding Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) investigations; scrutiny which calls into question the fire and rescue service's competence such as intervention from regulatory authorities, political and/or managerial instability, significant adverse national or local publicity; other issues which mean that undertaking the Challenge may undermine the reputation of the fire and rescue service, the fire and rescue service sector or the LGA
- advice on the submission, including the self-assessment, narrative and timetable
- advice on the arrangements for on site challenge including facilities in the peer team's base room, interview rooms, catering and IT requirements.

- discuss hotel recommendations. The hotel should be of business quality and convenient for travel to the fire and rescue service (see Appendix 4 for more details).

At the 'excellent' level:

The submission should be sent eight weeks before the on-site work, although a draft of the service's challenge submission could be sent to the challenge manager as soon as possible after the peer team has been confirmed. The peer team will then consider whether the service appears to be ready for the challenge.

During this time, the team will consider the likelihood of the service being successful in the challenge. If the submission does not appear to contain sufficient evidence to support the 'excellent' level, the team will identify the specific gaps or areas for concern. The challenge manager and the lead peer will discuss this with the service's co-ordinator and may ask for changes or additions to the on site timetable or for additional documents as a result. . The FRS may decide to postpone the challenge, in which case the service would agree an appropriate timescale for the challenge to be re-scheduled with the challenge manager and the lead peer.

The service and the challenge manager can explore other assistance that the LGA can offer such as informal peer feedback, gap analysis or bespoke equality support.

The on-site challenge

The on-site challenge takes place over two or three days depending on the level. Peers use interviews and group meetings with officers, members and other stakeholders to test out the submission.

More information about the on site challenge is available in Appendix 5.

Confidentiality

All of the information that a team gleans from discussions with people during the course of the peer challenge is non-attributable to individuals. This will be emphasised at the start of every meeting and respected at all times. It is vital for the success of the challenge that the team establishes a climate of trust in which people feel they can be open and honest.

One of the key motivations for people acting as a peer is the opportunity to learn from others. Peers are encouraged to return to their own service at the end of the process and talk about their experiences. However the peers respect the fact that some of the information the team comes across may be sensitive in nature and do not use it in any way that may undermine the service or the integrity of the challenge process.

The first day

The FRS co-ordinator and the senior officer with responsibility for equality and diversity will meet the team upon arrival to show them to their base room, inform them about the facilities that have been provided and address any immediate queries that they may have.

Before the interviews and focus groups commence, there should be an introductory meeting with the Chief Fire Officer to provide the peers with a short introduction to the service, its equality journey and any significant service, economic, or political issues. This also provides the team with an opportunity to explain how it will work.

The team then starts its interviews, group meetings and visits in accordance with the agreed timetable.

Feedback

The peer team provides verbal feedback to the fire and rescue service on the final day of the challenge. Normally the team uses a power point presentation format. The LGA has a 'no surprises' policy and so there may be interim feedback during the challenge.

At the end of the challenge the peers reach one of two conclusions:
1. the fire and rescue service's self-assessment has met the requirements of the Equality Framework at the level claimed or
2. the fire and rescue service's self-assessment has not met the requirements of the Framework at the level claimed. If this is the case LGA is able to offer support to help. If the challenge was at the 'excellent' level the peer team can award an 'achieving' level if appropriate.

The challenge report

Following the challenge, a short report is prepared by the peer team and the challenge manager. This covers an explanation of the reasons for the team decision.
The report also highlights:
• feedback on all five areas of the framework
• examples of notable or innovative practices
• significant areas of concern
• suggested areas for consideration based upon the findings
• signposting to other organisations for additional support

The fire and rescue service has the opportunity to comment on the report before a final version is agreed.

<u>Publicity</u>

The FRSEF and the equality peer challenge are elements of sector-led improvement, fire and rescue services will be expected to share their good practice. This may include sharing case studies and participation in learning events.

The LGA will also ask if it can share the good practice found on the challenge. This will only be done with the consent of the participating FRS.

CFOA and the LGA encourages all services to publish their reports and associated action plans. The FRS will need to think through in advance the timing and format of publication.

Appendix   Challenge Flow Chart

Service requests a challenge and offers preferred dates.
Minimum 16 weeks lead in time applies
↓
An LGA challenge manager is assigned and contacts service.
Dates are agreed
↓
Initial discussion takes with the service on preparations for the Challenge
↓
Peer team is sourced
↓
Team is agreed in consultation with client
↓
Six ('achieving'_ or eight ('excellent') weeks before the challenge the service
submits its self-assessment, narrative report, supporting documents and draft
timetable
↓
Peers undertake off-site consideration and analysis of the submission.
↓
Further discussions held with the service. Additional evidence or changes to
the timetable may be requested
↓
Team meets day before the challenge
↓
On-site challenge takes place
↓
At the end of the challenge the peer team gives feedback presentation
including decision
↓
Challenge manager sends draft report to the client within eight weeks of the
Challenge. Final wording is agreed and the document quality assured.
↓
Invoice is sent to client service
↓
Evaluation phone call takes place

Appendix 2 – Submission documents

The service should produce all its documentation electronically, and provide one hard copy of all the main and supporting documents in the peer team's base room.

The self-assessment, narrative and case studies should illustrate what the service has achieved at both a corporate level and in the provision of services against the five performance areas of the FRSEF:
- Knowing your communities
- Leadership, partnership and service commitment
- Community engagement and satisfaction
- Responsive services
- A skilled and committed workforce

When documents are mentioned in support of statements in the submission, a reference or electronic link should be made including an indication of the page number or paragraph that peers should read. Where supporting documents are available on your website a link should be provided.

Many services will already have structures in place that have been used to develop other assessments and inspections and it is usually acceptable to use these.

At both levels of the FRSEF, the peers will look for evidence of outcomes achieved and how the service is making a difference. At the 'achieving' level, the focus will be more on the processes that the service has in place to achieve those outcomes. At the 'excellent' level, there is an expectation that the processes and structures are in place, and the emphasis is on consistently achieving outcomes across all the areas of the framework, all protected characteristics, and all areas of the service. There will still be areas for improvement at both levels, and peers will make a balanced overall judgement based on triangulating the evidence in the submission with the discussions they have on site.

Self-assessment

The service should have conducted its self-assessment before booking the peer challenge. A template is provided on the website to aid this assessment although a service may develop its own way of presenting this assessment.

The self-assessment should clearly set out how well the service meets each of the criteria in the FRSEF. There are some prompt questions provided, and columns to explain how the service demonstrates each element. The peers will focus on the "what difference will this make?" section in order to be sure that the service is achieving outcomes.

The self-assessment can be in note format, using bullet points and referring to other documents as appropriate (including the case studies at the 'excellent' level).

The narrative report

The narrative should be based on the results of the self assessment. It should cover the whole service, and should:
- Introduce the peer team to the service and the place the service covers
- tell the service's equality story and how it works in practice
- outline the service's equality and diversity journey to either the 'achieving' or 'excellent level
- provide the peers with a clear account of the service's key equality and diversity achievements and outcomes.
- describe what being at the 'achieving' or 'excellent' level means to the service, the users of the service and partners.
- set any outcomes that exemplify the service's claim (more detail should be provided in the accompanying case studies at the 'excellent' level)
- include a short description of any recent changes
- an organisation chart
- be no more than 20 pages

Case Studies

At the 'excellent' level, case studies provide an opportunity for the service to demonstrate the breadth and depth of its achievements, The case studies should be examples of different areas of work, projects or initiatives that illustrate the service's self-assessment. They should focus on the outcomes achieved and what difference the work has made to local communities.

Case studies should be kept brief, and can be explored in more depth on site through the visits. They can be referenced in the self-assessment and the narrative as illustrations of the FRSEF criteria.

Appendix 3 - Supporting documents

A contents page should be included stating which specific sections of documents support statements in the narrative or highlight key parts of the document clearly in yellow to bring it to the peers' attention.

The emphasis should be on quality – what really supports your self-assessment – rather than quantity. It is important to consider the relevance of documents and how they help illustrate the self-assessment. While it is down to individual services to decide what is best for them there should be a balance between too little information which does not provide enough evidence and too much which could overwhelm the team.

This list is not mandatory nor is it exhaustive. Each service should decide which documents are most useful to illustrate its self-assessment.

Core documents

▪   Integrated Risk Management Plan
▪   Corporate and service plans with equality actions; targets and examples of how progress is monitored
▪   Corporate Equality Strategy and policies
▪   Corporate equality action plan with targets.
▪   Workforce Strategy
▪   Procurement policy/commissioning policies
▪   Evidence of equality analysis (e.g. equality impact assessments)

Other useful documents

▪   List of key equality personnel, structures and groups
▪   Map of the service area with stations etc
▪   Terms of reference; agenda and latest copy of minutes from corporate group overseeing the equality agenda
▪   Scrutiny arrangements and other member Involvement
▪   Consultation/participation/involvement policy or strategy
▪   User satisfaction surveys/information
▪   Examples of community engagement which has had positive outcomes including with marginalised groups
▪   Extract from resident/community member survey results (only where relevant)
▪   Annual report on complaints handled
▪   Examples of where equality analysis has made a change to service delivery
▪   Evidence of Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliance – details of the percentage of buildings which conform and action plans for future
▪   Sources of local data: examples of what data is being collected
▪   Protocols for sharing data locally
▪   Evidence of how data has been used to inform and achieve equality outcomes e.g. community profiles; service development and Equality Analysis

- Corporate workforce monitoring report including corporate and directorate workforce diversity targets
- Equality training programmes - evidence that managers have received training on harassment and bullying, grievances, discipline etc and examples of what the training covers
- Member training programme and attendance figures
- Induction programme
- Equal pay review and action plan
- Appraisal guidance document
- Anonymous examples of personal development plans demonstrating how equality is embedded into the appraisal process
- Staff Survey Results (relevant extracts only)
- Dignity at Work/Harassment Policy
- Reports from other recent external equality assessments e.g. consultants' reports; peer assessments
- Record of compliments and complaints
- Press coverage, awards e.g. Beacon and Local Innovation Awards, LGC and/or Municipal Journal Diversity Awards, rankings in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index
- Budgetary and service planning framework to show how resources follow needs

Appendix 4 – On site timetable

The on-site visit is a key part of the peer challenge process. It will enable the peers to triangulate the organisation's self-assessment. The interviews, group meetings (and visits at the 'excellent' level) are designed to test the overall claim as well as the information provided in the submission.

A draft timetable for the challenge should be included with the main submission.

Key elements to consider:

▪   Rooms need to be booked for interviews and focus groups. It is easier if these two rooms are booked out for the duration of the peer challenge but this may not be possible. Meetings cannot take place in the team's base room.
▪   Peers generally work in pairs, so have two streams of activity. This allows for an additional third stream if necessary.
▪   don't include too many sessions
▪   It is often easier to schedule all sessions for around an hour. Interviews with one or two people may therefore finish earlier than focus groups. Peers will ensure that they finish within the time allocated, and allow a few minutes between sessions for a break to write up their notes.
▪   Include team review time which is a key part of the challenge process, They will need to meet together each evening to discuss the day's findings.
▪   the timetable may include early evening sessions if necessary or appropriate.
▪   If it is not possible for an interviewee to attend in person, a phone meeting is acceptable.
▪   Allow travel time if needed between buildings or to visits
▪   If peers are invited to meetings already scheduled they should have the opportunity to talk to those attending as part of the challenge, rather than simply observe proceedings.
▪   Interim feedback is often provided at the ends of each day.

Who to include:

Peers will want to meet with people and groups who can validate the self-assessment and triangulate evidence from all the submission documents.

A good approach is to focus on internal stakeholders on day 1 and external stakeholders on day 2. However, in reality this may not be possible

Internal

Chair of fire authority/portfolio holder
Member champion for diversity
Members involved in scrutiny
Opposition group members
Chief Fire Officer

Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Principal Officer leading on equality
Head of Equality
Head of Human Resources
Other Principal Officers (Operational) Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Community engagement manager
Performance management manager
Manager with responsibility for procurement
Trade Union representatives
Key strategic partners (e.g. councils, police, health)
Training officers
Head of Communications (internal and external)
Website manager

Groups

Equality Steering Group
Area and group managers
Station Managers
Employees - below manager level and including both support staff and fire
fighters. The attendees should reflect the diversity of the employees and be
from several different stations.)
Employee Diversity Fora Chairs (if in existence)

External

Community or voluntary groups
Volunteers
Statutory partners
Equality advisory groups

Focus groups and Interviews

Groups should be kept small; ideally no more than twelve people at any one
time. Groups should be discrete, i.e. senior managers, front line staff,
voluntary sector representatives and public sector partners should be seen in
separate groups.

There should be external stakeholder groups: one made up strategic partners
and one made up of community or voluntary groups. Others may be
appropriate.

If possible the interviews with the Chief Fire Officer the Chair of the Fire
Authority should take place on the first day of the Challenge.

External Visits ('excellent' level peer challenges only)

▪ One or two visits to community projects or client events can greatly add
to the peer team's understanding of your achievements.

- Visits should be to community projects or events that are the subject of a case study submitted to the peer team.
- Allow plenty of time for visits including travelling time.
- Each visit will normally be undertaken by two peers.
- During the visit peers will want to talk to recipients of the service as well as officers of the service and its partners.

Appendix 5 - On-site practicalities

Peer team base room

This needs to be lockable and for the exclusive use of the peer team for the duration of the review. This room cannot be used for interviews; telephone interviews or group meetings as there will be confidential information in it about the peer team's deliberations. If it is not possible to provide a lockable room the organisation should provide a lockable cupboard or drawer for peers' belongings during the challenge.

The LGA will advise if any of the peer team have any specific access or other requirements that need to be taken into account. The service will be responsible for ensuring that rooms are allocated for interviews and individuals or groups are available at the right time.

The base room needs to have:
- wall space to stick flip chart paper up
- a table big enough for all the team to sit around and work on
- space to fit all the team and their belongings comfortably
- ICT: two computers or laptops with intranet & internet access, a printer in the room, or secure printing, telephone with internal and external lines
- Stationery: flipcharts, large post-it notes in different colours, note pads for each peer, Blu-tack, pens
- One hard copy of all main documents previously submitted with contents listed clearly
- Projector on the final day to draft the presentation

Other facilities

In addition to the base room, there needs to be separate rooms for interviews and focus groups. The service should provide flipcharts and post-it notes in the rooms used for focus groups.

The team uses PowerPoint to deliver the feedback presentation. This means a projector will be needed in the room where the final feedback is given.

Catering

Hot drinks, water, cold drinks, snacks (e.g. biscuits and fruit) should be available at any time throughout the day. The service needs to provide lunch to the team in the base room where they will have a working lunch each day

LGA will notify the FRS in good time of any specific dietary requirements they may have

Appendix 6 - Sample Timetables

The team can work in the evening if necessary to accommodate members, community groups or operational needs.

These samples are intended as a guide to help not as a model to be followed exactly. There may be other officers, staff or people from the community that are important for the peer team to meet. The timetable should be developed with the support and guidance of the challenge manager,

For the 'achieving' level

Day 1

TIME	Stream 1	Stream 2
08.30 -9.00	Team arrival, room set up, welcome form FRS co-ordinator	
9:00–9.30	Presentation by host FRS on self assessment	
9.30 -10.15	Interview Principal Officer lead for equality	Interview with Member champion for equality or diversity
10.15 – 10..30	Team break/meeting	
10.30 – 11.30	Interview with Chief Fire Officer	Interview with Chair or portfolio holder
11.30 -12.30	Interview with senior operational manager	Focus group of Area or Group managers
12.30 – 1.15	Focus group with Station Managers	Interview with Head of HR
1.15 – 2.15	Lunch and team meeting	
2.15 – 3.15	Interview with Head of Equality	Focus group of employees

3.15 – 4.15	Interview with community engagement manager	Interview with unions FBU/FOA/Unison
4.15 – 5.15	Focus group with Equality Steering Group	Interview with chairs of employee forums
5.15 – 6.15	Team working	Focus group of members

Day 2

TIME	Stream 1	Stream 2
08.30- 9.00	Team meeting and preparation	
9:00 – 10.00	Interview with key strategic partner e.g. local authority chief executive, chair of LSP, Directors of Children's and Adults Services etc	Interview with principal officer or senior manager responsible for procurement
10.00 – 11.00	Focus group with community volunteers	Focus group of fire fighters
11.00 – 11.15	Break	Break
11.15 – 12.15	Interview with Head of Communications	Focus group of voluntary sector partners
12.15 – 1.00	Lunch and team working	
1.00 – 3.00	Team working	Team working
3.00	Feedback to FRS	Feedback to FRS

For the 'excellent' Level:

Day 1

TIME	Stream 1	Stream 2
08.15 -9.00	Team arrival, room set up, welcome form FRS co-ordinator	
9:00–9.30	Presentation by host FRS on case for "excellent"	
9.30 -10.15	Interview Principal Officer lead for equality and diversity	Interview with member champion for equality and diversity
10.15 – 10..30	Team break/meeting	
10.30 – 11.30	Interview with Chief Fire Officer	Interview with Chair or portfolio holder
11.30 -12.30	Interview with senior operational manager	Focus group of Area or Group managers
12.30 – 1.30	Interview with unions	Interview with Head of HR
1.30 – 2.15	Lunch and team meeting	
2.15 – 3.15	Focus group with Station Managers	Focus group of employees
3.15 – 4.15	Interview with community engagement manager	Interview with Head of Equality and Diversity
4.15 – 5.15	Focus group with Equality Steering Group	Interview with chairs of employee forums
5.15 - 5.45	Team working	Member focus group

Day 2

TIME	Stream 1	Stream 2
08.30- 9.00	Team meeting/preparation	
9:00–10.00	Interview with the Head of Communications	Interview with principal officer/senior manager responsible for procurement
10.00 -11.00	Interview with key strategic partner e.g. local authority chief executive, chair of LSP, Directors of Children's/Adults Services etc	Visit to community group/event/project
11.00 – 11.15	break	Visit to community group/event/project continued
11.15 – 12.15	Interview with key strategic partner e.g. local authority chief executive, chair of LSP, Directors of Children's and Adults Services etc	Visit to community group/event/project continued
12.15 – 1.15	Focus group with community volunteers	
1.15 – 2.30	Lunch and team working	
2.30 – 3.30	Community fire station visit	Focus group of voluntary sector partners
3.30 – 4.30	Community fire station visit continued	Focus group of fire fighters
4.30 – 5.30	Team working	Focus group of Scrutiny members
5.30 – 6.30	Team working	Team working

Day 3

TIME	Stream 1	Stream 2
08.30- 9.00	Team meeting and preparation	
9:00 – 10.00	Other interviews as needed	Other interview as needed
10.00 – 11.00	Interview with other key strategic partner e.g. Directors of Children's and Adults services etc	Interview with Interview with other key strategic partner e.g. senior police officer
11.00 – 11.15	Break	
11 – 12.30	Last opportunity for any further visits, community focus groups or interviews with key partners	
12.30 – 1.00	Lunch	
1.00 – 3.00	Team assessment and feedback preparation	
3.00 – 4.00	Feedback to the FRS	