



THE CHIEF  
FIRE OFFICERS  
ASSOCIATION

I&DeA  
improvement and development agency

# Key principles

Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework



FIRE &  
RESCUE  
SERVICE  
EQUALITY  
FRAMEWORK



## **Chief Fire officers Association**

CFOA is the professional voice of the UK fire and rescue service, supporting its members to fulfil their leadership role in protecting our local communities and making life safer through improved service delivery. CFOA provides professional advice to inform government policy and is committed to developing both strategic and technical guidance and sharing notable practice within the wider FRS. Membership of the Association comprises almost all the senior management of fire and rescue services in the United Kingdom. CFOA is the driving force in managing change and implementing reforms in the service.

## **Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA)**

The IDeA supports improvement and innovation in local government, focusing on the issues that are important to councils and using tried and tested ways of working. We work with councils in developing good practice, supporting them in their partnerships. We do this through networks, online communities of practice and web resources, and through the support and challenge provided by councillor and officer peers. We also help develop councillors in key positions through our leadership programmes. Regional Associates work closely with councils in their areas and support the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs).

[www.idea.gov.uk](http://www.idea.gov.uk)

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## Key principles of the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework

The fire and rescue service has been seeking a bespoke equality framework for a number of years. Therefore, following the publication of the Equality Framework for Local Government, which superseded the Equality Standard for Local Government, the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) has worked with the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) to produce the new Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework (FRS EF). The FRS EF recognises and addresses equality and diversity objectives that are a priority for the fire and rescue service.

The FRS EF is outcome-focused and based upon the same principles as the Equality Framework for Local Government, including the use of three achievement levels:

- ‘developing’
- ‘achieving’
- ‘excellent’.

It has also been cross-mapped with the national ‘Fire and rescue service: Equality and diversity strategy 2008 - 2018’<sup>1</sup> to incorporate the same five priority areas stated in that document. This should greatly assist fire and rescue services in preparing their annual report to the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG). The priority areas of performance are:

1. Available on the CLG website:

[www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/equalitydiversitystrategy](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/equalitydiversitystrategy)

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

The FRS EF complements and supports the services' national core values. These are:

- service to the community
- people
- diversity
- improvement.

The FRS EF also has a strong correlation with relevant statutory duties and external assessment methodologies. Using the 'COUNT' principle (count once and use numerous times) it should be possible to provide evidence that will be relevant to:

- statutory duties
- the 'Fire and rescue service: Equality and diversity strategy 2008 - 2018'
- comprehensive area assessment (CAA)
- operational assurance
- the managing performance element of organisational assessments.

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Accordingly, both the CLG and the Audit Commission have recognised the FRS EF as an appropriate means to measure and accredit the performance of individual fire and rescue services with respect to equality and diversity.

The FRS EF has been cross-mapped against the EFLG to identify common areas. Matters that tend to be led by local authorities – such as commissioned or procured services, equality mapping and sustainable community strategies – have been presented in a fire and rescue service context.

Cross-mapping with the 'Fire and rescue service: Equality and diversity strategy 2008 - 2018' has ensured the inclusion of a number of areas that are particularly important to the fire and rescue service, such as integrated risk management planning (IRMP), workplace facilities, recruitment and dealing with bullying and harassment.

Importantly, it has also been constructed to provide scope for the different governance arrangements that services operate within, be it metropolitan, combined or county based.

The FRS EF has been thoroughly tested with nine fire and rescue services and widespread consultation. Following feedback, the FRS EF has been revised where appropriate.

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## 1. Understanding equality

As with the local government framework, the FRS EF uses a broad definition of equality which was originally set out in ‘The Equalities Review’<sup>2</sup>, based on the idea of ‘equal life chances’.

“An equal society protects and promotes equal, real freedom and opportunity to live in the way people value and would choose, so that everyone can flourish.

An equal society recognises people’s different needs, situations and goals, and removes the barriers that limit what people can do and be.”

This definition is more aspirational than the formal legal definitions of equality. It is about what we can do to create a fairer society and recognises that:

- equality is an issue for us all
- we don’t all start from the same place
- to create a fairer society we need to recognise different needs.

‘The Equalities Review’ also suggested that the life chances of different groups could be measured against ten key ‘domains’ or outcomes set out in Appendix 1 (page 19).

This definition includes the groups that are protected by discrimination law. Fire and rescue services will therefore need to consider the impact

2. Cabinet Office (February 2007) ‘Fairness and Freedom: The Final Report of the Equalities Review’, available from [www.archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/equalitiesreview](http://www.archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/equalitiesreview)

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that race, gender and transgender, disability, age, sexual orientation and religion or belief may have on the life chances of members of their communities.

Fire and rescue services should also seek to understand the relationship between these characteristics, as well as the socio-economic status and the experience of other vulnerable groups, such as looked-after children and white working class boys with poor educational attainment.

The definition of equality in the Framework is very similar to the way inequality and vulnerability is defined by the Audit Commission and other inspectorates for the purposes of the CAA.

“Effective local public services target effort where improvement is most needed to tackle inequalities within and between communities. This may include focusing on the particular needs of people who are disadvantaged or discriminated against through age, disability, race, gender or transgender, religion or belief and sexual orientation.

It may also include efforts to reduce child poverty or other inequalities within communities. We will consider how well local partners know and understand the nature and extent of inequality and disadvantage within their communities and how effectively they are working to reduce or eliminate discrimination.”<sup>3</sup>

3. Audit Commission (February 2009) ‘Comprehensive Area Assessment, Framework Document’, available from: [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)

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## 2. The five performance areas

These are:

- Leadership and promoting inclusion
- Accountability
- Effective service delivery and community engagement
- Employment and training
- Evaluation and sharing good practice

### Leadership and promoting inclusion

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

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needs. They will have ensured that employees are clear about their role in making the service a fair and inclusive organisation. Leaders will also be promoting good community relations and ensuring that the service achieves equality outcomes.

Equality action plans are an important mechanism to identify appropriate equality objectives and achieve significant progress. Fire and rescue services should be able to demonstrate monitoring and reviewing of their equality action plans and the achievement of significant outcomes. They should be able to demonstrate that procurement is contributing to its equality and diversity objectives, including arrangements for regularly monitoring and reviewing processes.

Partnership between employers and representative bodies will be essential to provide effective support in achieving the desired continuous improvement in performance. Representative bodies should have the opportunity and actively encouraged to contribute. Where that is the case, representative bodies are expected to reciprocate by making a positive and constructive contribution to delivering equality and diversity improvements.

## Accountability

Driving change and developing confidence among employees and communities requires everyone in the organisation to accept a degree of accountability. The extent of such accountability will vary depending upon an individual's specific role and responsibilities. For instance, the chief fire officer is expected to have a strong strategic influence on the

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whole service, whereas an individual firefighter's impact will be as a work colleague alongside their peers, delivering a range of services to diverse local communities.

The Framework places considerable emphasis upon the demonstrable delivery of improvements across a wide range of equality and diversity matters. Such progress should be regularly reported, reviewed and updated in accordance with a cycle of continuous improvement.

Both the FRS EF and the 'Fire and rescue service: Equality and diversity strategy 2008 - 2018' place considerable emphasis upon addressing bullying and harassment. Accordingly, everyone in the service is accountable for establishing and maintaining appropriate behaviours.

## Effective service delivery and community engagement

Effective planning and engagement are key to improving the quality and effectiveness of service delivery to all communities. Fire and rescue service plans, strategies, policies and procedures should therefore take full account of the needs of local communities.

The CAA framework places emphasis upon the importance of involving groups who may experience disadvantage or inequality.

"We expect local services to be effective at giving a voice to people who are vulnerable or at greater risk of disadvantage and inequality, identifying their potential and supporting them to achieve the levels of choice, autonomy and improved outcomes that other citizens enjoy.

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This will vary according to the local context but will include the groups previously identified [see section on understanding equality] and will include groups which local partners have a requirement to consult and engage with under equality legislation”<sup>4</sup>

The FRS EF places emphasis upon the importance of working in partnership with the community and key partners. Narrowing equality gaps and improving the life chances of different groups will require a pooling of evidence, resources and action planning. While, for example, local authorities have the overall responsibility to lead on equality mapping across a wide range of subjects, such as education, health and community safety, fire and rescue services are expected to contribute. They will do this by sharing information on matters such as fires, road traffic collisions and anti-social behaviour.

Similarly, there are a number of examples where notable outcomes have been achieved for vulnerable people where fire and rescue services have worked in partnership with other organisations to share resources and expertise. These include innovative youth engagement programmes, multi-agency home safety referrals and ‘handy van’ schemes.

The over-riding priority of effective service delivery and community engagement is to achieve outcomes which improve the quality of life for local people and reduce inequalities. This must be evidence based, demonstrable and sustainable.

4. ibid

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### Employment and training

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

Actively engaging with an increasingly diverse society helps to enhance an organisation's reputation and enables it to attract and retain employees and to further develop appropriate services. Having a good reputation as an employer means fire and rescue services will be able to attract talent from a range of communities, choose the best people for jobs, and meet recruitment and retention needs. Conversely, an organisation that does not value diversity will be seen as increasingly out of touch, which is bad for its reputation and performance.

Providing a service based on understanding the differing needs of users is a lot easier if the organisation has a workforce trained in good diversity practice that reflects people it serves. An 'employer of choice' recruits from the widest and most diverse pool. These recruits offer knowledge and insights on providing the best service and this should, in turn, contribute to organisational improvement that ultimately saves more lives and property.

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Evidence suggests that individual differences are essential ingredients for high productivity, creativity and innovation. People tend to perform better and are more productive when they can be themselves and share their individuality for the benefit of an organisation that is committed to their well-being.

The 'Fire and rescue service: Equality and diversity strategy 2008 - 2018' has set challenging recruitment targets for women in the operational sector, and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) employees across the whole organisation. Furthermore, many individual services have set even more demanding local stretch targets.

Such commitment is commendable but fire and rescue services must ensure that this ambition is 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 must promote employee understanding of equality and diversity and take robust action to eradicate bullying, harassment and unacceptable behaviour. 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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### Evaluation and sharing good practice

Monitoring, evaluation and recognition of good practice are essential to ensure continuous improvement and to make the best use of resources. Fire and rescue services should collect and analyse evidence of improved performance and good practice, share it with others, celebrate success and address areas for improvement.

The FRS EF and the 'Fire and rescue service: Equality and diversity strategy 2008 - 2018' both place emphasis upon the importance of monitoring, evaluating and reviewing plans, policies and procedures in order to create a cycle of continuous improvement. This should be supported by both community and employee consultation in order to ensure that improved outcomes are being achieved and recognised.

Through their achievements, fire and rescue services should become exemplars of good practice for other organisations to follow, sharing their experiences and working with others to assist with improved outcomes for local communities.

National organisations, such as the CLG, CFOA, the IDeA, representative bodies and employee stakeholder groups, all have a responsibility to contribute to the development and sharing of good practice. This can be achieved through joint working, sharing knowledge and resources and communicating examples of notable practice.

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### 3. The three levels of performance

The FRS EF is designed to enable fire and rescue authorities to benchmark their performance against three distinct levels.



The characteristics of a fire and rescue service at each of the levels are detailed within the five performance areas, together with a number of accompanying questions indicating the range of evidence that will be required to confirm the performance level.

As the FRS EF is intended to be outcome-focused rather than process-driven, it is purposely designed to avoid a prescriptive list of requirements. Fire and rescue services should therefore use the Framework, this 'Key principles' document and the 'Help' document as guidance on the type of outcomes and supporting evidence that will be required in order to achieve specific levels of performance.

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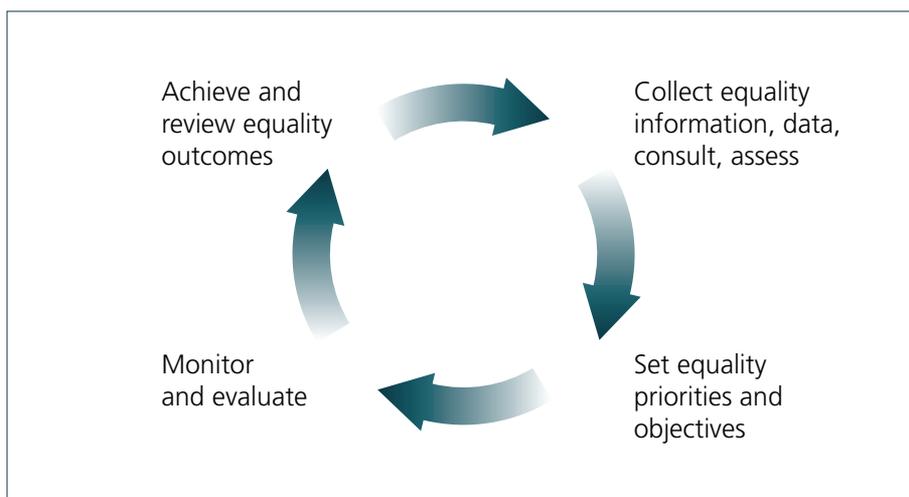
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# 4. Working with the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework (FRS EF)

Although we have distinguished three different achievement levels, the Framework should be regarded as a whole, representing a path of continuous improvement.



In planning to work with the FRS EF, fire and rescue services should initially study the expectations of an '**excellent**' service so that they can understand what is required to get there. Fire and rescue services

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should also then study the details of the '**developing**' and '**achieving**' achievement levels so that they have built up a strong understanding of the overall requirements.

There will be elements of the **developing** level that some fire and rescue services will need to address even if they have migrated across to the FRS EF at the **achieving** level. This is due to the different approach of the Framework as an outcome focused document and also its correlation with the 'Fire and rescue service: Equality and diversity strategy 2008 - 2018' and the expectations of CAA.

For many fire and rescue services there will be aspects of their work that are already at the **achieving** or **excellent** levels, although as a whole they would still be at the **developing** or **achieving** levels. This is to be expected as part of the cycle of continuous improvement and the overall journey to excellence.

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## 5. Migrating from the Equality Standard for Local Government to the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework

Fire and rescue services that have, through self-assessment, reached levels 1 and 2 of the Equality Standard prior to the publication of the FRS EF will be regarded as **developing**.

Fire and rescue services that have been externally accredited at level 3 of the Equality Standard prior to the publication of the FRS EF will be regarded as **achieving**.

Fire and rescue services that have, through self-assessment, reached level 4 of the Equality Standard prior to the publication of the FRS EF will be regarded as 'moving towards excellence'. This is not a specific performance level in the FRS EF but will enable recognition of those services which have progressed beyond level 3 of the Equality Standard before it was superseded by the new Equality Framework. It is therefore not recognised through accreditation or the use of a specific CFOA / IDeA seal. It is intended to assist the period of transition from the Equality Standard to the FRS EF and will therefore no longer be applicable once those services which are at level 4 have either achieved **excellent** or reverted back to **achieving** within the three year period between peer reviews.

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Fire and rescue services that have been externally accredited at level 5 of the Equality Standard prior to the publication of the FRS EF will be regarded as **excellent**.

County-based fire and rescue services may migrate to the FRS EF independently of the local authority if they so wish. Where fire and rescue service performance is in advance of that of the local authority it is considered that such recognition will assist in identifying good practice and raising performance across the whole organisation in due course.



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## 6. Peer challenge

Fire and rescue services may claim performance at the **developing** level based on a thorough self-assessment. But, at the **achieving** and **excellent** levels self-assessments will require validation by an IDeA Diversity Peer Challenge.

The Diversity Peer Challenge that previously applied to levels 3 and 5 of the Equality Standard has been revised to provide a means of benchmarking achievements against the FRS EF.

It will consist of two parts:

- a review by IDeA accredited fire and rescue service peers of the service's own self-assessment, including appropriate supporting evidence
- an on-site visit by three peers to conduct interviews and focus groups with employees, councillors and other stakeholders.

Fire and rescue services that have acceptable evidence of current performance at the **achieving** and **excellent** levels of the FRS EF will be awarded a certificate by the CFOA / IDeA and will be entitled to use the relevant FRS EF seal.

In order to ensure that accreditation is current and to encourage continuous improvement, **achieving** and **excellent** fire and rescue services will be expected to apply to the IDeA for re-evaluation at least every three years.

# Appendix 1

The 10 dimensions of equality	
Longevity	including avoiding premature mortality
Health	including wellbeing and access to high-quality healthcare
Physical security	including freedom from violence and physical/sexual abuse
Education	including being able to be creative, to acquire skills and qualifications and having access to training and lifelong learning
Standard of living	including being able to live with independence and security and covering: nutrition, clothing, housing, warmth, utilities, social services and transport
Productive and valued activities	such as access to employment, a positive experience in the workplace, work/life balance, and being able to care for others
Individual, family and social life	including self-development, having independence and equality in relationships and marriage
Participation, influence and voice	including participation in decision-making and democratic life
Identity, expression and self-respect	including freedom of belief and religion
Legal security	including equality and non-discrimination before the law and equal treatment within the criminal justice system

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These dimensions are taken from 'The Equalities Review,' published on 28 February 2007. To read the review in full go to:

**[www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk)**

The Equality and Human Rights Commission are currently working on key indicators to measure equality gaps in these domains. Further information will be available on their website.

**[www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)**



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