



Equality Policy

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PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

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Contents

1	Introduction.....	3
2	Scope	3
3	Policy statement on equality and diversity.....	3
4	Policy aims	4
5	Our duty and the drivers for equality.....	5
6	Mission, vision and values.....	6
7	Responsibilities of the Service.....	7
8	Responsibilities of employees	8
9	Employee support mechanisms	8
10	Training and development	9
11	Language and terminology	9
12	Workforce monitoring.....	9
13	Workplace bullying & harassment.....	10
14	Violence against staff.....	10
15	Domestic violence.....	10
16	Complaints.....	11
16.1	External complaints.....	11
16.2	Internal complaints	11
17	Alternative formats.....	12

PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

Version:	1	Next review:	30/09/2018	Equality Policy
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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Avon Fire & Rescue Service (AF&RS) is committed to equal and fair treatment in both employment practice and in service delivery. This is in recognition of its legal and ethical duty to represent and serve communities.
- 1.2 Information about our strategic priorities and legal obligations in relation to equality and diversity and how we are working to achieve them can be accessed from our website at: <http://www.avonfire.gov.uk/equality-and-diversity>.

2 Scope

- 2.1 This policy will apply to all employees, volunteers and auxiliary staff, elected members of the Avon Fire Authority, contractors and any visitor to service premises.
- 2.2 The service will also ensure that contractors and providers of goods and services are aware of matters of equality and diversity and understand their obligations in terms of behaviour whilst on service premises and during their contact with service employees. This requirement will be clearly set out in written communications to contractors and providers of goods and services, forming an explicit part of the contract between individual contractors and AF&RS.
- 2.3 Breaches of this policy may lead to disciplinary action and in certain cases dismissal in accordance with the [Discipline Policy](#). Employees will be personally liable under the various statutory acts covering equality and discriminatory behaviours.

3 Policy statement on equality and diversity

- 3.1 Equality in the workplace is about:
- Working in an environment that is free from discrimination.
 - Understanding that people have different needs and valuing individual differences.
 - Equality of access in employment and service delivery.
 - Treating all individuals fairly – without bias, prejudice or stereotyping. This applies to all recruitment, selection, promotion and career development decisions affecting employees and the people in the communities that we serve.
 - Recognising that there is often not a level playing field and we may need to take positive action with some employees or service users and communities to redress imbalances.
 - All staff working together to ensure this policy really works. This means that all employees have a responsibility to abide by the spirit and contents of the policy,

PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

Version: 1
 Status: Published

Next review: 30/09/2018
 Issue date: 15/01/2016

Equality Policy



ensuring we do not discriminate against colleagues, job applicants, suppliers or people in the community who receive our services.

- Supporting, developing and making best use of the skills and talents of all members of staff.

3.2 Equality is **not** about:

- Lowering standards in any way.
- Pretending that everyone is the same.
- Giving particular groups or individuals unfair or unjustifiable advantages.
- Choosing particular people for jobs just because of who they are.

4 Policy aims

- 4.1 To ensure that all employees are treated with dignity and respect at all times.
- 4.2 To ensure that all existing and potential employees receive equal and fair treatment in all aspects of recruitment, employment, promotion, training and development.
- 4.3 To provide equal access to our services, to all sections of the community.
- 4.4 To identify and eliminate existing or potential barriers which prevent anyone receiving equality of opportunity in matters of employment and delivery of service.
- 4.5 To increase awareness of opportunities in the fire and rescue service for people from under-represented groups in the community, and to positively encourage applications for employment with the service from people from under represented groups. This will result in an increase in the number of employees in the service from under-represented groups.
- 4.6 To ensure that this policy is effectively implemented by acting on any breaches, providing support, training and where necessary taking disciplinary action in accordance with the Service's disciplinary and grievance policies and procedures.
- 4.7 Demonstrating a commitment to a programme of action and training on Equality and Diversity issues.
- 4.8 To ensure the work of the organisation is subject to appropriate scrutiny by the Avon Fire Authority Equalities Forum and the Equalities Steering Group.
- 4.9 To review all relevant employment and service delivery policies and responsibilities in line with the equality impact assessment process.

PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

Version: 1
 Status: Published

Next review: 30/09/2018
 Issue date: 15/01/2016

Equality Policy



- 4.10 To encourage and support employees to enhance their potential.
- 4.11 To ensure that AF&RS communication is accessible and in a format that can be understood by all communities.
- 4.12 To monitor service outcomes to ensure all sections of the community are receiving our services and that, where appropriate, services are targeted at those at greatest risk of death and injury from fire.
- 4.13 To undertake a review of the equality, discrimination, diversity and cultural issues of all employees on a regular basis.
- 4.14 To increase awareness of opportunities within AF&RS through targeted and time-planned positive action campaigns, in all recruitment activities. (Wholetime and Retained Duty System Operational and Support Staff).

5 Our duty and the drivers for equality

5.1 Avon Fire & Rescue Service has a legal obligation to comply with the 2010 Equality Act.

5.2 An important part of the Act is the General Equality Duty, which has a key role in ensuring that fairness is at the heart of public bodies' work and that public services meet the needs of different groups. The Act also imposes **specific duties** upon us to ensure that we meet our obligations under the General Equality Duty.

5.3 The General Equality Duty requires us, in the exercising of all our functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited under the Act.
- b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- c) Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it."

5.4 The nine characteristics which have protection under the 2010 Equality Act are:

- Sex (gender)
- Sexual orientation
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Age

PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

Version: 1
 Status: Published

Next review: 30/09/2018
 Issue date: 15/01/2016

Equality Policy



- Disability
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Marriage and civil partnership

5.5 We are signed up to the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework and have reached the middle “Achieving” level. This involves reaching various criteria (and providing evidence that we have done so) across a range of performance areas:

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

5.6 We will strive to maintain and build on the “Achieving” level status with the ultimate aim of reaching “Excellent” level.

5.7 We will implement strategies and deliver development initiatives that aim to improve employees’ awareness of their individual responsibilities, the impact of discrimination and the impact of their personal behaviour upon each other, service users and the culture and reputation of Avon Fire & Rescue Service.

5.8 The purpose, aims and values set out in our Equality Policy will best be achieved if the diversity of staff in all sections of the organisation reflect the local communities that we serve, and we make full use of the talents and resources of everyone within our organisation.

6 Mission, vision and values

6.1 Our mission, vision and values directly express the principles of equality and the value of diversity.

Our Mission:

To improve public safety through prevention, protection and response.

Our Vision:

For our staff to be motivated and inspired to make all of our communities safer.

Our Values:

Integrity, Trust, Respect, Learning, Can-do, Openness

PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

Version:

1

Next review: 30/09/2018

Equality Policy

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Issue date: 15/01/2016



7 Responsibilities of the Service

- 7.1 The successful implementation and monitoring of the Equality Policy will be the responsibility of the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive, (CFO/CEO), Chairman of the Fire Authority, and the Service Management Board. The strategic lead for Equalities and Diversity is the Director of Corporate Services.
- 7.2 The Equality & Diversity Adviser has day-to-day responsibility for review and development of the internal-facing equality and diversity work of the organisation.
- 7.3 Externally, responsibility for equality in service delivery sits with our Service Delivery (Risk Reduction) Directorate.
- 7.4 The specific responsibilities of the Service Management Board will be to:
- Make appropriate arrangements to secure equality in terms of service delivery and employment.
 - Ensure that all directorates and functions of the Service are aware of their equality duties.
 - Make appropriate arrangements to embed the equality and diversity agenda into the business planning and performance management processes.
 - Monitor the diversity of existing employees and job applicants.
 - Review procedures to improve access to under-represented groups.
 - Provide clear guidelines on acceptable and unacceptable behaviour or conduct.
 - Create and maintain a working environment which is free from victimisation, intimidation, discrimination and harassment by taking action to ensure that this policy and the related Bullying and Harassment Policy are actively managed.
 - Take appropriate action in line with the Service's Equality Policy and Bullying and Harassment Policy where there are breaches of the policy, and provide counselling and support to all parties affected.
- 7.5 Consultative arrangements will be in place to enable all employees to contribute through the appropriate channels including the Equalities Steering Group, Equalities Forum, employee audits and surveys and employee representative bodies. Consultation will also be undertaken with specialist groups and members of the community when appropriate.
- 7.6 The remit of the Equalities Steering Group is to bring together senior managers to progress the equality and diversity work of the organisation, to share and disseminate ideas and information, and to monitor and provide challenge and scrutiny where appropriate.

PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

Version: 1
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Equality Policy



8 Responsibilities of employees

8.1 Every employee has a duty to:

- Adhere to the values and mission of AF&RS.
- Comply with all aspects of the Service's Equality Policy, Bullying and Harassment Policy and legislation that outlaws discrimination on the grounds of the protected characteristics.
- Participate in any development activities deemed appropriate by the Fire Authority.
- Bring to the attention of an appropriate manager any suspected discrimination or harassment or incitement to commit such acts or practices.

9 Employee support mechanisms

9.1 If any employee feels that they have not been treated in accordance with the word or spirit of this policy or the organisation's values there are various channels of redress and support available. They should contact any of the following for support and advice:

- Their line manager
- Human Resources Department
- Equality and Diversity Adviser
- Representative body

9.2 External support

- Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)
 - The EHRC is an independent statutory body which has been established to help eliminate discrimination, reduce inequality, protect human rights, to build good relations, and to ensure equality of opportunity. Visit their website for further information: <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/>
- Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS)
 - This is an organisation devoted to preventing and resolving employment disputes and promoting fair employment practice. Visit their website at: <http://www.acas.org.uk>.

9.3 Other support

Additional sources of external support options and organisations can be found listed in the [Bullying and Harassment Toolkit](#).



10 Training and development

- 10.1 We will provide training to ensure that all staff understand all aspects of this policy, employment legislation and conditions of service.
- 10.2 This training will be delivered through a blend of e-learning and face-to-face methods to all newly appointed and existing staff, and staff with managerial/supervisory responsibilities to ensure that they understand the implications of the Equality Policy and the related [Bullying & Harassment Policy](#).

11 Language and terminology

- 11.1 Language that is likely to cause offence or injury to staff or the public will not be tolerated.
- 11.2 Attention will be given when preparing reports, documents, forms advertisements, publicity and training material to ensure that reference to gender is neutral (for example, use “they” instead of “he” or “she”), that language is not offensive and that it positively promotes equality.
- 11.3 Material intended for external viewing should undergo the scrutiny of the Corporate Communication Manager/Team, with advice from the Equalities Unit when appropriate.
- 11.4 New and revised policies must be compiled in accordance with the [Policy Publication and Management Process](#) which requires an equality impact assessment (EIA) to be undertaken at the start of the policy initiation or review process.
- 11.5 Further guidance can be found in the Corporate Style Guide which is on the Corporate Communication pages of the intranet.

12 Workforce monitoring

- 12.1 Diversity information on employees and job applicants is collected and analysed. This will include:
- Age
 - Gender
 - Race or ethnic origin
 - Disability
 - Religion or belief
 - Sexual orientation



- 12.2 This information will be collected on training, redeployment, redundancy, restructuring, promotion, resignation and discharge from service (alongside reasons for leaving). It will also be collected on those who are invited to attend Assessment Development Centres and those who are placed on a development programme.
- 12.3 Data concerning employees who invoke grievance procedures and who are subject to disciplinary action will also be kept and monitored.
- 12.4 Data will be kept for periods in accordance with Data Protection legislation.

13 Workplace bullying and harassment

- 13.1 The [Bullying & Harassment Policy](#) and related [Bullying & Harassment Toolkit](#) are published on the policies area of the AF&RS staff intranet. The policy makes it clear that bullying and harassment will not be tolerated and the toolkit provides extensive guidance on how to deal with bullying and harassment.
- 13.2 The objective of the policy and toolkit is to ensure that bullying and harassment is taken seriously and that initial responses are appropriate. Employees are encouraged to raise matters directly with the perpetrator (with support if necessary) to nip things in the bud and respond proportionately.

14 Violence against staff

- 14.1 Given the nature of services that AF&RS provides, staff may sometimes encounter violence or verbal abuse when carrying out their work. Any incident in which an employee is abused, threatened, assaulted or otherwise subjected to anti-social behaviour should be reported to a manager and on Wellworker. This includes racist, sexist or homophobic abuse.

15 Domestic violence

- 15.1 Staff may experience domestic violence or hate crime at home or outside work which will affect them in all aspects of their lives, including their performance at work. Domestic violence can occur in many forms, such as physical, emotional, financial, sexual, but none are acceptable.
- 15.2 Information on how to tackle domestic violence and hate crime is available from the HR Department. Support and counselling through the Red Poppy Counselling Service are available to any staff experiencing violence or abuse at home. Employees can self-refer for this service – there is no need to go to the HR Department. They can be contacted by emailing info@theredpoppycompany.co.uk or visit their [website](#).



16 Complaints

16.1 External complaints

16.1.1 As a public organisation, we have a statutory obligation to treat people fairly. We must have in place a policy that allows members of the public to tell us when things go wrong and for us to respond to that information and resolve it to a satisfactory conclusion.

16.1.2 Our [Compliments and Complaints Policy](#) contains full information about the procedure including applicable timescales for providing a response and resolutions. The policy can be downloaded from the 'Contact Us' area of our external website: <http://www.avonfire.gov.uk/contact-us/non-emergency>

16.1.3 Members of the public may submit compliments or complaints to us verbally - in person or by telephone to any AF&RS staff member - or in writing at any premises of AF&RS. Alternatively there is an electronic complaints form which can be accessed via our external website: <http://www.avonfire.gov.uk/contact-us/non-emergency?id=171>

16.2.4 We can also arrange for additional help if requested, such as arranging a face-to-face meeting or bringing in a British Sign Language or foreign language interpreter if required.

16.1.5 Any member of staff who receives a complaint from an external source should refer to the [Compliments and Complaints Policy](#) for guidance on the procedure to be followed.

16.2 Internal complaints

16.2.1 Where a member of staff considers that they have been treated unfairly, the right exists to lodge a formal grievance under the appropriate Service Grievance Procedure.

16.2.2 The [Grievance Policy](#) and associated procedures can be found on the Policies page of AF&RS intranet. Alternatively staff can obtain advice from their manager, union official, or a member of the HR team.



17 Alternative formats

- 17.1 This policy can be made available in alternative formats or languages. To request this please contact the Equality and Diversity Adviser on 0117 9262061 extension 339 or email equalities@avonfire.gov.uk. Alternatively you can call in to our reception in Headquarters at Temple Back, Bristol, BS1 6EU, or write to us at that address.

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15/01/2016	1.0	Approved for publishing	
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