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Date: 14<sup>th</sup> April 2011

Dear Harshbir Sangha

## **PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY: REDUCING BUREAUCRACY (DUTIES IN ENGLAND)**

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service is proud to have been recognised as Excellent under the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework. We have worked to mainstream equality in all our activities and believe that this has strengthened the delivery of our services to the diverse communities on Merseyside. We believe that the Public Sector Specific Duties have ensured that we know and understand our communities' needs better, have improved the delivery of our services and enabled us to employ more people from the diverse communities on Merseyside.

By becoming more active in the community rather than simply turning out to fires and other emergencies, over the last ten years we have reduced accidental dwelling fires per annum by nearly 40%, reduced fire deaths by over 50% and anti-social behaviour fires by over 60%. Investing in equality and understanding the significance of deprivation and its impact on fires, deaths and injuries has meant that we have made Merseyside stronger, safer, and healthier

The requirements of the specific duties have provided the vehicle for Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service staff and Fire Authority members to deliver on their commitment to equality. We know that commitment is but one stage in the journey and that proper structures need to be in place to enable that commitment to be translated into action. We fully support the Government's drive to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy but we believe that there needs to be a clear framework to support the delivery of equality and diversity across the public sector.

We would be disappointed if the requirements of the Public Sector Duty were reduced in respect of the publication of information. The need to engage with communities and to undertake a proper assessment of the equality impact of particular policies could be regarded as unnecessary if they were not a requirement under the legislation.

For this reason we believe that the specific duties of the Public Sector Duty published in January 2011 provided a balanced and proportionate approach to the need to have a structure that supports outcomes.

We are particularly disappointed that this consultation comes just days before the new Regulations were to be enacted, and that the consultation proposes a reduction in the duties. This creates not only a lack of certainty and confusion but also sends a signal that public sector bodies can derogate from the basic requirements of the duty and still ensure deliver on equality. We do not consider that this is the case.

We urge the Government to implement the specific duties as set out in the draft Regulations published in January. We believe these represented the minimum requirements to enable public bodies to realise their duty to eliminate prohibited conduct, advance equality and foster good relations in their communities.

Yours sincerely

MICHAEL HAGEN  
DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER