



CFOA
Services

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Date: 14th April 2011

Dear Harshbir Sangha

Public Sector Equality Duty: Reducing Bureaucracy

I write as the lead officer responsible for matters of Equality and Diversity in the Chief Fire Officers Association of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (CFOA).

I believe the Fire and Rescue Services still suffer from outdated stereotypical ideas about their work. The reality is that we have developed an enviable record in delivering equality outcomes for the different communities across the country by following the specific requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty. By moving from a reactive approach to dealing with fire and other emergencies to a preventative approach over recent years, we have redefined the definition of “front line services”.

The requirement under the Public Sector Equality Duty to understand and consult with our communities has been fundamental in transforming our service delivery and has had a positive impact on our employment profile. I believe that many other public bodies could learn from the way in which equality and diversity has been mainstreamed by the Fire and Rescue Service.

Commitment

We know that fire discriminates. It is a sad fact that the more vulnerable in society have higher incidents of fire and other emergencies. Fire and Rescue Services have been committed to eliminate this discrimination and the Public Sector Equality Duty Specific Duties provided a blueprint for us to translate that commitment into action.

Publication of Information

We believe that the requirement to publish information on engagement undertaken and on equality analyses is a determinant of the activities themselves. Without the requirement to show what has been done public bodies are more likely to dispense with the need to engage with communities and to undertake a proper assessment of the equality impact of their policies. These activities are central to the delivery of equality and to move from a system where such matters are required to one where they are not sends a signal that they are no longer required.

We consider that the requirement to publish information should be a requirement of the specific duties of the public sector equality duty.

Devolved Duties

CFOA is the professional voice of the UK Fire and Rescue Services. Our remit covers England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Whilst we recognise and support the difference inherent in each of the countries of the UK, it is of some concern that the proposed legislation with regard to the specific duties is so radically different in each administration. Such divergent views and regulations do not send a clear message to public bodies of the importance of equality.

Implementation Dates

We are particularly disappointed that this revised consultation comes just days before the new specific duty regulations in England were to be enacted. This also sends a message to public bodies that having the basic structures in place to deliver on equality is not important.

We urge that the Government implements the Specific Duties as set out in the draft Regulations published in January, as these will enable public bodies to realise their duty to eliminate prohibited conduct, advance equality and foster good relations.

Yours sincerely

MICHAEL HAGEN
CHIEF FIRE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION – EQUALITY & DIVERSITY LEAD