



**Northern Ireland
Fire & Rescue Service**

**Implementation of Section 75
Annual Progress Report
1 April 2006 – 31 March 2007**

May 2007

Equality Unit
NIFRS Headquarters

EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Authority Annual Progress Report 2006 - 2007

This report template includes a number of self assessment questions regarding implementation of the Section 75 statutory duties from **1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007**. Please enter information at the relevant part of each section and ensure that it is submitted electronically (by completing this template) and in writing, with a signed cover letter from the Chief Executive or, in his/her absence, the Deputy Chief Executive to the Commission by **31 August 2007**.

Name of public authority (Enter details below)

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS)

Equality Officer (Enter name and contact details below)

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Executive Summary

- What were the key policy/service developments made by the authority during this reporting period to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations?

(Enter text below)

- A five year review was conducted of the Equality Scheme and findings reported to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. This gave the opportunity to reflect on 'lessons learned' and to reiterate our commitment to fulfilling our statutory obligations.
- Mainstreaming equality activity continued throughout the reporting period with policy development across our Directorates. Our ongoing Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) process resulted in the requirement to provide enhanced crewing levels on a number of identified stations. This is with the primary aim of providing the right resources in the right place at the right time to meet the safety needs of those in identified areas. The change to how stations are staffed and for what duration is referred to as 'Variable Crewing' and this proposal was subject to internal and external Section 75 consultation.
- During the reporting period an EQIA was underway on standby arrangements for Flexible Duty Officers.
- Policy development work took place on age discrimination, discipline and grievance procedures, business continuity planning, catering arrangements, disability equality and on occupational health policies. Work commenced on a comprehensive review of NIFRS Code of Procedures on Recruitment and Selection during the reporting period.
- During 2006-07 gender diversity has been a priority in the NIFRS equality agenda. We joined the equality and diversity network 'Opportunity Now' which is proving mutually beneficial as we avail of good practice and the Campaign utilises the

services of female firefighters in their Challenging Careers events targeted at young females.

- Government-led national gender outreach material for the UK Fire & Rescue Service was successfully employed in Retained Firefighter recruitment campaigns in February 2007. This material supplemented locally designed posters and leaflets advertising vacancies at 16 Retained Stations. This process was driven by Area Commands and gender outreach was promoted in local communities using images of a NIFRS female firefighter. This initiative proved positive and resulted in a notable 14% of applications coming from women in these areas.
 - NIFRS Board granted approval for additional resources to the Equality Unit.
 - Interagency co-operation and working in partnership with other organisations continued with the aim of reducing the numbers of death and injuries as a result of emergency incidents. This approach is extended to all sections of the community.
 - The Community Development strategy, as reported in previous Section 75 Annual Progress Reports, continued to be implemented with enhancements to existing multi-lingual fire safety literature and roll-out of key youth initiatives.
 - NIFRS revamped website launched with comprehensive area dedicated to equality. Website is also e-consultation enabled.
- What are the main initiatives planned in the coming year to ensure the authority improves outcomes in terms of equality of opportunity and good relations for individuals from the nine categories covered by Section 75?

(Enter text below)

- Commencement of measures to be outlined in a Disability Action Plan to meet the statutory disability duties contained in the Disability Discrimination Order 2006.

- Appointment of a Diversity Officer to assist in taking the Section 75 agenda forward. Advertisement and shortlisting took place during reporting period. Appointment of suitable candidate is anticipated Summer 2007.
- Further implementation of gender diversity initiatives under the Gender Action Plan.
- Review of procurement strategy and policy in terms of equality.
- Section 75 review of new national firefighter point of entry tests.
- Monitoring survey exercise of NIFRS to ascertain up to date Section 75 baseline data across all nine equality dimensions.
- Roll-out of equality and diversity training for all staff through a variety of media.

Section 1: Strategic Implementation of the Section 75 Duties

- Outline evidence of progress made in developing and meeting equality and good relations objectives, performance indicators and targets in corporate and annual operating plans during 2006-07.

(Enter text below)

- ‘Supporting our People’ is a key area under the NIFRS Corporate Plan 2005-2010. This is a measurable aspect and refers to ‘Securing and developing a workforce to meet current and future organisational needs, reflecting equality and diversity requirements, progressing the Modernisation Agenda and promoting the health and welfare of staff.

The equality and good relations objectives during 2006-07 are:

Action	Progress to date
Develop, consult and issue a revised policy on NIFRS HQ Standby map by December 2006.	Complete. Chief Fire Officer reviewed all standby arrangements and an EQIA on these arrangements commenced during the reporting period.

Action	Progress to date
Complete programme of training by March 2007.	<p>Training on equality and diversity remains ongoing. Specific in-house equality training is delivered to operational middle management incorporating the learning outcomes under the Equality and Dignity module of the Integrated Personal Development System for firefighter personnel.</p> <p>Equality and fairness training is covered at induction level for all trainee firefighters.</p> <p>Disability awareness refresher training was provided to Headquarters staff during the reporting year.</p>
Introduce a 'Commitment to Diversity' competence test in Firefighter recruitment.	Complete. The interview process contains a question related to equality and diversity.
Agree an Equality Employment Plan.	A Gender Action Plan has been devised and gender outreach measures are already being implemented.
Take actions to ensure that by 2010, at least 10% of all new trainee intakes amongst uniformed operational staff are women.	On target. Specific gender outreach materials are used, in addition to female firefighter presence at careers events, schools talks and in TV and radio promotions.

Section 2: Screening

- Provide an update of new/proposed/revised policies screened during the year.

Title of policy subject to screening	Was the <u>F</u>ull Screening Report or the <u>R</u>esult of initial screening issued for consultation? <i>Please enter F or R</i>	Was initial screening decision changed following consultation? <u>Y</u>es/<u>N</u>o	Is policy being subject to EQIA? <u>Y</u>es/<u>N</u>o? If yes indicate year for assessment.
Draft Variable Crewing Proposal	R	N	N
Review of NIFRS Catering Arrangements	R	N	N
Draft Phased Return to Work Policy	R	N	N

Section 3: Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

- Provide an update of policies subject to EQIA during 2006/07, stage 7 EQIA monitoring activities and an indicative EQIA timetable for 2007-08.

EQIA Timetable – April 2006 - March 2007

Title of Policy EQIA	EQIA Stage at end March 07 (Steps 1-6)	Outline adjustments to policy intended to benefit individuals, and the relevant equality & good relations categories due to be affected.
Standby arrangements for Officers on the Flexible Duty System (Based at FRSHQ, FRSTC, District and Area Headquarters)	Step 5	Consultation closing date 16 April 2007. Consultation analysis report under preparation.

Ongoing EQIA Monitoring Activities April 2006- March 2007

Title of EQIA subject to Stage 7 monitoring	Indicate if differential impacts previously identified have reduced or increased	Indicate if adverse impacts previously identified have reduced or increased
Wholetime Personnel Undertaking Retained Duties	Reduced	Reduced

2007-08 EQIA Time-table

Title of EQIAs due to be commenced during April 2007 – March 2008	Existing or New policy?	Please indicate expected timescale of Decision Making stage i.e. Stage 6
National Point of Entry Tests for New Entrant Firefighters	New	c.April 2008

- Where the EQIA timetable for 2006/07 (as detailed in the previous annual S75 progress report to the Commission) has not been met, please provide details of the factors responsible for delay and details of the timetable for re-scheduling the EQIA/s in question.

(Enter text below)

Not applicable

Section 4: Training

- Outline training provision during the year associated with the Section 75 Duties/Equality Scheme requirements including types of training provision, numbers attending, and conclusions from any training evaluations.

(Enter text below)

Training	Numbers attended	Evaluation and Conclusions
Disability Awareness Refresher training provided by Stepping Stones, Lisburn	17	Worthwhile and informative. Disability awareness training to be rolled out to all staff through a variety of media under the proposed Disability Action Plan.
'Safe to Manage' diversity awareness overview training	32	Positive evaluations received although participants have indicated that more concentrated training is required on areas relating to harassment and bullying and dignity at work.
Induction training for Retained operational recruits	10	It has been noted that it is beneficial to new entrants to receive this training at the start of their career.
Opportunity Now Equality Academy Training	3	Feedback confirms that involvement with Opportunity Now affords access to good practice.
Chief Executive's Forum on Disability Action Plans	1	Informative event, pitched at senior management.
Monthly Core and Team Brief System for all staff	all staff (2102)	Communication system to inform and update all staff of events and requirements relating to the Service. Staff are informed through this mechanism of consultation exercises and how to become involved.

Training	Numbers attended	Evaluation and Conclusions
Equality information section on NIFRS website	Available to all with web access	Good feedback from Her Majesty's Inspector for Fire and Rescue Services, staff and public on equality related section

Section 5: Communication

- Outline how the authority communicated progress on delivery of the statutory duties during the year and evidence of the impact/success of such activities.

(Enter text below)

- The Corporate Communications Manager continues to ensure that press releases, media statements and senior officer public speeches reflect NIFRS commitment to equality and diversity and the statutory duties. Internally, progress on equality is reported as an agenda item of the NIFRS Service Support Committee of the Board (and formerly to the Human Resources Committee of the Fire Authority).
- Communication of progress on screening activities etc mainly takes place via the internal 'public folders' shared email facility for NIFRS staff. This system can house downloadable documents, questionnaires, draft policies etc. Staff are directed to check this folder either by email or through the new Monthly Core and Team Brief mechanism.
- Wide public consultation is considered within the corporate Consultation Group and this includes the equality statutory duties. A consultation strategy for this Group is under development.
- As reported in last year's Progress Report, the development work on the new NIFRS website was completed during this reporting year. The new website was available for public use from 1 September 2006 and features an e-consultation facility along with a prominent section dedicated to equality.

Section 6: Data Collection & Analysis

- Outline any systems that were established during the year to supplement available statistical and qualitative research.
- Outline any research undertaken/commissioned to obtain information on the needs and experiences of individuals from the nine categories covered by Section 75.

(Enter text below)

- Preparation work was carried out to equip the 'Peodesy' equality monitoring database in anticipation of ECNI Guidance on Monitoring and the proposed internal data collection exercise to update Section 75 baseline information for NIFRS personnel.
- Information in respect of equality research continues to be shared amongst members of the DHSSPS Equality Steering Group.
- Operations Department continued to monitor risk profile data in line with the new Standards of Emergency Response for Northern Ireland.
- In October 2007 we participated in a national Gender Diversity Benchmarking exercise facilitated by Opportunity Now. This research involved questionnaire survey across the organisation and an equality audit of existing policies and practices from a gender equality perspective. The results are anticipated in May 2007, followed by further action under the Gender Action Plan, supported by Opportunity Now.

Section 7: Information Provision, Access to Information and Services

- Detail any initiatives/steps taken during the year to improve access to services including provision of information in accessible formats.

(Enter text below)

- As reported in previous Progress Reports, we have the capacity to deal with requests for information in alternative formats and access to translation services. During the year we were open to accessing the Regional Translation Contract applicable to DHSSPS.

- The new NIFRS website is accessible to people with visual disabilities and contains relevant information on the statutory duties
- All capitals works programmes are cognisant of DDA compliance and this is a key element in our proposals for station relocation.
- Community Development has enhanced its multi-lingual fire safety information by developing resources for operational personnel at incidents where members of the public do not speak or have a limited knowledge of English.

Section 8: Complaints

- Identify the number of Section 75 related complaints:
 - received by the authority;
 - resolved by the authority (including how this achieved);
 - which were not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant;
 - which were referred to the Equality Commission.

(Enter text below)

- No complaints were received during the reporting period

Section 9: Consultation and Engagement

- Provide details of the measures taken to enhance the level of engagement with individuals and representative groups during the year.

(Enter text below)

- We joined the Employers Forum on Disability during the reporting year to improve access to networks and avail of good practice and advice. We are also making use of contacts through Opportunity Now.
- Engagement is evident at Area Command level through the following groups:
 - Age Concern – we provide safety information to older persons through presentations and static displays
 - Your Turn Programme – we work with Community Safety Partnerships and the Common Purpose initiative. This

- programme aims to educate young people who may have potential peer influence within their community in relation to adverse effects of hoax calls, attacks on firefighters etc.
- Inter-ethnic Support Group – we provide fire safety advice in partnership with ethnic support groups through presentations and fire safety days.
- Safer Mournes Partnership and Regeneration of Mournes Area – in partnership with Mourne Heritage Trust, PSNI, Down District Council amongst others, we focus on fire prevention and land management through resource sharing and engagement.
- Bonfire Liaison Committee – local community groups, Down District Council and NIHE all have input to this committee. Its primary aim is to promote safer bonfires during Halloween.
- Anti Social Steering Committee – in liaison with Town Centre Manager and PSNI, we work with this group to reduce anti-social behaviour within the Down District Area.
- Community Policing Team – in conjunction with PSNI talks are given to 6th form pupils at schools to increase awareness of associated dangers of speeding
- Action Zone – we are actively involved in this rural network providing smoke alarms and referrals for home risk assessments
- Cross Community – in the Greater Belfast Area, our officers work with local representatives to improve working relations and to stop attacks on firefighters within the Eastern Command area
- Oaklee Housing Association – we liaise with local community leaders and premises owners to reduce arson and aid with fire prevention within the Clonard area of Belfast
- Groundwork Northern Ireland – we endeavour to assist Groundwork with cross community projects and neighbourhood renewal
- North Belfast Older Peoples Community Safety Partnership – promotes all areas of safety for older people throughout the District incorporating Age Concern, Crime Prevention, Help the Aged, Good Morning Ballysillan, Voluntary Service Bureau, Housing Advice and Senior Line.

- East Belfast Alternatives & Community Restorative Justice, Ireland – addresses attacks on firefighters and achieves greater social inclusion throughout Eastern Area Command through an Education Awareness Programme.
- Essential Services Safety Group – we work with PSNI, NIAS and West Belfast Taxis to reduce attacks on essential services, incidents of arson and low level street disorder.
- Blackie Community – work has been carried out to develop an NIFRS role to assist professionals in suicide awareness
- Local Intervention Fire Education (LIFE) Scheme – in conjunction with local community groups, the LIFE Scheme helps to educate lesser privileged children on the role of the Fire & Rescue Service. Aimed at young people at risk, the Scheme seeks to improve integration with the local community, reduce attacks on firefighters, reduce hoax calls and reduce firesetting.
- Youth Justice Agency – this Agency works with us to reduce arson and nuisance fires in Omagh.
- Crossborder Crisis Management Group – the purpose of this Group is to develop a strategy for the emergency services on both sides of the border to deal with emergency incidents that may occur in border areas.

Section 10: The Good Relations Duty

Provide details of additional steps taken to implement or progress the good relations duty during the year. Please indicate any findings or expected outcomes from this work.

(Enter text below)

- See Section 9 above.

The Good Relations Duty has been taken forward through the Community Development Strategy and also through service delivery changes resulting from our IRMP. As outlined in Section 9 above, we actively engage with a wide range of Service stakeholders with the primary aim of meeting our strategic objectives to reduce the number of death and injuries due to fires and emergency incidents.

The secondary aim is towards making Northern Ireland a safer and better society to live in.

- During the reporting year our youth engagement initiatives have yielded some notable results. The LIFE Scheme has developed ambassadors for the Fire & Rescue Service in the young people themselves. Each young person going back to his or her own community helps us with our fire safety message.
- Both statistical and anecdotal evidence has shown that 90% of deliberate fires are started by children and young people. It has been proven from studies of Firesetters Schemes run in other Fire & Rescue Services that early intervention and education of children and young people who are developing a fascination with fire can greatly reduce the chance of firesetting reoccurring.
- We encourage our Irish language speaking staff to participate in school safety talks and media articles. A female firefighter was interviewed on the Irish language Radio Ulster magazine show 'Blas' discussing firefighting as a career choice for women, issues surrounding attacks on firefighters and community fire safety initiatives in Belfast.

Section 11: Additional Comments

- Please provide any additional information/comments

(Enter text below)

- We will continue our mainstreaming endeavours and look forward to focusing on specific areas, namely gender, disability, age and race over the coming year. Our Disability Action Plan will commence from July 2007 and progress will be reported in the Section 75 Annual Progress Report for 2007-2008.