

## RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION ON FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY STRATEGY 2008 – 2018

### 1. National Strategy – General

- 1.1 Central Government commitment to improving performance in equality and diversity in the Service is welcomed and the strategy provides a useful benchmark for our existing equality plans and activities. However our corporate equality plan additionally takes account of local priorities in a way that a national strategy cannot.
- 1.2 Monitoring, evaluation and reporting feature strongly in the Strategy but it does not relate these to the current standard used to measure progress (Local Government Equality Standard). This is regrettable since existing and potential partners in the public service use the LGES.
- 1.3 The Strategy mainly identifies the same priorities and required actions as our own Equality Plan but would be improved by making an explicit case for *why* we should be a diverse organisation. This is fundamental in increasing understanding and winning commitment to diversity from everyone in the organisation.
- 1.4 Recognition of the additional capacity and/or resources required to make the strategy a reality would be welcomed.

### 2. Targets and Monitoring

- 2.1 A review of the existing workforce composition targets is welcome although we would prefer to measure progress with reference to desired outcomes. The terminology of “targets” has often been misunderstood and gives rise to concerns over quotas and supposed lowering of standards.
- 2.2 The revised target for women (12% of operational fire fighters by 2013) is still unrealistic for some services where recruitment demand is low. For Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, this target would represent an operational workforce comprising 78 women by 2013 – an increase of 53 in 5 years. Given current resourcing, it is unlikely that we will need to recruit this number of firefighters in total in the next 5 years.
- 2.3 Our preferred approach would be to aim for increasing numbers of women and BME applicants with each recruitment process, consistent with actual requirements, and in the case of BME applicants, the relevant local population. Parity with white male applicants in rates of success through the selection process and in retention and progression through the service would also be a more significant desired outcome.

### 3. Guidance

- 3.1 Current legislation, codes of practice, regional and national sharing of good practice via diversity specialists and HR functions already provide plenty of guidance.