



Promoting Gender Equality

Gender Equality Scheme and
Action Plan

June 2007 – 2010

Foreword by Brian A Murray, Chief Fire Officer Highlands & Islands Fire & Rescue Service

Highlands & Islands Fire & Rescue Service is committed to achieving equality throughout all areas of the organisation and service delivery. This is the first Gender Scheme that we have produced, and we are committed to improving gender equality. The Service has a legal duty to promote gender equality under the Equality Act 2006, under both the general and specific duties. The Service has always appreciated the benefits of valuing a diverse workforce and the introduction of this Scheme will only continue to enhance this.

As an organisation we are constantly striving to ensure that we achieve equality of opportunity for all and we will continue to push forward the diversity agenda and change the culture of our Service so that it reflects this commitment.

For many years we have been trying to address gender inequalities, and change the culture of our organisation so that we are approachable to all people, and that they can feel comfortable in the workplace. This Scheme goes one step further and formalises our approach. It also ensures that every employee is aware of their responsibilities and that we have a clear and consistent approach to our obligations.

Contents

Section 1

1. Introduction	5
1.1 What is a Gender Equality Scheme?	5
1.2 The General Duty	5
1.3 The Specific Duty	6
1.4 Statistics and Targets	6
1.5 How We Are Meeting our Duties	6
1.6 Benefits to the Organisation	7
2. Organisation Structure and Decision Making Process	8
2.1 Organisation structure	8
2.2 Committees	8
2.3 Map of HIFRS Service Area	9
2.4 Employees within the Service	10
3. Functions of the Service and Strategic Overview	10
3.1 The Organisation's Departments	10
3.2 Our Vision for the Future of HIFRS	11
3.3 Strategic Aims	12
3.4 Profile of the Area We Serve	13
3.5 Working in partnership	13
4. Equality and Diversity	14
4.1 Some of Our Achievements to Date	15

Section 2

5. Involving People	15
6. Impact Assessments	16
7. Gathering Information	16
8. Using Information	17
9. Reporting	17
10. Consultation	17
11. Arrangements for Monitoring Policies for Adverse Impact	18
12. Publishing Information	18
13. Arrangements for Training Staff	19
14. Review of the Scheme	19
15. Complaints Procedure	19

Statement of intent

Highlands and Islands Fire & Rescue Service is committed to ensuring equality for all who use our services and we will endeavour to do this through implementing our Gender Equality Scheme and Action Plan, along with other documents, which work towards our equality objectives.

In order to do this the Service will ensure that the organisation understands its responsibilities and that there is clear communication throughout so that our intentions are transparent. We will continue to consult with our communities on this Scheme and any other relevant functions in the future.

We have set clear targets which we will monitor and review on a regular basis. This will ensure that these are still relevant to our overall strategic aims. We will amend our equality and diversity aims and objectives to keep pace with the changing environment to sustain our progress.

1. Introduction

The Highlands & Islands Fire & Rescue Service (HIFRS) falls into the category of organisations that are bound by the Sex Discrimination Act (SDA) 1975, as amended by the Equality Act 2006, who are required to publish a **Gender Equality Scheme**. Under the provisions of this legislation, we are bound to follow both the 'specific' and 'general' duties.

1.1 What is a Gender Equality Scheme?

A Gender Equality Scheme is a strategic document and action plan, which details how the Service is going to approach its duties under the legislative requirements. It sets timescales for achieving the objectives that are set out in the Action Plan. This Scheme will encourage and push forward gender equality; it will give practical improvements to the organisation, which will ensure we are meeting our duties in this legislation

The aim of this Scheme is to promote equality of opportunity and to eliminate discrimination both as a service provider and as an employer. It will promote positive attitudes and participation for men and women.

1.2 The General Duty

The General Duty (Section 76A of the SDA 1975) states that as an authority, when carrying out our functions, we must have due regard to the need to:

- to promote equality of opportunity between men and women
- to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment (under the SDA 1975 and Equal Pay Act (EPAA) 1970)

The way this legislation differs from previous legislation is that:

- We must be proactive in eliminative discrimination and harassment
- We must be proactive in promoting equality of opportunity and not just avoiding this.

We are required to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment in employment and vocational training for people who intend to undergo or have undergone gender re-assignment, within this document the expression 'transsexual person' shall be used.

This must be applied to all areas of the Service. It ensures that gender equality is central to the way the organisation works, putting it at the centre of decision making processes and policy making and mainstreaming it into everyday processes.

1.3 The Specific Duties

Under The Sex Discrimination Act (Public Authorities) (Statutory Duties) (Scotland) Order 2007, we are obliged to meet the specific duties. Within this part of the legislation we are required to publish a Gender Equality Scheme by 29 June 2007, to implement certain aspects of this and to report on it.

A Gender Equality Scheme shall state, in particular:

- How it intends to meet its general and specific duties
- How men and women should be involved in the development of the Scheme.
- To consult stakeholder (employees, service users and others including trade unions)
- The Service's methods for impact assessment of its policies and practices or likely impact.
- Steps which the Service will take towards fulfilling its general duty – setting out its gender equality objectives (the Action Plan)
- The way information will be gathered on employment and its functions
- The way in which information gathered is to be used, such as reviewing effectiveness of the action plan
- Within a period of three years take steps, as set out in the Action Plan (unless it is unreasonable or impracticable to do so)
- Publish an annual report containing a summary of the steps taken under the Action Plan, and review the Scheme every 3 years.

1.4 Statistics and Targets

Local Indicators

HIFRS has set their own local targets to try and increase the numbers of women employed under the retained duty system (RDS). A target of 8% has been set for 2007/2008.

1.5 How We Are Meeting our Duties

The service has already introduced many good practices to overcome gender inequalities and to encourage under-represented groups to apply for positions within the Service.

We have been monitoring our employees and potential employees for many years and will continue to do so. As an organisation we will ensure that this information is utilised effectively to review our policies and identify patterns of concern.

The initiatives that the Service introduces along with a change in culture will help to meet the above target.

The Service aims to be recognised as an equal opportunities employer and has policies to help achieve its goal. These policies cover all aspects of employment, including selection, recruitment and training, positive action and flexible conditions of service. Our percentage of uniformed females is 6.8%. We achieved the highest percentage of female uniformed promotions in Scotland, with 21% of all uniformed promotions being female.

To ensure that our policies remain effective (and for no other purpose) the Service maintains records of employees' and applicants' gender. Ongoing monitoring and regular analysis of such records provide the basis for appropriate action to eliminate unlawful direct and indirect discrimination, and to promote equality of opportunity.

The Service's long-term aim is to ensure that the composition of the workforce reflects that of the community of the Highlands & Islands. Where necessary, steps may be taken to assist under-represented groups to compete for jobs, as permitted by the relevant legislation.

The Service's equality and diversity policies and the measures to implement them have been devised on the basis of advice from relevant bodies as well as through consultation with the appropriate representative bodies.

1.6 Benefits to the Organisation

Promoting gender equality into the way we work and how the organisation operates will give improvements in the organisation in many different ways. Some of these are:

- better targeted policies
- representation of different genders at all levels and departments of the Service
- improvements in perceptions of services and more satisfaction with services
- better involvement and more participation by service users
- better targeted information
- clear understanding of the needs of service users
- better quality services which meet varied needs

It will also bring advantages with regard to employment of people:

- achieve a more representative workforce
- avoid losing or undervaluing staff
- improve staff morale and productivity
- identify and develop good practice
- more effective use of talent in the workforce

2. Organisation Structure and Decision Making Process

2.1 Organisation Chart

Ultimate responsibility for meeting the duties under the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, as amended by the Equality Act 2006, rests with the Chief Fire Officer, however, all managers and employees are responsible for the day-to-day management of the Scheme.

2.2 Committees

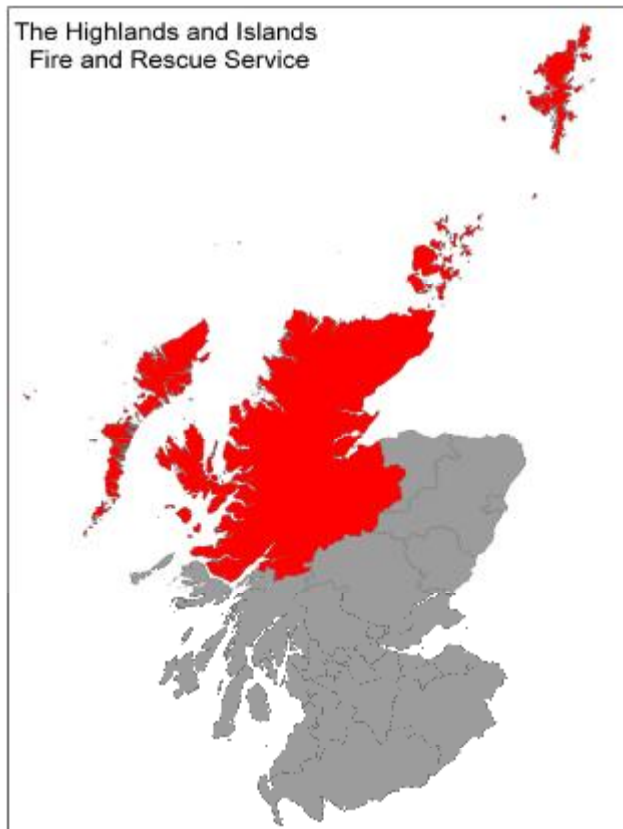
HIFRS serves the region covered by the four constituent authorities of The Highland Council, Orkney Islands Council, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and the Shetland Islands Council. The Authority comprises Members, who are elected councillors. The Fire Authority holds meetings several times a year. The Fire Authority's role is to ensure that the Service provides an effective and cost-efficient service and meets its legal obligations. The Fire Authority receives regular reports and updates on all areas of the Service. Agendas and minutes of meetings are published and placed on our website.

The Strategic management of HIFRS is facilitated through a number of structured committees:

- Executive Command
- Service Delivery
- Service Support

Information from these committees is then cascaded by relevant department heads to their teams for revising and monitoring departmental plans against the strategic aims outlined in the Service Plan.

2.3 Map of Highlands & Islands Fire & Rescue Service area



The Service has one wholetime operational station in Inverness, which is also home to our headquarters and most of the non-uniformed employees. We have training facilities housed at Seaford Road, Inverness, where our engineering and supplies functions are also housed. The Service Training School is located just outside Inverness in Invergordon. With a new bespoke training facility soon to be completed in Fort William, the Service has the opportunity and flexibility of providing training solutions in a location closer to the need of the communities which it serves.

There are 95 retained stations and 31 Community Response Units strategically located through the Highlands and Islands that serve our local communities.

2.4 Employees within the Service

These numbers are current as at April 2007.

	Number of people	Men	%	Women	%
Fire control	16	1	6.25%	15	93.75%
Non uniformed	60	27	45%	33	55%
Retained staff	1064	1000	93.99%	64	6.01%
Community Response Units	154	142	92.21%	12	7.79%
Uniformed Wholetime staff	133	131	98.5%	2	1.5%

Total number of employees at HIFRS is 1427, 91.2% are men and 8.8% are women.

The current number of women wholetime firefighters is 2.

Of the staff that work part-time (including our retained and CRU staff) 6.5% of these are women.

The Service employs a wide range of people, including Administrative Staff, Control Operators, Community Fire Safety, Finance, Firefighters, Human Resources, IT, Mechanics, Performance Team, Procurement and Training.

3. Functions of the Service and Strategic Overview

Our Purpose is: **Preventing, Protecting, Responding**

3.1 The Organisation's Structure:

HIFRS is managed under nine organisational departments:

Executive Command
Community Risk Management
Corporate Services

Engineering & Supplies
Operations Support
Learning & Development
Human Resources
South Command
North Command

Executive Command is lead by the Chief Fire Officer. This team comprises the Chief Fire Officer, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, and the Assistant Chief Fire Officer.

Community Risk Management supported the delivery of the service to all other directorates through the Integrated Risk management Plan. This directorate includes community fire safety teams, business fire safety professionals, community involvement and statistical analysis.

Corporate Services support the organisation through financial and performance management , as well as providing key administrative support to the Service.

Engineering and Supplies procure all consumables within the service including specialist items such as PPE. The engineering team maintain our fleet of vehicles, including customising those that have specific requirements to meet our needs.

Operations Support ensures that all the equipment and operational procedures needed to operate the Service are maintained and safe.

Learning and Development ensures that our staff are competent to carry out their present as well as identifying and filling skills gaps for the future.

Human Resources ensures that staff are recruited and managed effectively within the organisation.

North and South Command take responsibility for all operational activity within the Service.

3.2 Our Vision for the Future of HIFRS

- A service widely regarded as a leader in the provision of fire and rescue services, and being seen as providing assured professional emergency response to meet the needs of our communities
- A service seen as excellent for our performance over successive years in reducing deaths and injuries from fire and other emergencies. Risk management will have become embedded as the basis for our decision making about the deployment of resources.

- A service that has been successful in adapting to a changing world and the threats that this brings, whether that is as a consequence of climate change, a terrorist threat or other phenomenon. All major incidents attended will be considered as having been dealt with professionally and effectively and the reputation of Highlands & Islands Rescue Service enhanced.
- We will be seen to be a learning service, learning new tactics, approaches, using new equipment and facilities to provide the best emergency response service possible. We will also be a service that has a wide range of specialist skills and services provided through local, regional and national collaboration strategies that maximise the availability of a cost effective service.
- We will be a 'mainstream' player in community safety in the widest context through social inclusion, cohesion and sustainability agendas.
- A service that, although collaborating on the wider stage, will be clearly distinguished by our local communities as 'Their Fire and Rescue Service'

3.3 Strategic Aims

In order to assist in carrying out its functions efficiently and effectively, the Authority has set 4 Strategic Aims (with 5 Corporate Objectives), as detailed in its Service Plan. These Aims are:

1. Operate an integrated risk management approach for the delivery of services, covering both fire safety and operations
2. Provide a service committed to the highest levels of quality, demonstrating best value and sound corporate governance
3. Ensure that the Service meets the requirements of health, safety, dignity and welfare, determined through full and inclusive consultation
4. Support the development of our workforce so that their range of skills and abilities matches the needs of the Service and community, as identified by the Integrated Risk Management Planning process

3.4 Profile of the Area We Serve

Highlands & Islands Fire & Rescue Service serves the Authorities of the Highland Council, Orkney Islands Council, Shetland Islands Council and the Western Isles

Highland	Population 208,914
	Male 48.97%
	Female 51.03%
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	Population 26,502
	Male 49.36%
	Female 50.64%
Shetland	Population 21,988
	Male 50.35%
	Female 49.65%
Orkney	Population 19,245
	Male 49.35%
	Female 51.03%

(The above statistics are taken from Scotland's Census Results online, Census Data 2001).

3.5 Working in Partnership

The Service also works closely with partners in delivering our service, having close links with a wide variety of stakeholders. Through the provision of training for home carers and health service staff, we have been able to target resources to benefit the most vulnerable. The development of a Youth Engagement course in collaboration with youth organisation staff has helped to provide support to younger members of our communities. As a key partner, we have been in the development, introduction and installation of Community Partnership TV, allowing us to promote Community Fire Safety in a number of key outlets within Inverness and Tain.

The Service is also represented on the strategic community planning partnerships of the Highland Council, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and the Shetland Islands Council.

The Service works in Partnership with the Highland Well being Alliance Group, and aims to:

- Improve the connection between national priorities and those at Highland, local and neighbourhood levels.
- Ensure that people and communities in the Highlands are genuinely engaged in the decisions made on public services which affect them.
- Gain commitment from organisations in the Highlands to work together, not apart, in providing better public services.
- Provide the over-arching partnership framework for co-ordinating other initiatives and partnerships and, where necessary, acting to rationalise and simplify public sector working arrangements.

The Highland Well Being Alliance is made up of the following partners:-

The Highland Council
Highlands and Islands Enterprise
NHS Highland
Scottish Natural Heritage
Northern Constabulary
Communities Scotland
Highlands & Islands Fire & Rescue Service
Representatives from the private sector
Representatives from the voluntary sector

This joint approach is one that is developing nationally and is seen as a way forward for achieving projects and results, and with a work stream that specifically targets equality and diversity, allows a joined up and best value approach in targeting community engagement.

The Service also works on national projects with other fire services through the Chief Fire Officers Association (Scotland). One of these business streams is specifically tasked with looking at equalities issues within the Scottish Fire Services.

4. Equality & Diversity

We are committed to delivering fire safety and community fire safety services that are sensitive to the needs and aspirations of Highlands & Islands diverse communities by creating a workforce, which is representative of the community we serve.

Equality and diversity issues are considered at all levels in our decision making processes.

4.1 Some of Our Achievements to Date

Networking Women in the Fire Service

We are a corporate affiliate member of the above group. This organisation provides support and specific training for members of this group and hold annual events for women to network.

Buildings improvement programme - We are currently working through this programme and have been doing so since 2004, whereby an audit was undertaken of all of our buildings which looked at all equality issues.

Diversity training - We have recently carried out diversity training for all of our full time staff, which included gender related scenarios. This programme is now being given to our retained staff, and should be completed within 18 months.

Equality and Diversity Forum - In 2006 the Service created a forum made up of employees, staff representatives and fire board members to look at all areas of equality and diversity within the Service and to monitor the implementation of all equality schemes and related action plans the Gender Equality Scheme and Action Plan.

Operational Uniforms

Bespoke uniforms for female staff have been introduced and appropriate personal protective equipment.

Partnership working - The Service is a member of the of HARE and the Well Being Alliance which assists us to become further involved with local communities.

Setting of Targets – Internal targets to recruit more women into the Retained Duty System have been introduced; the target is that 8% of all new recruits are women.

Section 2

5. Involving People

The gender legislation gives the organisation a requirement not only to consult on the finalised scheme but also to involve men and women in the development of the Gender Equality Scheme.

In order to do this all employees were invited to participate through focus groups or questionnaires, and information was placed on our internal newsletter asking them to be involved as well as on the intranet and on the web site.

Representatives of our recognised trade unions were invited to a focus group where we discussed not only their personal perspectives, but the wider perspectives of their unions.

A joint consultation event was held as part of the Well Being Alliance. These were professionally facilitated on our behalf by the Highlands & Islands Equality Forum. There were four meetings, and they were held in Inverness (2 sessions), Fort William, Tain and Portree.

A general invitation was also placed on our website asking members of the public to contact us for participation in focus groups, or to complete an on-line questionnaire if they felt it was more appropriate.

The views and feedback from all of these groups and individuals have been taken into consideration, wherever possible and adopted into this final GES, these views allow us to create and prioritise our equality initiatives.

6. Impact Assessments

Each current and new policy/function will have an Initial Equality Impact Assessment undertaken to identify any areas of concern, which will then be resolved. If necessary, a Full Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken. Training has been given to all appropriate staff with responsibility for undertaking Equality Impact Assessments.

The purpose of undertaking these impact assessments is to ensure that all proposed and current policies do not disadvantage people on any grounds, including because of their gender, and also to identify where these might better promote equality of opportunity.

7. Gathering information

It is a requirement of the Equality Act 2006 to gather information in several areas of the organisation. This allows the organisation to make decisions based on the information obtained.

The Service will gather information on:

- Service delivery
- Employment – recruitment, development and retention
(This information can be gathered through monitoring forms, personal development reviews and exit interviews as well as those detailed below)
- Employees
- Equality Impact Assessments
- Monitoring forms

- Performance Management Appraisal reviews
- Customer satisfaction surveys
- Complaints
- Partnership groups

It is important to gather both qualitative and quantitative data. This information should help to identify whether the actions we have devised in the Action Plan are delivering greater gender equality.

8. Using Information

The information found from using the methods as set out in Section 7 will help to prepare subsequent schemes, and to identify if the actions devised have been effective.

Information gathered through surveys will be analysed and the results of this used to inform future action planning.

9. Reporting

We will produce a report on an annual basis containing a summary of:

- The steps the Service has taken to fulfil its legislative requirements (within the Action Plan)
- Results of information gathering, and what this indicates
- What the Service has done with the information gathered, and any actions as a result
- Progress reports will be contained within the Service Plan and Annual Public Performance Report.

10. Consultation

The Service is committed to consulting as widely as possible on the Scheme and to using comments arising to make amendments to the Scheme. Consultation is already widely used within the Service.

The way in which the Service will consult with the community and stakeholder groups will be done through several methods and using various groups/organisations both internally and externally.

The information from these groups will be used to inform and improve the Authority's policies and service delivery. We shall use the following groups for consultation:

Internal

- All recognised representative bodies
- Service Support Group
- Service Delivery Group
- Equality & Diversity Forum
- Employees through the intranet or newsletter

External

- Individual and community groups on our current partnership list
 - Through the annual IRMP questionnaire
 - HARE
 - Highland Well Being Alliance
 - Equality & Diversity business stream of CFOA (Scotland)
-
- It is important to ensure that each function to be consulted on is reviewed on an individual basis to ensure that the most appropriate type of consultation is used. The methods of consultation used will be the most appropriate for differing circumstances.

11. Arrangements for Monitoring of Policies for Adverse Impact

Monitoring specific areas and service delivery can give us information as to whether people of different sexes are experiencing the same or different level of service, thereby allowing us to identify areas of improvement and to establish:

- Levels of usage - whether over or under represented
- Levels of satisfaction – ascertain if all backgrounds are satisfied
- Levels of relevance – do policies meet the needs of communities?
- Levels of appropriateness – whether policies are culturally sensitive

Statistical information on employment issues, operational matters, fire prevention and fire safety inspections is gathered regularly.

Responses from the public, and complaints and comments will also be analysed to detect any adverse impact on the promotion of gender equality.

12. Publishing Information

The Gender Equality Scheme will be published in paper format and be available on request, it will also be placed on our website: www.hifrs.org

The results of the monitoring will be published annually and will be available on the website within the annual Public Performance Report.

13. Arrangements for Training Staff

The Service has already delivered training to personnel on equality and diversity which includes cultural awareness and harassment and bullying. This training is ongoing and provided to all new employees to the Service during their induction programme.

The training given to staff will be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure its relevance and effectiveness.

14. Review of the Scheme

The Scheme will be reviewed every 3 years by the HR Manager with appropriate managers responsible for completing actions as stated in the Action Plan.

The Action Plan will be amended annually and made available on request, with summaries sent to appropriate managers/employees.

15. Complaints Procedure

Internal

Employees are able to use the Grievance procedure which is available on the intranet or from Human Resources.

External

The Service has a corporate complaints procedure, which allows service users to make complaints, comments or compliments on any aspect of the Service. Details of this procedure are set out on our website at www.hifrs.org.

A complaint can be made in person by telephone or in writing.

By telephone: 01463 227000

By post to: Highlands & Islands Fire & Rescue Service
Headquarters
16 Harbour Road, Longman West
Inverness
IV1 1TB

